

29
3 NEW SCHOOL TALES!

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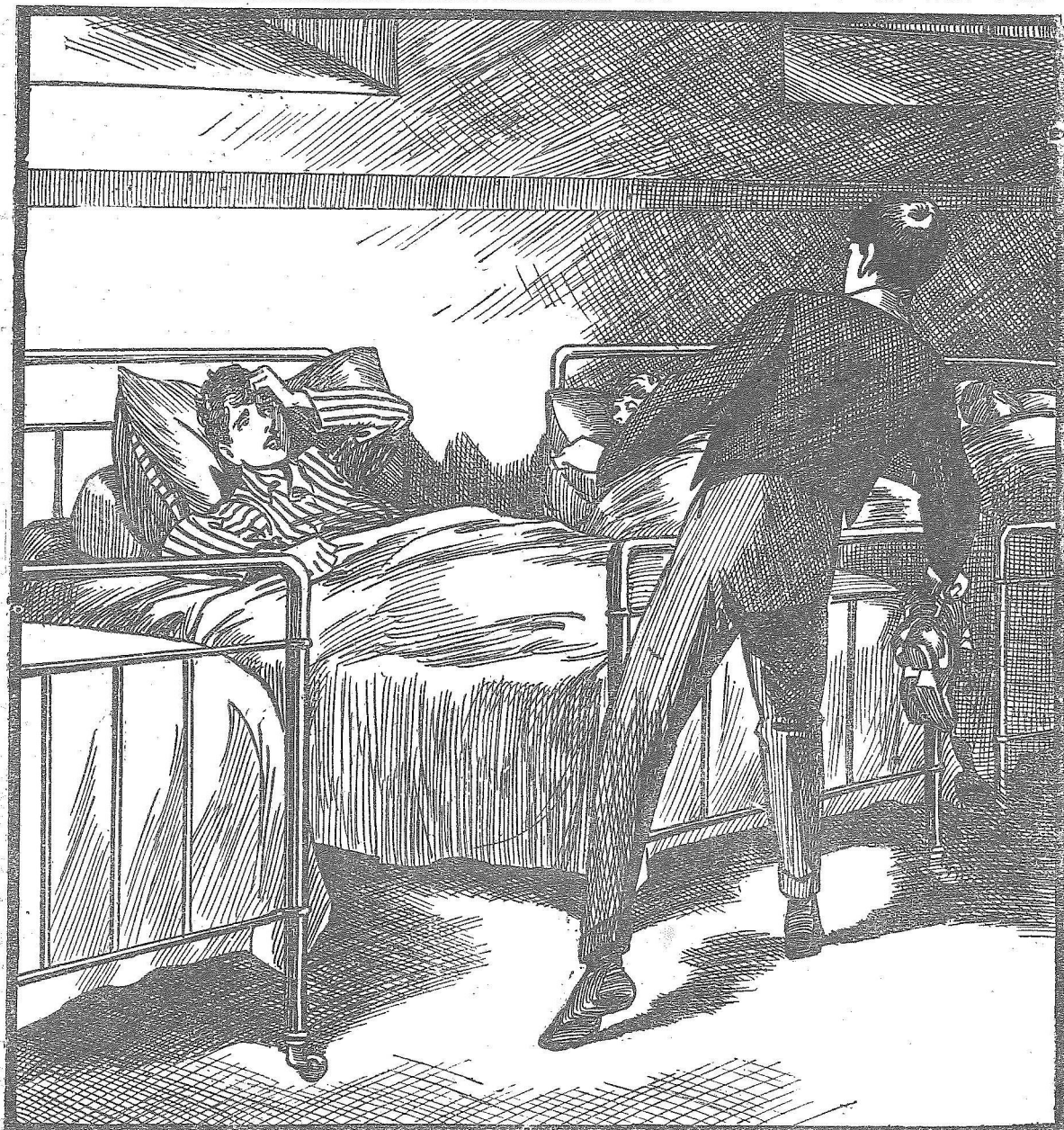
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Week Ending
August 9th, 1919.

No. 29.
New Series.

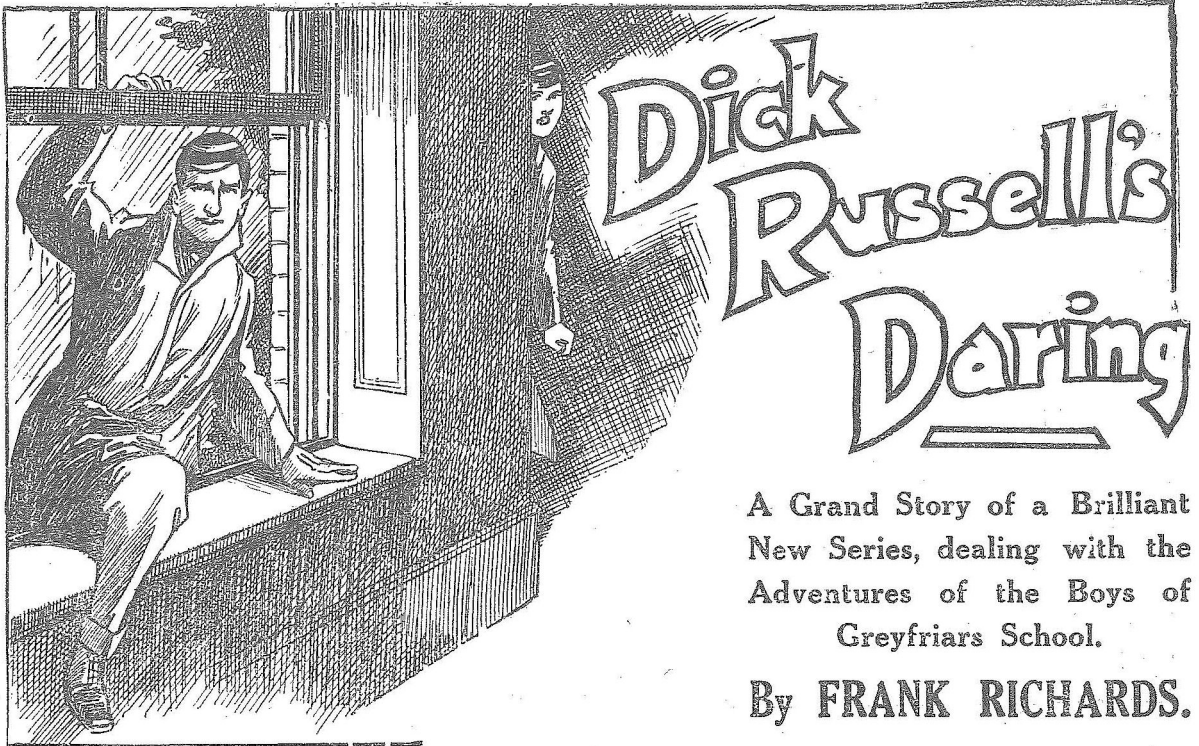
Popular

Three Complete Stories of—
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RUNNING AWAY FROM SCHOOL!

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



A Grand Story of a Brilliant
New Series, dealing with the
Adventures of the Boys of
Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Trouble in the Family.

"**B**LESSED if I can shift the beggar for toffee!"

Vernon-Smith, of the Greyfriars Remove, tossed the ball to Peter Todd, and threw himself full-length on the grass.

"See what you can do, Toddy," he said. Cricket practice was in progress on Little Side.

Next morning Vernon-Smith and his touring-party were due to visit Northampton, and a rumour had reached Greyfriars that the Northants team, composed of fellows from different schools in the county, was a particularly strong one—much stronger than the Dorsetshire side which Vernon-Smith & Co. had met a fortnight previously.

Accordingly, the Bounder was keeping his men up to the mark.

Dick Russell was batting. In fact, he had been at the nets for over half an hour, and had defied all comers.

Russell was rather a quiet sort of fellow, but since the sports tour had started he had come out of his shell a good deal.

Boxing was his strong point. He had met and defeated several county champions, and he was the chosen representative of Vernon-Smith's party.

Russell was now giving evidence of the fact that his prowess was not confined to the boxing-ring.

Vernon-Smith had been bowling to him ever since he took his stand at the nets, and Russell had showed supreme contempt for the Bounder's fast leg-breaks.

Peter Todd chuckled as he rubbed the ball in his hands.

"You must be off-colour to-day, Smithy," he remarked. "I'll jolly soon send this merchant packing!"

Dick Russell grinned as he overheard the remark.

He crouched low to receive Peter's first ball, and when it came the batsman leapt out at it.

Crash!

The next instant a couple of tiles came clattering down from the roof of the gym.

"Oh, well hit, sir!"

"Dot vos der stuff ter gif dem!" chuckled Bulstrode.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peter Todd stood blinking at Dick Russell.

"Are you sure that wasn't a fluke?" he inquired.

"Quite!" grinned Russell. "I'll do it again, if you like!"

And he did! Peter Todd's next ball shared a similar fate.

There was a peculiar expression on Peter Todd's face as he prepared to deliver the next ball.

Peter was not accustomed to having his head resting between his hands, and watched Russell with a sparkle of admiration in his eyes.

He was reflecting that Russell, on present form, would be worth his weight in gold at Northampton.

After a few more vigorous hits Dick Russell threw down his bat.

"Time I made way for somebody else," he said.

"Rats!" growled Peter Todd. "You're staying there, my son, until we get you out! And we'll do it somehow."

"Hear, hear!"

"All serene!" said Russell.

And, picking up the bat, he continued to hit.

Peter Todd, Dick Penfold, Dick Rake, and Ogilvy bowled to him in turn.

But Russell was playing at the very top of his form. His judgment was perfect.

At length Vernon-Smith, refreshed by his rest, came on to bowl again.

Dick Russell ran out at his first ball, and it curled round his bat and crashed into the wicket.

He was beaten at last!

Whilst Russell was unstrapping his pads Vernon-Smith clapped him on the shoulder.

"Jolly well played, old scout!" he said.

"I shall have to give you an earlier place in the batting list, I can see. If you show this form at Northampton, we shall win hands down!"

Russell grinned breathlessly.

"Sorry to shatter your hopes, Smithy," he said, "but I'm not coming to Northampton."

"What!"

Vernon-Smith stared at his schoolfellows in astonishment.

"Not coming to Northampton!" he echoed.

"Wherefore this thyness?"

"I've got another appointment," said Russell.

The Bounder thought he understood.

"Trouble at home?" he asked.

Russell shook his head.

"Have you run foul of Quicby, or one of the beaks?"

"No."

"Then why can't you come?"

Dick Russell explained.

"There's a big boxing tournament coming off this week down at Portsmouth. Nearly all the public schools in the South are sending representatives. Frank Courtenay's going from Highlife, and Tom Merry from St. Jim's. And I want to have a shot at bagging the light-weight honours."

"My hat!"

"It's the chance of a lifetime," said Russell. "I'm sick of fooling around in the ring with fellows who think they can box, but can't. I want to come up against something big."

The friendly look faded from Vernon-Smith's eyes.

"You're going to leave us in the lurch—what!" he said.

"Oh, I say! That's putting it rather strongly."

"Not at all. You're putting your own selfish pleasure first. You'd rather go gadding about at Portsmouth than lend your side a hand at Northampton."

Dick Russell shrugged his shoulders.

"Put it that way, if you like," he said.

"You know jolly well that I sha'n't be able to get a substitute," continued Vernon-Smith hotly.

This was true. There were twenty-four good sportsmen in the Remove, and twelve of them were already claimed by Harry Wharton's party. The other twelve were under the leadership of Vernon-Smith.

The remainder of the Removites were hopeless, from the sporting point of view.

Billy Bunter, for instance, would have proved a hindrance rather than a help; and the same remark applied to Skinner, Stott, Alonzo Todd, Wun Long, and the others.

Russell's absence would mean that Vernon-Smith would be a man short.

"It's not playing the game," said the Bounder. "Blessed if I can understand the Head giving you permission to go."

"He hasn't," said Russell.

"What! You're trotting off to Portsmouth without permission?"

Russell nodded.

"Then you'll be fired out of Greyfriars! And it'll serve you jolly well right!"

"Pile it on!" said Russell. "Go right ahead. Never mind me."

Vernon-Smith's self-control was in rags by this time.

"You're a rotten traitor!" he said.

"Steady on!" said Russell warningly.

"I repeat it!" said the Bouncer angrily.

"Only a traitor and a rank outsider would leave his side in the lurch like you propose to do."

Smack!

Vernon-Smith's patience had been at a low ebb; Russell's had been still lower.

The Bouncer reeled backwards as Russell's open palm smote his cheek with a report like a pistol-shot.

"My only aunt!" exclaimed Peter Todd, in amazement.

And there was a rush of Removites to the spot.

"What's all the rumpus about?" asked Bulstrode.

Neither Russell nor Vernon-Smith satisfied the curiosity of their schoolfellows.

The Bouncer recovered himself, and leapt at Russell. And the next moment the pair of them were fighting like tigers.

"Stop the silly asses!" growled Hazeldene.

"They don't want to take black eyes and swollen noses to Northampton!"

Donald Ogilvy dashed up to Russell, and endeavoured to swing him back.

"Hands off, Don!" muttered Russell. "I don't want to quarrel with my best pal."

"Chuck it, you silly ass!" exclaimed Ogilvy.

"Let go! I'm going on!"

Ogilvy saw that his chum's blood was up, and he realised the futility of attempting to stop the fight.

Peter Todd had tried to restrain Vernon-Smith from further assault and battery; and he had been curtly told to mind his own business.

The fight went on.

Dick Russell was a skilful and a scientific boxer; but in a bout of this description—which more nearly resembled a prize-fight than anything else—he was helpless.

Vernon-Smith was speedily getting the upper hand, and Russell would certainly have been floored, but for a dramatic interruption.

Unseen, either by the combatants or the spectators, Mr. Quelch had rustled to the spot.

"Smith! Russell! How dare you! Cease this hooliganism at once!"

The juniors dropped their hands to their sides.

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"I presume that you, Smith, were the aggressor in this unseemly affair?"

The Bouncer was silent. But Dick Russell spoke up quickly:

"I struck the first blow, sir."

"Indeed! And how did the quarrel arise?"

"I'm not able to take part in the sports tour at Northampton, sir. I'm going down to Portsmouth, to box in a light-weights' competition. And Vernon-Smith seems to think I'm a traitor."

"He certainly has good grounds for thinking so," said Mr. Quelch. "You are, I understand, one of the most valuable members of Smith's party. By going to Portsmouth, you would be leaving him in the lurch."

Russell said nothing.

"Have you received Dr. Locke's permission to box at Portsmouth?" continued Mr. Quelch.

"No, sir."

"What! You were about to take the law into your own hands?"

"I knew that permission would be refused, sir, so I intended to go on my own."

Mr. Quelch gasped.

He had been accustomed to a good many exhibitions of "cheek" in his time; but this was the extreme outside leg of insolence.

"Russell! How dare you contemplate such a wild and rebellious scheme?"

Russell was silent. He could not explain to Mr. Quelch that boxing was the be-all and end-all of his existence—that it was meat and drink to him, and that he would be much happier at Portsmouth, taking part in the light-weights' contest, than at Northampton.

Mr. Quelch's voice was very stern as he continued:

"I flatly forbid you to carry out your intention, Russell! You will proceed to Northampton with the rest of the party. But for the fact that Vernon-Smith would be handicapped without you, I should keep you under detention at Greyfriars for a week! As it is, you will write out five hundred lines on the conclusion of the tour. I shall request Gwynne, who will be in charge of the party, to keep you under strict watch and ward!"

Russell remained silent.

Little did Mr. Quelch dream that the junior intended to set him at defiance. Yet such was the case.

"I wish you to understand," said the Form-master, as a Partisan shot, "that if there is any more of this behaviour, the tour will be cancelled!"

And Mr. Quelch swept away.

A buzz of voices arose when he had gone.

"Russell, you ass!"

"Russell, you priceless idiot!"

Dick Russell ignored these epithets.

Without a word he strode away into the building, to think out ways and means of setting authority at defiance, and going to Portsmouth instead of Northampton.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

After Lights Out!

DONALD OGILVY awoke with a start in his bed in the Remove dormitory.

Ogilvy was a light sleeper, and the sound of a stealthy movement from the next bed had awakened him.

"Who's that?" he exclaimed.

"Shush!"

The next moment a figure stole softly towards Ogilvy's bed.

Peering through the gloom, Ogilvy distinguished the face of Dick Russell.

"Don't make a row," breathed the latter.

"I don't want to be bowled out at the start."

"Dick! What do you mean?"

"I'm off!" said Russell.

"Off your rocker? I guessed as much when I saw you scrapping with Smithy!"

Russell seated himself on his chum's bed.

"Look here, Don," he said. "You understand me better than any fellow here. You know that when I set my heart on a thing, I see it through. I've made up my mind to go, and I'm going! A dozen beaks wouldn't stop me!"

"But—"

"Smithy said I was a traitor. It's just possible he was right. By going to Portsmouth, I shall be spoiling the team's chances at Northampton. But I can't help it. I simply must go. I'm crazy keen on boxing, and always will be—though I admit it must sound funny to hear me talk like this, when I used to be one of the biggest funks in the Remove!"

"Surely you can let this stunt stand over for a bit?" said Ogilvy.

"That's just what I can't do. There won't be another big meeting of schoolboy boxers until next year's tournament at Aldershot. This is the chance of a lifetime!"

"But—but you'll be sacked from the school!" said Ogilvy, aghast. "You heard what Quelch said. He flatly forbade you to go. Can't you see that you're running a halter round your neck?"

Russell chuckled softly.

"When a fellow does what I intend doing," he said, "he must expect to pay the piper. If I get it in the neck for disobeying orders, and all that sort of thing, I sha'n't whine."

Ogilvy saw clearly that this was another case where argument was worse than useless. But he determined to make a further attempt to dissuade his chum from carrying out such a rash scheme.

"There will be a hue-and-cry after you in the morning," he said. "The Head will get into touch with the people at Portsmouth, and you'll be collared and sent back."

"Perhaps!"

"But you will!" persisted Ogilvy.

"My dear chap, I've taken all precautions. I'm not going to box in my own name. I shall be Jack Brown."

"But there may be some fellows at the show who'll recognise you—Frank Courtenay, for instance, or Tom Merry."

"Both decent fellows," said Russell. "They wouldn't give me away."

"Then you've quite made up your mind to go?"

"Quite!"

Ogilvy sighed.

"You'll regret this in a week's time, when you're chucked out of Greyfriars!" he said.

"I don't think I shall."

There was a long pause.

"How are you going to get to Portsmouth?" inquired Ogilvy, at length. "There are no trains at this time of night."

"I shall walk."

"You're behaving like a tame lunatic already. Don't add to it by acting like a wild one!"

"It's my only chance of getting away," said Russell. "If I wait till the morning, I shall be marched down to the station, and carted off to Northampton. And that's just what I don't want to happen."

"Portsmouth," said Ogilvy, making a mental calculation, "is nearly a hundred miles away. If you try to walk it, it'll take you about two days, and you'll finish up a hopeless creak. Talk about boxing! Why, you wouldn't be fit to tackle an infant aged one!"

"Ass!" said Russell. "I don't intend to walk the whole way. I shall plod along steadily for a few hours, and catch an early morning train from one of the big stations on the way. When I arrive at Portsmouth I shall be as fit as a fiddle."

"And where will you stay when you get there?"

"Well, I've got relatives living at Southsea, but it would be rather risky to stay with them. So I shall just take cheap lodgings."

"There are no such things as cheap lodgings these days," said Ogilvy. "Before the war a fellow could rent a room for five bob a week. He's got to pay about six times as much now."

Russell smiled.

"I've got plenty of tin, for once," he said. "And now I must be off. I can hear one of the fellows stirring."

"It's only Billy Bunter enjoying a nightmare," said Ogilvy.

Dick Russell rose, and groped for his chum's hand.

"So-long, old man!" he whispered.

"Well, if you must go, for once," said Ogilvy. "Mind you, I'm not aiding and abetting you in this business. I'm sorry you ever thought of going. We shall miss you badly at Northampton—"

Russell experienced a twinge of remorse. For a long time he stood irresolute.

Presently he spoke.

"I don't suppose you'll miss me so much as you think, Don," he said. "If things get too awful for words, and everything goes against you, you can wire me, and I'll come. Address the telegram to Jack Brown, at the Drill Hall, Portsmouth."

"All serene!" said Ogilvy.

There was a restless murmur from the bed occupied by Bulstrode.

"Who's that out of bed?" came a sleepy voice.

Dick Russell promptly stepped into the shadows.

A moment's breathless silence followed, and then Bulstrode, concluding that his imagination had played him a trick, turned over and went to sleep again.

Dick Russell noiselessly tiptoed from the dormitory.

"Good luck, old man!" came Ogilvy's whispered message through the gloom.

For a moment Russell hesitated.

He knew, in his heart, that he was taking a false step, that he was, as Vernon-Smith had said, a traitor.

But he knew, also, that if he went to Northampton with the tourists, he would put up a poor show. His thoughts would be elsewhere. He would be wishing all the time that he had gone to Portsmouth.

"I'll see it through!" he murmured.

And he stole softly down the stairs in the darkness.

It was not until he reached the box-room window—the usual means of egress for breakers of bounds—that Russell realised that a storm was raging outside.

The rain lashed upon the window from without, and the wind whistled through the old elms in the Close.

Russell went along to his study in the Remove passage, and fetched his raincoat.

Then he retraced his steps to the box-room window, and was about to open it, when somebody started to do so from outside.

Quick as thought, the junior sprang back into the shadows.

He heard the sash raised, and caught sight of a tall form clambering through the window.

"Hang the beastly rain!" muttered a voice. "I'm wet through!"

The voice belonged to Loder of the Sixth, who had doubtless been improving the shining hour by playing billiards at the Cross Keys.

The prefect lowered the window, and squelched away down the passage.

"A near squeak!" murmured Dick Russell. "If I hadn't gone back for my raincoat, I should probably have bumped into Loder in the Close."

Reopening the window, the adventurous junior wriggled through, and started on his reckless escapade.

The slanting rain beat full into his face as he crossed the Close.

"My hat! What a night!" gasped Dick

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Russell. "Rain and wind and giddy tempest! And, to crown everything, it's as black as pitch! Groo!"

All the same, Russell was not daunted by the prospect which lay before him.

In his early days at Greyfriars he had been something of a weakling. Since then he had learned to endure storms of a different nature from this.

Russell stepped out strongly into the night. In spite of his raincoat, he was soon soaked to the skin.

Sometimes the force of the wind caused the rain to abate slightly; but occasionally a perfect deluge poured down from the midnight sky.

Fortunately, Russell knew the roads well. He had sometimes cycled to Portsmouth, and the landmarks, even in the pitchy blackness, were familiar to him.

After three hours' hard walking, the junior slowed up.

He was not dead-beat, but he had been badly buffeted. He became conscious of a strong desire to throw himself down to rest, but he knew that such a course would be fatal. He remembered to have read of travellers who, weary of battling with the elements, had paused to rest by the wayside. And it had sometimes been the rest that knows no waking.

"I must keep on keeping on," he told himself.

And he urged himself forward into the blackness and the fast-falling rain.

A neighbouring clock struck two. Its muffled chime came faintly to the Greyfriars junior on the wings of the storm.

"Great Scott! I've got to stick it for three or four hours yet!" murmured Russell. But luck was with him.

After a time he caught sight of some farm buildings standing back from the road. Entering one of these, he clambered up into a dry loft, the floor of which was covered with straw and sacking.

Russell removed his raincoat and his Eton jacket—both were wringing wet—and laid himself down in the straw.

For a long time he lay staring into the darkness, his brain active with thoughts of the future.

At length, however, he fell into a doze. When he awoke, he blinked in the strong rays of the sunshine, which streamed in through the window of the loft.

The storm had passed, and a new day had dawned—one of summer's best.

Dick Russell quitted his temporary shelter, and took to the road again.

A walk of four miles brought him to one of the stations on the London, Brighton, & South Coast Railway.

A train was in as the Greyfriars junior hastily purchased his ticket, and scrambled on to the platform.

"Chichester, Havant, Portsmouth!" one of the porters was shouting.

Dick Russell settled himself in the corner of a third-class compartment, and enjoyed another nap as the train sped on its way.

The sudden jarring of brakes aroused him. Portsmouth at last!

As Dick Russell stepped out on to the platform he caught sight of a familiar figure alighting from the train.

"My hat! It's Courtenay!"

The Highcliffe junior heard the exclamation, and spun round.

He stared at the Greyfriars fellow in astonishment.

"Russell! What are you doing here?"

"I've come down with the same object as you—to collar the light-weight championship!"

"But—but I thought you fellows were going to Northampton this morning!"

"So they are, with the exception of this child."

"Did you get leave to come down here?"

"Yes—of the French variety!"

Frank Courtenay stared harder than ever. "You mean to say you've come without permission?"

"Right on the wicket!"

"Great pip! There will be the very dickens to pay for this!"

"I shall be sacked from Greyfriars, most likely."

"Phew! And you don't care?"

"Not if I win the light-weights."

Frank Courtenay accompanied Russell towards the exit.

"You're several sorts of an ass, you know!" he exclaimed. "If I were you, I'd scoot back to Greyfriars while there's time."

"There isn't time. They've missed me by now. I shouldn't go back, in any case."

"Well, you certainly take the bun!" said

the Highcliffe junior. "You've left Smithy's party stranded."

"Rats! They'll get on all right without me!"

"I'm not so sure. You're their boxer you—"

"There are others practically as good. Smithy himself, for instance. They'll worry through all right. What about some breakfast?"

"I'm game," said Courtenay.

And the two juniors went along to the George Hotel, in the quaint old high-street.

"How on earth did you get here?" asked Frank Courtenay. "I had to start travelling overnight, and put up at Chichester."

"I walked a good bit of the way," said Russell.

"My only aunt!"

"My luck was in, and I managed to pick up this train on the way."

"And where are you thinking of staying? I'm putting up at this hotel, and so's Tom Merry, when he arrives."

"Funds won't run to that," said Russell, with a smile. "I shall hunt for a small room somewhere."

"Well, I wish you luck," said Courtenay, as the juniors sat down to a steaming breakfast of porridge and eggs and bacon. "But you've taken a risk which I should never care to take."

"By the way," said Russell, "I'm going to box in the name of Jack Brown, for reasons which are obvious. You won't give the show away, will you?"

"Rely on me," said Courtenay. "And you can rely on Tom Merry, too. But—"

And Frank Courtenay shook his head, as if to imply that he didn't like the look of things at all.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Up Against It!

SEVERAL juniors glanced curiously at Dick Russell's empty bed when the rising-bell clanged out its shrill summons that morning.

Vernon-Smith was the first to comment on Russell's absence.

"Where's the silly ass got to?" he exclaimed.

There was a general shaking of heads.

Ogilvy discreetly held his peace. Russell's visit to Portsmouth was bound to come to light sooner or later; but Donald Ogilvy didn't mean to be the first to give away the information.

"Pr'aps he's gone for an early morning dip," suggested Bulstrode.

"We shall soon see," said the Bounder. Breakfast-time came, but not Russell.

Mr. Quelch instructed Wingate to make inquiries concerning the missing junior.

The captain of Greyfriars discovered, after breakfast, that Russell's cap and raincoat were not in his study.

He reported these facts to Mr. Quelch, who drew his own conclusions.

"It is incredible," said the Remove-master, "that Russell has set my orders at defiance, and proceeded to Portsmouth to take part in the boxing tournament. Yet I fear such is the case."

"Do you think I had better go and bring him back sir?" said Wingate, who was not averse to the prospect of a day's outing.

"No," said Mr. Quelch. "I will mention the matter to Dr. Locke, and he will doubtless communicate with the promoters of the boxing tournament, and issue instructions for the foolish boy to be sent back."

This was exactly what the Head did. But he was not likely to get any satisfaction. There would be no trace of Richard Russell at Portsmouth. And, if the junior played his cards well, he would pass successfully as Jack Brown.

At ten o'clock Vernon-Smith's party, in charge of Gwynne of the Sixth, started off for Northampton.

It was not a very merry party.

Dick Russell was not the best sportsman in the Remove, but he was one of the best, and his absence would be keenly felt.

There could no longer be any doubt that Russell had taken the law into his own hands and gone to Portsmouth.

"He'll be sacked, as sure as fate!" said Vernon-Smith. "And I sha'n't feel a scrap sorry for him! He's left us in the lurch, and he deserves all he gets!"

"Supposing he wins the Light-weight Championship of the South?" said Ogilvy.

"That won't lessen his offence in the Head's eyes!" said Gwynne.

"Faith, an' he's a silly spalpeen, entirely!"

"Who's going to be our boxing representative against Northants?" inquired Dick Penfold.

"I am!" said Vernon-Smith grimly. "I may not be quite up to Russell's weight, but I'll try to give the Northants fellow something to remember me by!"

"It's a sorry business!" said Peter Todd. "Don't you think so, Dutton?"

"Of course not!" said Tom Dutton. "I've only just had brekker!"

"Eh?"

"I couldn't eat mutton now, to save my life!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peter Todd raised his voice.

"Don't you think it's a shame about Russell?" he exclaimed.

"Yes—and I'm proud of it, too!" said the deaf junior.

"Proud of what, fathead?"

"My stout muscle! I'm a hefty sort of chap, you know!" said Tom Dutton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peter Todd requested the other occupants of the railway-carriage to carry him home to die. Tom Dutton's affliction was very trying at times, not only to himself, but to his school-fellows.

"Of course," said Dick Rake, taking a bright view of the situation, "we might manage to rub along without Russell."

But Vernon-Smith shook his head.

"I've been told on good authority," he said, "that the Northants fellows are a set of Jessops and Haywards, so far as cricket's concerned; and if that's the case, we shall need to be at full strength. If Russell were playing, and he reproduced the form he showed at the nets the other day, we should win. But if we pull off the match without him, then it will be a miracle!"

When the Greyfriars fellows arrived at Northampton, and were introduced to their opponents, they had to agree with Vernon-Smith.

The Northamptonshire boys looked wonderfully fit and keen.

Dryden, their captain, had won the reputation of being the finest junior sportsman in the county. He seemed a model of health and strength, and so, for that matter, did the others.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon when the tourists reached Northampton; and they had three hours to kill before the sports commenced. The time was taken up with lunch and a ramble round the town.

At five o'clock a move was made to the recreation ground, where the running races took place.

The Friars were singularly unlucky. Race after race went to their opponents.

Something in the nature of a cloud hung over the Greyfriars party, and they failed to do themselves justice.

True, Vernon-Smith gained a walk-over win in the mile, but this was the only oasis in a desert of failures.

The Greyfriars juniors retired to their hotel in a very subdued frame of mind.

It was mainly through Dick Russell that they had failed. They were worried concerning his absence, and they had lost most of the races through not being able to concentrate.

Matters were not improved next morning. The swimming races brought about another series of sweeping victories for Northants.

"Hadh't we better go back to Greyfriars?" asked Peter Todd dolefully. "This is awful!"

"Putrid!" agreed Bulstrode. "Still, Smithy will level things up a bit this afternoon in the boxing-ring."

"Hope so!" granted the Bounder.

His hopes soared higher when he saw what manner of opponent he was up against.

Dale, the Northants boxer, was such a small fellow that it looked as if Vernon-Smith would eat him.

But nowhere are appearances more deceptive than in a boxing-ring.

Dale was the possessor of a four-point-seven punch—a punch which, when it got home, usually caused considerable damage.

"Time!" rapped out Gwynne, who was acting as referee.

The two boxers closed, and then the Greyfriars spectators had the surprise of their lives.

Dale was a wonderful little box of tricks. His lively antics in the ring fairly bewildered the Bounder, who blinked and staggered back as he received a small but strenuous fist between the eyes.

"Good old Dale!" roared the Northants contingent.

"Buck up, Smithy!" urged Hazeldene.



"This telegram came for you ten minutes ago," said Frank Courtenay. "I didn't give it to you before, in case I put you off your stroke!"

Vernon-Smith rallied, and for a few seconds he managed to hold his own.

And then his guard went all to pieces before the lightning tactics of his opponent. Again and again Dale darted in.

His fists beat a tattoo upon the Bounder's ribs; and Vernon-Smith began to feel like a punctured balloon.

"Smithy's done for!" groaned Bulstrode. "Afraid so!" murmured Peter Todd. "I don't believe even Russell would have made much headway against that little wizard!"

"Bet you he would!" said Ogilvy, loyal to his absent chum.

"Oh, my hat!" said Dick Penfold suddenly. "Just look!"

As in a dream, the Greyfriars juniors saw their representative being driven round and round the ring.

And then, just before the first round was due to finish, Dale shot out his right, straight from the shoulder.

The Bounder reeled, and before he could recover, a sharp, swift upper-cut stretched him prone.

"Licked!" ejaculated Dick Rake. "And in the first round!" said Morgan.

Vernon-Smith was game to the last. He had pluck in plenty, and he actually succeeded in struggling to his feet, only to go down again before a half-arm jolt, which completely finished him.

As on the previous day, it was a very melancholy procession of juniors that trooped back to their hotel.

Only the cricket-match remained; and if the Northants boys won that the rout of Greyfriars would be complete.

And Northants were stronger at cricket than at anything else!

"What hopes?" murmured Wibey.

"None at all!" growled Dick Rake. "I think we'd better march back to Greyfriars whistling 'The Death of Nelson'!"

That evening Vernon-Smith's party of eleven was reduced to ten.

Tom Redwing, who had not been feeling up to the mark all day, was ordered to bed for twenty-four hours. And this meant that the Remove would take the field a man short.

Next morning the worst fears of the Friars were confirmed.

Northants ran up a huge score in their first innings.

Their batsmen combined vigour with carefulness. They hit hard, but never wildly. The innings closed for 250.

To this Greyfriars made a plucky response. Vernon-Smith, now thoroughly reckless, ran out at everything. And Fortune favoured him. He carried his bat for 70, and the Friars mustered 184.

"There's still a chance!" said Peter Todd during lunch. "If we can rattle those beggars out cheaply in the second innings we shall pull through!"

"There's too much 'if' about it for my liking!" growled Bulstrode.

After lunch, despite the best efforts of the Remove bowlers, Northants ran up another huge score.

Vernon-Smith tried every ball he knew; so did Dick Penfold. But their wiles were unavailing.

Peter Todd and Dick Rake came on as change-bowlers, but the result was not inspiring.

Dryden, for Northants, completed his century; and the score was 201 for five wickets, when Ogilvy strolled up to where Vernon-Smith was standing.

"Will you excuse me for a few minutes, Smithy? I want to bunk along to the post-office."

"Go ahead, then!" said the Bounder. "We're hopelessly licked, anyway, and one or two men off the field won't make the slightest difference to the result!"

Just as Ogilvy was leaving the field it began to pour with rain—not an April shower, but a tropical deluge.

Stumps were drawn for the day, and it was decided—weather permitting—to finish the match next morning.

"Good!" murmured Ogilvy, as he watched the flannelled figures leaving the field. "If I wire to Dick now he'll get here in good time for the finish."

Many fellows would have considered that Greyfriars was beaten already, and that one man more or less would not affect the issue.

But Donald Ogilvy had great faith in Dick Russell's cricketering abilities. Russell had an almost uncanny habit of hitting up runs just when they were most wanted.

Accordingly, Ogilvy did not hesitate. A few moments later he was busily engaged in filling up a telegraph-form.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Sweets of Victory!

SECONDS out! Time!" The Drill Hall at Portsmouth was packed to overflowing.

Schoolboy boxing, when public, always attracts large audiences; and the present case was no exception.

By a strange whim of Fate, Dick Russell—alias Jack Brown—had been drawn against Frank Courtenay in the first heat of the light-weights.

Thus, the Greyfriars junior had a very stiff hurdle to negotiate at the outset, for Frank Courtenay was a boxer of outstanding ability.

There was a storm of hand-clapping as the two juniors faced each other.

The bout was exciting from the start. Good boxer though Frank Courtenay was, he had undoubtedly met his master.

Russell forced the pace at the outset; and

after a couple of swinging blows to the body, he succeeded in driving his opponent against the ropes.

"Hurrah!"

"Polish him off, sir!"

But Courtenay didn't intend to be polished off so quickly as all that. He rallied, and there was a fierce bout of in-fighting before the first round ended.

Dick Russell's second—a young naval officer—set a perfect gale blowing with his towel.

"Jolly good, young Brown!" he remarked. "If you carry on in the way you've begun you'll work your way through to the final!"

"Precisely what I mean to do!" said Russell breathlessly.

He went up for the second round, resolved to bring matters to an early conclusion.

He liked Frank Courtenay immensely; but likes and dislikes do not count in the boxing-ring.

Dick Russell dealt out heavy punishment to his opponent.

This was the first occasion on which Frank Courtenay had met Dick Russell in the ring, and he was quite taken aback. He had supposed the Greyfriars fellow to be an average boxer, but not an exceptional one. He was living and learning.

Russell followed his man round the ring, his right and left shooting out in swift succession.

Frank Courtenay withstood the hurricane attack for a moment—perhaps more.

Then his guard went all to pieces; and Dick Russell, sailing in, flogged the Highcliffe junior with an upper-cut of which Jimmy Wilde would not have been ashamed.

Courtenay's head was singing. The referee's droning voice sounded far away.

"One—two—three—"

"Up you get!" urged a soldier seated in the front row.

Frank Courtenay tried to comply, only to fall back listlessly on to the boards.

"Four—five—six—seven—"

The Highcliffe fellow lay prone. "Eight—nine—ten!" counted the referee.

"Jack Brown wins!"

And the audience set up a cheer on behalf of Dick Russell.

Only two fellows present—Tom Merry and Frank Courtenay—knew that the Greyfriars junior was boxing under an assumed name.

Russell bowed his acknowledgments, and retired to the dressing-room for a rest.

He had fought barely two rounds with Frank Courtenay, but the going had been strenuous.

In his next heat he found himself pitted against a local boy named Beeton. And the latter lived up to his name by being knocked out in three rounds, Russell being irresistible.

Never had the Greyfriars fellows felt in such a perfect form.

The fact that he was playing truant, and had set Mr. Quelch at defiance, seemed to lend zest to his blows.

In leaving Greyfriars by night, Russell had taken a grave risk; and he meant to make the game worth the candle.

Bringing into play all the skill and science at his command, he worked his way into the semi-final of the light-weights.

Curiously enough, another semi-finalist was Tom Merry, of St. Jim's; but he was not matched against Russell.

Tom Merry lost his bout on points. Dick Russell won his, but it was no walk-over victory. He had to extend himself to the utmost.

At five o'clock in the afternoon the referee made an announcement which set the hall in a buzz.

"Final—light-weights. George Peters, of Burchester College, versus Jack Brown, of—"

The referee paused. He had no record of Russell's school.

"Call it Kent!" murmured Russell.

"Jack Brown, of Kent!" said the referee.

Those who had watched Russell working his way to the final gave him a cheer.

Russell had scored his victories in a more sensational manner than Peters.

But the latter was a great boxer. The fact that he had beaten Tom Merry proved that.

"Seconds out!" said the referee. And then, after a brief pause: "Time!"

Dick Russell was feeling a trifle war-weary as he stepped up to his man.

Peters, on the other hand, looked fresh, fit, and confident.

Nevertheless, the honours in the first round went to Russell.

The Greyfriars junior had mapped out his

plan of campaign beforehand. He intended to force the fighting.

And force it he did, to such an extent that the Burchester fellow was sent to the boards just before the end of the round.

The crowd jumped to the false conclusion that it was a knock-out.

They started cheering Russell.

But Peters was on his feet in an instant, and he was fighting gamely when the round ended.

The young naval officer who was acting as Russell's second summed up the situation in a far from cheerful manner.

"I don't think you'll pull it off," he said. "I've seen Peters box at Aldershot. The fellow's made of indiarubber. He refuses to take the knock-out."

But Russell smiled. He had his own opinion about that.

When the second round started the crowd was reminded of fireworks on Peace Night.

Russell rained blow after blow upon his opponent, and Peters, nothing daunted, fought fiercely in turn.

The Greyfriars junior received a blow on the head which almost made him dizzy; but he repaid it with interest.

Buff!

It was that most powerful of blows—the straight left.

Peters threw up his hands, and went to the boards with a crash.

"Oh, well hit, sir!"

"He's down and out this time!"

Even Dick Russell thought so. He stood over his man, little dreaming that Peters would have any further stomach for the fight.

The Burchester boy lay perfectly prone until the referee had counted six.

Then he staggered to his feet, and boxed on the defensive for the remainder of the round.

"Told you so," said the naval officer, as he sponged Russell's heated face a moment later.

"The fellow doesn't know when he's beaten. He's hard as nails!"

In the third round Dick Russell began to grow a little alarmed as to the result.

He no longer felt in the pink of condition. That blow on the head which he had received in the previous round robbed him of his wonted coolness. He became conscious of the fact that he was fighting a little wildly.

Then came another blow to the temple, and this time it was Russell who was down.

A mist swam before his eyes.

Was this defeat?

The murmur of the crowd sounded far away. What were they saying? Russell wondered. And then he distinctly caught the words:

"Buck up, Brown!"

With a supreme effort, Dick Russell lurched to his feet.

He expected to be sent down again on the instant, but, to his intense relief, he saw that Peters, too, was nearly at the end of his tether. The Burchester boy fought on doggedly, but all the force had gone out of his blows.

"Thought he had you that time," murmured Russell's second, as he brought the sponge into play. "Think you can last another round?"

"If he can, I can," was Russell's breathless comment.

"That's the spirit!"

Some of Russell's former vitality came back to him as he stepped up for the fourth round.

He remembered what defeat would mean to him—defeat in the ring, crowned with expulsion from Greyfriars. He resolved to summon all his strength for a final effort.

Peters almost tottered into the ring.

He was already something of a wreck. And Russell intended to make the wreckage complete in that round.

Peters thrust out his left. It was a feeble blow, and Russell easily parried it.

Then, sailing in, the Greyfriars junior shot out his right, and, before Peters could recover, followed up with his left.

All the energy at Russell's disposal had been concentrated into those two blows, the second of which flogged the Burchester fellow.

And this time Peters did not rise.

Mechanically, the referee started to count.

"Never say die, Burchester!" shouted somebody in the hall.

But Peters had reached that stage when he could fight no more. True, he made one plucky effort to regain his feet, but it was futile.

The referee concluded the count, and a salvo of cheers hailed "Jack Brown" as the victor.

Dick Russell was making his way towards

the dressing-room, when Frank Courtenay encountered him.

"Jolly well played!" said the Highcliffe junior heartily. And then he added: "This telegram came for you ten minutes ago. I didn't hand it to you in between the rounds, in case it put you off your stroke."

"Thanks!" said Russell.

He ripped open the buff-coloured envelope. The wire was brief, and to the point. It ran as follows:

"Jack Brown, Drill Hall, Portsmouth.—We want you.—DON."

Russell knew that Ogilvy would not have sent that wire unless things were progressing very badly at Northampton.

"My hat! I must go at once!" he said.

"Go where?" inquired Courtenay.

"To Northampton. Our fellows seem to be up against it. And now that my ambition's realised, and I've collared the light-weight championship of the South, I'm game for anything!"

"But you'll never get to Northampton to-night!" said Courtenay.

"Oh, crumbs!"

"You'll get as far as London, and that's all. You'll have to complete your journey in the morning."

Russell realised that there was no alternative.

If he had been heavily in funds, he would have hired a motor-car, in order to reach Northampton that evening; but such a course would have entailed an expenditure of about twenty pounds, which was altogether out of the question.

"It's rotten luck!" said Courtenay. "Still, I hope you'll turn up in time to do something."

"I hope so, too," said Russell.

He hurried into the dressing-room, changed into his Etons, and, by performing a marathon race along Commercial Road, managed to catch the last train to London.

And all the time one thought was hammering at his brains:

Would he be in time to save his side?

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The End of the Adventure.

"THREE hundred to win!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Ye gods!" groaned Peter Todd.

"Three giddy hundred!"

"It would be all the same if we wanted three billion!" remarked Dick Rake. "With only ten men, we're booked for a fine old licking!"

The Greyfriars juniors were not happy. Indeed, to use an expression of Bulstrode's, they were equal to weeping tears of blood.

The cricket-match had been resumed that morning, and the remaining Northants batsmen disposed of. And the Remove were now faced with the colossal task of scoring three hundred runs.

They had all day to do it in, but that thought gave them little consolation. The Northants bowlers would probably rattle them out for half the required number of runs.

Donald Ogilvy was worried and perplexed. The Scottish junior was not aware of the travelling difficulties with which Dick Russell was faced, and the thought assailed him that Russell had ignored his telegram.

Anyway, the morning wore on, and there was no sign of Ogilvy's chum.

Just as Vernon-Smith and Peter Todd were strapping on their pads, Dick Penfold dashed up with a copy of the "Sportsman."

Penfold was so badly out of breath that the cricketers could only catch fragments of his conversation, as follows:

"Dick Russell—light-weight champion—ripping victory—"

There was a rush on the part of the Removites to read the report.

The headline told them that Russell's visit to Portsmouth had not been fruitless.

"GREYFRIARS BOXER'S BRILLIANT 'VICTORY'!"

And the report continued:

"The light-weight championship, open to public school boys in the South of England, was contested at Portsmouth yesterday.

"There were many interesting bouts, but none more interesting than the final, in which E. E. Russell, Greyfriars School, defeated E. H. Peters, Burchester College.

"Russell boxed finely throughout. He reproduced the form he showed some time ago at Aldershot. But for Peters' obstinate re-

fusal to accept defeat, the fight would have ended at a very early stage.

"Curiously enough, the winner boxed under the name of 'Jack Brown,' but our representative, who had seen Russell box at Aldershot, at once identified him.

"Greyfriars has cause to be proud of Russell, who is a boxer with a big future."

"Hurrah!" shouted Ogilvy.
"Good old Russell!" said Bulstrode.

Even Vernon-Smith was impressed; but he said nothing. He could not easily forgive Russell for having achieved this honour at the expense of his schoolfellows, who were faced with a desperate situation at Northampton.

"Light-weight champion of the South!" exclaimed Peter Todd. "My hat!"

Dryden, of Northampton, who was waiting in the field with the rest of his team, signalled to the pavilion.

"Come along, Toddy!" said Vernon-Smith, taking up his bat. "They're waiting to slaughter us."

There was a cheer—rather an ironical cheer—as the Remove's first pair came down the pavilion steps.

Even allowing for the fact that cricket was a game of surprises, it seemed a sheer impossibility for the Remove to win.

Peter Todd batted cautiously. He was content, for the most part, to score singles. But Vernon-Smith went for the bowling with reckless abandon.

On one occasion, the Bounder was nearly stumped, and twice he badly "skied" the ball. But no one was fielding deeply enough, and Vernon-Smith continued to make merry. The score mounted apace.

When fifty went up on the board, the Greyfriars juniors exchanged hopeful glances.

"Smithy's putting up a fight," said Hazeldene. "I wonder if—"

"It's too much to hope for," said Bulstrode, who knew what Hazel was thinking.

"Games have been pulled out of the fire before now," said Dick Penfold. "Just look at Smithy! He seems to have a personal grudge against that bowler!"

The Bounder had just pulled the ball past square-leg to the boundary.

Sixty, seventy, eighty went up in turn on the telegraph-board; and Vernon-Smith and Todd were still together.

"It's going to take a blast of dynamite to shift them!" remarked Dick Rake.

But the partnership was dissolved at last.

With the score at a hundred, Vernon-Smith failed to get the full face of the bat to the ball, which glanced off into the hands of the point.

A tremendous ovation greeted the Bounder as he came off.

Out of the total of 100 he had scored 72, his rate of scoring having been considerably quicker than Peter Todd's.

"Man in!" said Wibley.

It was Dick Penfold's turn to bat. The son of the Friar's cobbler was every inch a cricketer. He played as Vernon-Smith had played—hitting out vigorously.

But his luck was not so good as the Bounder's. After sending three balls to the boundary in succession, he was caught at the wicket.

Dick Rake followed on. He started rather uncertainly, but once he had got the measure of the bowling there was no stopping him. He helped Peter Todd to take the score to 150 before being clean bowled.

"You're next, Bulstrode!" said Vernon-Smith. "It seems that we've still got a sporting chance. Go for the stuff bald-headed!"

Bulstrode grinned, and went to join Peter Todd at the wickets.

The score had risen to 180 when the leader of Study No. 7 was caught and bowled.

And then followed a startling collapse.

Northants, who had begun to get a little alarmed at the turn events were taking, tried a couple of fresh bowlers.

The change was for the better.

Hazeldene was bowled first ball, and Morgan and Wibley lost their wickets in the same over.

"It's all over, bar shouting!" murmured Peter Todd.

Tom Dutton went in next.

The first ball cannoned against his pad, and there was a chorus of appeal from the fieldsmen—for Dutton was obviously "leg-before."

The deaf junior walked moodily back to the pavilion, and Ogilvy came in to join Bulstrode.

Ogilvy was the last man in, unless—

But the Scottish junior had given up all

hope of Dick Russell putting in an appearance.

By means of careful cricket Bulstrode and Ogilvy carried the score to 210—ninety runs short of victory.

Then Bulstrode's middle-stump performed revolutions.

"It's all up!" said Vernon-Smith. But he spoke too soon.

Just as the players were about to retire to the pavilion the eleventh man arrived.

Dick Russell fairly sprinted on to the ground.

"Am I in time?" he shouted to the group of Greyfriars juniors in front of the pavilion.

"Just!" said Vernon-Smith.

"We want ninety to win—and you're our last hope!" said Peter Todd.

Dick Russell shot a hasty glance on to the playing-pitch.

He saw that his partner would be Donald Ogilvy. Between them those two might yet manage to save the game!

All that Russell did was to buckle on a couple of pads, and seize the bat which Peter Todd thrust into his grasp.

Then he strode on to the pitch.

What little hope the Friars possessed was nearly shattered when Dick Russell missed his first ball.

But the wicket remained intact, and the ball thudded into the gloved hands of the wicket-keeper.

"Phew! A jolly close shave!" remarked Dick Penfold.

But Russell made no more mistakes.

From that time he settled down into a steady game, and Ogilvy backed him up splendidly.

The two batsmen embarked upon the rather risky game of stealing runs.

But the risk was not so great in their case. Both were fleet of foot, and they managed to avoid being run out.

"Two hundred and fifty!" said Peter Todd, at length. "Only fifty more! My hat! I can forgive Russell anything, if he pulls this off!"

Dryden, of Northants, glanced towards the score-board, and frowned.

"This won't do, you chaps!" he said. "We must stop their merry antics somehow!"

The fieldsmen came close in, and there was no more run-stealing. But occasionally, to the delight of the crowd, Dick Russell drove the ball over the heads of the fieldsmen to the boundary.

Ogilvy was fairly fagged by this time. The heat and burden of the day were beginning to tell on him. He contented himself by placing a straight bat in front of every ball, and leaving the hitting to Dick Russell.

Dick Russell scored two more boundaries, which brought the Remove to within four runs of victory.

And then a startling thing happened.

Dryden was bowling, and he put everything he knew into his next delivery.

The ball got up wickedly, and Russell instinctively ducked his head.

But he was a fraction of a second too late.

The bat slipped from his fingers, and he went to the grass, stunned by a blow on the forehead.

"Oh, I say!" gasped Dryden, rushing to the spot. "I'm beastly sorry, old man—"

"It was a pure accident," said Ogilvy, stooping beside his injured chum. "Dick! Speak to me, Dick!"

There was no movement from Dick Russell. The local umpire carried a small flask of brandy in his pocket. He applied it to Russell's lips, and the junior soon came round.

"My hat!" he muttered, as he staggered to his feet. "I thought the end of the world had come! Everything went black, and—"

"Look here," cut in Ogilvy, "you're not fit to go on!"

Russell forced a smile.

"Rats!" he said. "I'm not going to chuck up the sponge when we only want four runs to win."

"I'm awfully sorry about this," said Dryden.

"Oh, don't worry," said Russell. "Accidents will happen. Besides, I'm feeling tons better now. Carry on!"

And the game was resumed, amid cheers from the crowd.

Dick Russell took his stand, and faced Dryden.

The next two balls went dangerously near to the wicket, and Russell was unable to deal with them.

The following ball, however, he nicked clean through the slips to the boundary.

The Remove had won the match! Dick Russell only had a faint recollection of what followed.

There was a rush of flannelled figures on to the pitch, and the next moment he found himself swaying in mid-air, borne on the shoulders of his schoolfellows.

Donald Ogilvy was treated the same. And a happy, boisterous crowd of juniors carried the winners of the match in triumph to the pavilion, and afterwards—so great was their enthusiasm—to the hotel.

Vernon-Smith no longer felt hostile towards Dick Russell.

"You played like a giddy Trojan!" he said warmly. "You deserve the V.C. for making the winning hit after you were crooked."

"I don't know about the V.C.," murmured Russell, on whose forehead a bump the size of a pigeon's-egg was slowly forming. "All that I've got to look forward to is the sack from Greyfriars!"

"Faith, an' I shall have something to say about that!" said Gwynne.

And when the victorious cricketers returned to Greyfriars next morning Gwynne's first mission was to the Head's study.

Dr. Locke smiled as the prefect entered.

"I trust the tour has been successful, Gwynne?"

Gwynne nodded.

"Our fellows won the cricket-match, sir—thanks chiefly to Russell."

The Head frowned at the mention of Dick Russell's name.

"I fail to understand you, Gwynne. That foolish boy proceeded to Portsmouth against orders. I have not yet been able to trace his exact whereabouts—"

"He's back at Greyfriars, sir," said Gwynne.

"Bless my soul!"

And after he had won the light-weight championship at Portsmouth, he travelled to Northampton, and won the cricket-match for his side. It was his love of boxing that caused him to go to Portsmouth in the first place, sir. Representatives were sent from Highcliffe and St. Jim's, and Russell naturally didn't want to be left out. I hope you'll take these facts into consideration when dealing with him, sir."

The Head's brow grew less stern.

"It was my fixed intention, Gwynne, to expel Russell from Greyfriars. I now see that several excuses can be found for his action. But excuses do not constitute a justification. I shall punish Russell severely."

"You won't expel him, sir?"

"No," said Dr. Locke, after a pause.

"Good enough," thought Gwynne.

And he withdrew from the Head's study, well satisfied.

An hour later Dick Russell was summoned to the Head's study.

He fully expected that he would be called upon to face the extreme penalty, for Gwynne had told him nothing of his recent interview with the Head.

Indeed, Russell had gone so far as to pack his belongings in anticipation of being sacked from the school.

The junior looked on in surprise as the Head produced a cane. He was thinking that it was a bit thick to be expelled and caned in addition.

The Head's next words reassured him.

"You have been guilty of a very serious offence, Russell. But for the extenuating circumstances which have been brought to my knowledge, I should have expelled you from this school. As it is, I shall let a flogging meet the case."

A week before, in the Remove dormitory, Dick Russell had told Ogilvy that he would be quite prepared to pay the piper. And he meant it.

The flogging was a severe one, but Russell kept a stiff upper-lip throughout.

Not a murmur escaped his lips, and the Head himself secretly admired the junior's pluck.

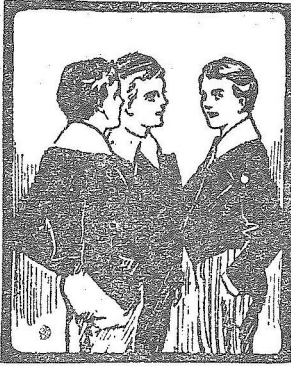
That evening there was a bumper celebration in Vernon-Smith's study.

Accommodation was limited; supplies of tuck were not.

And, happiest of all, in spite of sundry aches and pains caused by his tussles in the ring, the cricket-ball, and the Head's cane, was Dick Russell, the public school light-weight champion of the South!

THE END.

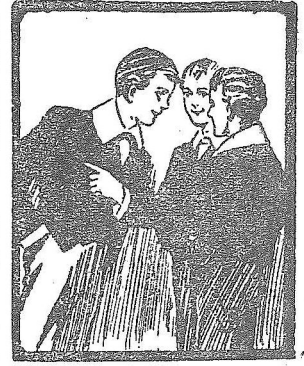
THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 29.



THE ROOKWOOD BURGLARY!

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

BY OWEN CONQUEST.



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Tubby Muffin's Raid.

"WELL hit, Jimmy!"

"Bravo!"

Tommy Dodd pulled a wry face as he saw his bowling repeatedly sent to the boundary by Jimmy Silver, his rival on the Classical side at Rookwood.

The juniors were practising at the nets for the forthcoming match with Greyfriars, and Jimmy Silver was entertaining the spectators to some hard hitting. Jimmy was in form, as was proved by the perspiration running down the manly brow of Tommy Dodd, the leader of the Modern juniors, who had been trying unsuccessfully to take his wicket.

The next ball fairly flew from the hand of Tommy Dodd, but Jimmy Silver coolly stepped out to meet it, and the sound of a hard object striking against the roof of the pavilion signalled another boundary.

"I think that'll do, my son!" said Jimmy Silver, leaving the wicket. "You Modern chaps don't know how to play cricket for toffee!"

"Rats!" growled Tommy Dodd.

The leader of the Fistical Four walked away with his chums, Raby, Newcome, and Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Repeat the giddy performance to-morrow, and we shall lick Greyfriars to a frazzle!" said Raby enthusiastically.

"Hear, hear!"

Jimmy Silver looked thoughtful. He had his doubts about licking Greyfriars to a frazzle. Harry Wharton & Co. could put a jolly good team into the field, as had been proved in previous matches.

"What about tea?" asked the leader of the Fistical Four.

Raby, Newcome, and Lovell nodded in agreement.

"I'm feeling rather peckish."

"So am I," said Lovell.

"Jolly good job your remittance came this morning, Jimmy, old scout!" said Raby.

"Hear, hear!" agreed the Co.

The juniors had laid in a plentiful supply of tuck on the strength of Jimmy's remittance, and they looked forward to tea with great relish. Now that the war restrictions had been lifted, study feeds had resumed their old shape and proportions.

They arrived at the end study, and Lovell pushed open the door. A startled exclamation came from within, and a strange sight met the gaze of the juniors.

"My hat!"

Tubby Muffin, the fat Classical junior, was perched on a chair against the study cupboard, and a smear of jam gave colour to his fat face, which had turned to a sickly white at sight of Jimmy Silver & Co.

The juniors stood transfixed for a moment, hardly able to believe their eyes; then a roar of anger burst from them:

"Collar him!"

"Scalp him!"

"Oh crumbs!"

The last came from Tubby Muffin.

The chair on which he had been standing slipped, and, with a startled cry, the fat junior descended with a clatter into the fireplace, where he lay groaning.

"Ow-yow!"

Jimmy Silver wrathfully yanked the fat junior to his feet, and Tubby Muffin stood there, shaking with apprehension. He had little mercy to expect from the irate juniors, he knew, and the faces of his captors bore sufficient testimony to the fact.

"Now, you fat gormandiser," said Jimmy Silver, tightening his grasp upon the ear of the hapless Tubby, "what were you doing at our cupboard?"

"Ow-ow-yow! Leggo my ear, Silver, you beast! I—I wasn't at your cupboard! I should scorn to pinch another fellow's grub!"

"But we saw you!" hooted Raby.

"Oh crumbs!—I mean, did you? Ahem! I was only seeing if you had any jam-tarts—that is to say, I— Oh dear!"

Tubby Muffin, with his usual disregard for the truth, had caught himself in the toils. He looked frantically round for a way of escape; but the exasperated juniors guessed his thoughts, and Arthur Edward Lovell closed the door.

Jimmy Silver gave another tweak to the ear of the unfortunate Muffin.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Oh, bump the fat worm!" said Lovell.

The four juniors laid hands on Muffin's ample person, and he was raised in the air.

Bump!

"O-ow!"

Bump!

"Silver, you beast—"

Bump!

"I think that will teach the rotter to leave our cupboard alone in the future. I'll give you two seconds to clear out, Tubby!" he said grimly.

But one second was enough for Muffin.

He scrambled to his feet, and bolted for the door, helped from behind by a well-delivered boot belonging to Lovell. Once in the doorway, he paused and glared savagely at the laughing juniors.

"Yah, beasts!"

"May as well have tea now that our porpoise has gone!" said Newcome.

"Hear, hear!"

And the Fistical Four busied themselves getting tea ready.

Tubby Muffin had not been long at the cupboard, and, bar the absence of a few jam-tarts, their tuck was just as they had left it.

"Lucky we came upon the fat worm before he had time to wolf the lot!" said Raby, munching a cream-puff.

And the Co. nodded in silent agreement.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Head's Brother Arrives.

JIMMY SILVER leaned back in his chair with a sigh of contentment.

"Another cream-bun, old man?" asked Raby, proffering the remaining bun temptingly.

The leader of the Fistical Four shook his head.

"I'm finished!"

"Lovell, old chap—"

"Not me!"

"Newcome, can I tempt you to this dainty morsel?"

"You can't!" was Newcome's laconic reply.

"Well, here goes!" said Raby; and with that the cream-bun very soon disappeared.

It had been a sumptuous repast, and the four juniors leaned back in their chairs and discussed the all-important matter of cricket.

"I think we shall whack them!" said Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Hear, hear!"

The conversation was interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Come in!" sang out Jimmy Silver.

The page-boy at Rookwood pushed his head round the door, with a grin.

"Which as 'ow the 'ead wants to see you, Master Silver."

"Wants to see me?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, Master Silver."

The Fistical Four exchanged glances of inquiry.

"Wonder what the Head wants to see me for?" said Jimmy Silver, with a frown.

"Blessed if I know!"

"I suppose I'd better go."

And the leader of the Fistical Four left the study and made his way to the Head's sanctum, turning over in his mind all probable scrapes which had come to light.

"Come in!" came in answer to his tap at the door.

Jimmy Silver entered.

"Ah, Silver, I want you to do me a favour!" said Dr. Chisholm kindly.

Jimmy Silver breathed an inward sigh of relief.

"Yes, sir; certainly!"

"I am expecting my brother from South Africa," went on the Head, "and he is arriving by the five-thirty train at Coombe Station. I should like you, my boy, to meet him."

"Yes, sir, with pleasure!" replied Jimmy Silver.

"Thank you, Silver! If you care to take your chums with you, you can." And the Head smiled.

"Very good, sir!"

Jimmy Silver left Dr. Chisholm's study, and made his way back to his chums.

"What luck?" inquired Lovell sympathetically.

"Oh, it wasn't a wigging! The Head wants us to meet his brother from South Africa, and he's arriving by the five-thirty train at Coombe."

"We shall have to look sharp!" said Newcome, looking at his watch. "It's five-fifteen now!"

And the chums left the study, and went down to the gates. They arrived in good time for the train at Coombe; it was just coming round the bend when they walked on to the platform.

Five or six people alighted, and amongst them Jimmy Silver spotted a well-set-up man of Colonial appearance, with a likeness to Dr. Chisholm.

The stranger looked round the platform as if expecting to meet someone, but on catching sight of the Rookwood caps, came over to the Fistical Four.

Jimmy Silver stepped forward and lifted his cap.

"Excuse me, sir, but are you Mr. Chisholm?"

"Yes, my boy," replied the stranger. "And you're from Rookwood, I perceive."

"Dr. Chisholm sent us to meet you, sir," said the leader of the Fistical Four.

In company with Mr. Chisholm the juniors left the station in the direction of Rookwood, and chatted on the way back to the school about the glories of South Africa.

It appeared that Mr. Chisholm was on a visit to a London firm with some specimen diamonds, and had decided to visit his brother at Rookwood for a few days.

Jimmy Silver noticed that he was carrying a bag, to which he grasped tightly, and, looking up from the bag, he was surprised to see the face of a man peering at them through the hedge. The next moment it had disappeared.

"Look!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

The others followed his outstretched finger, but could see nothing but the hedge, which was swaying gently under the breeze which had sprung up.

"I saw the face of a man looking at us!" burst out the leader of the Fistical Four. "And then it suddenly disappeared!"

Mr. Chisholm eagerly searched the hedge, but the owner of the face must have disappeared, for they could find no trace of anyone. Nevertheless a shade of disappoint-

ment crept over Mr. Chisholm's face, which changed into a thoughtful frown.

"You're dreaming, Jimmy!" exclaimed Lovell, with a grin.

"Ass! I tell you I saw a face!"

"Anyway, there's no one there now," said Raby, who shared his chum's opinion.

The party arrived at the school in silence, each busy with their thoughts; and Jimmy Silver, leaving his chums in the quad, conducted Mr. Chisholm to the Head's study.

"Thank you very much, my boy!" said the stranger genially. "You may have been right about that face—I've been shadowed ever since I left the shores of South Africa. This journey has been a constant source of worry to me. Diamonds prove a great attraction to thieves, and several attempts have been made to secure them, but so far their efforts have been unsuccessful."

Jimmy Silver looked interested. He was sure now that he had seen a face in the hedge, and the expression on it boded ill for anyone to meet the owner.

The leader of the Fistical Four rejoined his chums, and related all that Mr. Chisholm had told him.

"Jimmy, my boy, you may have been right," said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"It's up to us to keep an eye on those diamonds," he said.

"Chump, the Head will lock them up in his safe!" was Raby's emphatic reply.

"I know; but still you never know!" answered Jimmy Silver wisely.

As a matter of fact the diamonds were already under lock and key. Dr. Chisholm was taking no chances. He knew the value of those stones, and his brother had related to him the incidents of his journey, which proved that someone was waiting an opportunity to steal them.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Burglary.

TIME you kids got a move on," said Bulkeley, the captain of the school, as he looked into the end study.

"Right-ho, Bulkeley!"

And the Fistical Four trooped up to the Fourth Form dormitory, and began to undress.

By this time the subject of Mr. Chisholm's arrival was a well-worn topic. All the same, it was eagerly discussed by the juniors until Lonsdale, the prefect, turned out the lights. Then the buzz died down.

Jimmy Silver lay awake thinking. He could not sleep—try as he might he could not forget that face; but at last he drifted into an uneasy slumber.

He awoke with the chiming of the clock in the tower, and listened. Nothing broke the stillness of the night save the sighing of the trees. Suddenly there came to his ears the crunching of feet on the gravel.

With a bound, the leader of the Fistical Four was out of bed, and tiptoed softly over to the window. He was all excitement. In the gloom he made out the slinking shape of a man moving towards the Head's window. Should he awake the rest of the fellows, or investigate himself? He decided upon the latter course. Slipping on his trousers and coat, he crept out of the dormitory, and stepped noiselessly downstairs.

From underneath the door of the Head's study there came a small beam of light. The thief was at work. Jimmy could distinctly hear the grinding of a fine drill upon the safe. His heart leapt as he listened at the door, and his breath came in gasps. Should he call out for help, or should he wait? Hesitation proved fatal.

Of a sudden the light went out, and before the astonished junior could acquaint himself with the change, something hard hit him on the head with a terrific force. Everything seemed to fade away into oblivion, and the junior sank to the floor with a groan.

His assailant with a grim smile placed a wad which gave off a sickly-smelling odour over Jimmy Silver's nostrils, and then lifted him on to his back and padded softly back to the study.

Evidently the burglar's work was accomplished, for he gathered up his tools and climbed out of the window, still bearing the unconscious form of the junior.

The intruder crossed the drive and scaled the wall bordering the grounds. The other side of the wall was a car waiting with a man at the wheel.

"Ere, Johnson, give us a hand!" cried the burglar, in a soft voice.

The man at the wheel of the car came forward, and between them they lifted the unconscious junior over the wall, and carried him to the car.

"Did you get them, Jim?" asked Johnson, as the car moved off.

"Sure I did; but this youngster nearly spoilt my game."

"How's that?"

"Why, he was a-breathing outside the door, and I heard him, so I just taps him over the 'ead, game like, and 'ere 'e is!"

Johnson remained silent for a moment.

"We shall have to leave him in that deserted hut up on the moors, or he'll blab."

"That's why I brought 'im along. We want twelve hours' start to make a clean get-away."

The other nodded, and there was silence. The car raced on, purring gently, and pulled up about two miles from Rookwood, at the deserted woodman's hut. The unconscious junior was then bound and thrown into the hut, and the two rascals, leaping into their car, raced away at breakneck speed in the direction of the coast.

It was about an hour later that Jimmy Silver regained consciousness, and he stated about him wildly. Then it all came back to him—his watching at the Head's door, and the blow on the head from the burglar.

His head was aching terribly from the blow, and to his amazement, he discovered that he was securely bound.

To shout for help would be futile. For one thing, he realised that he was in the deserted woodman's hut, and another that it was in the early hours of the morning, when no one would be abroad.

"Good heavens!" he groaned. "Here I am, trussed up like a fowl, and the scoundrel has got clean away with the diamonds, and I'm the only one that knows as yet!"

He ground his teeth in his utter helplessness, and at his folly in not rousing the school when he had come upon the burglar. Frantically he tugged at his bonds, but they were tied skilfully, and the rascals had done their work too well.

He gave it up in despair, and watched and waited for the dawn. But long before the dawn arrived he had sunk into a deep slumber.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Jimmy Silver Missing.

RISING-BELL clanged out at Rookwood, and the occupants of the Fourth Form dormitory awoke to life.

Arthur Edward Lovell was the first up, and he walked over to the bed occupied by Jimmy Silver, with a wet sponge. It wasn't often that the leader of the Fistical Four laid in bed after the rising-bell had gone, and Lovell determined to keep his leader up to scratch.

"Get up, Jim— Why, where on earth is he?"

Lovell asked the question on nearing the bed, for, to his amazement, the bed was empty. It certainly looked as if it had been slept in, but of Silver there was no sign.

The Fourth-Formers gathered round, mystified, and offered all kinds of explanations.

"Perhaps he's gone for an early morning swim," suggested Raby, towelling himself.

"That's it," agreed Newcome.

And the juniors trooped down to breakfast. All was commotion and excitement downstairs, and strange rumours were afloat.

Tubby Muffin, the fat junior, came up to Raby Newcome and Lovell, his face working with great excitement.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Brrr!"

"Buzz off, Tubby!"

"But it's about Silver!" said Tubby eagerly. The three chums were all attention.

"Get it off your chest, Tubby!"

"I happened to hear the Head say"—and Tubby paused to let his words sink in—"that there has been a robbery overnight, and that his safe has been rifled, and Jimmy Silver is missing."

"Great Scott!"

"I always had my doubts about the honesty of Silver," went on Muffin loftily; "but I didn't think he would descend to such depths as to rob his own school."

"Eh?"

"What?"

"I mean that Jimmy Silver has run away with the plunder, and—"

Tubby Muffin's colloquy was cut short, and ended with a yell.

"Yow-ow! Wharrer you at?"

The infuriated juniors rushed upon Tubby Muffin, and that fat youth was dribbled out into the passage with well-placed boots, which found a resting-place upon his fat person.

"Yah! Stoppit, you beasts!"

Raby Lovell and Newcome passed on, leaving the unfortunate Tubby in a dishevelled heap on the floor.

The chums were looking concerned. The burglary at the school, and their leader's disappearance connected together. But in what way they couldn't for the life of them imagine, but certainly not in the way Tubby had suggested. By this time nasty rumours were being spread, and their chum's name was on the lips of all the juniors.

"I wonder where poor old Jimmy is?" remarked Lovell thoughtfully.

Then the bell went, and the juniors made their way to Big Hall.

Quite a buzz of conversation was running around, and the masters could not prevent it. The events of the past night was on everyone's lips, and Jimmy Silver was the centre of the topic.

There came a rustle at the door, and the majestic figure of Dr. Chisholm swept into the room. Immediately there was silence. The usually kind face of the Head had undergone a change, and in its place reigned a severe frown.

"Boys," began the Head, "I have something of a very regrettable nature to bring to your notice. As perhaps you have already heard, my safe was broken into last night, and stones of great value have been stolen. It has come as a great shock to me—especially as Silver of the Fourth Form is missing. I do not for one moment think that he is responsible for the theft, but I am sure that he is in some way connected with it."

There began a muttering amongst the assembly.

Dr. Chisholm held up his hand.

"Silence!" he commanded.

"If any boy here can throw light upon the mystery, will he kindly step forward?"

Silence.

The Head's keen eyes swept through the assembly, but no one moved from their places.

"Very well, my boys, that is all."

So saying, Dr. Chisholm stepped out of the room.

Raby Newcome and Lovell were joined by Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern Side.

"I'm sure Jimmy hasn't pinched those rotten diamonds!" said Lovell.

"Hear, hear!"

"It's up to us," went on Lovell, "to find him."

The juniors nodded. Very little work was done that morning in classes. Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, was very lenient with the boys, and both master and pupils were glad when morning lessons were over.

Raby Newcome and Lovell searched everywhere for their chum, but no trace could be found. Tommy Dodd & Co. had also been busy, but they had drawn blank.

"I can't help thinking that foul play has happened to Jimmy," said Lovell. "Now, I'll put forward a theory."

His chums were all attention. At any other time they would have laughed to scorn the idea of Lovell putting forward a theory, but Jimmy Silver's disappearance had altered their views.

"Spout it out!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Now, supposing," began Lovell, "that a burglar raided the Head's safe, and Jimmy, waking at the time, investigated?"

"Go on, old top!" said Mornington, who began to see through the theory.

Lovell paused before resuming.

"If you were a burglar, Tommy Dodd—"

"Eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, if you were a burglar, and you found that you were being watched, what would you do?"

"I suppose I should knock the wacher over the head," grinned Tommy Dodd.

"Exactly! Now, it's my belief that Jimmy came across the burglar at his work, and, as you have suggested, was knocked on the head."

"Yes, that's feasible," said Raby. "But how do you account for his disappearance?"

"Fathead, let me finish! After a burglar had broken open a safe containing such a haul, he would want to make sure of a clean get-away."

The juniors listened eagerly. They were coming round to Lovell's way of thinking.

Lovell proceeded:

"Well, if Jimmy was left knocking around, naturally he would give the alarm, and so spoil their chances."

"Lovell, old scout, I believe you're right," said Mornington.

"You ought to have been a giddy detective," said Tommy Dodd, with a grin.

"Or a burglar!" chimed in Tommy Doyle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Lovell hadn't finished with his theory. "We've searched all over the school, you chaps, and we haven't come across a trace of Jimmy. Therefore, it goes to prove that he must be outside somewhere."

"Marvelous!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell frowned. He didn't consider the present a matter for joking.

"Poor old Jimmy may be badly injured for all we know, and it's up to us to find him," he said emphatically.

"Hear, hear!"

"It's no good leaving it to the police. I haven't much faith in them, anyway. Now, it's my suggestion that we devote the whole of the afternoon in looking for Jimmy."

"But what about the cricket-match?" hooted Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, crumbs!"

The juniors turned to Mornington, the junior captain of the Rookwood Eleven.

He read the inquiry in their gaze.

"I'll wire Harry Wharton, and postpone the match. This bizney comes a jolly long way in front of cricket," he said.

The party of searchers made their way to the dining-room for lunch, and, after a hasty meal, the juniors mounted their bikes, and rode out of the gates in the direction of Coombe.

They pedalled along in silence, each busy with their own thoughts.

"Hold on!" said Mornington, at length.

"Hadden't some of us better go the opposite way?"

"Good idea!"

Erroll Lovell and Mornington wheeled their bikes round, and rode back along the dusty, winding road across the moors. Every now and then they halted and searched the bushes for signs of the missing junior, but drew blank every time.

They pedalled wearily on, and the afternoon was drawing to a close, when Mornington pointed to the old woodman's hut along the roadside.

"By Jove, I'd forgotten that!"

And the juniors flashed along the remaining piece of road at a great pace till the hut was reached.

Dismounting, they piled their bikes against the walls, and Lovell pushed open the door. It was quite dark inside, but out of the gloom they heard a voice.

"Help!"

"That's Jimmy's voice!" said Lovell excitedly.

"Hurrah! We've found him!"

When their eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom they made out the figure of Jimmy Silver trussed up with rope. Willing hands soon cut the ropes that bound him, and Jimmy Silver, with a spasm of pain creeping over his face, struggled to his feet.

But he could hardly stand. Having been so long in a cramped position, his blood refused to circulate, and he staggered out of the hut on the friendly arm of Lovell.

"Has the rotter been caught?" asked Jimmy Silver feebly.

The juniors shook their heads.

"What happened, Jimmy?" inquired Lovell. The leader of the Fistical Four related his experiences up to the time of the blow on the head from the burglar.

The juniors listened with growing wrath and indignation. If the rascals ever fell into their hands they would receive a warm time.

There was a nasty lump on the back of

Jimmy Silver's head, and he looked a ghastly white. He had had no food all day, and was feeling in a weak condition.

"How are we going to get Jimmy back to the school?" asked Mornington.

That was a puzzler. He certainly couldn't walk, and the juniors had each got a bike to consider.

Just then Tommy Dodd sighted a car coming round the bend in the road, and he ran to intercept it.

The car pulled up, and after Tommy Dodd had explained the position, the owner willingly agreed to convey Jimmy Silver back to the school.

The juniors helped him into the car, which set off for Rookwood, with the search-party riding behind on their bikes. In this manner the little procession entered the gates of Rookwood, and old Mack, the porter, stared after it with growing amazement.

In old Mack's opinion Jimmy Silver had bolted with the diamonds, and he was the last person he expected to see returning to Rookwood. Old Mack scratched his head for an explanation, and, mumbling to himself, re-entered the lodge.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Jimmy Silver's Return.

"HERE he is!"

"Good old Jimmy!"

Such were the remarks which greeted Jimmy Silver's return to Rookwood. Quite a crowd had gathered round the car, and Jimmy had to relate his adventures, not once, but many times, to the admiring crowd of juniors.

Then he made his way to the Head's study, and knocked at the door.

"Come in!"

The voice of Dr. Chisholm bade him enter, and Jimmy, with beating heart, pushed open the door.

The Head jumped.

"Silver! Why, bless my soul!"

Jimmy Silver grinned feebly.

"Sit down, my boy!" said Dr. Chisholm, recovering from his astonishment. "You look positively ill!"

Certainly Jimmy Silver was looking very white, and he felt very tired, but a smile came to his face as he looked at the growing amazement on the Head's face.

"Tell me, my boy! What has happened?" asked the Head.

Jimmy Silver told his story once more, and the Head listened attentively.

"I admire your pluck, Silver," said he, when the junior had finished. "But your best plan would have been to have roused the school."

Jimmy Silver flushed. He had realised that many times whilst he had been lying in the hut.

Dr. Chisholm noticed his discomfiture.

"Don't let that worry you, Silver," he said kindly. "The police are already on the track, and perhaps by this time they may have some news."

"I trust so, sir," said the junior.

"Now, you had better rest yourself, after you have had some food; but the matron will look after you."

"Thank you, sir!"

Jimmy Silver left the study, and met his chums, who were waiting for him outside. Together they entered the end study, where a dainty meal had been prepared for the hungry junior.

"Pile in, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver piled in, and very soon the table was cleared of a good proportion of

eatables. Jimmy was raking up for the breakfast and lunch he had missed.

But at last he had to declare himself beaten, and leaned back in his chair, with a contented sigh. He was feeling tons better. A square meal had seemed to put new life into him, and, bar a slight headache, he was the none the worse for his adventure.

It was the next morning when the juniors were at lessons that the news came through of the capture of the burglar and his accomplice.

It appears that they had tried to board a ship at the coast, but a detective recognised them as being wanted, and had consequently arrested them.

Dr. Chisholm sent for Jimmy Silver, telling him that he was summoned to appear at the court. The Head gave his permission for the junior to have the day off, and added, with a smile, that he could take his three chums.

Jimmy Silver left the study, feeling elated at the prospect of a day off.

Lovell, Raby, and Newcome listened attentively to their leader, and a look of envy crept over their faces when they learned that he was free from lessons for the day.

Jimmy Silver smiled as he noted their expression, and then added:

"The Head gave me permission to take you three chumps along with me!"

He had calculated to surprise his chums, and the effect was electrical.

"Eh!"

"What!"

Jimmy repeated his statement.

Lovell commenced to dance a jig in the exuberance of his spirits, and Raby and Newcome joined in heartily.

Then the kindly face of Mr. Chisholm stowed in the study.

"You fellows ready?" he asked genially.

They grabbed at their caps, and followed Mr. Chisholm out of the study to the drive where the Head's car was waiting for them.

The Fistical Four seated themselves comfortably in the cushions, and the car drove off followed by a loud burst of cheering from the juniors who had gathered to see them off.

The car raced along swiftly, and very soon drew up at the court.

Jimmy Silver entered with a slightly nervous feeling at his heart, but he was soon reassured by the kindly smile of the magistrate, and gave his evidence in a steady voice.

The two rascals were convicted, and the precious stones were handed over to Mr. Chisholm.

The Fistical Four drove back to Rookwood in high spirits. Lovell declared it was time there was another burglary. Lovell had visions of another day off, but Jimmy Silver shook his head wisely.

For a time, at least, he had had enough, and he caressed his head tenderly. The bump was gradually dying down, and in a few days would disappear entirely. Meanwhile, it reminded him of a very unpleasant time spent in captivity.

Mr. Chisholm was delighted at the recovery of his precious stones, and lost no time in journeying to London, and placing them in safe hands, after which he returned to the school for a few days. He and Silver were great friends, and before Mr. Chisholm departed from the school, he was invited to a study feed.

Tommy Dodd & Co. were invited, and a host of other juniors, and, although space left much to be desired, the sumptuousness of the feed fully overcame the deficiency in room. Silver had quite recovered from his adventure, and the two rascals, it transpired, were doing "time."

THE END.

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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Money-Making Scheme.

REALLY, Blake, dear boy, I am supwised at you!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, who spoke, and his remark was addressed to his chum, Jack Blake.

Gussy might well be surprised.

It was something quite out of the ordinary to find Blake indoors when he might be out, and on such a fine day as this was, too. No one in the Fourth was keener on fresh air and exercise than was Blake.

But if he had been at work on an imposition, there would have been no great cause for surprise. Blake did get such things at times. He was not an absolute model of deportment.

And Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, though a mild and genial little man, was methodical about impositions. He booked them; and he would have them done, and done to time.

But it was not over an impot that Blake was ruffling his hair and biting the cap of his fountain-pen.

Before him on the table lay a paper, on which was scrawled a list of names—at least, they looked like names at first sight. At the second glance, to anyone who had not the clue, they looked more like lunacy.

"Merry Monarch, Guatemala, Panopticon, Pershing, Wayfarer II., Wasp, All My Eye, Boanerges, Forest King, Laundry Maid." Who but a lunatic could have collected such an assortment of incongruous words?

So it might seem to anyone absolutely ignorant of racing matters. But the list of horses for almost any race would provide such another assortment.

And it was over such a list that Blake was ruffling his hair and biting his fountain-pen.

Gussy knew something about racing, and thought he knew a great deal. He had once or twice dabbled in such matters, with the best possible intentions. And his study mates—Blake, Hermes, and Digby—had openly expressed their disgust at his doing so.

Blake took no notice of Gussy's remark. He ruffled his hair a trifle more, and looked at his fountain-pen as though he were a trifle disappointed in its flavour.

"Merry Monarch, Boanerges, Panopticon; Boanerges, Panopticon, Merry Monarch; Panopticon, Merry Monarch, Boanerges," he murmured.

"I repeat that I am supwised at you, Blake!"

"Brrrr!" growled Blake. "Shurrup, ass!" Gussy had looked at the paper, which lay in front of Blake. He had also noted that there were copies of the "Sportsman" and "Sporting Life" on the floor. And he had jumped to a conclusion, natural enough, but, as it chanced, erroneous.

"I decline to shut up, Blake! An' I also decline to be addresssed in that exceedingly wude mannah!"

"Brrrr! Merry Monarch, Panopticon, Boanerges!" was Blake's cryptic rejoinder.

"Aftah all that you have said at vavious times to me as to the folly of bettin', Blake, aftah the contempt you have fwequently expwessed for Wacke an' Cwooke an' othahs who go in for that kind of thing—"

"What are you burbling about, imbecile? Who's betting?"

"It is not like you to pwevawicate, Blake!"

"Who's prevaricating, idiot?"

"Bai Jove! This is weally too much to beah! But I am wewolved not to see you come to wuin for want of a word in season, Blake, whethah you like bein' spoken to for your own good or not!"

Blake looked up, grinning.

"If a word in season would save anybody from anything, I should say you'd be quite a useful chap, Gustavus. For that clapper of yours is going all the blessed time, and I suppose what you've got to say must be in season now and then, though a lot of it is bound to go to waste. What do you imagine I'm doing?"

"You might deceive Dig or Hewwies, dear boy, but wemembah that I am au fait in wacin' mattahs. I know quite well you are twyin' to pick the first thwee home in some wotten wace or othah!"

"Right, and wrong! I'm trying to pick the first three; but it's not in a rotten race. The 'Sportsman' speaks of it as one of the classic events of the season. And I haven't the least notion of betting on it!"

"But, weally, dear boy, if you are not going to bet—"

"Don't I tell you I'm not, fathead!"

"Then what is the use of pickin' the first thwee?"

"To win money, chump!"

"But how can you win money on a wace without bettin' on it?"

"That's as easy as fallin' off a form," replied Blake.

And no doubt he believed what he said. In spite of the hair-ruffling and the pen-biting, Blake had conceived quite a wrong notion of the difficulty of the task he had set himself. To look at him, one might have thought him in the throes of some almost hopeless task; but he was sure that it was all going to work out right in a very short time.

"I do not see how," said Arthur Augustus, after a moment's thought.

"You wouldn't! You're an ass!"

"Weally, Blake, I must ask you to dwop this vulgah personal abuse—"

"It's nothing of the kind. It's merely the frozen truth. Have you never heard of this paper?"

From underneath the "Sportsman" Blake picked up, and exposed to view, a copy of a weekly journal appealing to the million.

Gussy elevated an aristocratic nose.

"I have seen it. I cannot say I have evah wead it, or that I am evah likely to. I do not caah about that sort of thing, dear boy."

"Well, I don't see how you can know a fat lot about what sort of thing it is. But never mind that. I don't want to read the tripe myself. It's the competition I'm on to. A thousand pounds down for giving first, second, and third in the St. Elmo Stakes at Wadceaster. What do you think of that, old bean?"

"I cannot take it sewiously, Blake. It stands to weason—"

"No, it doesn't!" roared Blake. "At least, not to your reason, for you never had any. The thing can be done, and why shouldn't I do it? This study can do with some oof, I think—what?"

It was indubitably true that No. 6 Study on the Fourth Form passage could offer a hearty welcome to anything in the way of cash honestly come by. For No. 6 Study was as nearly stony as well could be. And none of its four inmates had any expectation of a remittance for some time to come.

"Wathah! An' you weally think that it's on the squaah, Blake, an' the sort of thing a fellow might decently go in for?"

"It's the sort of thing I could go in for, and I'm jolly well going in for it!" replied Blake. "I haven't asked you to go in, so it doesn't matter whether it's below your high-toned taste and morals."

"You are wathah a poor hand at sare, you know, Blake, dear boy," said Gussy benignantly. "An', as you will certainly wequiah my help, I will not wesen your pucwile attempts. I—"

"Your help! What should I want the help of a silly ass like you for?" howled Blake.

"I am not a silly ass, Blake! But I will set that aside. May I ask what you know about wacin'?"

"As much as the next man, I suppose. I'm Yorkshire, and Yorkshiresmen are generally reckoned to be all there when it comes to judging a horse."

"Yaas, dear boy, that is poss. But when the animal is no more than a name in a papah—"

"Chump! I'm not trusting to picking them out on their names! I've got more sense than that, I should hope. Look here, I've been having a go at the 'Sportsman' and the 'Life.' Never read them before, except for the cricket and footer, you know; but I suppose the chaps who write for them know something about racing, too—what? Well, here's the list of entries for the St. Elmo Stakes. Those I've crossed out in pencil aren't likely to run, as far as I can make out from the papers. That leaves ten, and some of them don't seem to have an earthy. If I can get them down to five

or six. I ought to be able to name one, two, and three all serene, don't you think?"

Blake was evidently keen, and his keenness had communicated itself to Gussy.

"Bai Jove! It weally does look quite a good thing," he said. "There's a chapta in algeba—Rodhunter, you know. That ought to help us. Somethin' about 'Combinations an' Permutations, I fancy. A B C, A C B, A C, B C A, an' all that, you know. An' how many different ways a cwew of eight could sit in a boat, an'—"

"Fathead! This is a horse-race, not a boat, and I don't want any footling old algebra to help me! If I did, I'd ask Dig, not you! Or Kerr, or Manners—they're smarter than Dig."

"Dig denies it, on principle!" spoke the voice of Robert Arthur Digby from the door. "I don't know who they are, or what it is; but I deny that they are smarter than I am!"

"Maths—specially algebra—and Manners and Kerr are the fellows I said were smarter than you," replied Blake, with a cheery grin.

"Oh!" said Digby, entering, followed by Herries, Levison, Cardew, and Clive. "If it's any old mouldy class subject, I don't mind. Manners or Kerr, Talbot or Levison, Tom Merry or Roynance—they're all better than I am at maths. Still, I think I'm top dog in this study at algebra!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

To Make Sure!

"WHAT'S going to win the St. Elmo Stakes at Wadecaster, Cardew?" asked Blake. "You rather fancy you know something about racing, don't you?"

"In the days of my youth I certainly contributed a little to the support of the bookies, Blake," replied Cardew. "I have ceased to do so. I date the beginning of my reformation to the day when I first saw a bookie in the flesh. There was so much of it, an' it really seemed to me such extremely unwholesome flesh, that it gave me furiously to think, as our allies across the narrow streak say, I considered—"

"Oh, out the cackle and come to the horses!" broke in Blake. "What's going to win?"

"Surely you haven't taken to that game in your old age, Blake?" asked Levison.

"Never mind whether I have or whether I haven't! What's going to win the St. Elmo, Cardew?"

"If I tell you, will you give me your word that you won't bet on it, old gun?" returned Cardew gravely.

"Yes!" was the rather unexpected answer—unexpected because it seemed difficult to account for Blake's sudden interest in such matters except on the theory that he had succumbed to the betting craze, though that did appear very unlike level-headed Jack Blake, too.

"Then I will tell you," drawled Cardew. "Oh, dry up!" snapped Clive. "You know nothing about it, Ralph!"

"But I do, dear boy! The race, Blake, will be won by—"

Cardew paused, and Blake picked up an inkstand, and made as if to hurl it at him.

"Don't shoot—I'm comin' down! That's what the 'possum said, y'know. The race will be won by—the first horse home, unless there's a successful protest against him!"

"Idiot!" snorted Blake. "I've a jolly good mind to chuck this at you!"

"It's sheer horse-sense, not idiocy at all!" returned Cardew. "But what's this gadget of yours, Blake? You're not really interested, are you?"

"I am, though! I'm going to win a big prize in this rag!"

And Blake held up again the paper he had shown D'Arcy.

Levison chuckled.

"You're not the first that's thought so, Blake!" he said.

"Have you tried?"

"No. Haven't any money to burn—never have! But I know people who have tried."

"Do you mean the thing's a swizzle?"

"I don't say that. I shouldn't think it is. They get the cash back out of the increased circulation, I suppose. It isn't a swizzle, but it's a lottery. I haven't any special objection to lotteries, but they're never certs, old chap!"

"But I've worked this thing out—at least, I've partly worked it out, and I reckon I can make pretty sure of naming one, two, and three, in proper order," said Blake, rubbing the back of his head reflectively.

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"So you can, if only you send in coupons enough!" Levison replied, with a sardonic smile.

"Well, that's my notion." "Hold on, half a tick, Blake!" interjected Herries. "Can't other chaps think of that notion?"

"H'm! They might, certainly," answered Blake, a little taken aback; but he brightened up as he added: "I'm not a pig. I don't want the whole thousand. I'd like it, of course; but I'd be satisfied with a hundred—or fifty—or even twenty!"

"You jolly well will be satisfied—when you get it!" retorted Levison. "How many giddy coupons do you think it will take to make sure?"

"I haven't exactly worked that out," confessed Blake. "How many should you think?"

"Oh, a few million, more or less!"

"Rot!"

"Weally, Levison, I cannot help but think you are mistaken," Gussy said earnestly.

"Suppose there are four horses in the wace—"

"Can't be did! More likely to be forty!"

"Twenty-five entries, as a matter of fact," Blake said. "But I've cut out fifteen of those—"

"Eh? You have, old gun? I'm afraid that's against Jockey Club rules!" said Cardew, shaking his head. "A horse can't be scratched by anyone but his owner, y'know."

"Fathead! I didn't say scratched! The fifteen are those the papers say won't run."

"Well, we'll let you scratch fifteen of them, whether the Jockey Club agrees or not," said Levison, still with a sardonic grin.

"That leaves ten, any one of which may be first or second or third."

"That's so," Blake agreed.

"How do you work it out, Herries?" asked Levison, winking at the rest.

"Blessed if I know!" answered Herries. "I don't see how you can. But Blake seems to. What I'm afraid of is that other fellows can, too, if he can."

"How would you work it out, Gussy?"

"I should call them A, B, C, and so on. Then I should put down A B C, A C B, B A C—"

"You said that before!" snapped Blake.

"And I don't see that it's any better than my way. Perhaps it's shorter; but you can't put down A B C on the coupons—you have to put 'Merry Monarch,' and so on."

"How would you work it out, Digby?" inquired Levison.

"Dunno. Wait half a mo', though. I seem to remember. Ten of 'em, you say? Well, it's two multiplied by three—that means you would be sure to get your one, two, three all right in singles if there were only three horses; but as there are ten, you've got to multiply by four, then by five, then by six, then by seven, then by eight, then by nine, and then by ten—see?"

"By gad, it sounds quite easy!" drawled Cardew.

"What's that make?" asked Levison.

"About nine million seventeen thousand an' ninety-seven!" Cardew volunteered.

"It's not all that! But it's three million six hundred and twenty-eight thousand eight hundred!" Clive said.

"Oh!" gasped Blake.

"Did ums do it all in um's little head, then?" cooed Cardew, patting Clive on the back. "Oh, what a headache in the mornin'!"

"Rats! It's easy enough to do a sum like that in one's head—if one has a head at all!" said Clive cuttingly.

"But is it right, Levison?" asked Blake.

"Oh, you can depend on old Clive! That sort of thing's in his line. As to that, I worked it out myself while Dig was running it over, and it's dead-right."

But Digby and Clive and Levison were all wrong. They had forgotten that what was wanted was not the possible combinations up to ten, but the combinations of them possible with that number, which entailed slightly more calculation, though the resultant number was smaller.

Blake and Gussy looked at one another. Both were disappointed.

"If you could write six coupons a minute, and could stick at it all day long, twenty-four hours to a day, it would only take you about fourteen months!" said Clive, after another mental calculation. "Or four hundred and twenty of you could do it in a day. But the things would want checking, for if you let in a single duplicate, you'd be bound to leave out one possible combination, and that particular combination might be—"

"That weally is not at all likely, Clive!" protested Gussy.

"No, I shouldn't say it was exactly worth arguing about!" Clive replied cheerily.

"When are you going to start?"

"Blake, dear boy, we shall have to think of some other way," said the hopeful Arthur Augustus.

He spoke quite seriously, and his seriousness encouraged Blake.

Levison, Clive, Cardew, and Digby were plainly scoffers.

Never mind; they would sing small when Blake carried off the prize.

And it stood to reason that there were other ways of winning besides sending in between three and four million coupons. For certainly nobody did that, and certainly people did win these prizes.

"I should chuck it, Blake!" said Levison.

"Hanged if I do!" snorted Blake.

Yorkshiremen—to say it with all respect due to the race—can be obstinate; and Blake's obstinacy was aroused.

"There's not much sport in it if you could be sure of winning, Blake," said Digby.

"I'm not after sport; I'm after the oof," replied Blake. "I've seen lots of asses make fellows—I mean, lots of fellows make asses—of themselves by taking up racing as a sport."

"Yaas," agreed Cardew, yawning. "There's only one thing more dangerous, by gad!"

"What's that?" demanded Blake.

"Taking it up with the notion of makin' money out of it, old gun!"

"Well, the bookies do that," said Herries.

"And if there's anything to be got out of this coupon dodge the bookies will jolly well have it, you bet!" Digby said.

Digby was the only one of the four chums who was openly incredulous of Blake's money-making scheme, however.

Herries thought there might be something in it, and Arthur Augustus was at least as hopeful as Blake, which was saying quite a lot.

Levison & Co. had looked in on some detail connected with a projected picnic. When they had settled that—Blake said they might do exactly as they jolly well liked about it—they departed, and Dig went with them. But Blake and Gussy and Herries settled down to solid work on the great money-making scheme.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Not Birds of a Feather.

"SAY, Blake, old chap!"

Blake turned and gave the speaker a good stare.

He was not used to being addressed as "old chap" by Aubrey Racke.

There were few fellows at St. Jim's who barred Racke and Crooke more completely than Blake did. He was uncompromising; he would not go an inch out of his way to be civil to anyone he disliked.

It was seldom he spoke to Racke at all, and seldom that Racke spoke to him. But the visage of Young Moneybags wore an ingratiating smile at this moment.

"Well?" said Blake.

"I hear that you're goin' in for somethin' fresh," returned Racke.

"Do you?"

"Oh, don't be sniffy! If you're really keen on racin' I dare say I may be able to give you a tip or two."

"Thanks; but I don't want any tips!"

"Oh, come along, Aubrey!" said Crooke.

Racke shook off the hand his chum had laid upon his arm, and Crooke, with a muttered word that sounded rather like an oath, slouched away down the corridor.

Jack Blake chanced to be coming out alone, which was unusual. If the four had been there, Racke might have hesitated to tackle him thus.

It rather puzzled Blake why Racke should want to be chummy, and he could not account for this overture in any other way but that.

Blake was not poverty-stricken, but he certainly had not money to burn. And he never toadied to anybody. Racke's associates were either fellows who had cash to fling away in folly, or scoundies like Mellich and Trimble, tolerated and patronised because they were willing to treat the wealthy Aubrey as a great man.

But other fellows' cash was not really necessary to Racke, who had plenty of his own.

He had come to St. Jim's to get polish and make influential friends, and thus far his success in either way had not been conspicuous.

Arthur Augustus had soon had enough of him. The Shell generally fought sly of Racke. Now Jack Blake, from the snob's



The two juniors fought each other around the study. Blake was knocked up against a low bookcase, and its contents went thumping to the floor. (See page 16.)

point of view, did not count for nearly as much as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, son of Lord Eastwood. But Racke had learned that at St. Jim's matters were not ruled by the snob's code.

Among the Fourth and Shell Blake counted for rather more than Gussy. In his own form he was only rivalled by Figgins and Kerr, both New House juniors, in athletic ability and all-round influence.

To pal up with Blake would suit Racke very well indeed; and in something he had heard lately he thought he had discerned his chance to pal up.

Cardew and Levison had been joking about Blake's new wheeze. He had not asked them to keep it dark, and they saw no reason why they should.

"But it's correct that you've begun to take an interest in racin', isn't it?" asked Racke.

"It may be right, or it may be wrong; but it's no bizney of yours!" replied Blake.

"Oh, come off it! You needn't play the Puritan with me, Blake. I'm not in that line."

"I never heard anyone say you were, and I shouldn't believe them if I did. I'm not myself, but—"

"Merry Monarch's my tip for the St. Elmo Stakes," Racke said, with a crafty leer in his eyes.

"Think he'll win?" returned Blake, forgetting for a moment to whom he was talking in his interest in the subject. "I'm not so sure of that. But I fancy he will be in the first three."

"Then there's All My Eye. He ought to be worth backin' for a place," Racke continued.

Now, the combined counsels of Blake, Gussy, and Herries, none of them knowing anything about the matter, assisted by the hints given by the sporting papers, which all three had been diligently studying during the last two or three days, had cut out All My Eye entirely.

It was plain that the sending in of over three million coupons was just a trifle too big a task. So the three had set to work

to get the ten probable runners down to five or six probable winners, and in the course of doing so they had already discarded All My Eye, Laundry Maid, and Forest King, while hesitating which among Wasp, Guatemala, Pershing, and Wayfarer II, should also be ruled out.

To reduce the number to six meant that it would only be necessary to send in one hundred and twenty coupons in order to be certain of a share of the prize at least—provided, of course, that the first three home were among the selected six. Which, as Gussy sapiently remarked, was not so "vevy unlikely."

In fact, all three had begun to fancy themselves as tipsters. It is an illusion easily produced—not so easy to maintain, however. The race concerned is apt to dissipate it.

"All My Eye hasn't a chance—not a dog's chance!" said Blake hastily.

"Hasn't he? Well, then, the information I've had straight from the stable is dead off!" answered Racke, with the ghost of a sneer. "I hear that they are runnin' him in earnest this time. He was only out for a breather at Selwood last week."

"You really think—"

"My dear chap, it isn't what I think. I've given up thinkin' for myself in these matters. What's the dashed use? The only thing to rely upon is the straight tip from the stable, an' even then it isn't a lot of use if you've no more than one stable that will give you the tip. When you know that A and B are both tryin', you can begin to size up their merits; but what's the use of doin' that when neither of them may win?"

"It's a rotten game!" said Blake, with a flash of genuine wrath.

"Well, I don't say it isn't. I only say that's the way it's played, by gad, an' that if you're in it you've got to allow for its bein' played that way," returned Racke.

Blake looked at him hard.

"You know more about the game than I do," he said. "I'm not in it. I don't bet, you know. If you've heard that you've heard a blessed fat!"

"Oh, I know!" replied Racke. "You're only beginnin' to wake up to the game. But you'll take to it all right, by gad!"

"Bet you I don't!"

"There you are, dear boy—ready to bet now!"

"Don't be an idiot! That's the sort of thing any fellow says."

"I know that you've got interested in the competition gadget that chap Leftley runs in his rag," Racke went on. "You think that's a different thing from havin' a bit on a race. I don't want to argue about it; but to my mind there's nothin' in the competition bizney—simply nothin' at all!"

"It's a heap better than going and putting on cash with some rascally bookie!" snapped Blake, growing angry at Racke's persistence, and somehow feeling, though he knew it was silly, that Racke had done him a bad turn in the matter of All My Eye. If Racke had not said anything about the wretched animal Blake & Co. would have been quite satisfied to leave it out of account.

And very likely Racke was wrong. He might brag about his tips from the stables; but it was not generally believed at St. Jim's that Racke's little futters in the betting line brought him in much profit.

"I don't see it. Look here, Blake, what's the dashed good of swottin' at dashed coupons for hours, when you might back any horse you liked for a place without any silly trouble like that? Come along with me to the Green Man, an' I'll introduce you to a fellow who will take your bets all serene, an' pay up if he—"

"Thank you for nothing! I know a bit about your friend Banks, and he's rot my sort!" broke in Blake angrily.

"I didn't say it was Banks," retorted Racke.

Racke was losing his temper. It was easily lost, and he had begun to see that he would not come over Jack Blake. As the wise man of old said: "In vain is the snare set in the sight of the bird."

"It's the Green Man, anyway—that's enough for me!" said Blake.

"You wouldn't be seen at such a terrible place, of course?" sneered Racker.

"You wouldn't be seen there, if you could help it," answered Blake, not without acuteness. "But you'd go sinking there on the sly. That's not my style, Racker."

"Oh, dear, no!" You remind me of the Rechabite who went to the dashed back door with his jug," Racker gibed, unheeding the warning flash in Blake's eyes.

"What do you mean, you sneering cad?" snapped Blake.

"Only that you haven't the pluck to go in for the bettin' game straight out, so you take the back door coupon way—that's all!" Blake's hand shot out and fastened upon Racker's nose.

"You sweep! You howling cad!" roared Blake. "Thought I was developing into the same sort of specimen that you are, didn't you? Perhaps this will show you that I'm not!"

And he wrung Racker's nasal organ with considerable emphasis.

"I shouldn't screw it off, Blake," spoke a cool voice behind him. "It isn't a pleasant dial, an' it's not absolutely the nicest thing I know in noses. But the dial would look still more unpleasant without it, an' I don't think the nose would be any ornament lying around loose, by gad!"

It was Ralph Reckness Cardew who spoke, and there was no fellow at St. Jim's whom Racker hated more than Cardew, unless it was Cardew's chum Levison.

To have his humiliation witnessed by Cardew was gall and wormwood to the cad of the Shell, and when Blake released his nose he really looked like showing fight for the moment, stimulated thereto by Cardew's presence.

But a glance at Blake's angry face and broad chest took out of him all desire towards combat. He would have had no chance against Blake, and he knew it.

"All right!" he said viciously. "I'll be even with you for this, Blake! An' I shall know what to expect another time. I hadn't any notion but to be civil, an'—"

"I don't want your confounded civility!" snorted Blake. "And I'm glad to hear that you know what to expect next time you make the mistake of supposing that you and I are birds of a feather! But I should advise you never to make it again!"

Racker slunk away.

"The dear Aubrey got on to the competition gadget, Blake?" inquired Cardew blandly.

Blake glared at him, and then stalked off without a word by way of answer.

He did not like that at all. Could it be that Cardew considered the racing competition put him on Racker's level?

Well, what if he did?

What was Cardew's opinion worth, anyway?

Blake was quite sure that betting and filling up racing competition coupons were matters as far apart as the Poles

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Lathom is Annoyed.

BAI Jove! They've got to be posted to-night, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Yes; that's right. You were a silly ass, Blake, not to let us get on with them after prep last night, when we wanted to."

"Silly ass yourself, Herries! There's another horse been scratched since then—Guatemala. We weren't sure about him, you know."

"I wish it had been All My Eye," said Herries doubtfully.

Somehow or other Racker's tip about All My Eye, repeated by Blake, had impressed all three of the Coupon Company, as Digby called it.

"It is all my eye!" remarked the unbelieving Dig now, with a chuckle.

"What is, fathead?" snapped Blake.

"The whole blessed thing! The competition is all my eye in the first place; I don't believe in it a ha'porth. And it's all my eye, you innocents thinking you can pick out six horses like that, and get the first three among them. And it's all my eye taking any notice of Racker. And—"

"Oh, that's enough! Let's bump the ass!" snorted Herries.

Dig scuttled for the door. Opening it in haste, he barged into the great George Alfred Grundy.

"Is that your usual way of coming out of THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 29.

a room?" demanded Grundy, with a gasp of pain. For Dig had got him in the wind.

The Fourth-Former dodged round Grundy's burly figure before replying.

"No, not my usual way," he answered from the passage. "Only when you come along. With other chaps there's generally room to get past. But what with your size and your clumsiness, Grundy, old hoss—No, thanks! I do not want a thick ear, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself to talk about giving me one! Hasn't Railton told you often enough that you shouldn't bully little chaps? Ta-ta, Coupon Company!"

"If we win anything we'll jolly well see that you won't have any of it!" yelled Herries.

"That's all right! You won't win anything; and if you do, the rag won't shell out!" retorted Dig, as he went.

Grundy closed the door carefully.

"I've come to talk to you fellows," he said, with portentous gravity.

"Oh, have you?" returned Blake.

His tone was certainly not encouraging. But there was nothing thin-skinned about the great George Alfred.

"Yes, I have," he said. "I don't like this bizney you're going in for."

"Then you can lump it!" answered Herries.

"Weally, Gwunday—"

"Dry up, Gussy! Look here, Grundy, what in the wide world has it got to do with you?"

"That's not the question" answered Grundy stubbornly. "Matter of that, it's got something to do with everybody who has the good name of the school at heart. I mentioned it to Merry. It seemed to me that he ought to speak to you about it, as he's supposed to be captain of the Junior School; but—"

"Tom Merry is captain of the Junior School," broke in Blake.

"Oh well—yes I suppose you might say he is. But I—"

"Oh we know your silly ass notion that you're entitled to Tom Merry's job!" snorted Herries. "You needn't come here to tell us that."

"An' what did Tom Mewwy say to you, Gwunday?" asked Gussy.

"He's a silly ass! He laughed!"

"I don't wonder," returned Blake. "You'd make a cat laugh, Grundy. I never saw such a solemn old donkey as you are in my life before. Clear out, please! We're busy, and we haven't time to be amused just now."

"Oh, yes; I know what you are busy at! Blake, I'm not going without giving you my opinion about it—mind that!"

"You'll do it at your own risk, then, Grundy! Because if we don't cotton to your opinion—and it's not a bit likely we shall—we shall put you out on your giddy neck! It's your usual way of leaving this study I know; but we've noticed once or twice that you haven't quite seemed to like it."

"You will do nothing of the kind, Blake! Now, see here! I'm not long-faced or puritanical; but I do hate to see decent fellows—and you three are that, though there's plenty of room for improvement in you—"

"Let's have a little of it," suggested Blake.

"A little of what? I don't follow you."

"The room for improvement. There would be more room in this study if you did a bunk, you know."

"I suppose you think that's funny? I don't. I consider it childish—worse than Lowther's silly puns. Now, what I have to say to you, Blake—and you, too, Herries and D'Arcy—is—"

"Twy 'Au vevoiah!' Gwunday," said Arthur Augustus, with a broad smile at his own wit. Gussy thought that really rather good.

"Oh, don't be silly! What I have to say is that I don't approve of betting, and that I thought you fellows were—"

"Who's betting?" roared Blake.

"What is the real difference between sending along those coupons and betting on the race?" demanded Grundy, pointing to the pile of coupons at Blake's elbow. "You've spent money on them—"

"It wasn't your money, was it, ass?" Blake snapped.

"Certainly not! I should not think of supplying money for such a purpose. I imagined I had made it clear to you that I strongly disapproved of the whole scheme."

"And I thought I had made it clear to you that you'd go out on your giddy neck if we—"

"Try it, that's all!"

Grundy's defiance was all that was needed to ensure his going out in the manner indi-

cated—as Grundy might have known had he not been too dull and too self-assured to profit by previous experience.

Arthur Augustus flung open the door, and the three fell upon Grundy as one man.

They lifted him off his feet. They rushed him to the door.

"Yooooooop! Stoppit, you silly ass!" hooted Grundy. "Yaroooh! Oh, sorry, sir! But it wasn't my fault, really!"

The three had swung and heaved, and Grundy had shot forth. Neither Blake & Con nor Grundy had the least idea that Mr. Lathom was coming along the passage until Grundy smote the master of the Fourth amidst.

Mr. Lathom came down with a crash. It would have needed a bigger and heavier man than Mr. Lathom to stand up against the impact of Grundy, hurled like that.

"Dear me! This is really— Get up, Grundy, you absurd fellow! You are painin' me extremely!"

Grundy extricated his head from the region of the master's brace-buttons, and moved his foot, which had apparently been seeking to caress the master's face. Grundy got up, and he and Blake lifted Mr. Lathom up, while Herries and D'Arcy stood confused and alarmed.

"I assuah you, sir—" began Arthur Augustus.

"If you can assure me that you had nothing to do with the violent propulsion of Grundy from your study, and the consequent damage inflicted upon me, I will try to believe you. D'Arcy, though appearances are against you!" broke in Mr. Lathom angrily. "But any assurance upon any—"

It was us, sir," admitted Blake. "We were putting Grundy out. We—er—didn't want him, sir."

"Take a hundred lines each! Grundy, you should abstain from thrusting yourself in where you are not wanted. I shall give you lines, though I am by no means sure that you deserve them; but—"

"I had something to say to these fellows, sir—"

"Oh, shut up!" hissed Blake.

"I decline to shut up! I hope, sir—"

But Mr. Lathom was passing on, rejecting silently Gussy's offer to give him a "bush down."

"You ass!" snapped Herries to Grundy.

"You don't suppose I was going to tell him about your wretched racing bizney, do you?" hooted Grundy. "I'm not a—"

"Well, you've told him now, whether you meant it or not!" said Blake crossly.

For Mr. Lathom had halted for the fraction of a second, and had turned his head. He must have heard. Grundy's voice was well known to St. Jim's for its carrying properties.

But Mr. Lathom did not say anything. He passed on, dusty and disgruntled.

"I'll go!" said Grundy darkly. "A warning is no good to you fellows, I can see that! You'd better pal up with Racker and Crooke and that set! I'm disappointed in you!"

"We don't care a hang about that!" retorted Blake. "We take your giddy opinion for just what it's worth—which is nothing at all. But go and be disappointed in your own study! If we catch you at it in ours, there will be a dead ass lying about—that's all!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Blake's Essay!

I DON'T see how you're going to get those things done in time for the post to-night, Blake," said Herries, pointing to the little pile of coupons.

"We shall have to take some of them each, an' get them filled up among us, deah boy," suggested Arthur Augustus.

"You jolly well won't!" snapped Blake.

"You would go putting the blessed names down wrong! I've got the whole thing mapped out, and I shall have to see to it. I was just going to tell you so when that chump Dig started his rot, and then Grundy barged in!"

"The A B C is weally my ideah, an' it seems a vewy queeah thing to me if a fellow can't do things by a system he had invented himself," said Gussy, hurt and indignant.

"I don't see the use of the letters. I should put down the horses' names," Herries said.

"I'm going to put down the horses' names, fathead!" returned Blake. "You have to."

"Well, what are the letters for, then?"

"A stands for Merry Monarch, B for Panopticon, C for Boanerges, D for Pershing, E for Wasp, and F for Wayfarer II."

"But you're not going to put down A B C, but Merry Monarch, Panopticon, Boanerges.

So what's the use of the letters?" Herries persisted, scratching his chin in puzzlement.

"Oh, my hat! Was there ever such a thick-headed ass? I've explained to you a dozen times at least!"

"I know you have, and every time it gets worse mixed up than ever. And I'm not a bit satisfied you're doing it the right way now. At first it was going to take a hundred-and-twenty coupons to make sure of getting the thing right with five horses. Now you say you can do six with a hundred-and-twenty. If those chaps were right at first they must be right now."

"But they weren't right!" howled Blake. "I've explained that to you. I went to Kerr, and he showed me where they were wrong. It was because they were making combinations of three out of the five or six. Kerr had it worked out in no time."

"Well, show us how it's worked," Herries said obstinately.

"There isn't time; it would take a blessed fortnight to drive it into your thick skull! Gussy understands, don't you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, dear boy. It's somethin' about a minus and a group of three," answered Gussy, not looking in the least as if he understood. "I'm quite satisfied about that; but I do think you had better hand ovah half the coupons to me to do, you know."

"Oh, hang it, there goes the dinner-bell! Never mind! It's English this afternoon, and I'll scrawl about a hundred words of any old stuff for my essay, and then get on with these. Old Lathom won't notice; he always sticks his head into a book as soon as he's given out the subject."

Neither Herries nor Arthur Augustus was exactly satisfied. It seemed to them that Blake was taking altogether too much upon himself. True, the project had been his in the first place; but the trio had shared the expense equally, and had puzzled their heads together over the list of horses, deciding which to include in their picked six, and which to leave out.

It was rather galling to the other two after that to be told that they had not intelligence enough to fill up the coupons. But Blake was accustomed to take the lead in Study No. 6, and he had no notion of relinquishing it in so important a matter as this.

He managed to get some of the coupons filled up between dinner and the hour of classes; but there was still at least half of them to do, and he took in with him to the Form-room the whole bundle of coupons and a sheet of paper, upon which were one-hundred-and-twenty combinations of the letters A, B, C, D, E, and F, beginning with A B C and ending with F E D. This was his key, to insure that each possible combination of three from the six likely runners selected should appear on the coupons.

At the head of it appeared the letters, with the name of a horse against each.

"English" included literature and essay-writing. It is necessary to make the distinction, for it cannot be said that the essays handed in by the Fourth were exactly literature, even using that word in its widest sense.

Blake's that afternoon certainly was not likely to be.

Mr. Lathom began by lecturing for half an hour or so on the play of "King Lear." He was keener on Shakespeare than most of the auditors; but on the whole they did not mind listening—or pretending to listen—to their Form-master "gassing about old Lear," as Dig irreverently put it.

They would have been very well suited had he gone on gassing for the duration of the lesson. But, having said his say, he told them they were each to write an essay on the characters of Lear's three daughters, and that they would be given forty minutes to write it.

"I say, Dig, what were the giddy females' names?" whispered Blake to the nearest of his chums.

"Panopticon, Boanerges, and Merry Pershing, or something like that," replied Dig, with his tongue in his cheek.

"Fathead! I mean old Lear's daughters!" said Blake crossly.

"Silence there!" rapped out Mr. Lathom.

"Ophelia, Desdemona, and Portia," whispered the obliging Mellish, from behind Blake.

Mellish also had his tongue in his cheek. The names he gave did not come from "King Lear" at all, but from three other Shakespeare plays.

"Which was the one that was all serene?" asked Blake.

"Oh, Beatrice!" replied Mellish, having already forgotten the three he had mentioned, and bringing in a disconnected fourth.

Blake stuck down "Ophelia, Desdemona,

Beatrice," and underlined the "Beatrice." He had a vague notion of what the play was about, though he had not derived that notion from anything Mr. Lathom had said, and he was casting Beatrice for the part of Cordelia, Blake had been thinking about All My Eye while Mr. Lathom was talking.

He went at his essay with a rush now. He ascribed to Ophelia and Desdemona bad qualities which nothing Shakespeare says anywhere justified, and he made of Beatrice something very unlike the arch and witty maiden of "Much Ado about Nothing." Once, through preoccupation of mind, he put down Panopticon instead of Ophelia, and once All My Eye somehow got into the essay when he meant to write Beatrice. But as Beatrice was wrong, that did not matter much; and as Blake had not time to read over his essay, he did not discover his mistake.

He thrust the task aside, while the rest were still scratching away, and set to work on his coupons, with a few books at the front of his desk as a kind of breastwork.

The job had got as far as the D's. D stood for Pershing, and Blake knew that Pershing's name had to be written in the first space twenty times.

That was easy. It was after that the necessity for care came in. The key said D B A. Blake wrote Merry Monarch in the second space, and Panopticon in the third. D B A meant reversing those two names. And so on, and so on.

It was not really difficult, if one only paid close attention to it, though Blake may have been right in thinking that both Gussy and Herries were capable of muddling such a job.

Blake gave it all his attention. He forgot where he was as he scribbled away, glancing from key to coupon and back again. He was concentrating upon that job as he had certainly not concentrated upon Shakespeare.

"Drop it!" he whispered angrily, as Digby nudged him in warning.

It was all that Dig could do. He had not time to nudge again. And Blake, oblivious of his surroundings, had completely failed to take warning.

A hush fell upon the Form-room. The sound of scratching pens ceased. All the Fourth turned their eyes towards where Blake sat scribbling away at his coupons, and Mr. Lathom stood behind him, watching him.

The mouth of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was wide open, and the face of George Herries was contorted into a scowl. Digby looked uncomfortable. He had done his best to look uncomfutable. Mellish grinned maliciously. It was Baggy Trimble, however, who brought Blake to his bearings with painful suddenness.

"He, he, he!" cackled Baggy; and Blake looked up.

Even as he did so a voice behind him spoke:

"So that is the manner in which you employ the time that should be devoted to the pursuit of literature, Blake?" Mr. Lathom said, with an unusual touch of sarcasm.

Blake looked round wildly. He would have tried to conceal the incriminating coupons, but it was plainly too late for that.

"I—I'd finished my essay, sir," he said, conscious that it was rather a weak thing to say, but unable to think of anything better calculated to appease the Form-master.

"Indeed! And you have now passed on to matters of more importance than Shakespeare, I see!"

Blake agreed with that most thoroughly; but he knew that Mr. Lathom did not mean it. He half-stretched out a hand in a kind of involuntary protest when the master took up the key paper.

"A—Merry Monarch; B—Panopticon; C—Boanerges; D—Pershing; E—Wasp; F—Way-farer II," he read aloud. "A B C, A C B, A B D, A D B. Really, Blake, though I can hardly say that I understand this paper in its entirety, it reveals to me your possession of method and industry which, I am sorry to say, you seldom show in your class work."

Blake sat silent. There was nothing he could well say in reply to that.

Mellish and Trimble and Chowle tittered. Most of the others sat in suspense, wondering what would happen to Blake. Mr. Lathom was far from being severe, as a rule; but it was evident that he was angry now.

"And what are Merry Monarch, Pershing, and the rest of them, Blake?" asked the master.

"Horses, sir," answered Blake.

"Racehorses?"

"Yes, sir."

"And this employment of yours is in some obscure way connected with—er—with bets upon the race in which they are engaged, I presume? I have heard of attempts to reduce to systems the chances of the tables at Monte Carlo. Is this something of the same kind applied to horse-races?"

"It—yes, I suppose you might say that, sir," admitted Blake. "But it's not betting."

"That seems to be a distinction without an essential difference. Give me those papers, Blake!"

There was no possibility of refusal. Very reluctantly Blake handed over the coupons.

"Now let me see your essay!"

Blake handed over that also. He knew it was not especially good; but he hoped it would pass muster.

Mellish's grin widened. Mellish knew he was safe. Whatever happened, Blake would not betray him. And this would be a fine yarn to tell Rakce & Co. later.

A wry smile played about the lips of Mr. Lathom as he read that essay.

"Is this a joke, Blake?" he snapped, when he had finished.

"A joke? No, sir!" replied Blake, surprised.

"Then you really believe that the three daughters of King Lear were Ophelia, Desdemona, and Beatrice?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fourth roared. The Fourth in general wished Blake well out of the scrape into which he had fallen, though most of them regarded him as a particularly silly ass for having fallen into it. But if that was not a joke, the Fourth had never heard one.

"Er—er—weren't they, sir?"

"Digby, what were the names of Lear's daughters?"

"Generil, Regan, and Cordeilia, sir," replied Dig, rather reluctantly.

He was prepared for the glare Blake gave him, and he felt sorry now that he had not answered that question differently when Blake had asked it.

"You cannot recall any mention of Panopticon, and—er—and All My Eye in the play, Digby?"

"No, sir. But I haven't read it all, you know."

"Blake, this is either an impudent joke, or it is one of the strangest cases of wool-gathering I have ever encountered!" snapped Mr. Lathom.

"I—I suppose I must have been absent-minded," muttered Blake, resolving that Mellish should smart for this.

"In what play of Shakespeare's does Ophelia occur?" asked the master sharply.

"Hamlet," sir," answered Blake. He knew that well enough when he came to think of it.

"And Desdemona?"

Blake had to think this time.

"Othello, isn't it, sir?" he said, at last.

"Ah, that is enough for the present! I will see you in my study after classes, Blake!"

And Mr. Lathom rustled to his desk, frowning thunderously.

He took the coupons and the key paper with him. Blake would not have minded so much about anything else if only he had left those.

All that labour in vain! And the prize-money lost when it was practically in his hands!

It was rough luck indeed!

And it was really Grundy he had to thank for this!

If Mr. Lathom's suspicions had not been aroused by that silly idiot's shouting things about a racing bizney, this would never have happened—Blake was sure of that. It was not the master's custom to sneak round trying to catch out fellows doing something else while they were supposed to be writing essays.

Yes, it was certainly Grundy who was to blame for the chief trouble. Of course, Mellish came in, too. But Blake did not care a tenth part as much for the bloomers he had made in that essay, through Mellish's treacherous misinformation, as he cared for the loss of the coupons.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. Complicated Revenues.

GRUNDY'S the silliest idiot in this blessed school, and that's saying a heap!" roared Blake.

The Fourth had been dismissed, and had swarmed out into the corridor.

Blake, with rage still burning in him, lost no time in expressing his opinion of George Alfred Grundy.

He ought to have lost no time in going to Mr. Lathom's study. But Mr. Lathom had

not said "directly after classes," and Blake was so angry that he thought little of the chance that he might be keeping the master waiting.

"What in the wide, wide world has Grundy to do with it, old top?" asked Kerr.

"If Grundy told you anything about Shakespeare, you might have known it was wrong," Figgins said.

"Old Grundy knows no more about Billy S. than the man in the moon," added Kerrish.

"It wasn't Grundy who put me wrong over that. It was that cad Mellish! Where is he?" howled Blake, looking round for the sneak of the Form.

"Non est inventus," replied Cardew. "In other words, the eminently discreet Percy has evaporated."

"It was your fault too, Dig!" snorted Blake. "It seems to have been everyone's fault except your own," observed Levison caustically.

"Well, it was partly mine," confessed Dig, contritely. "I'm sorry, Blake, old fellow!"

"Oh, it doesn't matter so much about that," answered Blake, mollified at once, "though your jokes are pretty rotten, Dig! And I mean to take it out of Mellish's hide when I get hold of him, the sweep!"

"What did Mellish do?" inquired Clive.

"Gave me those silly wrong names when I asked who Lear's daughters were!" Blake replied. "But never mind that. He thought it was funny, I suppose. I hope he'll still think it's funny when I get hold of him, that's all!"

"But what was Grundy's precise villainy?" drawled Gardew.

"It was all through him!" snorted Blake. "Look here, I don't care what you silly asses think, but you may as well know the truth. Grundy's a sneak! He sneaked to Lathom, and that's how it was the old fossil had his eye on me!"

"Weally, Blake, deah boy—" "I don't think old Grundy really intended to sneak."

Blake turned on D'Arcy and Herries in wrath. They, at least, ought to have agreed with him.

"Then you're idiots!" he snapped. "Look here, Kerr—look here, Piggy—Julian, you've some sense—so have you, Levison—and Clive, too! What do you make of this? That ass Grundy came to our study to rag me about taking up betting—jolly likely thing for me, eh? Well, we put him out, and tumbled Lathom over doing it. Of course, that was an accident; the old fossil got in the way."

"Go on, dear boy!" said Cardew, as Blake paused for breath. "Grundy's guilt is not yet apparent, I consider."

"Grundy's a sneak—that's what Grundy is!" roared Blake.

The Shell Form-room door had just opened, and those words came clearly to the ears of the fellows pouring out.

They also reached the ears of a fellow who was not among the crowd surging to the door. Grundy rose to his feet, clenching his big hands, his face flaming.

"Sit down at once, Grundy!" snapped Mr. Linton, who had not heard. "Did I not tell you that you were detained?"

"Yes, sir; but—"

"Sit down!"

"But, sir—"

"Sit down, and be silent!"

Grundy subsided, muttering.

The door closed. Grundy, Wilkins, Gore, and Lucas were left inside. Those four had been dropped on to for inattention. The rest joined the crowd of Fourth-Formers.

"He shouted at the top of his voice something about a racing bizney," continued Blake. "He meant Lathom to hear, and the old bird did hear. He turned his head—we all saw him. But he's craftier than we thought; he lay low till this afternoon, and dropped on to me then."

"Grundy never meant to sneak—that's a dead-sure thing!" said Kerr.

"It was only one of Grundy's whispers," Monty Lowther said. "He can't help his voice."

"I'm going to tell him what I think when I see him!" shouted Blake. "I'm not going to row with Mellish—I've no quarrel with him. Where is Grundy?"

"He's kept in," answered Gunn.

"Well, you can wait for him here, and tell him what I think about him when he comes out!"

"See here, Blake—"

"I'm not going to argue with you, Tommy!"

You fellows may think what you like—I know!"

"Blake, old man—"

"Shan't argue with you, either, Talbot! I haven't any quarrel with anyone but Grundy. Oh, there's Mellish, too—but that's hardly a quarrel! I shall simply give that young blackguard a jolly good hiding!"

Racke and Crooke were among those who heard that, and they grinned at one another. Mellish was, more or less, by way of being a pal of theirs; but that fact did not make them anxious for his safety.

The nose of Aubrey Racke still looked rather inflamed, and spite against Blake still burned in Racke. But it was Mellish who, looking in upon Racke and Crooke in their study five minutes later, suggested a dodge which promised an instalment of revenge.

"That cad Blake's gone to Lathom's study, and Lathom ain't there!" he said, grinning. "He's gone out of gates—I saw him go."

"Well?" snarled Crooke.

"It wouldn't be half a bad wheeze to lock him in!" said Mellish.

"Nothin' in it," replied Racke. "He'd get out of the window."

"I fancy not." Mellish returned, with another of his cunning grins. "Railton's walking up and down the quad with Kildare. Blake wouldn't try that on while he's there. And they're yarning nineteen to the dozen. They may walk up and down till tea-time, likely enough."

"I'll do it!" said Racke. "Come along, Gerry!"

It really was rather a poor thing in the way of revenges. Doubtless, it might momentarily increase Mr. Lathom's ire with Blake. But the master of the Fourth was a very reasonable man, and in general a very good-tempered one; and little time or argument would be needed to convince him that Blake would not have locked himself in.

He might not be back for hours, however, and Blake's temper would certainly suffer if he had to stay there till his return. Moreover, it was but a small instalment of Racke's intended revenge—something easy on account, so to speak.

At about the moment when Mellish put his head into the study of Racke and Crooke, it chanced that Grundy, Wilkins, Gore, and Lucas came out of the Shell Form-room. Mr. Linton had suddenly remembered an appointment and had given them a hundred lines each instead of keeping them in longer.

Gunn was waiting.

"Where's that fellow Blake?" panted Grundy.

"He's gone to Lathom's room. You can't get at him yet. Here, I say, Grundy, you silly ass, come back!"

"It's all right, Gunny!" said Wilkins. "Even old Grundy won't be such a fatheaded clump as to go for Blake before Lathom. What's it all about? I heard Blake roaring things about Grundy, but—"

"Blake's an ass! But Grundy's got to be stopped, Wilky!"

"You can't stop him, and I can't stop him, and the two of us together can't stop him!" answered Wilkins. "Just you tell us the yarn!"

"Well, it's like this, though I'm hanged if I understand it all!"

And Gunn proceeded to relate what he knew, while Grundy stamped furiously up the staircase to Mr. Lathom's quiet study on the first floor.

The door stood open, and Blake was visible inside. He had been there some minutes, but, concluding that the master might be expected back at any moment, had made up his mind to wait for him.

He faced round as Grundy rushed in.

The burly Shell fellow was in too big a rage to remember where he was—or to care if he remembered. At no time was he any great respecter of persons, at best. He might not have gone for Blake before Mr. Lathom, but even that is not certain.

"You say I'm a sneak? Put your hands up!" he hooted, as he rushed in. Blake put up his hands at once. There was small choice for him, anyway. But he was nothing loth. He was as enraged with Grundy as Grundy was with him.

Racke, Crooke, and Mellish saw Grundy rush in. Racke stole up to the door, slipped the key from the lock inside, thrust it in outside, and locked the door just as Grundy got home on Blake's nose.

"They didn't see me!" he chortled.

But there he was wrong. Blake had caught a glimpse of him.

But Blake had no time to think about Racke just then. Grundy needed all his attention.

Stamp, stamp, stamp! Biff, biff, biff!

They fought each other around the study. Chairs fell with successive crashes plainly audible in corridor and quad. Blake was knocked up against a low bookcase, and it lurched forward as he moved away. The books came thumping to the floor.

Grundy went backwards over the table, and upset the ink. He regained his equilibrium, and grabbed Blake in a grizzly-like hug.

They rolled on the floor together, still punching.

Racke and Crooke and Mellish fled. It was time to flee.

If they had waited another ten seconds Mr. Railton, Kildare, and Mr. Lathom would have spotted them.

Those three came rushing up the staircase, with a crowd at their heels.

Mr. Lathom had come from the gates at the precise moment when the attention of the Housemaster and the prefect had been attracted to the sounds of strife proceeding from his study.

It was Mr. Railton who turned the key in the lock and threw open the door.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "Grundy—Blake, what does this mean? Get up at once!" thundered Mr. Railton.

It was not until prep had well begun that Blake was seen again by his chums. Then he came into No. 6 looking very decidedly the worse for wear.

"You've got a nose!" said Herries critically.

"Brrrrrr!" replied Blake. "Can't think why you were such a silly ass!" said Dig.

"I like that! Why, Grundy came for me like a mad bull! I only defended myself. I suppose it was up to me to do that, even if it was in Lathom's den?"

"Grundy looked as if you had defended yourself good and hard!" said Digby, grinning cheerily.

"I think I gave him as good as I got. But I don't think now he meant to sneak."

"What did you get?" asked Herries. "A bit more than I wanted," replied Blake.

"Railton attended to me. I'd rather have had Lathom. What's that, Gussy, you fat-head?"

"I refuse to be called a fathead, Blake! I newly remarked that I am glad you have the sense to perceive that old Gwunday—"

"Brrrr! That's all right! The only thing I'm worrying about now is that we've lost our chance in the competition."

"That's all right, too," said Dig. "Lathom left the things on his desk, and I didn't see any harm in collaring them. They weren't his."

"Dig will get in a wow for it!" said Gussy anxiously.

"They weren't finished," Blake said, looking at Dig in surprise.

"I finished the job. Easy enough with the key," replied Digby.

"Thanks, old chap! I say, Dig's in it, if we win the prize, isn't he, you fellows?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Of course he is!"

"I'd sell my share for five bob," said Dig, grinning again.

And it turned out that five bob would have been more than it was worth!

Forty-eight hours later Study No. 6 was in great excitement. Merry Monarch had run first, Panopticon second, Boanerges third. The very first coupon Blake had filled up gave the three in correct order!

Visions of wealth floated before the mental vision of Blake, Herries, and Gussy.

They waited—they had to wait. And at last came the prize—eight-and-something!

Over two thousand coupons had given "Merry Monarch—Panopticon—Boanerges," it appeared.

"Well, that does it!" said Blake, in disgust. "We're absolutely out of pocket, and all that work wasted, too! That puts the lid on it!"

And it certainly did seem rather like a blunder, taken all round—Blake's blunder, so Gussy and Herries maintained, though Dig said there were three of them in it, and others said there were four!

THE END.