

Amuse 34

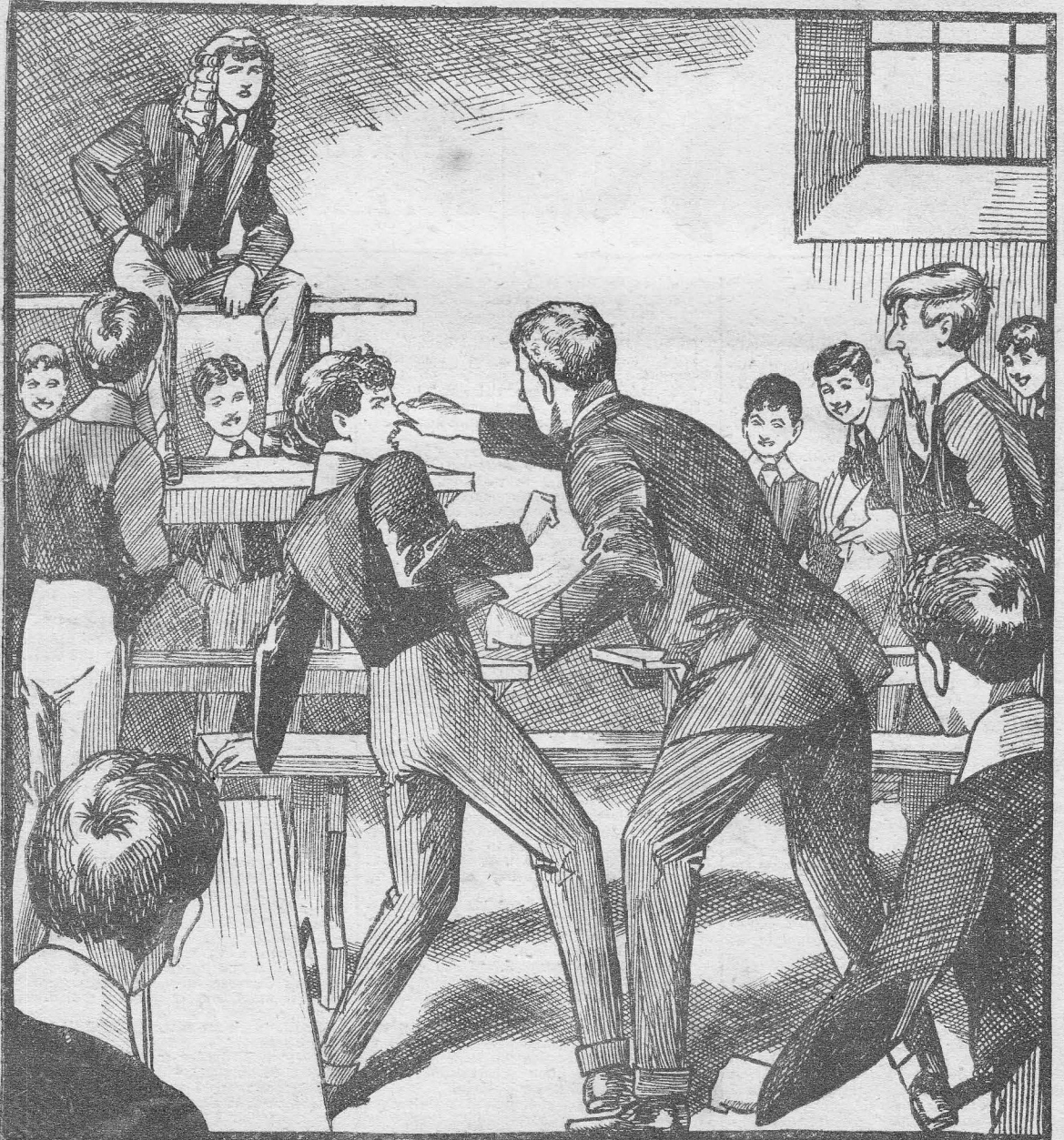
THREE NEW STORIES INSIDE!

The **Penny** **1½**
Popular

Week Ending
September 13th, 1919.

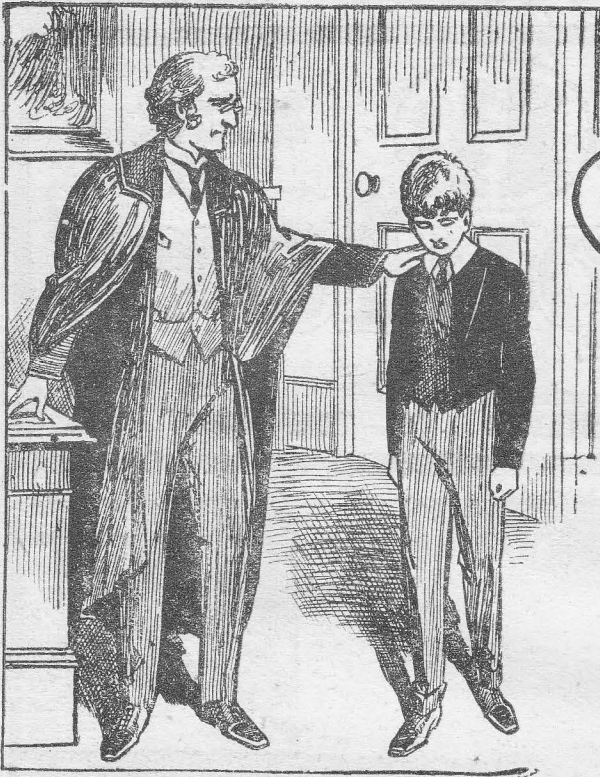
No. 34.
New Series.

Three Original Complete Stories of—
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TROUBLE AT THE TRIAL!

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



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with the Adventures of HARRY
WHARTON & Co. of Greyfriars.
By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Outcast.

"I SAY, Mauly—" began Dennis Carr. The schoolboy earl, reclining on the couch in his study, continued to chat to Sir Jimmy Vivian, apparently unconscious of the fact that his new study-mate had addressed him.

"I say—" repeated Dennis Carr, with a heightened colour.

"As I was sayin', Jimmy," drawled Lord Mauleverer, "it's very nice to walk along by the seashore an' explore the old caves, an' that sort of thing. But it's frightfully faggin' an' exhaustin', for all that. Anythin' for a quiet life, dear boy—" "Mauleverer!"

Mauly could no longer pretend not to hear. Dennis Carr confronted him with clenched fists and gleaming eyes.

"Hallo, Carr!" murmured Mauly drowsily. "Did you speak, bedad?"

"Yes, I did! I spoke to you twice before, and you ignored me! I want to know why!"

"I was simply obeyin' orders," said Mauly. The new boy glared.

"You mean to say you're going to be a party to that silly rot about sending me to Coventry?" he exclaimed.

"Right on the wicket!" said the schoolboy earl. "I'm not supposed to be speakin' to you now, but you asked for an explanation, an' you can have it! You were sent to Coventry for sneakin' to Quelch—an' quite right, too! It wasn't the first offence. Sneakin' is a rotten thing—a detestable thing. I know that Bunter sometimes sneaks, but he hasn't got savvy enough to realise the meanness of it. You have. There's no excuse for you, Carr, an' Wharton did the right thing in sendin' you to Coventry."

Sir Jimmy Vivian gasped. "Blessed if that ain't the longest speech I've ever known you to make, Mauly!" he exclaimed.

Mauly smiled. "I thought I'd make my explanation perfectly clear, don't you know. Then Carr won't be in any doubt as to why we cut him dead."

"You burbling chump!" hooted Dennis. "You condemn a chap first, and make inquiries afterwards. I thought you would be different from the rest. I hoped you would give a fellow a fair chance."

Mauly looked scornful. "You can't deny that you sneaked," he said. "It's common knowledge that you com-

plained to Quelch that you'd been made to run the gauntlet in the dorm."

"I didn't!"
"You did!"
"I tell you I didn't!" persisted Dennis. Lord Mauleverer shrugged his noble shoulders.

"I'm not goin' to argue with you," he said. "It's too exhaustin'. You played the sneak, an' nothin' you say now can turn black into white."

"That's so," agreed Sir Jimmy. "We were quite willin' to be pally with you, Carr, an' we were quite willin' to make you feel at 'ome in this study. But there are some things a feller can't overlook. An' sneakin' to a master is one of 'em."

Dennis Carr, breathing hard, stood and glared at his study-mates.

"I've a jolly good mind to knock both your silly heads together!" he exclaimed. "You've jumped to conclusions, like everybody else. It's true that Quelch found out that I was made to run the gauntlet, but he didn't find out from me!"

"Who told him, then?" asked Mauly. "Ask me another! But it wasn't me."

Dennis saw by the expressions on the faces of Mauly and Sir Jimmy that they didn't believe him.

And, after all, why should they? Unfortunately, he was the victim of a previous conviction, so to speak. He had sneaked once, and the fellows naturally concluded that he had sneaked again.

Harry Wharton, exercising his authority as captain of the Remove, had decreed that Dennis Carr should be sent to Coventry forthwith, and, for once in a way, the Form was almost entirely in favour of Wharton's action.

Lord Mauleverer resumed his conversation with Sir Jimmy Vivian, and the new boy strode out into the passage, slamming the door furiously behind him.

"The cads!" he muttered. "I thought that Mauleverer, at least, wouldn't go with the stream. But he's no better than the rest of them!"

At that moment the Famous Five of the Remove came along the passage, a healthy, happy-looking procession in their dark-blue football jerseys. Bob Cherry carried a brand-new football under his arm.

Harry Wharton & Co. passed Dennis Carr as if he were of no more account than a fly on the wall. They were evidently quite in earnest about sending him to Coventry.

"Look here, Wharton—" began the new boy.

There was no reply. The captain of the Remove did not even turn his head.

"How long are you going to keep up this tommy rot?" demanded Dennis.

Still no answer.

"You silly asses—"

The Famous Five disappeared round a bend in the passage.

"Hang them!" muttered Dennis.

"He, he, he!"

There was a sudden cackle at the new boy's elbow. Turning, Dennis beheld Billy Bunter, the fat, ungainly porpoise of the Remove.

"He, he, he!" repeated Bunter. "Cut you dead, did they? Serve you jolly well right! Sneaks are barred at Greyfriars!"

"What are you doing here, then?" said Dennis contemptuously.

The satire was quite wasted upon Billy Bunter. He blinked at the new boy through his big spectacles.

"You've only got yourself to blame for this," he said. "You ought to have put yourself under my protection at the start."

"My hat!"

"It's not too late, even now," said Bunter. "If you'll pay me a small consideration, I'll undertake to bring you up in the way you should go."

"That's very kind of you!"

"Not at all! I can teach you how to sneak without being found out."

"What!"

"And I can give you some useful tips which will enable you to keep on good terms with Wharton and the rest."

"Indeed!"

"I can also teach you such things as table manners," said Billy Bunter, warning to his subject. "Most new kids don't know how to eat their soup quietly, and they use a knife instead of a fork. All these little things make a bad impression on the fellows. For half-a-crown a week I'll guarantee to turn a rough diamond into a polished gem!"

Dennis Carr regarded the fat junior with a grimace which Bunter was too short-sighted to notice.

"You'll teach me manners for half-a-crown a week—what?"

"Yes!" said Bunter eagerly. "I've turned many a country yokel into a perfect gentleman before now. I should only charge you a bob a week in the ordinary way, but you're supposed to be in Coventry, and I'm running a big risk in speaking to you. Suppose you pay me the first instalment now?"

"A jolly good idea!" said Dennis Carr. "I will!"

And he dashed his fist into Billy Bunter's jaw with an impact which caused the fat junior's spectacles to leap off his nose.

"Varoooonh!" yelled Bunter. The stone floor of the passage seemed to get up and strike him in the face. He felt as if he had run foul of a steam-roller.

"You're willing to teach me manners for half-a-crown a week," said Dennis Carr, "and I'm willing to teach you manners for nix! That's the first lesson. You can have the next at once, if you like!"

Billy Bunter didn't like. Pausing only to recover his spectacles, which were slightly splintered, the fat junior scuttled away down the passage.

Dennis Carr strode away in the opposite direction.

He saw quite a number of fellows, but they did not see him—at least, they pretended not to.

Every time Dennis attempted to open a conversation the fellow he addressed walked away without speaking.

The new boy began to realise that being sent to Coventry was one of the bitterest forms of punishment ever invented.

A form licking, a bumping, or even running the gauntlet, were experiences which, though painful, were brief. But being sent to Coventry was slow torture.

Dennis Carr was trembling with rage and chagrin by the time he reached the end of the Remove passage.

He was an outcast—a pariah. Nobody wanted him, nobody had a good word to say for him.

"They're a set of cads!" Dennis told himself over and over again. "They hate me, and I hate them! There isn't one fellow in the Remove who doesn't think me guilty of sneaking to Quelch!"

But that was where Dennis was wrong.

Mark Linley, the lad from Lancashire, who himself had undergone bitter experiences in his early schooldays, was prepared to stand by Dennis Carr. Despite the new boy's waywardness and his foolish pride, Mark Linley saw good in him. That was just like Linley. He was always swift to praise a fellow's good points, and to overlook his bad ones.

Dennis encountered the Lancashire lad in the Close.

He half expected Mark Linley to pass him by, as the rest had done, without a word or look.

Mark, however, stopped short, and clapped Dennis on the shoulder.

"Buck up, Carr!" he said.

"I suppose you know that I'm in Coventry?" said Dennis.

Mark nodded.

"The fellows are saying I sneaked to Quelch," continued the new boy. "Do you think that?"

"No, I don't!" said Mark Linley emphatically.

Dennis Carr drew a deep breath.

"It's jolly decent of you to say that, Linley," he said quietly. "You're the only fellow in the Remove who's got a good word to say for me. But you'd better not be seen jawing to me. I don't want to drag you into my troubles."

"Rats!"

"You're fairly popular in the Form," Dennis went on, "and I don't want you to lose your standing through me."

"Don't be an ass! I know you didn't sneak to Quelch; therefore I shall speak to you as often and as much as I like."

"They'll begin to tar you with the same brush—"

"Let them!" said Mark Linley. "You needn't be alarmed, Carr, either on my account or your own. The fellows will come round fast enough. This is an ugly business, but it will blow over. Keep a stiff upper-lip, and—"

"Linley!"

Vernon-Smith of the Remove strode up to the two juniors.

"Carr's in Coventry," he said.

Mark Linley smiled.

"He's in the Close at the present moment," he remarked.

"Don't be funny!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "You saw Wharton's order on the notice-board?"

"I did."

"Aren't you going to obey it?"

"No, I'm not going to act against my better judgment. I'm convinced that Carr didn't sneak to Quelch about the ragging he had in the dorm. The information must have come from quite another source—possibly from Bunter."

Vernon-Smith gave a snort.

"Carr sneaked before—" he began.

"That was because he wasn't taught to our ways."

"Then he needs to be taught a sharp lesson. A week in Coventry will do him all the good in the world!"

"I don't agree with you, Smith," said Mark Linley. "It will do more harm than good. When a fellow is cut dead, he gets rebellious, and doesn't care a straw what happens. Carr hasn't been given a fair chance of finding his level yet. He's quite willing to be decent, if he's treated decently in return."

Vernon-Smith scowled.

"I, for one, am not going out of my way to be decent to a sneak!" he said. "And, what's more, you're not going to chum up with this rank outsider!"

"Carr's no worse than some fellows, and better than most," said Linley.

"Is that a knock at me?"

"If the cap fits, wear it."

Smack! Vernon-Smith's open palm struck Mark Linley across the cheek.

"I don't permit insults from a factory cad!" he said, all his former hatred of Mark Linley welling up anew.

It was a long time since the term "factory cad" had been applied to Mark Linley. It brought a rush of colour to the Lancashire lad's cheeks, and the next moment he and Vernon-Smith were fighting like tigers.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's all the merry rumpus about?"

It was Bob Cherry's voice. The Famous Five had just returned from a brief round of practice on Little Side.

Harry Wharton & Co. arrived at an exciting moment.

Vernon-Smith dashed his fist into Mark Linley's face, and Mark, though dazed, managed to shoot out his left, catching his opponent fairly and squarely under the jaw.

"Chuck it, you asses!" exclaimed Frank Nugent, in awed tones. "You're underneath the Head's window!"

The fight raged fiercer than ever.

"Separate them!" rapped out Harry Wharton.

And the Famous Five rushed up to the combatants.

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull laid violent hands upon Vernon-Smith, and swung him back. The other three did likewise to Mark Linley.

"Let me get at him!" muttered Vernon-Smith.

"Not this evening!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "Some other evening! What's it all about?"

"Linley's backing up that rotter Carr!"

"Eh?"

"Birds of a feather, you know!" gasped the Boulder.

Harry Wharton turned to the Lancashire lad.

"Is that true, Linley?"

Mark nodded.

"Carr's been sent to Coventry!" said the captain of the Remove.

"Not by me!" said Mark Linley.

Wharton flushed.

"It's by order of the Form," he said.

"Carr proved himself a sneak—"

"I've got my own opinion about that."

"Don't be a silly chump, Marky!" said Bob Cherry. "Carr's not your sort, anyway. Let him rip!"

"I'm standing by him," said Mark doggedly.

"Oh, all right!" said Bob, in tones of resignation. "Don't blame me if the Form sends you to Coventry as well!"

"Whatever the Form says or does won't make the slightest difference."

Harry Wharton, anxious to avert a quarrel between two chums of such long standing as Mark Linley and Bob Cherry, took Bob's arm and led him away. The other members of the Famous Five followed, keeping a watchful eye on Vernon-Smith, in case he showed a desire to resume hostilities.

Mark Linley remained chatting with Dennis Carr for some moments. Then he, too, went into the building, leaving the new boy alone with his reflections.

And, needless to state, those reflections were anything but pleasant ones.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Shock for Highcliffe.

"MIGHT as well go for a stroll," murmured Dennis Carr. "There's nothing doing in this hateful place!"

He tramped moodily out of gates, and along the road leading to Friardale.

Dennis felt in the condition known as "fed-

up, and far from home." He had not known a moment's real happiness since he had been at Greyfriars. Had he but known it, this was entirely his own fault.

He hated the old school, and the fellows there hated him. If he were suddenly taken from amongst them, no one would be sorry, no one would care, except Mark Linley.

Dennis recalled with a glow of gratitude the Lancashire lad's staunch championship.

But, even with Linley as a chum, life at Greyfriars was anything but a bed of roses.

"I've a jolly good mind to run away!" muttered Dennis, as he strode along.

And then he thought of the consequences of such an action—the wrath of his father, and—what was of far more importance—the grief of his mother.

Dennis feared his father, and he was fond, very fond, of his mother.

"It can't be done," he told himself, at length. "If it was only the pater, I might chance it; but I daren't upset the mater. She's had quite enough worry as it is."

Absorbed in his reflections, Dennis passed through the straggling High Street of Friardale almost before he was aware of the fact.

When he emerged into the open country beyond, shouts came to his ears, accompanied by the thudding of a football.

Dennis stopped short.

"I'd give anything for a game of footer!" he murmured.

And then he caught sight of the ground, and the flash of running figures. An exciting match was in progress.

Dennis Carr learned from one of the spectators that Highcliffe juniors were playing Friardale Athletic.

"What's the score?" asked Dennis.

"Nothing yet," said his informant. "In the ordinary way, Friardale would wipe up the ground with those school kids; but they've only got ten men. That means a weakness in the forward-line."

Dennis nodded. He saw that the locals were stubbornly defending their goal against the repeated attacks of the Highcliffe forwards, led by Frank Courtenay.

The game was most one-sided. Highcliffe could do everything but score. They attacked in clever formation, and all sorts of shots were rained upon the local custodian, who, more by good luck than anything else, managed to keep his charge intact.

Half-time arrived with the score-sheet blank.

Dennis Carr walked on to the field, and singled out the local skipper.

"Any chance of a game?" he asked.

The Friardale captain stared.

"Well, we're certainly a man short," he said, "but—"

Dennis laughed.

"I know what's in your mind," he said. "You're thinking I'm too much of a midget to be of any use. But I promise you that if you give me a trial you won't regret it."

"But what about togs?"

"I can play as I am—minus my coat," said Dennis.

"All right," said the local skipper.

When the game was resumed, Dennis Carr lined up with the forward line of the local team.

His school cap was lying on the touch-line, underneath his coat, and Frank Courtenay & Co., of Highcliffe, had no suspicion, as yet, that he was a Greyfriars fellow.

"I think," remarked the Caterpillar, Frank Courtenay's closest chum, "that we'll force the fightin', so to speak, this half. What do you say, Franky?"

Frank Courtenay laughed.

"We were attacking all through the first half," he said, "but we couldn't bag any goals. And Friardale have got eleven men now. That fair-haired kid's taking a hand—or, rather, a boot."

The Caterpillar glanced at Dennis Carr, and gave a chuckle.

"That!" he said, in mingled amusement and contempt. "The first powerful gust of wind that comes along, Franky, will blow it off the ground!"

A moment later the Caterpillar had the shock of his life.

Dennis Carr raced away with the ball at his toes.

Smithson, in the Highcliffe goal, stood ready to receive the oncoming leather. And Smithson, as well as the Caterpillar, had the shock of his life.

The new player went through the Highcliffe defence like a knife through butter. He outwitted the backs, and, with a powerful drive, sent the ball crashing into an undefended corner of the net.

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"Goal!"

The Friardale skipper rubbed his eyes. "Jove, but that was a great shot!" he said. "Can you do it again, kid?"

"I'll try," said Dennis Carr. All his troubles—and they were legion—had slipped from his memory now. He was heart and soul in the game—determined to render a good account of himself.

"I owe that kid an apology!" murmured the Caterpillar. "He's a force to be reckoned with, Franky, after all. His dribblin' and shootin' are the last word!"

"We shall have to pull our socks up!" was Frank Courtenay's grim rejoinder.

Ponsonby & Co., the cads of Highcliffe, were watching the game from the touch-line. They rejoiced exceedingly at Dennis Carr's goal.

"This is where our dearly-beloved Courtenay gets it in the neck!" chuckled Pon. "Absolutely!" said the parrot-like Vavasour. "Wonder where that kid sprung from?" murmured Gadsby.

"He's a descendant of Steve Bloomer, by gad!" said Monson.

The Highcliffe players tried desperately to turn the tables. And after a time they succeeded.

The Caterpillar—anything but a caterpillar as he sped along on the wing—swung the ball across to Frank Courtenay, from whose head it shot into the yawning net.

"Level!" exclaimed Flip Derwent. "Keep it up, you fellows!"

Highcliffe had most of the game after this. But whenever Dennis Carr managed to break away with the ball there was always trouble for the Highcliffe defence.

Dennis was easily the most dangerous man on the Friardale side; and he needed careful watching.

For the space of half an hour, however, nothing further was scored by either side.

Then, with only ten minutes remaining for play, Dennis Carr calmly took the ball from the toes of Tom Wilkinson, of Highcliffe, and streaked down the field like a hare.

The halves were upon him like a pack of wolves, but he shook off their attentions, and continued his swift career towards the Highcliffe goal.

"Go it!" yelled Ponsonby, whose loyalty to his own school had long since been dead. "Drive her through!"

Dennis Carr's progress was temporarily checked by the backs, who closed in upon him from either side.

"Pass!" jerked out the Friardale skipper. Dennis promptly got rid of the ball, and the captain, receiving his pass, shot hard for goal.

The ball struck the upright, and rebounded on to the field of play.

Dennis Carr was upon it like a flash. Without waiting to steady himself, the Greyfriars junior shot, and the ball bounced over Smithson's head into the net.

"Goal!" yelled Ponsonby, executing a jazz in his excitement. "How d'you like that sort of medicine, Courtenay?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"One of these days," murmured the Caterpillar, as the teams lined up again in the centre of the field, "I shall appear in the dock on a charge of cad-slaughter! Pon gets on my nerves! I shall simply have to slay him, sooner or later!"

"He's a thundering cad!" growled Frank Courtenay. "He doesn't know the meaning of the word loyalty. But never mind Pon now. We've got about three minutes to stave off a licking."

"Without wishin' to pose as a pessimist," drawled the Caterpillar, "I think the odds are about a hundred to one that we go under."

The Caterpillar's surmise proved correct. Although they battled desperately in the closing stages, the Highcliffe players failed to get on terms.

Thanks to Dennis Carr, Friardale Athletic had defeated the schoolboys by two goals to one.

Muddy and breathless, and dispirited into the bargain, the Highcliffe Eleven trooped off the field.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Flip Derwent suddenly. "That kid who played for Friardale is a Greyfriars fellow!"

"Rot!" said Frank Courtenay incredulously. "He's just stuck a Greyfriars cap on, anyway."

"So he has, begad!" said the Caterpillar. "I've not seen his chivvy before. He must be a new kid."

Frank Courtenay, with a clouded brow, strode over to where Dennis Carr was standing.

"Are you from Greyfriars?" he demanded.

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Dennis nodded.

"Then what the thump do you mean by playing for a village team?"

"There's no law against it, that I know of."

"There's an unwritten law," said Courtenay. "Are you in the Greyfriars Remove?"

"Unfortunately!" said Dennis. "Then you ought to be playing for them."

"I'd jump at the chance! But Wharton wouldn't have me in the team at any price!"

"Why not?"

"I don't happen to be one of his own particular pals, you see."

Frank Courtenay frowned. "You needn't try to tell me that Wharton selects his team by favouritism," he said. "I've known Wharton longer than you have, and he's perfectly fair-minded."

"Stop bullying that kid, Courtenay!" said Ponsonby, stropping up with his fellow-knits.

"He's no right to be playing for a village team!" growled Frank.

"Rats! A fellow can play for whom he likes. It's a free country!"

"Courtenay's only wild because his side got licked!" said Gadsby.

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

Frank Courtenay turned on his heel, and strode away. He could not trust himself to remain in the presence of the Highcliffe knits. Had he done so, the faces of Ponsonby & Co. would have stood in danger of disfigurement.

Ponsonby turned to Dennis Carr. "Well played, kid!" he said heartily. "You put up a toppin' show!"

"Did I?" said Dennis indifferently. Ponsonby nodded.

"You're sound value as a footballer," he remarked. "I'm almost as good a judge of football as I am of horseflesh."

"Do you bet?" asked Dennis.

"Oh, we indulge in a mild flutter now and again!" said Pon carelessly. "Just to keep ourselves from perishin' of stagnation, you know. Would you care to come along to the Retreat?"

"What's that—a pub?"

"No giddy fear! It's a jolly sight nicer than a pub, and not nearly so risky."

"It's a cosy little den of our own," explained Gadsby. "It was simply an old barn at first, hidden in the wood. We gave it a thorough spring-cleanin', an' furnished it with rugs an' things."

"It's a sort of home away from home," added Monson.

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Comin' along?" asked Ponsonby.

Dennis Carr hesitated. He was a fairly good judge of character, and he had summed up Ponsonby at the outset as not being a nice person to know.

And then he reflected that the company of fellows like Ponsonby was preferable to the solitude and loneliness of Greyfriars.

A moment later his mind was made up. "Lead the way!" he said.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Voice of the Charmer!

THE Retreat, as Ponsonby had aptly named it, was situated in the heart of Friardale Wood.

A casual passer-by would not have suspected, from a glance at the exterior of the ramshackle little barn, that its interior resembled an hotel lounge.

Ponsonby unlocked the heavy wooden door, and swung it open.

"My hat!" said Dennis, stopping short on the threshold in admiration. "You certainly know how to do things in style!"

And the Highcliffe knits chuckled. Ponsonby had spared no expense in furnishing the place.

There were costly rugs on the floor, there was an anthracite stove, and a small oak cabinet in the corner.

Dennis Carr's curiosity was roused. "What's in that cabinet?" he asked.

Producing a bunch of keys, Ponsonby unlocked the cabinet, which was seen to contain solid and liquid refreshment, a pack of playing-cards, and a box of cigarettes.

"We have here," said Ponsonby, in the manner of an auctioneer, "all the ingredients for a good time."

"Hear, hear!" said Gadsby. "We can enjoy a smoke and a game of cards, far from the maddin' crowd. There's absolutely no risk of our bein' spotted."

"Absolutely none!" said Vavasour.

Ponsonby eyed Dennis Carr narrowly, quietly taking stock of him. His sharper's instinct told him that the Greyfriars fellow had plenty of money, and Ponsonby re-

garded him in the light of a pigeon waiting to be plucked.

Then, taking the box of cigarettes from the cupboard, Pon handed it to Dennis.

"No, thanks," said the latter, a slight flush mounting to his cheek.

"What!" said Pon, in astonishment. "You mean to say you don't smoke?"

"No. Smoking's not one of my accomplishments."

Ponsonby brought pressure to bear. "Come along!" he urged. "Every fellow smokes nowadays—unless he's either a prig or a born idiot!"

"Afraid I'm a born idiot, then," said Dennis.

"You play cards, surely?" said Monson. Dennis shook his head.

"Footer and cricket are quite exciting enough for me," he said.

"Oh, help!" gasped Ponsonby. "We seem to have got hold of another edition of Wharton, you fellows."

"Looks like it, by gad!" said Monson. Dennis Carr flushed.

"For goodness' sake, don't class me with Wharton!" he said. "I detest the fellow!"

"In that case, why don't you take part in a mild flutter?" said Gadsby.

"It's against my principles."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Guileless George; or, The Boy Who Stuck to the Straight and Narrow Path!" murmured Ponsonby.

Dennis Carr ignored this cheap sneer. "This is a jolly snug little place," he said, "and it's a pity you can't put it to some better use than smoking and gambling."

"Ye gods!" gasped Pon. "Hark at him! You didn't think we came in here to sing hymns, did you?"

"Or to discuss the weather?" said Gadsby. Dennis Carr was too much overcome by a sudden fit of coughing to reply.

The Highcliffe knits were already in full blast with their cigarettes, and the atmosphere grew thick and hazy.

Dennis staggered to the door. "Not goin', are you?" exclaimed Pon, in amazement.

"Yes," said Dennis. "I want to practise deep-breathing exercises outside. I'm not used to an atmosphere that you can cut with a knife."

"Great pip!"

"Let's bump the silly idiot!" growled Monson. But at a warning signal from Ponsonby he subsided.

"You might change your mind, kid, later on," said Pon. "An' if you do, you'll know where to come for a little entertainment."

Dennis Carr paused in the doorway. "It's quite possible," he said, "that before very long I shall want to join you. But until then there's nothing doing."

Dennis was thinking that if his Form-fellows at Greyfriars continued to persecute him, and make his life a misery, he would throw all his principles overboard, and join forces with Ponsonby & Co. But he was not prepared to take the downward plunge at a moment's notice.

"You won't breathe a word about this place?" said Ponsonby. "If Wharton & Co. got to know, they'd try an' ferret us out."

"They wouldn't succeed, of course!" said Gadsby. "But it would be unpleasant—dashed unpleasant! We don't want a lot of outsiders nosin' around here."

"You can rely on me to keep mum," said Dennis.

And, nodding to the Highcliffe knits, he strode away in the direction of Greyfriars.

Dennis spent a wretched evening.

During prep Lord Mauleverer and Sir Jimmy Vivian kept up an animated conversation, but they never once spoke to Dennis. They had cut him right out of their existence; and although he made several attempts to join in the conversation, the result was so discouraging that he finally gave it up.

His prep finished, Dennis went along to Study No. 1.

The Famous Five were at home. Frank Nugent was playing chess with Hurree Singh, and Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Johnny Bull were playing dominoes.

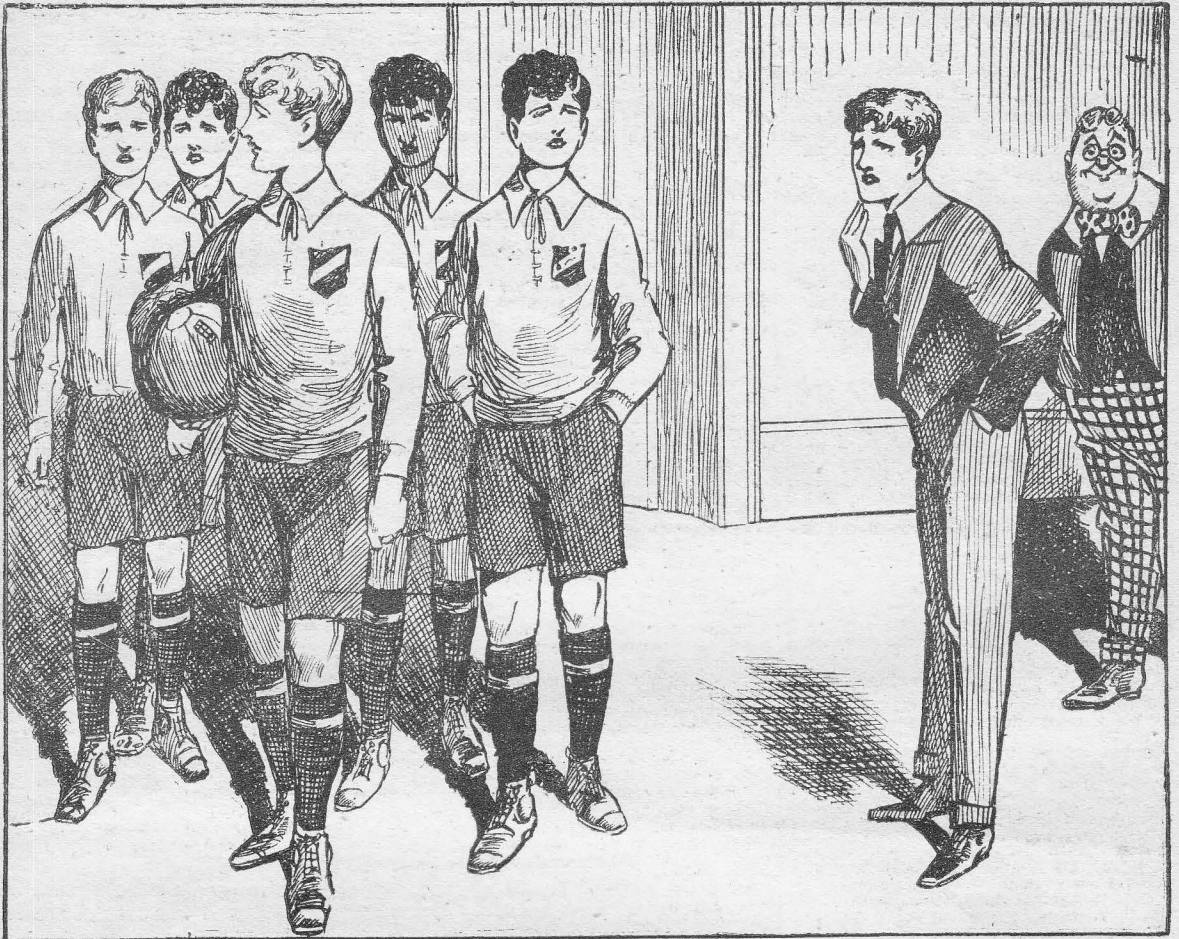
No one looked up as Dennis knocked and entered.

"Look here, Wharton—"

"The domino-players took no heed. "Wharton! I'm speaking to you!"

Still no response. Dennis Carr strode across the study, and his hand fell none too gently upon Wharton's shoulder.

The captain of the Remove deigned to



Harry Wharton & Co. passed Dennis Carr as if he were of no more account than a fly on the wall. "Look here, Wharton—" began the new boy. There was no reply. (see page 1)

look up at last. What he said was brief and to the point.

"Get out!"
 "Isn't it time you chucked this silly rot?" said Dennis angrily. "How long am I going to remain in Coventry, as you call it?"

"A week, at least," said Wharton.
 "And if you're not jolly careful, it'll be a whole term!" chimed in Bob Cherry.
 "Sneaks are barred from this study," said Frank Nugent. "Travel!"

Dennis Carr did not travel. He stood glaring at the Famous Five.

"For sheer caddishness," he said, in measured tones, "you fellows take the biscuit!"

Harry Wharton rose to his feet. The other occupants of the study followed his example.

"Pitch him out!" snapped Wharton.

Dennis Carr threw himself into a fighting attitude, but before he could do any damage he was seized by many hands and bundled to the door. Here he held his ground for a moment—but only for a moment. The Famous Five sent him whirling into the passage, and the study door slammed in his face.

Dennis picked himself up, and limped painfully away.

During the interval between prep and bedtime he encountered nothing but black looks. Every glance in his direction said, as eloquently as any words would have done: "You're a sneak!"

Mark Linley would have cheered him up, but the industrious Lancashire lad was swooning in his study.

Dennis went up to the Remove dormitory in a black mood.

"Looks as if I shall have to make my friends outside the school!" he muttered. "I almost wish I'd given in to that fellow Ponsoby this afternoon."

Smoking and gambling were not in Dennis

Carr's line. But that was better—anything was better—than a routine in which he could neither speak nor be spoken to.

Every day Dennis was becoming more and more alienated from his schoolfellows. He was among them, but not of them. They regarded him with contempt and derision. They pronounced him guilty of sneaking, when all the time he was innocent. Had the fellows but known it, it was Billy Bunter who had informed Mr. Queleh of the fact that Dennis had been made to run the gauntlet.

It was a long time before sleep visited the eyes of Dennis Carr that night, and he told himself that he was getting very near the end of his tether.

He stood, in fact, at the cross-roads of life.

He was asking himself the question which so many fellows have asked themselves at critical periods of their history: What was the use of going straight?

Why not renounce, once and for all, the principles which had been instilled into him by his parents?

Playing a straight game was not worth while. It brought him more kicks than pence. Playing with a straight bat had landed him—where? In Coventry!

Dennis Carr was faced with a big mental problem. His good and bad angels seemed to be fighting for the possession of his soul.

And it looked very much as if the bad angels would triumph!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Trial by Jury!

"I SAY, you fellows—" Billy Bunter, simply bursting with news and importance, rolled into Study No. 1 next day.

Five voices ordered the fat junior to deposit himself on the other side of the door, but Billy Bunter stood firm.

"I've got something that will interest you fellows," he said. "Especially you, Wharton."

And Bunter spread out a copy of the local paper on the study table. It was Mr. Queleh's copy, but that small detail didn't seem to trouble Bunter.

"Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "What's the latest? Have we declared war on Timbuctoo?"

With a grimy forefinger, the Owl of the Remove indicated a certain paragraph in the football column. It ran thus:

FRIARDALE ATHLETIC v. HIGHCLIFFE SCHOOL.

"This match was played on the Friar Dale ground on Wednesday, and resulted in a win for the local team by 2 goals to 1.

"Highcliffe did the lion's share of the attacking, but the score-sheet was blank at half-time.

"In the second half, however, the game was revolutionised by the appearance in the local side of a young and promising player named Carr.

"Carr is a Greyfriars boy, and he ought not to be wasting his talents by taking part in village football. He scored two grand goals, including the one which won the match, and, judging by his display, he is worth a place in the Greyfriars First Eleven."

"My hat!" gasped Nugent. "This must refer to our Carr!"

"There's only one Carr at Greyfriars," said Harry Wharton. "It must be him."

"Worth a place in the First Eleven!" quoted Bob Cherry. "My sainted aunt!"

"I say, you fellows—" "This is the limit!" said Wharton angrily. "Carr's got no right to play for a team outside the school!"

"He's done this just to spite you!" said Billy Bunter. "He's a hot-stuff footballer—"

something after my own style—and he's trying to make you ratty by playing for a village team."

"Of course," said Johnny Bull thoughtfully, "there's no law against a fellow playing outside the school."

"It's not the thing," said Wharton. "Unless we make an example of Carr, we shall have half the members of the Remove team playing for outside clubs. And that won't do."

"The ludicrous Carr wants promptly ticking off!" remarked Hurree Singh, in his quaint English.

"Let's make him run the gauntlet again!" suggested Billy Bunter. "It's ripping sport! Besides, I only managed to get about half a dozen whacks in when he ran the gauntlet before—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're a bit too bloodthirsty, Buntie," said Bob Cherry. "Buzz off!"

"Eh?"

"Run away and pick flowers!"

"Gimme Quelch's paper first!" said the fat junior.

"Oh, my hat! Is that Quelch's?"

"Yes. He always lets me read the news first, and then I can tell him where to find all the tit-bits—the divorces, and all that sort of thing, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter took the paper—and his departure.

Harry Wharton turned to his chums.

"Of course, we must take action against Carr," he said.

The others nodded.

"If he played for another team through ignorance," said Frank Nugent, "we could overlook it. But this is sheer cheek! As Bunter says, he turned out for Friardale Athletic just to spite us."

Harry Wharton rose to his feet.

"I'll go along and bring him to judgment," he said.

The captain of the Remove found, however, that Dennis Carr was not in his study.

"Lookin' for the new kid?" inquired Lord Mauleverer.

Wharton nodded.

"He'll be along in a few minutes," said the schoolboy earl.

"Good! I'll just leave him a message!"

Harry Wharton picked up a slate, and inscribed a brief message on it in chalk. It ran thus:

"TO DENNIS CARR.

Take notice that you are wanted immediately in study No. 1!

(Signed) HARRY WHARTON."

Wharton placed the slate in a prominent position on the mantelpiece, and retired.

"Where's the merry victim?" asked Bob Cherry, as Wharton re-entered Study No. 1.

"He'll be along soon. I've left a message for him."

Half an hour elapsed, however, and there was no sign of Dennis Carr.

"Looks like defiance," murmured Johnny Bull.

"I votefully suggest," said Hurree Singh, "that a painful couple of us go along to his esteemed study, and forcefully drag him hither."

"Good egg!" said Bob Cherry. "I'll come with you, Inky."

And the two chums stepped along to Lord Mauleverer's study.

Dennis Carr was there. He had just finished chalking something on the slate, which he had restored to its place on the mantelpiece.

Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh gasped when they saw the message:

"TO HARRY WHARTON.

Take notice that you are a silly ass!

(Signed) DENNIS CARR."

"High treason, by Jove!" murmured Bob Cherry, advancing towards Dennis Carr.

"Come along, my beauty!"

"Hands off!" said Dennis sharply.

"You will proceedfully come with us!" said Hurree Singh. "Anything you utterfully say will be used in evidence against you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Lord Mauleverer and Sir Jimmy Vivian.

Dennis Carr, who was heartily sick of the treatment he was receiving at the hands of the Removites, fought like a wild-cat.

Bob Cherry recoiled from a blow on the nose which caused the claret to flow, and Hurree Singh was sent sprawling against the bookcase. But they speedily recovered, and Dennis Carr, with his collar and tie streaming loose, and his hair ruffled and awry, was

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 34.

forcibly ejected from Mauly's luxurious apartment, and taken along to Study No. 1.

"Here's the giddy prisoner!" said Bob Cherry. "We'll hold him tight, Harry, while you cross-examine him."

"Let me alone—" began Dennis furiously, but Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh stood one on each side of him, like warders; and each of his wrists was held in a crushing grip.

Harry Wharton turned to the prisoner.

"Is it correct that you played footer for Friardale Athletic yesterday?" he asked.

"Yes!" panted Dennis.

"Don't you know that you're not supposed to do that sort of thing?"

"I'll do as I jolly well like!"

Wharton frowned.

"That's just where we don't see eye to eye," he said. "You won't do as you like! You'll do as the captain of the Form likes!"

"Not on your life!" said Dennis.

"You only played for the village team out of pure cussedness—"

"I didn't! I can never get a game here, on account of being in Coventry; and that being so I must get all my footer outside the school."

"That's the last village match you'll ever play in!" said Wharton.

"It isn't! I've had a letter from the skipper of Friardale Athletic, asking me to play again on Saturday; and I've consented."

"I refuse to let you go!"

"You sha'n't stop me!" said Dennis passionately.

"Oh, yes, we shall!" chimed in Nugent.

"We'll see that you're shoved under lock and key!"

"You eads!"

At that moment Peter Todd appeared in the doorway.

"What's going on in here?" he asked.

"Carr again!" growled Johnny Bull. "He's not only a sneak, but a traitor. He played footer for an outside team yesterday!"

"My hat!"

"What sort of punishment do you suggest, Toddy?" asked Wharton.

Peter Todd chuckled.

"Why not bring him up for trial at the local police-court—in other words, the Rag?" he exclaimed.

"We'll have a properly organised court—judge and jury, and all the necessary spare parts."

"Rippin'!" said Bob Cherry.

"Carr's always complaining that he never gets a fair trial," said Nugent. "He shall have one this time."

"Meanwhile," said Peter Todd, "you can release him on bail."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh released their captive; and Dennis Carr, white with rage, stamped out of the study. He would have shown fight, but he realised the futility of pitting himself against the Famous Five, with Peter Todd thrown in.

An hour later the arrangements for the "trial" were complete.

A dozen jurors had been duly sworn in, and Harry Wharton himself—aided by a wig which was the property of the Remove Amateur Dramatic Society—was to preside as judge.

The following announcement appeared on the notice-board, for all the Remove to see:

"NOTICE!

A trial by jury will take place in the Rag at 8 p.m.

ROLL UP! ROLL UP! ROLL UP!

The audience is requested to refrain from throwing things at the judge. There is no objection, however, to kicking the prisoner!"

(Signed) HARRY WHARTON,
Lord Chief Justice."

"My hat!" ejaculated Bolsover major, when he read the announcement. "Who's the merry prisoner?"

"Carr, you bet!" said Skinner.

"There's going to be some fun to-night!" said Stott. "Hope the beast is sentenced to run the gauntlet. I'm dying for some exercise!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows!" piped the voice of Billy Bunter. "What part am I going to take in this?"

"Oh, you'll be the Woolsack!" said Bolsover major.

"What's that?"

"Something soft for the judge to sit on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a great and growing excitement in the ranks of the Remove.

A mock police-court trial would be great

fun for everyone concerned—barring the prisoner.

Long before the appointed time the Rag was crowded.

The jurymen were in their places, and just as eight o'clock chimed from the old clock-tower the judge arrived.

Harry Wharton's appearance was greeted with loud cheers.

"Carry on, your worship!"

"On the ball!"

Assisted by the members of the jury, Wharton clambered up to his lofty and somewhat precarious seat—a chair mounted on a pyramid of forms—and then, adjusting his wig, he prepared to open the proceedings.

"One minute, your worship!" said Bob Cherry.

Wharton frowned.

"No interruptions, please!" he said.

"But—but you can't set the ball rolling!" protested Bob.

"And why not, pray?"

"Because there's no prisoner!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a yell of laughter from the audience.

The preparations for the trial were complete. But the most important part of all, the bringing in of the prisoner, had somehow been overlooked.

His worship blushed.

"I should advise you to turn the jury loose," said Bob Cherry, who happened to be the foreman of that august body. "We'll find the giddy prisoner soon enough!"

"Go ahead, then!" said Wharton.

The members of the jury sprinted out of court in a most undignified procession.

"Talk about hare-and-hounds!" chuckled Frank Nugent. "Where shall we hunt for the beggar?"

"Everywhere!" said Bob Cherry tersely.

The jurymen searched everywhere for Dennis Carr—except in the most obvious place, namely, his study.

Finally, Johnny Bull remembered that he might be there; and investigation proved that he was.

"Come along, my pippin!" said Bob Cherry. "You're going to be brought to justice!"

Dennis Carr stared.

"You don't mean to say you're going to persist in this tommyrot?" he exclaimed.

"We is, we are! Give me a hand, you fellows!"

The next moment Dennis Carr found himself being whirled along in the direction of the rag.

There was a chorus of approval from the long-suffering audience as the prisoner was hustled into court.

"Police-constable Bolsover!" rapped out Harry Wharton. "You will mount guard over the prisoner!"

"What-ho!" grinned Bolsover major.

And then the "trial" began.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Bombshell!

PETER TODD, who revelled in an affair of this sort, had appointed himself counsel for the prosecution.

There had been quite a lot of applicants for that post, but the leader of Study No. 7 had successfully ousted the rest.

"Gentlemen of the jury—" began Peter.

"Hurrah!"

"We are here to-day—"

"And gone to-morrow!" grinned Ogilvy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dry up!" growled the counsel for prosecution. "As I was saying, we are here to-day for the purpose of trying, before Mr. Justice Wharton and a Grand Jury, the accused person who is now struggling in the brawny arms of Constable Bolsover!"

"Good!"

"I suggest," said Skinner, "that we pronounce sentence first, and hold the trial afterwards!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence in court!" rapped out his worship.

The laughter subsided, and Peter Todd continued:

"The charge against the accused," he said, "is a dual one—"

"My hat!" said Bulstrode, in surprise. "Has he been fighting a duel?"

"Don't be an ass!"

"I couldn't be a bigger ass than the counsel for the prosecution if I tried for a hundred years!" said Bulstrode.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Very red in the face, Peter Todd resumed his speech. He reflected that a counsel's task was in no sense a bed of roses.

"The accused is charged with a dual

offence, gentlemen. In the first place, he wantonly, deliberately, and with malice aforethought, played football for a village team. In the second place, he was very cheeky when taxed with his offence, and he said he would do it again.

"So I will!" growled Dennis Carr.

Harry Wharton leaned forward, which was rather a risky thing to do, situated as he was.

"Kindly tweak prisoner's nose, Constable Bolsover!" he said.

"Certainly!" said Bolsover major. "Anything to oblige!"

And he squeezed Dennis Carr's nose tightly between his thumb and forefinger, causing the prisoner to set up a fendish yell.

"I need not enlarge, gentlemen," said Peter Todd, "upon the prisoner's action in playing for an alien team. That sort of thing is rank bad form. If a fellow isn't content to get all his footer inside Greyfriars, he ought not to play at all. The accused has shown no sense of loyalty whatever, either to his Form or to his school. One would have thought that being sent to Coventry would have taught him a sharp lesson. But no! He proceeds to heap coals of fire on his own head."

"Where's the fire-extinguisher?" came in a breathless whisper from Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In fact," said Peter Todd, scowling at Skinner, "he seems to do everything he possibly can to annoy us. He has proved himself a sneak; he has now shown himself to be a traitor into the bargain! No jury—unless they were a set of dithering idiots—could possibly bring in any verdict other than 'Guilty!'"

This concluded the speech for the prosecution.

Peter Todd resumed his seat amid a chorus of applause.

"Now let's hear the case for the defence," said Ogilvy.

"There isn't one!" said the judge.

"Oh, yes, there is!" interposed a quiet voice.

And the audience noticed that Mark Linley was on his feet.

An indignant murmur arose.

"Sit down, Linley!"

"You're not going to side with that cad!" Mark Linley waited until there was a chance of making himself heard. Then he started to speak.

"I feel called upon to say a few words in Carr's defence—"

he began.

"You'll feel called upon to apply a beef-steak to your eye before long!" said Bolsover major darkly.

Nothing daunted, Mark Linley continued.

"The attitude of the Remove towards Carr," he said, "has been unjust. It is true that Carr made himself unpopular when he first came by kicking Bolsover—"

"And sneaking to Quelechy!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I refuse to believe that he sneaked!" said Mark Linley. "There's no proof that he did, anyway. He's been sent to Coventry on the strength of a mere supposition."

"That's a good word," said Skinner. "I'll back it both ways!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It isn't often that I go in the face of the Form like this," went on Mark Linley.

"But I must say you fellows have overshot the mark in your persecution of Carr. He is now charged with playing football for a village team. There's no crime in that that I can see. Wharton—who's usually the soul of fairness—wouldn't give him a show in the Remove team; therefore Carr is quite justified in getting his football elsewhere."

"Rats!"

"Choke him off, your worship!"

"We're fed-up with fellows who champion cads!"

"You'd better sit down, Linley," said Wharton, not unkindly. He hesitated to be harsh to such a staunch chum as Mark Linley had proved himself to be.

"Let me say one more word," said the Lancashire lad. "This is not a trial, really. It's a sheer farce, because the jury have got their verdict mapped out in advance. But if there's any question of punishing Carr, I mean to do my level best to prevent it."

"Hark at him!" sneered Stott. "Hark at the giddy champion of the oppressed!"

"Bump him!"

"Rag him baldheaded!"

Mark Linley sat down, conscious of the fact that he was almost as unpopular as the prisoner. Had a stranger been present, and noted the hostile glances which were directed

towards Mark, he would certainly have gathered the impression that it was the Lancashire lad who was on trial, and not Dennis Carr.

Harry Wharton then addressed the jury.

"You have heard both sides," he said, "and it is for you to decide whether a fellow is justified in playing for an outside team, and, when taxed with it, threatening to do it again. You can leave Carr's past record out of it. It's a pretty shady one, but that's beside the point. It's only this latest affair that matters. Personally, I don't see that there's the slightest excuse for Carr, and I'm astonished that such a level-headed fellow as Mark Linley should want to back him up. That's all. You can now go ahead with your verdict."

The jury did not retire. No retirement was necessary. A verdict of "Guilty" on both charges was brought in at once.

"Hurrah!" said Skinner. "Fetch the black cap, somebody!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

After an impressive pause, Harry Wharton announced:

"It is my painful duty, Carr, to see that a public example is made of you. You are sentenced to—"

The judge stopped short.

The door of the Rag was thrown open, and Trotter, the school page, burst in.

"Master Carr?" he said breathlessly.

"He's not available for a few minutes," said Peter Todd.

"Ere's a telegram just come for him," said Trotter.

Dennis Carr looked up quickly.

"Hand it over!" he said.

Bolsover major appealed to the judge.

"Is he to have it, your worship?" he asked. Wharton nodded.

"It may be urgent," he said.

Trotter handed over the telegram, and Dennis Carr ripped open the buff-coloured envelope with trembling fingers. Dennis had a dread of telegrams. In his case they had nearly always portended bad news.

For a moment he stood stupidly staring at the pencilled words.

The shock came with a suddenness that stunned him.

"Your mother is dying. Come at once.—Father."

Bolsover major saw that something was seriously the matter. He released Dennis Carr at once.

"What's the little game?" demanded Skinner. "He'll bolt if you're not careful!"

"He's had bad news," said Bolsover.

"Gammon!"

"It's a trick!" said Stott. "He arranged for this telegram to be sent, so that he could wriggle out of his punishment."

But both the judge and the jury were convinced that the telegram was genuine enough.

Dennis Carr's face was ghastly. A moan escaped his lips. If he were acting, then he was indeed a clever actor.

Mark Linley was at his side in a moment.

"What is it, Dennis?" he murmured.

Dennis Carr could not trust himself to speak. He was about to hand the telegram to Linley, but he checked himself.

If he announced the fact that his mother was dying, the Removites would show him sympathy on that account. And Dennis didn't want their sympathy.

"I must go!" he said, in a low tone.

"I wanted at home!"

Mark Linley accompanied Dennis to the door. Skinner and Stott and several others sprang forward to stop them; but Harry Wharton waved them back.

"You're not to lay a finger on Carr!" he said.

"Shame!" said Skinner.

"You mean to say you're going to let the trial fizzle out like this?" demanded Stott.

For answer, Harry Wharton dismissed the members of the jury; and the prisoner having taken his departure, there was nothing for it but for the audience to do likewise.

Five minutes later the Rag was empty.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Parting of the Ways.

OUTSIDE, in the passage, Dennis Carr pulled himself together.

On first reading that message, terrible in its earnestness, he had been dazed—unable to comprehend the full significance of it all.

Dennis now faced the facts clearly.

His mother—she who had been not only mother to him, but comrade and counsellor

as well—lay dying. And unless he journeyed post-haste to London, he might never see her again!

"Can I help you, old man?" asked Linley.

"No," said Dennis. "I must go and see the Head."

Mark Linley nodded, and walked slowly and thoughtfully away.

Dennis Carr went straight to the Head's study. He placed the telegram on Dr. Locke's table without speaking.

The Head glanced at the message, and then at the pale-faced junior who stood before him.

"You must go at once, my poor boy!" he said kindly. "It is just possible that your father, in a moment of mental distraction, has exaggerated the situation. I should be sorry to buoy you up with false hopes at a time like this, Carr. At the same time, it is possible that your mother has rallied since the despatch of this telegram."

"I hope so, sir!" faltered Dennis.

He hurried from the Head's study, and a few moments later he was cycling at top speed in the direction of Courtfield. There was just time to catch the last evening train to London from Courtfield Junction.

It was past lighting-up time, and Dennis had no lamps on his machine.

P.-c. Tozer, looming up out of the shadows, called to the cyclist to stop.

"Young rip! Which I'll 'ave the lor on yer!"

Dennis Carr sped on into the night.

As he rode into Courtfield a glimmer of lights from the station-platform told him that the train was in.

Fairly flashing through the station approach, Dennis dismounted, hurled his bicycle into the cloak-room, and boarded the train whilst it was on the move.

He was a breathless, bedraggled figure, and the other occupants of the railway-carriage stared at him curiously.

Dennis lay back in his corner-seat, pumping in breath. He had ridden recklessly and furiously, and he had caught his train by a hair's-breadth. It was a non-stop from Courtfield, but to Dennis it seemed to crawl.

A precious hour had already elapsed since he received his father's telegram; and in that hour, the worst might have happened.

But Dennis clung desperately to the hope which the Head's words had inspired.

It was possible—just possible—that his mother had rallied.

Mrs. Carr had never been a strong woman; but by sheer will-power she might have pulled through the crisis.

And if not—

The possibility that his mother might be taken from him had never occurred to the unhappy Dennis until this day. She had been weak, he knew; but he had never supposed her life to be in danger.

With the exception of Mark Linley, his mother was the only real friend he had in the world. He could not regard his father in the light of a friend. He feared his father; but there was no real, deep-seated affection between Mr. Carr and his son.

As the train sped on its way, Dennis Carr stared with unseeing eyes at the retreating landscape, overhung with a pall of blackness.

In that moment he had forgotten all about Greyfriars—forgotten the feud with his school-fellows—forgotten the recent trial by jury. His thoughts were solely for his mother.

What had happened? What was happening? Had the lamp of life flickered lower? Or had it been extinguished altogether?

"If I lose my mother," muttered Dennis, "I lose everything else besides!"

By that he meant that he would lose all desire to play straight.

Deprived of the only friendship and affection which really mattered, he would go downhill.

It was once prophesied of Dennis Carr that if ever he decided to go to the dogs, he would do so thoroughly—just as thoroughly as he played football and did his Form-work. There were no half-measures about anything that Dennis Carr undertook.

After what seemed an age, the intolerable suspense of the train journey was at an end. A gleam of lights heralded the London terminus. Dennis was out of the train before it stopped, and speeding towards the barrier.

He paid his fare—there had been no time to purchase a ticket at Courtfield—and, hurrying out of the station, jumped into a stationary taxi.

"Out of that, young shaver!" said the driver.

Dennis stayed where he was.

(Continued on page 16.)



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Waking Up the Moderns.

SHOOT!"
Crash!
"Oh, my hat!"
There was great excitement in Jimmy Silver & Co.'s study in the Fourth Form passage of the Classical House at Rookwood.

That morning Jimmy Silver had received a brand-new football from an indulgent uncle, and the chums of the Fourth had no sooner removed the paper covering in which it had arrived than they started to punt it about.

King Cricket had reigned supreme during the hot summer months, but now that the days were growing cooler, Jimmy Silver & Co., like many others, looked for a more exhilarating pastime.

King Footer was coming into his own once more.

The punting of a football in the small studies allotted the juniors at Rookwood was apt to lead to trouble. It certainly led to trouble in this particular instance—the first time Jimmy Silver had kicked a footer for months.

It was he who had shouted to Newcome to shoot, but the leather sphere seemed to fascinate him to such an extent that he charged Newcome off the ball and kicked it himself.

Crash!
The ball went sailing through the window, smashing the glass into a thousand fragments.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Newcome. "You fat-head! You've done it now!"
Jimmy Silver snorted.

"I didn't kick it through the window on purpose!" he said warmly. "That's a blessed window got to be paid for now!"
"Good job you're in funds, isn't it?" said Raby sweetly.

"My hat! Aren't you going to take your share?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "You silly asses, you were kicking the ball about yourselves a few seconds ago!"

"But we didn't kick it through the window, did we?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell.
Jimmy Silver glared excitedly about him. Had he been a little cooler he would have seen that his chums were only pulling his leg.

When accidents of that kind happened in the Fistical Four's study, they shared and shared alike—the trouble or the expense or both.

"Well, of all the chums a chap ever had, you chaps are about the limit!" said Jimmy Silver indignantly. "What are you grinning at, Lovell?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "Your face, Jimmy, is like the sun with a storm-cloud over it!"

"Your face will be like nothing on earth in a minute!" said Jimmy Silver darkly.

"Don't you think we'd better go down and get the ball?" suggested Newcome. "I suppose you don't want some Third-Former to hop out and pinch it, do you?"
Jimmy Silver started.

"My hat! I'd forgotten all about the ball!" he said quickly. "Come on, you chaps, and we'll have a punt about the quad. There are no windows to break there!"

"Aren't there!" exclaimed Lovell, as the four chums walked quickly from the study. "I could point you out a few that will break quite easily."

Jimmy Silver stopped suddenly as Raby and Newcome chuckled.

"Are you fatheads pulling my leg?" he demanded warmly.

The juniors shook their heads solemnly.

"Not at all!" said Raby.
"Wouldn't think of it!" said Lovell and Newcome.

Jimmy Silver glared, and went on down the corridor alone. His chums followed, laughing softly, but Jimmy Silver affected not to hear.

When they reached the quadrangle, they found their ball resting in the centre of the asphalt. The mere sight of the ball sent a thrill through Jimmy Silver, and he ran quickly towards it, and gave it a hefty kick.

The ball went sailing towards the gates, and it was unfortunate for Tubby Muffin that he happened to be coming in at that moment on a bicycle.

The ball met the fat junior of the Classical House full on the chest, and he went one way and his bicycle went the other. He met the ground with a bump.

"Ow! Yow! Yaroooh!" roared Tubby.
"Well saved, sir!" shouted Jimmy Silver delightedly. "My hat! He'd make quite a good goalkeeper!"

Tubby Muffin sat up, and blinked angrily around.
"Ow! Who threw that ball?" he demanded.

Jimmy Silver & Co. ran up, laughing.
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "Some throw—what?"

"Oh, really, you fellows—" began Tubby Muffin plaintively.

"Look out, Tubby!"
"Ow!"

Tubby gave another howl, and jumped hurriedly to his feet as Jimmy Silver, who had run after the ball, came dribbling it towards the fat junior.

"What's the matter, Tubby?" asked Jimmy Silver innocently. "Afraid of a footer?"

"Ow! No, I'm not!" said Tubby, keeping a wary eye on the ball. "You fellows know jolly well that I'm a good footballer—goal-keeping is my speciality!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is there funny about that?" demanded Tubby angrily.

"There wouldn't be room for a ball to pass if you once got between the posts!" chuckled Newcome. "The opposing team would object to you as goalie, Tubby."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you fellows—" said Tubby indignantly.
"Supposing you pick up your bike— Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "You cheeky rotter! That's my bike!"

Tubby Muffin backed hastily behind Newcome, Raby and Lovell, as he saw the almost ferocious expression on Jimmy Silver's face.

"I—I—I—I had to go down to the village," said Tubby apologetically, "and I—I—I knew you wouldn't mind lending your bike to an old friend like— Keep him away, you chaps!"

The juniors laughed again as Jimmy Silver picked up the football and held it ready to drop to his foot for a kick. His objective was so obviously, Tubby Muffin that that worthy took to his heels and ran as fast as his fat legs could carry him.

"Ow! Keep him away!" he roared as he ran.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothing to laugh at!" growled Jimmy Silver, as he dropped the ball to the quadrangle and picked up his bike from the ground. "The fat rotter might have busted the pedals!"

"You kicked the ball," said Newcome softly. "Tubby would have put the bike away without your knowing he'd borrowed it if the footer hadn't got in his way!"

"Or he in the way of the footer!" chuckled Lovell.



Jimmy Silver wheeled his bike, fortunately undamaged by the fat junior's fall, back to the shed before he turned once more to the football.

His eyes lighted up suddenly as he looked at the open window of Tommy Dodd & Co.'s study in the Modern House. Tommy Dodd & Co. were their friendly rivals, and three good chaps.

"My hat! What about waking up the Modern House to the fact that old King Footer has come to stay?" asked Jimmy Silver.

The other juniors nodded quickly.
"Top-hole idea!" said Newcome. "I vote we dribble the ball along their passage, and then biff it into their study."

"Why not kick it from here?" said Jimmy Silver coolly.

"Eh?"
"Through their window!" went on the leader of the Classical juniors in the same calm tones.

"My hat!"
"You ass!"

"As if it's possible!"
Jimmy Silver snorted.

"Of course it's possible!" he growled. "I'll stand you a ginger-pop all round if I can't kick the ball into their study in three tries."

"Done!" said the Co. quickly.
Jimmy Silver measured the distance with his eye, and, picking up the ball, dropped it, and with a hefty kick sent it flying towards the window.

But he was too far away, and the ball fell in the quad, without touching the wall of the Modern House. It bounced on the asphalt, and Newcome recovered it.

"One!" he counted, as he handed the ball to Jimmy Silver.

The second shot went nearer the open window, but still fell a bit short, and it bounced on the wall and back into the quad.

"Two!" said Lovell, as he trapped and kicked the ball over to his leader.

"Third time's never like the rest!" said Jimmy Silver hopefully.

This time he retreated a few paces, and ran forward, dropped the ball, and caught it neatly as it descended.

Biff!

"The window!" howled Newcome.

Crash!
For the second time that evening, the football careered noisily through the glass of a window. The ball disappeared inside the study, but the splintered glass fell tinkering to the asphalt.

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver, in dismay. "That's the second window I've busted to-day!"

"Third time's never like the rest!" chuckled Newcome. "Jolly good job for you, Jimmy, that there won't be any more third times!"

"Oh, shut up ragging!" said Jimmy Silver morosely. "My hat! There'll be a row over this!"

"Hallo! There's Tommy Dodd popping his head out to see who kicked the ball!" said Raby, and, raising his voice, shouted, "Can we have our ball back, Tommy?"

Tommy Dodd shook his fist savagely at the cheerful Raby.

"You—you dummies!" he roared. "Wait until we come down to you!"

"Buzz the ball out, anyhow, Tommy!" shouted Jimmy Silver. "That's a brand-new footer!"

"You'll want a brand-new head when I come down there!" said Tommy Dodd darkly.

He disappeared in the study, and a few moments later he came out of the Modern House, with Tommy Doyle and Tommy Cook, his chums.

"Now, which of you dummies kicked the

blessed ball?" he demanded, as he came up to the Classical juniors.

"Alone I did it," said Jimmy Silver bleakly. "Then alone you'll pay for the blessed window!" snapped Tommy Dodd. "I suppose you'll come up and clear the study out for us?"

"Something wrong with your supposer," said Jimmy Silver, with a frown. "Hand over that ball, Tommy Dodd!"

Tommy Dodd had brought the ball with him, carrying it by the end of the lace. "I'll give it to you back—in a minute!" he said warmly.

And the Modern House junior proceeded to lay about Jimmy Silver & Co. with the footer in a manner that was distinctly painful.

A football wielded by an arm as strong as Tommy Dodd's could hurt, and Jimmy Silver & Co. found that out very quickly.

Biff! Biff! Biff!
"Ow! Yowow!" roared Jimmy Silver. "You fathead! Shurrup!"

Biff! Biff!
"Ow!" exclaimed Newcome, as Tommy Dodd brought the ball down on his head.

"Yow!"
"Stick it, Tommy!" shouted Doyle and Cook.

"I am!" snorted Tommy Dodd. He certainly was. By the time he had finished Jimmy Silver & Co. were feeling very sore about the head. They retreated at last, and Tommy Dodd surveyed them critically from a distance.

"Want your footer?" he asked calmly. "Ow! Wait until I get some breath, you dummy!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Here it is!" said Tommy Dodd. And he kicked it towards the Classical House juniors with a force that nearly took them by surprise. But Raby, who had escaped Tommy Dodd more than the others, caught and held it.

"Chin-chin!" called out Tommy Dodd. "We'll let you know how much the window costs to repair!"

And the three Tommies walked back to their house, arm-in-arm, and satisfied that Jimmy Silver & Co. had learned a lesson.

"This is what comes of waking up the Modern House!" growled Bovell. "My head's sore!"

"So is mine, fathead!" growled Jimmy Silver. "Why didn't you go for him?"

"Why didn't you?" retorted Lovell.

"Ahem! I never thought of it. I only wanted to get out of the way of the ball."

And Jimmy Silver & Co., deciding that they had enough of football for one evening, went up to do their prep.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Making Up the Team!

TAP!
Jimmy Silver & Co. looked up from the papers before them as there came a knock on their study door.

"Come in, fathead!" said Jimmy Silver. The "fathead" proved to be Teddy Grace, a Classical House junior who had a passion for playing practical jokes. Whenever he visited Jimmy Silver & Co. in their study they usually became very suspicious.

"Hallo!" said Jimmy Silver slowly. "What do you want, Putty?"

Putty—the name by which Grace was known to his intimates—grinned.

"No jokes this time, Silver," he said quickly. "I've come to talk business."

"Eh? Selling up the study?"

"No, you chump! It's about footer—"

"Oh dear! Has it got about already that I'm making up a team to play the Modern House asses?" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Putty Grace nodded cheerfully. "Most of the chaps seem to know all about it," he remarked. "I just want you to put my name down."

"What do you play?" asked Jimmy Silver cautiously.

"Soccer."
"Fathead! I mean, where—goal, back, half-back, or where?"

"Oh! Why didn't you say— Here, let that inkpot alone, Newcome!" said Teddy Grace hastily. "I'm not joking; it's your blessed leader who's so slow."

"What?"
"I—I-I mean—outside-left, Silver," said Teddy Grace, moving towards the door as Jimmy Silver's hand wandered towards the ruler.

"Well, why couldn't you say so?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "Outside!"

"Yes, that's what I said," said Grace innocently.

"I mean outside the door, fathead!" roared Jimmy Silver, springing to his feet, and snatching up the ruler.

Teddy Grace grinned, and hastily put the door between himself and the irate captain of games for the junior Forms at Rookwood.

Jimmy Silver resumed his seat, frowning. He did not like interruptions whilst settling the all-important question as to who should play for the Classical Fourth in the good old game.

Tap!
"Oh, goodness! Here's another of 'em!" said Newcome. "Come in, chump!"

It was Teddy Grace who cautiously opened the door, and poked his head round the corner.

"Is that all right, Jimmy?" he asked softly.

Whiz! Bang!
Teddy Grace only just shut the door in time, for the ruler which Jimmy Silver threw at him crashed on the door a second later.

The juniors heard Teddy Grace go down the corridor, chuckling to himself. Jimmy Silver resumed his seat, and once more drew pen and paper towards him.

But he was not left long to puzzle over names of possible players, for there came another knock at the door.

Tap!
"Oh, my hat!" said Raby. "Somebody else now!"

"Shush!" said Jimmy Silver warningly. "I expect it's that joker come back again!"

He got up from his chair, and picked up a cushion. Then he crept towards the door, and stood just behind it, so that whoever entered might not see him when the door was opened.

"Come in!" said Newcome, as Jimmy Silver nodded to him.

The door opened, and a junior came slowly into the study. Jimmy Silver did not wait to make sure that it was Teddy Grace who had knocked, but brought the cushion down with a swing upon the head of the visitor.

"Ow! You chump!" came a howl from the junior, and he sat down with a bump.

It was Mornington!
Jimmy Silver helped the junior up, his face almost as red as Mornington's.

"Sorry, old scout!" said Jimmy Silver hastily. "I—I-I thought it was that joking ass Grace back again!"

Mornington looked at Jimmy Silver for a moment as if he would like to wipe up the floor with him, but for some reason best known to himself, Mornington took the incident very nicely, and even smiled upon the flushed leader of the Classical House juniors.

"That's all right, old son," he said lightly. "I can understand mistakes happening sometimes."

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared.

"You don't mind?" said Jimmy Silver, in amazement. "If you like it, Morny, you've only to say so, and I'll oblige you with a few more swipes!"

Mornington backed into the study hastily. "Numno!" he exclaimed. "I—I-I mean, a busy chap like you must get irritable sometimes."

"Eh?"
The juniors stared at Mornington as if he had suddenly gone mad. Jimmy Silver threw the cushion to the chair to which it belonged, and sat down heavily on top of it.

"It's not so very hot nowadays, either," he said slowly. "Anybody cracked you on the napper, Morny?"

"No. What makes you think that, Jimmy?" asked Mornington innocently.

"You're off your rocker, aren't you?" said Jimmy Silver, in surprise.

Mornington shook his head. "Not at all. Why?"

"Well, if I went to a chap's study and he biffed me over the head with a cushion, I'm blessed if I would say I could understand it! I'd go for the fathead, whoever he was, and biff him with his own cushion!"

Mornington reddened slightly. "Oh, well—"

"What did you come for, anyway?" interrupted Newcome.

"Ahem! I hear you're making up a footer team—"

"Oh, my hat! That explains everything!" broke in Jimmy Silver. "Morny, I wish I'd biffed you a few more times!"

"Eh?"
"You're the second silly ass who's come to ask to be put in the team. We've been sitting down for nearly an hour, and we've only managed to get about five names down!"

"Good! You four and myself! Sorry! I

ought to have known you'd have put my name down!"

"Rats! The other is the ass I biffed—or wanted to biff just now—Putty Grace. Your claim will be duly considered, and the sentence promulgated in due course, et cetera, et cetera—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
And Mornington, satisfied that he stood a good chance of getting into the team, left the study.

Jimmy Silver resumed his seat for the third time.

"I hope that's the last silly ass who'll come butting in while we're getting the names out!" he growled. "Put Morny down, Raby, and that makes six. The three Colonials might as well go in—I believe Conroy is a hefty sort of back. Pons might do for— Oh, my hat!"

Tap!
It was another knock at the door that interrupted Jimmy Silver and brought forth that remark.

"Stop outside, unless you want your silly, fat head punched!" he shouted. "You're not in the team!"

The door opened, and it was not a junior who walked in. It was Bulkeley, captain of the school, and therefore captain of games. His face was flushed, and his eyes were glittering angrily.

Jimmy Silver jumped hastily to his feet, and went round to the other side of the table.

"I—I—I say, Bulkeley, old man—" he began nervously.

Bulkeley snorted. "I thought you said something about punching my silly, fat head, if I cared to come in," he said shortly. "Why don't you start?"

"Ahem!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "You see, Bulkeley, we thought it was some other ass—I mean, some other chap. We're—we're rather busy, you know."

Bulkeley glanced at the papers on the table.

"Getting a footer team out?" he asked. The Co. heaved a sigh of relief as the Sixth-Former dropped the subject concerning the punching of heads.

"That's it!" said Jimmy Silver eagerly. "Would you like to see the names we've got down? Perhaps you'll be good enough to advise us, Bulkeley—"

"I advise you to be careful what you say to anybody who knocks at your door, young shaver," interrupted Bulkeley, with a laugh. "It might have been Mr. Bootles, or one of the other Form-master's, and then where would you have been?"

"Under the table, I expect," grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I came down to see if you had thought about getting a team ready," said Bulkeley. "I've reserved the junior ground for a match between the Classical and Modern House juniors for Saturday afternoon next. Get a team out, and have a go at the posts with the nets up."

"Right-ho, Bulkeley!" said Jimmy Silver.

And Bulkeley, with a nod, walked out of the study and closed the door behind him.

"Rattling good sort, old Bulkeley," said Jimmy Silver, with a sage nod. "Takes an interest in the junior footer teams as well as the senior teams. He might have given me a thick ear for cheeking him, mightn't he?"

"Ho might!" assented the Co. heartily.

"Suppose we buck up and get the names down!" said Newcome. "We shall have to fix things up with the Tommy Dodd. By Jove! Won't it be a treat to barge into those asses on the footer-field again?"

And the question of names was once more gone into. This time they were allowed to proceed uninterrupted for fully five minutes. Then there came another tap at the door.

It was Tubby Muffin, and he showed himself the moment after he had tapped. The fat Classical was not of the kind that waits to be asked before entering a study.

The wrathful Co. looked up.

"Outside—no vacancies!" snapped Jimmy Silver, remembering the incident of the purloined bicycle.

"Oh, really, Jimmy, old son—" began Tubby.

"I'll Jimmy old son' you, if you don't get the door between your fat carcase and my boot in a couple of minutes!" said Jimmy Silver darkly.

"But about a goalie—"

"Outside!"
"But, look here—"
"Bump him out, you chaps!"
But Tubby Muffin did not wait to be

bumped out. He went of his own accord, and very quickly at that!

"That's another!" said Jimmy Silver. "I'm taking the precaution to lock the door this time, so don't answer if any fathead knocks!"

And for the fourth time the juniors paid their attentions to the list of names for the Classical House football team for the junior match with the Modernites.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. The Match.

"SHOOT harder, you chaps!"

It was Jimmy Silver who spoke, and he was on the football-field on the Friday evening before the match with the Modern House juniors.

Bulkeley had been over to Tommy Dodd & Co., and they had raked together a team to play the Classical House.

Jimmy Silver, who believed in giving his men plenty of work in the way of training, had them down at the netted posts soon after all had finished their prep.

"Look out, goalie!"

Biff!

Conroy caught the ball as it was passed to him, and slammed it hard and true towards the goal. Jimmy Silver was giving Higgs a trial in goal, and the junior was turning out to be a good man between the posts.

The ball went whirling towards the top corner of the posts, and Higgs leapt up to it, and, using his fists, punched the leather well away from the goal.

"Good save, Higgs!" said Jimmy Silver. "And a top-hole shot, Conroy! Come on, some of you chaps! Biff it about! I'll go in goal with Higgs, so let's have the stuff hard and true!"

For the next half-hour the two juniors in goal were kept busy. They had two balls on the field, and these were slammed into them one after another.

"Good enough!" said Jimmy Silver, at last. "And mind you play your hardest to-morrow afternoon. It will be warm, I expect, but you've simply got to stick it until the match is over!"

And the team trooped off the field, stiff from their exertions, but keenly looking forward to the match of the morrow.

But it appeared that everything was not going to be lovely in the garden, for Mr. Bootles sent for Jimmy Silver immediately after morning classes on Saturday.

Jimmy Silver, already dressed in footer rig, ran quickly to the Form-master's study.

"You sent for me, sir?" he said, as soon as he entered.

Mr. Bootles looked up from his desk with a frown.

"Ah, Silver!" he said; and Jimmy Silver felt a little shiver of dismay run down his back at the Form-master's cold tones. "I unfortunately forgot to mention rather a serious matter to you during classes this morning."

"Oh!"

"There appears to have been two windows broken by a football—one in your study and one in Dodd's of the Modern House. It also appears that you are responsible."

"Oh, sir—"

"So, besides paying for the damage, Silver, you will stop in this afternoon, and write five hundred lines for playing football in the House. You may go!"

Jimmy Silver stood rooted to the spot. In the excitement of the match with the Modern House, he had entirely forgotten all about

the broken windows.

"Excuse me, sir," he said hastily. "Could—could I do them after the match, sir?"

"You heard what I said, Silver?"

"Y-y-y-yes, sir! But—"

"Then please obey!"

Jimmy Silver left the study, his face showing his dismay, and walked slowly back to his study.

"What's up?" asked Newcome, at once.

"Gated!" said Jimmy Silver tersely. "All over the rotten windows getting broken!"

"Gated? Oh, my hat! Got some lines to do?" said Raby, in dismay.

"Yes."

"Oh, goodness!"

The juniors looked at one another in dismay. Jimmy Silver was their best player, and the loss to the Classical House was almost sufficient to render their chance of success hopeless.

There was a hasty step in the corridor, and Bulkeley came into the study. He was frowning, and appeared impatient.

"Come along, Silver!" he said tersely. "You ought to have been down at the field ten minutes ago! The Modern House team is waiting!"

"I've got to do some lines for busting a window," said Jimmy Silver morosely. "I'm sorry, Bulkeley, but the team will have to do without me to-day!"

"Oh, hang!" snapped Bulkeley. "I wanted to see if there are any juniors decent enough to play for the school. Why couldn't you be more careful at a time like this?"

Jimmy Silver did not answer. There seemed to be a lump in his throat, and the captain of the school could see how keenly he felt being out of the match.

Bulkeley's face softened suddenly, and he hurried from the study.

"Get on down, you chaps," said Jimmy Silver hurriedly. "No need for you to miss the match!"

The Co., feeling very downhearted, left the study and walked quickly down to the playing-fields.

Jimmy Silver was still sitting, the picture of disappointment, when Bulkeley came running back into the study.

"Come on, kid!" he said kindly. "I've got you off the lines—"

"Good old Bulkeley!" shouted Jimmy Silver excitedly. "Come on, old scout!"

The excited junior dashed out of the House, across the quadrangle, and into the fields, with Bulkeley close behind. There was a roar of delight from the juniors as their captain rushed on to the field.

Bulkeley was refereeing, which pleased all the players, for he was immensely popular with the juniors.

Tommy Dodd won the toss, and elected to kick with the wind.

Phoop!

Jimmy Silver, with a hasty look round, took the first kick of the game—and of the season—and sent the ball skimming out to Lovell on his left wing.

Lovell trapped it neatly, and was off down the wing as fast as his legs could carry him. But Tommy Cook, playing back for the Modern House side, robbed him of the ball just as he was going to pass it across to Jimmy Silver in the centre.

"Well tried, Lovell!" called out Jimmy Silver encouragingly.

The Modern House juniors swung the ball from side to side, advancing quickly towards the Classical's goal. Tommy Dodd was playing inside-right for his team, and he secured the ball when it swung right across from the left.

"Hurrah! First-timer!" shouted the Modern juniors who were watching the game from the line.

Tommy Dodd steadied himself an instant, and then shot with all his might. The ball went sailing towards the centre of the bar, and it appeared as if it must go in.

"Higgs!" roared Jimmy Silver. "Punch!" Higgs had no need to be told, for he was really a good goalie. He leapt towards the sailing ball, and lashed out straight and true with his fist.

Biff!

"Well saved, sir!"

There was a roar from the crowd as Jimmy Silver trapped the ball as it touched the ground, and, after a hasty glance round, ran it towards the opponents' goal. Jimmy Silver was possessed of a splendid turn of speed, and he went up the centre of the field, with the ball at his toe, as if he were on the cinder-track.

"Go it, Jimmy!" roared the Classicals.

"Tackle him, Moderns!" hooted the Modernites.

Drizzling the ball past the opposing halves, Jimmy Silver snapped it out to Lovell on the left wing. Running forward, Jimmy Silver was just in time to catch it as it was neatly passed across the centre of the goal.

The backs rushed for him, and Jimmy Silver made as if to kick with his right, but changed quickly, and sent the ball neatly into the corner of the net with his left.

"Goal!"

A great roar of cheering broke from the spectators, and Jimmy Silver flushed with pleasure. He had scored the first goal of the season for the Classical House.

"Very good, Silver!" said Bulkeley quietly. And Jimmy Silver flushed again. Praise from the "skipper" was praise indeed!

The ball was placed in the centre, and the Moderns kicked off. From that point the play was fast and furious. The Modernites were a goal down, and they did their best to score an equaliser.

But Higgs was a splendid goalie, and he kept the leather out of the net, incurring much cheering from the spectators by so doing.

In the second half Jimmy Silver showed his prowess with the ball to an extent no less than his capabilities for leading a team.

He kept advising his wings, or his halves, and mildly corrected them when they made a mistake.

Phoop!

The whistle blew for the last time, and the players trooped off the field.

The Modernites were beaten, but there was no disgrace attached to their defeat. The Classicals had a better team.

Bulkeley tapped Jimmy Silver on the shoulder as the Classical leader went off the field.

"Silver!"

"Hallo, old top!" said Jimmy Silver genially.

"I shall give you a chance for your cap in the trial game on Wednesday afternoon!" said Bulkeley quietly. "Have a run round and get fit."

And with a kindly nod the skipper walked away, leaving Jimmy Silver staring after him.

"Oh, my hat!" he said dully.

"No, it's your cap!" chuckled Newcome, and slapped his leader on the back.

And Jimmy Silver & Co., in very high spirits, trooped up to the study to discuss the game, and Bulkeley's wonderful news.

THE END.



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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

No Surrender!

FIGGINS—Kerr—Wynn—what does this mean?"

It was the angry voice of Mr. Ratcliff, master of the New House at St. Jim's, which asked that question.

The three juniors whom he addressed faced him, standing side by side in their study.

They had expected his coming, and they had been sure he would be angry. There was no surprise in it all. But Kerr was the only one of the three who was quite cool.

The master paused a moment for a reply. But none came, and he rapped out:

"I told you that you were to rejoin your Form this morning. I now learn from Mr. Latham that you have absented yourselves. What do you mean by it?"

It was clearly up to Kerr to reply. He was the moving spirit in this defiance of Mr. Ratcliff, and he knew what to say. For the life of them, Figgy and Fatty could not have answered otherwise than lamely.

"We are sorry, sir," the Scots junior said. "But I told you last night that I was not satisfied."

"Not satisfied to do as you were told, Kerr? But that is absurd! It does not matter in the least whether you are satisfied or not!"

"Perhaps not to you, sir. It does to me—and to Figgins and Wynn. We want this cleared up. You called me a liar, and it was practically agreed that the Head should settle the affair. We are willing to go before the Head now or at any time; but we're not willing to let it slide."

"That has nothing to do with your attendance at classes, Kerr!"

"Excuse me, sir; but it has. We were kept away from classes till it was settled. You said so yourself. We will go back when it is settled—not before!"

"Then it shall be settled here and now!" spluttered Mr. Ratcliff, very angry, yet curiously shaky. "I admit that you were not—er—telling untruths, Kerr, and I am—er—that is, I regret that in my justifiable objection to your attitude I should have suggested that you were doing so. Is that enough for you? Surely you do not expect more than that!"

"I should like to know what has made you sure that I told you the truth, sir—that it was not I who ran against you on the stairs and knocked you over."

Mr. Ratcliff gulped, and turned a strange colour. His face was almost green.

"I accept your word, Kerr. Is that not enough?"

"No, sir. It's too late for that!"

"Then what do you want, boy?"

"Isn't it a fact, sir, that you know now who did knock you down?"

Figgy and Fatty gasped.

So that was what Kerr had had 'up his sleeve all the time!

But was he certain? How could he be certain? And what a risk he was taking if he was wrong!

"What do you mean, Kerr? I am quite at a loss to understand—"

"I'll put it as plainly as you like, sir. Hasn't the fellow who knocked you down confessed?"

"I—I—really, Kerr, I have never in all my career come across anything so extraordinary as your attitude! If you are not very careful you will find yourself expelled!"

"No one but the Head can expel me," replied Kerr coolly.

Again Figgins and Fatty gasped.

This looked very like the sack for them all.

But their loyalty held firm. They trusted Kerr, and were ready to stand or fall with him.

Mr. Ratcliff opened his mouth to speak, held it open for several seconds, looking rather like an ugly codfish out of water, closed it, and flounced out of the room, slamming the door hard behind him as he went.

"My hat, Kerr!" said Figgy.

Fatty stood with his china-blue eyes wide, rubbing the back of his head.

Fatty Wynn's faith in Kerr was very strong indeed; but it was being put to a severe test just then.

"It's all serene," said Kerr coolly. "Ratty's hoisted the white flag of surrender. He's got to have time to think it over; but he'll cave in when he has had time."

"And apologise, do you mean?" asked Figgy.

"I don't care a rap about his blessed apology!"

"Do you mean to take us to the Head, then?" inquired Fatty.

"I don't mean that so much. I'd be willing to settle it without that, really."

"But what do you want, ass? I can't understand you!"

"Only that the old sweep should put Kerruish right, Figgy!"

George Figgins snorted.

"I don't see why you should bother your head so much about that chap," he said.

"Can't the silly idiot put himself right if he wants to?"

"I suppose he could. But he won't. That's where the trouble is."

"Let him stew in his own juice, then!" snapped Figgy.

"You think Kerruish has owned up to Ratty, and Ratty's keeping it dark, Kerr?"

said Fatty, in a puzzled, hesitating way.

"Got it in once, old top! Only I don't think—I know."

"Hanged if I don't believe you're right!" Figgins said. "If Ratty could have denied it he would have done. But he couldn't—that was why he went out and banged the giddy door. All the same, what's the good of taking all this trouble for Kerruish?"

"I think it's worth while. It's for you fellows to choose whether you do."

"I don't—for Kerruish," said Figgins deliberately. "But I think anything's worth while for you, Kerr."

"Same here," Fatty said.

And what Fatty's speech lacked in eloquence it made up for in sincerity.

It was Kerr's turn to look puzzled.

"I hate running you two into risk," he said.

"though, upon my honour, I don't believe there is much risk in this. It looks almost as

though I thought more of Kerruish than I did of you. But you must know that isn't it."

"Oh, we know that all right!" replied Figgins.

"And we did rather put the poor bounder through it," Fatty said thoughtfully.

A grin overspread his plump face as he remembered how Kerruish had looked with a painted face, a trimmed waste-paper basket by way of hat, and an old tablecloth for a skirt.

Eric Kerruish, of the School House, had played an audacious jape upon Figgy & Co., and had been caught out by them. He had entered the New House in the role of a new boy named William Angle—a name which was in itself part of the jape—and he had gone out of it disguised as Fatty now remembered him.

His collision with Mr. Ratcliff had occurred on the way out; but he had not been recognised by the master. All the trouble since had sprung from his reluctance to own up to that collision.

Kerruish was no funk. He had not confessed when Mr. Raiton had asked whether any School House boy was the culprit; but his failure to do so was not due to fear, but to resentment against the fellows who had scored over him so signally.

Later he had gone to Mr. Ratcliff and had owned up; and the New House master had caved him; and told him no more need be said about it. In fact, he had impressed upon Kerruish the notion that the confession was to be a secret between them.

Feeling that the other fellows despised him for what they thought his cowardice, Kerruish had kept that secret so far, and meant to go on keeping it.

But Kerr had made up his mind that it should not be kept, and George Francis Kerr had a longer head than Eric Kerruish.

Kerr's idea was that Ratty might be brought to admit the fact of the confession, and that thus Kerruish might be set right with everyone.

That might work—provided that Kerruish would sit tight, and that the master would not do anything unexpected.

But either Ratty or the School House junior might upset all Kerr's plans. And that was just where the danger lay.

Figgins, standing by the window now, saw Jameson, a New House Third-Former, go across the quad to the School House.

There was nothing at all remarkable in that. Jameson was a member of Wally D'Arcy's little band, the only New House member of it; and he spent all the time he could over the way.

But it did strike Figgins as worthy of note that Jameson, meeting Kerruish, should stop to speak to him, and that Kerruish, nodding sulkily, should then change the direction of his steps, and cross the quad.

For Figgy knew that Jameson had been one of the small crowd of fags which had hissed Kerruish the day before, and he could not help thinking that his manner of speaking to him now suggested that he was the bearer of a message.

"I say, Kerr," he said, "young Jampot has just spoken to Kerruish, and now the

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fellow's coming here. I do believe Ratty's sent for him!"

"Shouldn't wonder a bit," answered Kerr. But he did not guess for what purpose Mr. Ratcliff wanted to see Kerruish.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. More Opposition for Ratty!

"A H! I sent for you, Kerruish," said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir."
"I have been thinking over our interview of yesterday, and I have come to the conclusion that the matter can hardly be settled in the way I then thought. You have been fighting, I see."

"Yes, sir."
"With whom?"
"Clive."

The New House master knitted his brows. "When was that?" he asked.

"Yesterday, sir."
"Before or after I saw you?"
"After."

"But when I saw you there were marks upon your face that indicated your having been engaged in—er—some pugilistic encounter."

"Yes, sir."
"With whom were you fighting then?"
"Redfern."

"Bless my soul! You are either an exceedingly quarrelsome boy, Kerruish, or you are being made the victim of persecution."

"I think I'm quarrelsome, sir."

The dull pain in the junior's voice as he made that answer might have touched another man. It did not touch Mr. Ratcliff. He was not troubling about Kerruish. He was concerned with his own position.

Kerr had fairly put the wind up him. He knew how the Head would regard his keeping Kerruish's confession a secret, in the face of the fact that the misdemeanour confessed was known to at least half St. Jim's, and he sought a way to cover up his tracks.

"I incline to the other theory," he said. "I think you are being persecuted."

"It seems to me that I must know best about that, sir."

More opposition! Ratty fairly bristled at it.

"I do not agree with you, Kerruish. Now let yourself be guided by me. I take it that all the trouble you are undergoing is really due to your failure to answer when Mr. Railton called upon the boy who knocked me down to stand forth."

"It's partly that."

"In my opinion, it is wholly that. Now, what you have to do is to go to Mr. Railton, say that you are sorry you had not the courage to confess at the right time, and ask him to set matters straight for you."

"I won't do it!"
"Kerruish!"

"I won't—that's flat! I don't think you have the right to tell me to. I've owned up to you, and you wanted it kept dark—I don't know why. You punished me, too. I don't care much about that, but I don't see why I should go and ask to be punished again."

"I do not think Mr. Railton would punish you, my boy."

Mr. Ratcliff spoke as kindly as he could; but the kindness was not real, and it did not deceive Kerruish.

"Am I to tell him that you've done so already?" demanded the Manx junior.

"Er—no. I really do not think that would be advisable."

"It isn't fair! I won't do it!"
"But I order you to do it, Kerruish!"
"You can order, but you can't make me."
"This is open defiance!" snarled the furious master.

"I suppose so. I don't care much about that. I don't think I care much about anything. All I've got to say is that if you want Mr. Railton to know, you can tell him yourself!"

"If I do so, I shall certainly report to him your obstinacy and impertinence!"

"That's as you like, sir!"

Kerruish turned to go. He had said his last word, and his mind was making itself up to a desperate resolve.

He stumbled as he reached the door. The strain he had been enduring during the last few days was proving almost too much for him.

"Kerruish, come back!"
The angry voice of the master came dully to his ears, and he paid no heed to it.

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"Kerruish! I command you to come back!"

But the boy went on his way. He stumbled across the quad, hardly hearing the hisses of a small crowd of the fags. It amused them to hiss Kerruish, and they had no idea of the cruelty of what they were doing.

He could not go to No. 5. He could not face his chums, though he knew that Dick Julian was still loyal, and that neither Reilly nor Hammond had turned against him.

It was to a lonely box-room he went, and there, with his head buried in his hands, he thought it all out—or tried to think it out.

The thought that had come to him in Mr. Ratcliff's study still obsessed him.

He would run away!

It was the only thing to do—so it seemed to him.

He could not stay on at St. Jim's. He could not face the scorn in Mr. Railton's eyes when he knew the truth.

But he was not sure that Mr. Railton would know the truth ever.

Some instinct told him that Mr. Ratcliff was not playing fairly.

He might be playing Ratty's game in going. He did not know, and he did not much care.

Where should he go?
He had not money enough to get home with by rail and steamer. The Isle of Man seemed very far away to a fellow with only a few shillings in his pocket.

It would be easy enough to borrow from Julian, of course.

Easy enough in one sense—quite impossible in another.

Dick would lend. He would pawn his last possession for his chum's sake, if there were need to do so. But there would be no need. Dick was not short of money.

But he would want to know too much. No, Dick was out of the question.

What did it matter? Just to get away from St. Jim's—that would be some sort of solution to the problem that was fast growing too much for the boy's half-madened brain and strained nerves.

He would go! He would go that night!

If he went in the daytime there would be a hue and cry after him, and the chances were that he would soon be brought back.

But if he went by night he could get quite a long start.

It was hard to wait, but it was not quite so hard now that his mind was made up.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ratcliff was not feeling at all happy.

From his point of view, Kerruish would have put everything straight by owing up to Mr. Railton without saying anything about his earlier confession.

Kerruish, it seemed, would not do that. At least, he said that he would not do it. But he might weaken.

And Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn might weaken, though of that Ratty had less hope, for he knew from old how obstinate those three could be.

On the whole, the only thing that seemed possible to the worried master was to wait on events.

Certainly he would not go to the Head yet. He knew how strong a line the Head had taken in the matter of Mr. Selby, when that gentleman had failed to play the game with Kildare.

Dr. Holmes was rigorous as to fair play. That was one reason why he could not like either Mr. Ratcliff or Mr. Selby, and why they could not like him. But because of his knowledge of their temperaments he bore with them, and because of his position as Head of St. Jim's they had to bear with him.

Mr. Ratcliff could not help wishing now that some very different kind of man was in the doctor's place—someone who would swallow a specious story and refrain from awkward inquiries!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Kerruish Bolts.

SOMEHOW or other that day wore through, though every moment of it was like a nightmare to Eric Kerruish.

The dulled feeling which had made him deal to the hisses of the fag tribe did not last. He had more of that sort of thing to bear, and he found it very hard. He had to face the sneers of fellows whom he despised; he could not help note the averted looks of others who had been his friends, if not his chums.

He contrived to dodge Julian and Hammond and Reilly, and yet suffered all the time from

an absurd feeling that they were dodging him.

It was no use trying to quarrel with anyone. Tom Merry's advice that no one should pick up the gage he was so ready to fling down was being taken all round.

He had struck Cardew and Manners major and D'Arcy major and Blake. All four were proud enough in their different ways, and nothing could have been more ridiculous than to suppose that any one of the four was afraid to face him. But none of them would fight. They had made that quite clear.

And it was not because he was in Coventry. Indeed, it hardly seemed to be the fact that he was in Coventry. No sentence had been passed upon him, anyway.

But the thing that hurt him most, in some ways, and yet had in it a queer sort of comfort, was the talk he had with Levison minor. Joe Frayne standing by, without a word.

It was outside the gates, between afternoon classes and tea, that he met those two.

He had passed them without as much as a look. But Frank said, half timidly:

"I say, Kerruish!"

Every decent fellow at St. Jim's liked Frank Levison, and Kerruish was no exception to the rule. When Frank's face wore that pleading look it was as hard to be rude to him as it would have been to a girl. Not that Frank was girlish, either. He was a plucky, manly little fellow. But he was more sensitive than most youngsters, and far more sympathetic.

"Well, Frank?" said Kerruish.

"I want to say—oh, I don't quite know what I want to say, except that I think it's rough luck for you."

"It is, in a way, kid. But it's mostly my own fault."

"I'm not sure that it is. Anyway, if it is, that doesn't make it any easier to bear."

How had this youngster come to learn that? It is a truth that many people do not learn in long lives. They say that trouble is one's own fault, and pass it by like the priest and the Levite in the parable, who, no doubt, considered that the man who fell among thieves ought to have been more careful. But it is just for the trouble that is largely one's own fault that one most needs the sympathy of friends; and the true friend is he who recognises that and acts upon the recognition.

Frank Levison had learned it, anyway—perhaps from his dealings with his wayward, wrong-headed elder brother.

"You're right there, Frank," replied Kerruish, with a wan smile. "I don't find it any comfort at all to think that I've brought this upon myself."

"But you mustn't get thinking that everyone's down on you," Frank said. "They're not—really and truly they're not! Why, Wally's punched Reggie's head and Jampot's, too, because the silly asses hissed you! And he pretty nearly frightened young Buttercup and one or two more out of their skins about it!"

"He didn't frighten Manners minor out of his skin," Kerruish returned.

For Manners minor had been among the crowd which had hissed him last.

"No. It's not so easy to scare Reggie, and he's an obstinate young beast. But Jampot was sorry, and Hobbs and Curly and Joe, here, won't have anything to do with it. Buck up, Kerruish!"

The two passed on—Joe with a grin that was meant to be sympathetic, Frank with a very serious face.

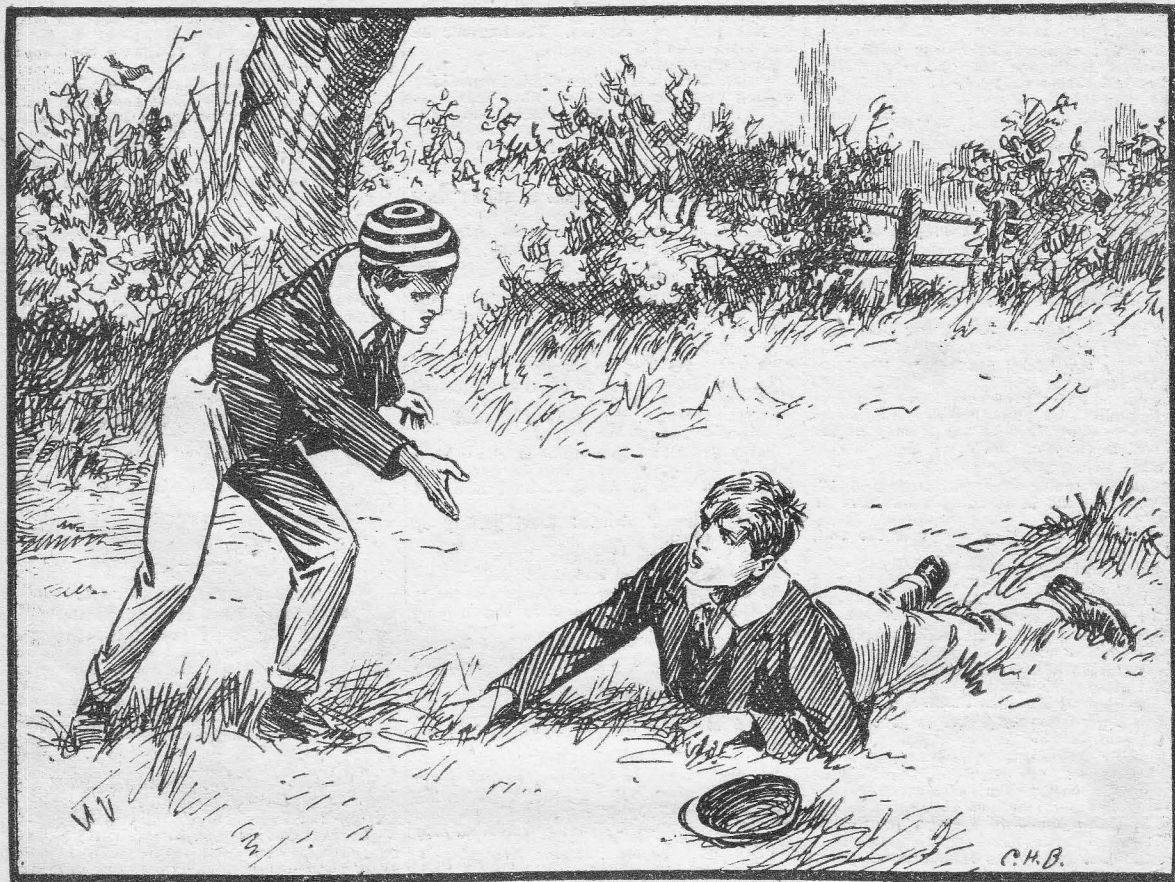
It was strange, Kerruish thought, that Wally D'Arcy should have taken up his case in that manner. But Wally, harum-scarum young rascal as he was, had something of the chivalry and the charity that were so notable in his brother, Arthur Augustus. No D'Arcy ever wanted to kick a fellow who was down.

Other fellows did, though, as Kerruish thought bitterly. Perhaps they would realise when he had gone how rough they had been on him. But they would not know that he had confessed. Ratty was not likely to give away that secret.

Should he himself take care before he went that it should become known after he had gone. It seemed to him that it would be something of a score against Ratty to contrive that.

But very likely they would not believe it; they might think that it had been put into his head by that direct question of Kerr's in the gym. And, anyway, there was not much in a score if one was not there to see its effects.

So, somehow, the day wore through, and time for going to bed came, and after that lights out, and after lights out the familiar chat in the dormitory, in which to-night he



"Eric! Eric!" It was the voice of Dick Julian, and Kerruish turned a miserable, haggard face to the one chum of whom he was certain. "I won't go back!" he panted. (See page 16.)

had no share, and after the talk had died away, sleep.

Kerruish had not meant to go to sleep. But he had been awake the greater part of each of the last two nights, and he succeeded in spite of himself.

He awoke with a start to the striking of the great clock of the school. In some alarm he counted the strokes.

But it was all right, after all. The striking went on until he had counted nine. The hour must be either eleven or twelve, he thought. Anyway, it was not one of the small hours of the morning, as he had feared at first.

He got out of bed, and dressed in silence. All his preparations had been made before he went upstairs, except for the taking of two or three articles of clothing from his box. These he took now, and put them into a light bag.

One moment he stopped by Julian's bed and touched ever so lightly the sleeping form of the best chum he had ever had, wondering whether he would ever see Dick again.

Kerruish was not a specially sentimental fellow, and perhaps it was natural enough that he should feel cut up just then.

He stole out of the dormitory on tiptoe. Downstairs he put on his stoutest boots. If he made up his mind to go home, after all, there would be quite a lot of walking to do, for his money must be economised for the steamer fare. One cannot walk all the way to the Isle of Man.

He got out easily enough, though he did not take the usual way out by the box-room window and the leads. He scrambled up the wall by the old tree, and dropped on the other side.

Then he set off across the moor to Wayland. The night was a summer's night, after a sweltering hot day. Though there was no moon it was not all dark, and Kerruish could see quite a longish stretch of the white moorland road before him. The cool night air was grateful to his hot head, and he felt that running away was not half bad—for a change.

It was queer to be passing through the sleeping streets of Wayland. Never before had it occurred to him how ancient and quaint the old town was. There was no one

stirring, not even a policeman. Naturally, Kerruish had no desire to see a policeman, however. His St. Jim's cap would have given him away, as he realised now; he had not thought of it before.

Beyond Wayland his spirits sank. It had been past twelve when he had set out; now it was somewhere about two o'clock, an hour at which vitality is somewhere near its lowest point.

Already he felt tired out, and it was not at all wonderful that he should feel so, seeing how much he had endured during the past few days. He looked forward almost with dread to the long, hot day that was coming.

It would not be a bad notion to get an hour or two of sleep before it came, he thought.

Coming to a spinney by the roadside, he slipped into it, over a stile, left the path that ran through it, found a comfortable spot among the bracken, lay down, and in less than five minutes had dozed off, his hand upon his bag.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. And Others Follow.

THE light streamed in through the windows of the Fourth Form dormitory, and Dick Julian stirred and woke.

He lay there for a minute or two, at first in drowsy comfort, then with that dull realisation of trouble which many older people know so well at such a time, but which is luckily unusual with the healthy boy.

There is something all wrong—thought stirs first to that knowledge. Then suddenly one is fully awake, with sleep hundreds of miles away, and the trouble is all there, just as it was when one dozed uneasily off.

Thus was it with Dick Julian. He thought of Kerruish, and naturally he looked towards his chum's bed—to see it empty!

In a moment he had flung the sheet off him, and his feet were on the floor.

Somehow, he had no doubt at all what had happened.

Eric had bolted!

Julian restrained his first impulse to waken Hammond and Reilly. It was no use dragging them into it, even if they were willing, and he had no certainty as to that.

He thought of Talbot, who had been more than decent to Kerruish the day before.

But it would not be fair to drag in Talbot. A glance showed him that Kerruish's toothbrush and face-glove had disappeared—just the things he would be sure to take.

Julian took his own. He took also several other things which he knew might be needed.

If he could track down Kerruish he would try all he knew to induce him to return.

But that might not be easy, or even possible. And if Kerruish persisted in going on Julian meant to go with him.

The quad was getting the first rays of the sun when he went out of doors, equipped for the road.

No use to go to the gates. They were not open yet, and there would be a fuss if Taggles were called up out of sleep to unlock them.

So Julian made for the wall by the old tree.

A long, low whistle caused him to start. It came from somewhere overhead.

He looked up, and saw the face of Kerr at a window.

"Whither away?" called Kerr softly.

Julian hesitated what answer to make. Kerr was not the kind of fellow over whose eyes it was easy to pull the wool.

"I'm coming down. Wait half a tick!" Kerr said.

His voice was hardly raised above a whisper, but in the morning stillness it came quite clearly to the ears of the School House junior.

"Oh, don't trouble!" replied Julian, with a touch of impatience. "It isn't anything that really concerns you."

"Not so sure!" muttered Kerr to himself, as he hurried on his clothes.

He stood by the window to do that, and kept an eye on Julian, lest he should slip away.

But Julian waited. He knew that Kerr would follow if he started ahead. And he

was not at all sorry to have Kerr's advice. The New House junior was quite the shrewdest fellow in the St. Jim's Fourth.

In a few minutes Kerr was with him, apparently ready for anything. But Kerr always had rather that way of seeming prepared, and it did not belie his character.

"Something happened, Julian?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Kerruish done a bunk?"

"Got it in once! You're pretty wide, Kerr!"

"Well, I might say that anyone would have to get up early to take me in, only that you've got up early this morning to take me out, it seems."

"No reason why you shouldn't come at all."

"Oh, I think so, Julian. I'm not sure whether Figgy and Fatty ought not to come, too!"

"Well, I am jolly well sure about that, anyway! Why on earth should they?"

"We don't specially need them, it's true. But we three had a thing to do together this morning, and in my absence those two may not feel quite sure what they should do about it. Never mind! I dare say it may be for the best in the long run."

"What were you going to do?"

"Wait till we're over the wall, and I'll tell you. No use in standing about here to yawn."

In another minute they were over the wall, and in the dusty road outside.

"Which way?" asked Julian.

It was curious that the leadership had passed at once to Kerr. And yet Dick Julian was by no means lacking in self-reliance.

"I think we'd better make for Wayland," replied Kerr at once.

They started across the moor, in the track of Kerruish, with the sun climbing up the sky almost dead ahead of them.

"You think he's pretty sure to go to Wayland?" said Julian.

"I really don't think there can be much doubt about it. You see, all of us know that side so much better than the Westwood way, and one is rather inclined to take a known road at such a time."

"Unless a fellow happened to think that that was just what other fellows would fancy he'd do."

Kerr's eyes twinkled.

"Kerruish is no end of a decent chap," he said.

"I'm glad to hear you say that," put in Julian. "It would not have surprised me if you'd taken a different line."

"Rats! Kerruish is no end of a decent chap, I say; but he isn't a specially original one, or—with all the respect due to him—a very specially brainy one, is he?"

"That's true enough. What about it?"

"Well, as he's more or less one of the herd, let's take it that he would do as the rest of the herd would. Just the same, with Figgy and Fatty. If they follow us—"

"Oh, hang it all, I hope they won't do anything so silly as that!"

"I think they will, Julian. It may be silly of them, but I rather fancy they will. I had to scrawl a line to say why I'd gone off, or they would have been worried half out of their lives. I told them not to come. But they don't always do as I tell them, you know."

"I suppose not. Well, if we must have two more, and it's not to be Reilly and Hammond, I'd as soon it was those two as anyone."

"I'd sooner it was Figgy than anyone else," answered Kerr. "Not so sure about Fatty. He's the dearest old chap; but it's something like cruelty to animals to send him along a hot, dusty road in weather like this. His poor old hooves will get sore, and he'll sweat horribly, and life will be a burden to him. No, I'd sooner have Tom Merry or Talbot or Blake, though Fatty is one of my best chums."

There was silence for a while after that. The sun was getting up, and the shadows they cast behind them were shorter now, and not so grotesque. The grass no longer sparkled with the dewdrops as though diamonds had been strewn upon it. And Kerr and Julian began to feel very empty.

"It isn't breakfast-time yet," remarked Kerr, breaking the silence. "But—"

"I was just thinking that very thing," replied Julian. "It certainly isn't breakfast-time, but—"

Then they laughed together, for if their stomachs were empty their hearts were stout.

"We might sit down for a bit," Kerr said. "No good rushing it."

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"But we can get brekker at Wayland," answered Julian.

"Not just yet, old top. There won't be any place open."

They sat down.

Within five minutes they sighted something coming over the moor from their rear.

The eyes of both were more than commonly good, and they saw what was coming before they could make out just what it was.

Then Julian said:

"Follows on bikes!"

"And bikes without anyone on them!" said Kerr.

"That's it! Four bikes and two riders."

"And one of the riders is fat, and the other is tall."

"Figgins and Fatty!"

"And they've brought our bikes, bless 'em! More sense than I gave them credit for."

It was even so. Figgins and Fatty Wynn were pedalling along the moorland road, and each wheeled a bike by his side.

As they drew nearer it could be perceived that Figgy was wheeling his spare steed without difficulty, but that the road was hardly wide enough for Fatty.

Fatty never had been quite as clever on a bike as his chums were; and he had agitation and a void within to contend with just then.

"Aho, there!" shouted Kerr, getting up from the grass.

"Aho!" howled Figgins.

And Fatty wobbled and nearly fell.

In another minute or two Figgy was jumping from his saddle, and Kerr was helping Fatty to dismount.

"Thought you'd come along?" said Kerr.

"What did you expect, ass?" returned Figgins.

"I expected two asses," Kerr replied. "And they've come, and, on the whole, I'm rather pleased to see them. So is Julian—eh, old man?"

"Well, yes," admitted Julian.

"I don't care whether you are or not," growled Figgins. "It's all the same to us. You might have known we should come—and you've given us a heap of trouble for nothing!"

Kerr was unruffled. He looked from Fatty, wiping his streaming brow, to Figgins, frowning resentfully, and he smiled.

"Thanks for bringing the bikes along, anyway," said Julian.

"Why didn't you idiots take yours?" snapped Figgy.

"Efficiency of getting them over the wall," explained Kerr.

"Oh, I see! Didn't think of that. Tell you what. Everyone will fancy we've done a bunk!"

"So we have," Kerr answered.

"A real bunk, I mean, fathead!"

"Isn't this a real bunk?"

"I thought you were only going after Kerruish," said Fatty. "Oh, my hat! Isn't it just hot? And what's it going to be like later on in the day?"

"We are after Kerruish," Kerr said. "But that's not to say we shall hunt him down at once. One good thing about its being so hot, Fatty, old dear, is that a chap really can't eat much in this weather."

"Oh, can't a chap?" snorted Fatty. "Why, I'm ever so hungry now—and so I ought to be, losing flesh like this! It's lucky I thought of putting some biscuits in my pocket."

"Jolly lucky!" said Julian heartily.

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Kerr.

"Thought you didn't want—"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking so much about myself, Fatty! I'm not so selfish as that. I can eat a biscuit or two. The question is, whether they're good for you."

"Here they are! Do as you like with them," grunted Fatty, unloading from two pockets. "I hadn't anything else I could bring."

Kerr shot all the biscuits, rather warm and a trifle limp, into one bag, filling it to overflowing. Then he split open the empty bag and laid it on the grass. Having put all the biscuits upon it, he proceeded to divide them into five equal portions.

Each portion contained seven.

Fatty gazed with his blue eyes wide open.

"Going to save some for Kerruish?" asked Figgins, thinking he understood.

"No. Chances are we shan't find him yet," replied Kerr, sweeping together two of the five shares. "That's your whack, Fatty."

"What?"

Nothing could have exceeded the real indignation of Fatty Wynn as he uttered that ejaculation. Tears were very near his eyes.

"Shouldn't talk as if you were so blessed greedy!" growled Figgins.

"It's all right, old fellow," said Kerr. "I was only teasing. It's share and share alike when there's any shortage, I know, though that will be a bit rough on you."

He redistributed the portions, and took care that it was Fatty who had only eight, while the other three had nine biscuits each.

And at that Fatty beamed. He began upon his share at once.

"What about cash?" asked Figgy. "I've sixpence halfpenny."

"I've a bob and some coppers," Fatty said, with his mouth full.

"I've a ten-bob note—my little hoard—and a trifle of small change besides," said Kerr.

"Oh, it's all serene!" Julian said. "I've a five, besides two or three quid notes and some silver. And it's all for the common fund."

"If needed," put in Figgins quickly.

"Oh, that's understood, of course!" Julian replied.

Five minutes later they were pedalling towards Wayland.

"Are we downhearted?" asked Kerr cheerily.

And three voices answered:

"No!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

How They Took It at St. Jim's.

IT was not until breakfast that the absence of the five became a topic of conversation at St. Jim's. And even then it was hardly of the five that anyone talked or thought, for the New House fellows had not yet learned that Kerruish and Julian had disappeared, and in the School House there was no notion as yet that Figgins & Co. had gone.

But before breakfast Hammond and Reilly had begun to worry.

They had little doubt what had happened. In his rage and despair, Kerruish had boited, and Julian had gone either with him or after him—after him, they fancied. But they knew that if Dick had known of his going in time, and had seen no way of preventing it, he would have gone, too.

In the quad, breakfast over, something like the correct sequence of events was guessed at.

Taggles had seen Figgins and Fatty Wynn go out with four bikes.

"Which way they said to me when I hasked them where they were goin' was cheek, an' nothin' but it!" growled Taggles.

The extra bikes were Kerr's and Julian's, of course, for Kerruish's was still in its place.

Kerruish had evidently gone over the wall. Julian and Kerr had followed in the same way. But the other two had gone out by the gates, and had gone later. They were following Kerr.

All St. Jim's knew that Figgins & Co. were in hot water. But only one person in the whole school suspected them of having run away on that account.

That person was Mr. Ratcliff.

The New House master hardly knew whether to feel glad or sorry.

There was a chance now of matters being cleared up without the Head's knowing that he had kept back a circumstance so material to the trouble of Kerruish's confession.

Running away was an offence serious enough to obscure the issue. If the five came back they would probably be only too glad to get a pardon for that offence, without seeking to go too deeply into what had led up to it. A little blackening of them now, a little pretended magnanimity when they returned, if they did return—that seemed Mr. Ratcliff's safest game.

So he whisked across the quad to see Mr. Raitton, the master of the School House; and more than half St. Jim's watched him go, his gown fluttering about his thin legs, his face portentously solemn.

There was something he must say to Mr. Raitton to safeguard himself.

"I'll bet he thinks Figgy & Co. have boited because he's been so down on them," said Redfern of the New House to the group around him.

His chums, Owen and Lawrence, were there, but, for the most part, the group was composed of School House fellows—Tom Merry and Talbot, Manners and Lowther, Blake and

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Herries and Digby, Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn, Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn, Levison major and Clive and Cardew, Roynance and Purranee and Lumley-Lumley.

"He's off it there," said Tom Merry. "Those three wouldn't do that."

"I don't think anyone but Kerruish has really tolled," Talbot said.

"That's it," agreed Kangaroo. "The rest have gone after him. Don't know that I'd have taken the trouble myself. But it's decent enough of them, too."

"I'm goin', too," said Harry Hammond, coming up in time to hear that. "So is Reilly. 'E's promised. We ain't goin' to be out of it all."

"Rats!" snapped Tom Merry. "We can't have anyone else doing a bunk. What we have to do now is to go out and look for those chap; and bring them back."

"And suppose we aren't allowed to go out and look for them?" asked Lawrence.

"Then we'll go without being allowed!" answered Tom.

"Hear, hear!" cried a score of voices. Even the great George Alfred Grundy agreed.

"That's the game!" he said. "I was just about to suggest it myself when Merry took the words out of my mouth, as he usually does."

"You'd be prepared to lead us, I suppose, Grundy?" said Dane, with his tongue in his cheek.

"I intend to lead you!" replied Grundy loftily.

"I don't think!" said Levison.

"That," said Monty Lowther, "is exactly what's the matter with Grundy. But the reason is not the same, for you are not congenitally incapable of thinking, Levison!"

"Oh, leave Gwunday alone!" spoke Arthur Augustus. "Noboday—"

"That is exactly what will happen when Grundy starts to lead us," put in Cardew blandly. "Grundy will be left alone. He will be a colonel without a battalion. But, pardon me, my noble kinsman, you were about to remark—"

"I was goin' to say, when you butted in with such wudeness an' lack of cewemonay, Cardew, that noboday means bettah than Gwunday, though he is wathah an ass."

"Eh? I'm an ass?" roared Grundy.

"You have said it," replied Lowther solemnly. "No one here would be so rude as to contradict."

"Oh, stop all this rotting!" snapped Manners. "I agree with Tom. We must go and look for these silly asses. And, as it's by no means certain that we can get leave to go, the best dodge might be to go off without it. That wouldn't mean quite so big a row as going after we'd been turned down."

"Best ask," said Talbot quietly. "I don't think either Railton or the Head will kick."

"But Ratty will," Redfern said ruefully.

"You know what an awkward old beast he is," added Owen.

"It rather strikes me," said Lumley-Lumley, "that Ratty has gone to cast his cares upon Railton, and that it will depend much more upon Railton and Lathom and Linton whether we get leave than upon Ratty."

And Lumley-Lumley was right—as in these days, when he thought things out more clearly than he had been wont to do, he often was.

Mr. Ratcliff fairly burst in upon Mr. Railton.

"You have heard the news, I take it, Railton?" he said excitedly.

The master of the School House, filling a favourite briar for a brief smoke between breakfast and classes, replied:

"The Hungarian business, I suppose you mean, Railton? I do really believe that Bela Kun is booked for a fall this time."

"Pooh! Pish! Absurd! I am talking of things nearer home than any Bolsheviki trouble."

"Oh! Of the runaways—or, rather, of the runaway—eh?"

Mr. Railton's coolness made his colleague almost frantic.

"Probably you are not aware that Kerr, Figgins, and Wynn have gone, as well as that misguided boy Kerruish?"

"And Julian," added Mr. Railton equably. "Five of them; that fact makes me feel much easier in mind, Railton. St. Jim's really is not a Dotheboys Hall—youngsters don't run away from it in crowds, you know. Undoubtedly Kerruish bolted; but I think the worst that can be said of the other four is that they went after him without leave."

"I do not agree with you, Railton!"

"My friend, you never do—in any sense whatever!"

"I know more of the innate depravity of Kerr, Figgins, and Wynn than you do."

"I know nothing at all of their innate depravity, beyond that which, as fallible human beings, we may all be said to share. Those three are not perfect saints, but they are as sound and decent boys as I have ever met. And Julian is a fellow of unusually high character, and, like Kerr, well-balanced beyond the common. Kerruish—well, I should not consider Kerruish innately depraved, though I know he has been giving some trouble lately."

The School House master paused, and lighted his pipe.

"And you can stand there and smoke in the face of all this trouble!" gasped Ratty.

"My smoking won't make it worse. I don't well see how I can be expected to rush out and search for the boys. I do not believe that they will come to any harm."

"I have something to tell you about Kerruish."

"Ah! I am not precisely astounded," said Mr. Railton drily.

"He was the boy who knocked me down on the staircase!"

"I have guessed as much."

"You guessed? He did not, then, confess his crime to you?"

"My dear, good man, don't call it a crime! It was nothing worse than an accident. No, he did not confess to me. Why should you think he would?"

"I ordered him to do so."

"Oh! Then, I assume, he had confessed to you?"

"Yes—oh, yes. But that was not all I thought necessary."

"It was all that seems to me necessary."

"I thought that, in respect to you—as a matter of courtesy—of discipline—"

"One moment, Ratcliff! I admit that I am disappointed that Kerruish did not make his confession when I asked for it. But, that chance having been missed, the affair was very little concern of mine at all. Had you reported him to me I should have punished him, of course. But that, I suppose, you did yourself?"

"Naturally! The boy's offence was against me."

"Just my opinion. Then why order him—"

"I have already told you why, Railton!"

"Your reasons were not wholly convincing to me. But let that pass. Of course, Kerruish should have obeyed. He understood at the outset—at the time of punishment—that he was expected to report to me, eh?"

That query confused Mr. Ratcliff. His was not a case that could stand much cross-examination.

"Er—that was not precisely the way it happened," he said. "I told him at the time that there was no need for him to mention the confession to anyone; he seemed very reluctant that his fellow-scholars should know of it."

"Queer—very queer! For surely it must have been to clear himself in their eyes of any charge of cowardice that he owned up. Excuse me, Ratcliff, but I really do not think any searchings of conscience as to the accident by which you suffered would have brought him to you. What did bring him to you a second time, may I ask?"

"I sent for him."

"After you had let him believe the incident closed—after you had inflicted punishment for his fault—you sent for him and told him that he must confess to me? You surprise me, Ratcliff! If it was necessary I should know, you could have told me yourself. As it is, you have, it would appear, put upon this boy a heavier weight than he knew how to bear, and personally I cannot hold you quite guiltless of responsibility for the foolish step he has taken!"

"You are not my judge, Mr. Railton!" panted the New House master, clenching his hands nervously.

"Oh, no! But I am entitled to an opinion, for it can hardly be said that the matter is no concern of mine."

Tap, tap!

"Come in!" called Mr. Railton.

"I have not finished—"

"You have said all that I care to hear at the moment, Mr. Ratcliff! Talbot—Merry—Blake—Redfern! Why, this looks rather like a deputation!"

"I do not see what Redfern can be doing in a deputation to you, Mr. Railton!" snapped Ratty.

But Redfern knew what he was doing, and he held his ground without a word.

Mr. Ratcliff went, glowering.

"The bell for classes will be going in a minute, sir," said Tom Merry. "We really are a deputation representing the Shell and Fourth. We want to ask you whether you will allow us to go and search for the fellows who are missing."

"But I think that only Kerruish really needs much searching for," said the Housemaster. "It strikes me that the other four have already taken upon themselves the task you want to undertake, though they have done it without leave."

"It may be so, sir," answered Jack Blake. "But we don't know that it is. And Figgys and I mean Figgins and Kerr and Wynn were in trouble as well as Kerruish."

"Do you propose that the whole of the two Forms should make holiday for the purposes of this search?" asked the Housemaster.

"We don't mind so much about all, sir," admitted Redfern.

"But only about you four and your particular friends, eh?"

The master smiled, and the four juniors could not help smiling also. For that was so very much what they did want.

"It is quite as much a question for Mr. Linton and for Mr. Lathom as for me," Mr. Railton said. "The Head was called away last night by the grave illness of a near relative, or, of course, he could settle the matter for us all. There are the prefects to be considered. They may think, and not unreasonably, that they have a better right than any of you to stir in the matter. But if your Form-masters do not object, a search-party or search-parties may be formed among you."

"Thank you, sir," said Talbot. And the four hurried off exultantly.

The news that they had been more or less successful had spread all over the quad by the time the bell went for classes.

In the surging movement inwards that followed, Wally D'Arcy, Frank Levison, and a few more of the Third found themselves close to their Form-master and tyrant, Mr. Henry Selby.

"Let's ask the old Hun!" whispered Frank in Wally's ear.

"What's the use? He'll say 'No,' and enjoy saying it. Let's go without asking him!"

"No, I'll ask, if you won't, Wally."

"Rats, then! I will."

Wally preferred his request—the modest one that he and four or five more of the fags might be granted a day's exemption from Form in order that they might share in the search for the runaways.

"Oh, yes, of course!" replied Mr. Selby, with biting sarcasm.

He was going to say more, naturally. But Wally was too quick for him.

"Thank you very much, sir!" replied Wally. And in a second he was lost in the crowd.

Frank Levison, Curly Gibson, Hobbs, Joe Frayne, Jameson, and Reggie Manners followed their leader.

"You're not coming, young Reggie!" snapped Wally.

"Bet you I am!" retorted Manners minor. And he did. There was no time to spare for cutting him out of the party.

When a few minutes later, Mr. Selby sent Figgott and Butt to find the seven, and order them to the Form-room at once, the seven had disappeared.

They were the first to take the trail. But those of the Shell and Fourth who had been allowed to go were not long after them.

THE SIXTH CHARTER.

The Obstinance of Kerruish.

THE sun was high in the sky when Eric Kerruish awoke, looked about him, and remembered where he was.

He lay for a minute or two, watching the leaves of the tall trees rustling in the breeze, and the little patches of blue sky framed by them.

It was quite pleasant in the spinney, and he was very tired. He felt that he could lie there all day; doing nothing but watch the blue sky and the green leaves.

But he also felt a void within, and realised the need of food. He roused himself, and glanced at his watch.

It was past ten o'clock, and he was only a few miles beyond Wayland!

This would never do! If he had been thirty or forty miles on his way such a spinney as this might have made a fairly safe hiding-place, for then he might safely have left it to get something to eat, and have returned.

But by this time there was sure to be a hue and cry after him, and he was altogether too near the home country.

Even as he stood there the sound of familiar voices came to his ears.

Wally D'Arcy & Co. had halted by the roadside, and were discussing the situation.

"Not worth while," said Wally.

"Why not?" asked Reggie Manners.

"Because Tom Merry and half a dozen more of them got ahead of us along this way while we were attending to your silly puncture—just the way of an ass like you to have a puncture at such a time!"

"Yes. We'd got a start of everybody!" growled Jameson. "Now a lot of them have caught us up!"

"Oh, rats to all of you!" sported Manners minor. "That doesn't prove that Kerruish isn't in here!"

"You can look if you like. We're going on. Hanged if we're going to bother! The other chaps would have been sure to search a place like this."

"I'm going to look!" replied Reggie sulkily. Kerruish stole away through the trees at once. He did not know what he would do if young Manners found him. He had a wild idea of seizing the venturesome Reggie before he could cry out, binding and gagging him, and leaving him there.

But that could only be a last resource. Better to hide if possible!

At the edge of the spinney farthest from the road he found a dry ditch overhung with brambles. He contrived to steal under the bushes and lie at full-length in the ditch, his heart beating nineteen to the dozen.

Reggie tramped noisily through the little wood, breaking bushes and breathing so hard that Kerruish could hear him in his cover. But the voices of the rest were already fading away in the distance.

They had ridden on, and Master Reggie suddenly made up his mind that he had better ride after them.

"Oh, hang it! They'll be getting miles ahead!" he muttered, within a yard of the fugitive's head.

And he turned and made his noisy way back to his bike.

Within ten minutes Kerruish had put some three-quarters of a mile of field and wood between himself and that spinney.

Then he halted behind a tumbledown barn. It was plain that the chase was hot after him.

When Wally had spoken of Tom Merry and half a dozen more, he had not meant that they were the only fellows on the track. Kerruish was sure.

Possibly the whole school was out searching. It looked like that when mere Third Form kids were allowed to share in the task.

Voices came to him from within the barn.

"I say, Aubrey, this is better than swotting in the Form-room—eh?" spoke the voice of Croke.

"Oh, rather, by gad! I'll go three!" answered Racke.

"You didn't want to come," said Scope.

"Well, that was only because I thought you fellows were dashed fools enough to want to go hunting. I'm not on for that kind of thing. I don't mind this, though the old shanty is a trifle smelly."

Racke, Croke & Co. were playing nap, it was evident.

"There's the ace for your king," said Baggy Trimble, with great satisfaction. "Pay up and look pleasant. He, he! I say, I wonder what Kerruish will get when they catch him?"

"A floggin' and then the sack!" answered Croke. "Serve him right!"

Kerruish crept away. He should have known better than to attach any weight to what Croke said; but he was still far from being in a normal state of mind, and it did weigh upon him.

So did the feeling that a net was closing in upon him. Probably search-parties were out on all the roads. Here was he, wandering about the fields, tired, hungry, and almost hopeless.

What was to be the end of it all?

He was stealing along by a hedge now, keeping a sharp look out. He could see a pantechnicon passing along a road only the width of one field away; but he had so completely lost his bearings that he did not know in the least what road it was.

He stopped, trying to think, endeavouring to get the lie of the country by the sun. Then he heard voices again, and recognised Kerr's among them, and he started to run.

Kerruish really was in no condition to run. He was empty within; he had had far too little sleep lately; and his brain was in a whirl.

But he staggered on, his breath coming hard, perspiration streaming down his face.

Then his feet struck a big molehill, and he fell forward, and lay there panting, almost sobbing, utterly collapsed for the moment.

"Eric! Eric, old chap!"

It was the voice of Dick Julian this time, and Kerruish turned his miserable, haggard face to the one chum of whom he was certain.

"I won't go back! I won't go back!" he panted.

"I sha'n't try to make you. But I'm not going to leave you, that's a dead sure thing! See here, old fellow, it's like this. When I found out you had gone, I started after you. I saw Kerr, and he insisted upon coming with me."

"What for? Kerr doesn't care what happens to me!"

"You're off it there—clean off it! He cares a good deal. He fancies it was all partly his fault."

"So it was!" said Kerruish bitterly.

"Perhaps it was. But you ought to make allowances. Well, Figgins and Fatty came after Kerr, and they caught us up on the moor. They brought our bikes; we couldn't get them over the wall. All three of them are close at hand. They thought I'd better speak to you first. Will you see them?"

"I don't care. But I'm not going back—mind that! And there's to be no trickery—they'll have to promise that!"

"They'll promise that all serene, I'm sure!" Julian went back to Figgins & Co., leaving Kerruish lying on the grass.

"Kerr," he said, "this is really for you to settle. You've the clearest head of the four of us. Kerruish won't go back, and I've promised him that we won't try to make him. I'm going on with him. The question is what you fellows mean to do?"

"The silly idiot!" growled Figgins, plucking at the grass as he half-madly said, "We all to run away because he's half-mad!"

"That's just it," Kerr said quietly. "I believe the fellow is half-mad, and it seems to me that we've got to humour him. I'm in this, for one, Julian."

"If you're going we're going, Kerr," said Fatty dismally. "But it's a jolly serious thing, you know."

"Oh, hang about the seriousness of it!" Figgins snorted, with a sudden change of front. "I'm on! After all, they won't sack five of us; and it will be a bit of an adventure dodging all the other bouncers—Tommy and Blake and the rest of them!"

"You mean," put in Fatty, "that we're to take Kerruish in hand and see that the other fellows don't nab him, and stay by him until he's willing to go back?"

"That's the size of it," Kerr replied.

"That's about my idea," said Julian. "I'm afraid he may not be very civil to you."

"Oh, we don't expect that," Kerr said.

"Don't want it!" growled Figgins.

The four went to where Kerruish lay. He was dull and apathetic; but uncivil he was not.

He consented to put himself into their hands; and from that moment Kerr and Figgins entered into the affair as into a great game. Fatty was less keen, and Julian was thinking too much of Kerruish and his state of mind to care much about the sport of it all.

But the four were agreed upon that, despite all the searchers might do, they would keep Kerruish from capture till he was willing to go back.

How they fared in what was bound to be a difficult task—how Tom Merry and Blake and the rest searched—what parts Racke & Co. and Wally D'Arcy and his little band played in the business—how bikes whose riders wore the St. Jim's colours scurried half over Sussex—and how it all ended—these things the next story must tell.

THE END.

There is a Long Complete Story of

TOM MERRY & CO.

in the

"GEM," EVERY WEDNESDAY.

THE CROSS-ROADS OF LIFE!

(Continued from page 7.)

"Take me to Park Crescent—at once!" he rapped out.

The man was about to excuse himself on the grounds that he had insufficient petrol, when he caught sight of the expression on Dennis Carr's face.

"Is it urgent, sir?" he asked.

"Very!" said Dennis. "It's a matter of life and death!"

The taxi-driver made no further demur. He clambered into his seat, and was soon speeding through the crowded thoroughfares of the metropolises.

When Dennis reached the house, he found it bushes and still—a house of death.

For a moment he stood irresolute on the top of the steps, scarcely daring to ring the bell.

Then the door opened, and Dennis Carr stood face to face with his father.

"My boy!"

One glance at his father's ashen face told Dennis the worst.

Flinging down his cap in the hall, he sped upstairs to his mother's room. The doctor emerged as Dennis was about to enter. He laid his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"My mother—" panted Dennis.

"Your mother," said the doctor gravely—"It was not necessary for him to finish the sentence."

Despite the feverish haste which had marked the journey from Greyfriars, Dennis Carr had arrived too late.

Without a word or a sign of farewell to her only son, his mother had left him.

She had passed away; and with her going the only real uplift and support which Dennis Carr had ever known passed away also.

"May—may I see her?" muttered Dennis.

The doctor nodded, and Dennis passed into the presence of the dead.

For a moment the doctor stood beside him. Then he went quietly from the room, leaving Dennis Carr alone with his grief—a grief which no words could paint, which no tongue could express.

A week later Dennis Carr returned to Greyfriars.

No mention had been made to Harry Wharton & Co. of the tragedy which had befallen their schoolfellow. Dr. Locke naturally concluded that the juniors knew why Dennis Carr had been summoned to London.

Although they did not know the facts, however, the Removites could see that Dennis Carr had passed through a great ordeal.

Even the caps of the Form—Skinner and Stott and the others—did not dare to suggest that he should be punished in accordance with the previous arrangements. The affair of the football match was allowed to slide; and Harry Wharton & Co. hoped that Dennis Carr would atone for his former folly, and fill a worthy place in the Remove.

Dennis, however, grew moody and aimless. His Form-work suffered; he played no games.

The ban of Coventry was removed; but Dennis took no advantage of it. When spoken to he scarcely seemed to hear. Even Mark Linley's continued friendship failed to rouse him from the stupor into which he had fallen. He seemed to have lost all interest in life.

One day he received a message, in the handwriting of Ponsoby, of Highcliffe, inviting him to a "little flutter" at the Retreat.

Dennis fell an easy prey to the smooth invitation. He disliked Ponsoby; but he sought distraction from his grief. He wanted to forget. And he felt that the only way to do so was to join Ponsoby's gay circle.

He had reached the cross-roads of life with a vengeance. And he no longer stood hesitating between the narrow, rugged path of decency, and the broad and beckoning one of folly and shame.

Dennis Carr chose the latter. And the day would surely come when he would regret his rash choice.

Would it then be too late?

THE END.