

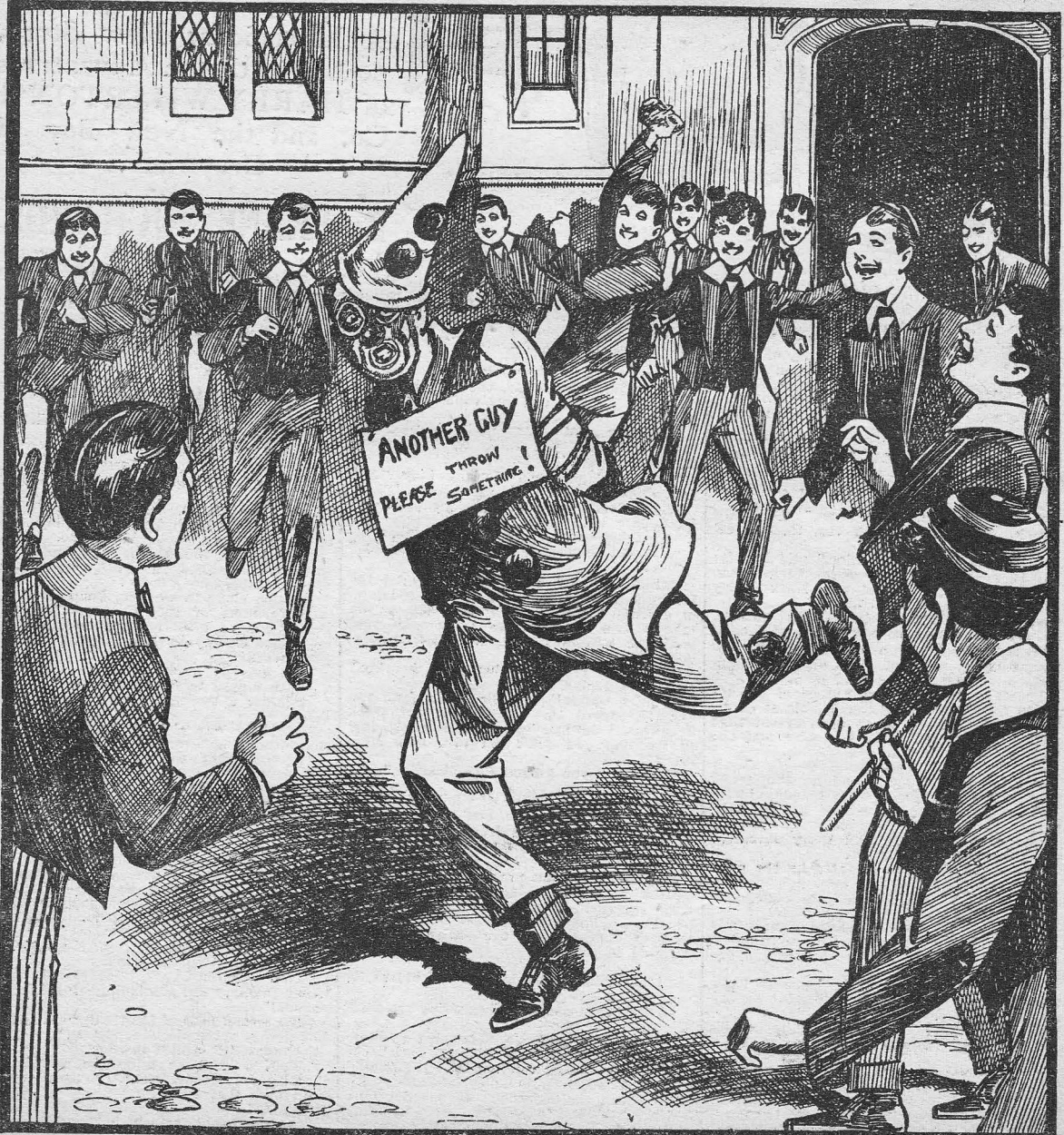
THREE GRAND LONG SCHOOL STORIES!

The **Penny** **1½**^d
Popular

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September 27th, 1919.

No. 36.
New Series.

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



MARK LINLEY'S ORDEAL!

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



Dennis Carr's Folly!

A Magnificent New Story, dealing with the Adventures of HARRY WHARTON & Co. and the New Boy of Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

In the Lion's Den.

"W HITHER bound?" Mark Linley, of the Remove, was passing through the old gateway of Greyfriars when Dennis Carr encountered him with that question. The Lancashire lad smiled rather grimly. "I'm going to Highcliffe," he said shortly. "To see Ponsonby?"

"Yes." "In that case," said Dennis, "I'll step along, too. There's pretty certain to be trouble, and two can put up a better show than one."

"I'd rather you didn't come," said Mark Linley. "I mean to carry this through off my own bat."

"You're a good sort, Linley," said Dennis; and there was genuine gratitude in his tone. He knew only too well why Mark Linley was going over to Highcliffe.

Since the tragic death of his mother, Dennis Carr had been sowing his wild oats. He had chummed up with Ponsonby; and chumming up with the black sheep of Highcliffe was a step on the road to disaster.

Ponsonby had taken advantage of the so-called friendship by fleecing Dennis at cards. He had fleeced him to such an extent that Dennis was in debt, to Ponsonby and the others, to the tune of ten pounds.

Pon had in his possession Dennis Carr's IOU for this amount, and he threatened that unless the money were speedily forthcoming he would communicate with Dennis's father. And Dennis was only too bitterly aware that Ponsonby had every intention of carrying out this threat.

The wretched junior, haunted by the prospect which loomed before him, had made a clean breast of his folly to Mark Linley—his only chum in the Greyfriars Remove.

Mark saw that the wayward Dennis was heading downhill. He saw, too, that unless prompt action were taken, exposure and disgrace would follow.

Dennis Carr's father, if he came to know the facts, would be certain to remove his son from Greyfriars.

So Mark Linley had determined to get his chum out of Ponsonby's clutches with all speed.

Once he managed to recover that IOU from Ponsonby, Dennis Carr would be safe.

It was a delicate business, for Ponsonby would not be inclined to deliver up the document except under great pressure.

Mark could not ask Harry Wharton & Co.

to assist him in his mission. Dennis Carr's secret had been entrusted to him, and to him alone; and he could not divulge it to others.

Mark Linley nodded to Dennis, and strode away along the frosty road in the direction of Highcliffe.

In the gateway of the rival school he was met by Frank Courtenay, the captain of the Highcliffe Fourth, and his chum the Caterpillar.

"Welcome, little stranger!" drawled the latter. "Have you come on business or pleasure, begad?"

"Business!" answered Mark, smiling. "And fairly unwholesome business at that!"

Frank Courtenay noted the gleam in the Lancashire lad's eyes.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"I've got something to say to Ponsonby."

"Oh!"

"At the present moment," murmured the Caterpillar, "our admirable Pon is indulging in a little flutter in his study. Unless you take a box of cigarettes along with you, you'll be refused admission. It's a smokin' concert, you see."

"I'll make Ponsonby give me a hearing," said Mark Linley.

"You're walkin' into the lion's den, you know!" warned the Caterpillar. "I think Franky and me had better toddle along, just to see that you don't get torn limb from limb!"

"We'll give you a hand with pleasure," said Frank Courtenay.

"That's awfully decent of you," said Mark.

"but I prefer to tackle Pon singlehanded."

"Just as you like," said Courtenay, a trifle nettled at Linley's independence. "Come along, Caterpillar!"

And the two chums proceeded out of gates. Mark Linley went along to the Fourth Form passage. He did not need to be told which was Ponsonby's study. From within that apartment came the sound of voices upraised in song.

"I am thinking to-night of the old rustic bridge That bends o'er the murmuring stream!"

chanted Ponsonby & Co. Though they were probably thinking of a different variety of "bridge" from that referred to in the song.

For a moment Mark Linley hesitated, with his hand on the doorknob. It was not funk which caused him to hesitate. It was trying to think how he could adequately express his opinion of Cecil Ponsonby. And he came

to the conclusion that his vocabulary was too limited.

The door of the study was thrown open, and Mark Linley stood on the threshold.

The revellers stopped singing, with the exception of Ponsonby, who rendered a variation of the song for Mark Linley's benefit.

"Though now far away, still my thoughts fondly stray To the rustic who worked in a mill!"

Mark Linley flushed.

Ponsonby knew, of course, that before coming to Greyfriars the Lancashire lad had worked in a mill. He had been a son of toil—a breadwinner. There was no disgrace in that, of course; but to the snobbish mind of Ponsonby hard work was a crime.

Mark Linley waited patiently until Ponsonby had finished the insulting refrain. Then he said, very quietly:

"I came along to see you, Ponsonby!"

"Very sweet of you, I'm sure!" drawled Pon. "Take a good look at me. Sorry I can't squeeze myself into a glass case for your benefit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"With regard to Dennis Carr—"

"I prefer a two-seater Ford myself!" said Pon.

And there was a fresh outburst of merriment from his cronies.

"It has come to my knowledge," continued Mark, unheeding, "that you got the kid into your clutches, and swindled him. You fleeced him right and left at cards."

Ponsonby's jocularly slipped from him like a mask. His brow grew dark.

"Who says I swindled him?" he demanded. "Carr told me so himself."

"Indeed! And you choose to take the word of a lying young waster—"

"I'd take Carr's word—or anybody else's, for that matter—before yours. You're a howling cad, Ponsonby!"

Pon started up angrily from the table. "Steady on!" he muttered.

"You cheated Carr," continued Mark Linley calmly, "and you hold his IOU for ten pounds!"

"The second part of that statement is true. The first is a thunderin' whopper!"

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Well, we'll leave aside the question of cheating for the moment. I want you to hand over that IOU!"

"What!"

Ponsonby could scarcely believe his ears. He knew that Mark Linley had a reputa-

tion for fearlessness, but he had not supposed that the Greyfriars junior possessed sufficient nerve to beard him in his den with a request of this sort.

"I'm waiting," said Mark Linley. "Hand over that scrap of paper."

"And suppin' I refuse?"

"Then I shall do my best to take it from you by force!"

"Oh, my hat!"

There was a chuckle from the Highcliffians. They realised that, if it came to a scrap, Mark Linley would not stand the ghost of a chance. He would be outnumbered from the outset, and would be sent back to Greyfriars with his tail between his legs, so to speak. And it would serve him jolly well right for interfering, they reflected.

"So long as that I O U is in your possession," said Mark Linley, "you've got Carr in your power. You can blackmail him till further orders. I'm a chum of Carr's, and I'm not going to see that happen."

Ponsonby laughed harshly.

"Lock the door, Gaddy!" he said.

Gadsby promptly obeyed.

Mark Linley clenched his hands tightly together, and took stock of the occupants of the study.

There were six of them. And they would have no scruples in attacking him all together. The Highcliffe cads did not know the meaning of fair-play.

Ponsonby surveyed the Greyfriars junior with a grin.

"I've got that I O U in my breast-pocket," he said. "You're quite welcome to try an' take it by force."

"Yes, rather!" said Monson.

Mark Linley began to regret that he had not permitted Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar to give him a helping hand.

He had not bargained on finding six juniors in Ponsonby's study. He could have tackled two—perhaps three. But six to one were odds which even the finest fighting-man could not resist.

Yet Mark Linley did not falter.

His thoughts turned to Dennis Carr—face to face with ruin as a result of Ponsonby's rascality.

Dennis was largely to blame, of course; but Mark Linley meant to leave no stone unturned to save the unhappy junior.

He saw that Ponsonby had no intention of voluntarily handing over the I O U—the document on which the fate of Dennis Carr seemed to hang. The only thing for it, therefore, was to fight.

With startling and unexpected suddenness Mark Linley shot out his left.

His fist collided with Ponsonby's jaw, and the leader of the Highcliffe "nuts" measured his length on the floor of the study.

Before he could rise, Mark Linley was upon him with the spring of a tiger.

He pinned Ponsonby to the floor with one hand, and with the other he groped feverishly for Pon's breast-pocket.

But the other five were not idle.

"All together!" sang out Gadsby.

There was a sudden rush, and Mark Linley was seized from behind and swung back from the squirming Ponsonby.

"Give it to him hot!" panted that hero.

And then the one-sided fight began.

Mark Linley wrenched himself free, and planted himself with his back to the wall.

He was so angry that he would have hit out even had the odds against him been sixty to one.

Biff!

Gadsby recoiled from a smashing right-hander, and sat down heavily upon Ponsonby.

Two more smashing drives from Mark Linley's fist, and Merton and Drury were down.

Vavasour was the next victim. His aristocratic nose received a thump reminiscent of the concussion of a bomb.

"Come on, you cads!" exclaimed Mark Linley, his face flushed and furious.

At that moment Ponsonby and Gadsby regained their feet, and, aided by Monson, they rushed at the Greyfriars junior.

Mark Linley fought on with the strength of despair; but he was receiving heavy punishment now.

His head throbbed wildly; and before his dazed eyes the study seemed to be going round and round.

He hit out mechanically, conscious of the fact that he could not last out much longer.

Perhaps help would come soon, he reflected. Perhaps Courtenay and the Caterpillar had returned.

Mark tried to remain with his back to the wall; but he tottered forward hopelessly, and in that moment Ponsonby smote him from behind with all his force.

The Greyfriars junior pitched forward on his face. And as he fell his head crashed against the leg of the table, almost stunning him.

"My hat!" muttered Ponsonby, a scared look coming over his face. "He—he—I believe he's unconscious!"

"Don't be an ass, Pon!" said Gadsby harshly. "He's only shamming!"

Ponsonby glanced at the fallen junior, and was reassured.

"What's the next move?" asked Vavasour, caressing his damaged nose. "Shall we truss him up? There's a length of cord in the cupboard."

Merton gave a chuckle.

"And there's a pierrot costume in the cupboard, too!" he said. "I vote we rig him up in that as a suitable guy for the Fifth of November!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly good wheeze!" said Ponsonby.

"He's a guy already," said Monson; "but we'll turn him into the complete article!"

Drury retired to the woodshed, and returned shortly afterwards with a tin of red paint, likewise some crayons.

Then, with a liberal brush, he proceeded to daub Mark Linley's nose with the paint.

The rest of the Highcliffians looked on, chuckling. The victim was too dazed to resist.

Having applied the paint, Drury began to still further decorate Mark Linley's face with the crayons.

Black circles were drawn round the junior's eyes, and his eyebrows were grotesquely elaborated.

"Now for the merry costume!" said Ponsonby.

Merton produced the costume, together with the pierrot's hat, while Ponsonby and Gadsby wrenched off Mark Linley's coat.

"It doesn't matter about his bags," remarked Ponsonby. "A couple of pairs won't hurt him in this cold weather. We'll slip the comic ones on over the others."

The work proceeded apace, and in less than twenty minutes Mark Linley presented a most ludicrous appearance.

His complexion was a cross between that of a seasoned toper and a clown. And his quaint, bulging costume caused the Highcliffians to shriek with laughter.

They had not quite finished with him yet. His hands were tied behind his back with the length of cord; and Merton inscribed a placard, which was pinned to the front of the costume. It ran as follows:

"ANOTHER GUY!"

PLEASE THROW SOMETHING!"

In this strange guise, Mark Linley was bundled to the door.

"Clear out!" said Ponsonby. "My compliments to Dennis Carr, an' tell him that unless that little debt be settled by Saturday, I shall write a nice, chatty letter to his pater."

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" chuckled Gadsby, as Mark Linley staggered away down the passage.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The quadrangle happened to be crowded as the weird-looking figure passed through it.

A roar of laughter went up from the onlookers.

Mark Linley got to the school gates as quickly as he could, but he had to run the gauntlet of a shower of missiles.

The owners of peashooters got busy, and those who lacked those weapons contented themselves with hurling lumps of dirt.

Mark Linley was almost dropping as he emerged into the roadway.

When his head had cannoned against the leg of the table, the latter had come off best.

The unfortunate junior felt that it would be as much as he could do to get back to Greyfriars.

"The cads!" he muttered. "Oh, the cads!" And, feeling utterly sick and spent, he stumbled along the hard, white road.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Chance for Dennis Carr.

"HE, he, he!" It was the well-known cackle of Billy Bunter of the Remove.

The fat junior was cycling into Friar-dale on Johnny Bull's bicycle, which had been borrowed without permission—and the sight of an extraordinary-looking person, clad like a pierrot, lurching towards him, almost caused Bunter to roll off the machine.

When he drew level with the strange apparition, Billy Bunter dismounted.

"He, he, he!" he repeated. "What on earth—"

And then, catching sight of the placard on Mark Linley's chest, the fat junior went into a fresh spasm of merriment.

"Oh, my hat! Another guy! He, he, he!"

Mark Linley came to a halt, panting.

"Untie me!" he gasped.

Billy Bunter gave a start as he recognised the voice.

"Why, it's Linley!"

"Yes," muttered Mark impatiently. "Untie this cord at the back!"

The fat junior chuckled.

"No jolly fear!" he said.

"Look here, you can see how I'm fixed—"

"You can stay fixed for all I care!" said Billy Bunter. "I don't contaminate myself by touching low-down scholarship cads!"

Now that Mark Linley was securely trussed up, it was perfectly safe for the fat junior to cheek him.

"If only I had my hands free—" muttered Mark.

"But you haven't got 'em free!" chuckled Bunter. "And you'd better be careful how you address me. You're in my power, you know. Of course, I should be quite willing to untie you if—"

"If what?"

"If you'd be prepared to make it worth my while. My terms are five bob—perfectly fair and reasonable, don't you think?"

Mark Linley gritted his teeth.

He was on the verge of exhaustion, and he would have given a great deal to obtain the freedom of his hands and arms, so that he could remove that hideous costume. But he was not going to be bartered with in this way.

"Five bob," repeated Billy Bunter, "and you can have your freedom! That's a sporting offer."

Mark Linley did not close with it. He started to walk on, dragging one foot after the other, as if they were held down by leaden weights.

Billy Bunter blinked wrathfully through his big spectacles at the retreating figure.

"You always were a mean beast, Linley!" he said. "Are you going to agree to my terms?"

"No!"

"Well, you can take the consequences!"

So saying, the fat junior picked up a number of turfs from the roadside, and commenced to pelt the helpless Lancashire lad.

Billy Bunter's aim was erratic, and most of the missiles either went wide or fell short of their mark. But a few got home; and the bombardment did not add to Mark Linley's personal comfort.

And then there was the indignity of it. To be bombarded by Billy Bunter!

Mark grimly reflected that he would take it out of Bunter afterwards.

He staggered on for a few hundred yards; and then, though he was loth to throw up the sponge, he crossed to the side of the road and sat down. He was a physical wreck.

He might have remained seated by the roadside indefinitely had not the Famous Five of the Remove suddenly appeared on the scene.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated the astonished voice of Bob Cherry. "I think I shall have to write a book dealing with common objects by the wayside."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What on earth is it?" gasped Frank Nugent.

"A spare part belonging to a travelling circus, I expect," said Johnny Bull.

"Why, the merchant's bound!" exclaimed Harry Wharton in surprise.

"His hands are knottily tied behind his esteemed backfulness!" said Hurree Singh.

"Entie me, you fellows, for goodness' sake!" muttered the object of this conversation.

Bob Cherry gave a convulsive start.

"My only aunt! It's Marky!"

In a twinkling the Famous Five assisted their schoolfellow to his feet.

Johnny Bull drew out his pocket-knife and severed the bonds, after which Mark Linley commenced to doff the pierrot garb.

It was only too obvious that the Lancashire lad had been the victim of a practical joke, and that he had fallen into the hands of the Amalekites.

Harry Wharton pressed for details.

"Is this a trick of Trumper's?" he asked. Dick Trumper was the youthful leader of Courtfield County Council School.

Mark Linley shook his head.

"I've got to thank Ponsonby for this," he said.

"Ponsonby! You don't mean to say that you've been over to Highcliffe?"

"Yes."

"All on your own?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. Mark nodded.

"Then you were simply asking for trouble! Why didn't you ask your uncles to accompany you?"

"I didn't want to drag you fellows into it." "Rats! We should have loved it! Many moons have passed since my clenched fist beat a tattoo on Pon's nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What was the object of this friendly call on Pon?" inquired Frank Nugent.

Mark Linley hesitated.

"I went over on behalf of Carr," he said rather vaguely.

Harry Wharton frowned.

"I should be inclined, if I were you, to let Carr fight his own battles!" he said.

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry. "It's a mistake to saddle the troubles of a boulder like Carr."

"Carr has his good points——" began Mark. "Then it requires a pretty powerful microscope to see them!"

"You fellows have never given him a fair chance!" said Linley. "He made one or two bad blunders when he first came to Greyfriars, and he's been persecuted ever since."

"Serve him jolly well right!" was Johnny Bull's gruff comment. "Johnny couldn't stand Dennis Carr at any price!"

"It beats me why you want to champion that cad, Marky!" said Bob Cherry.

"I champion him," said Mark Linley quietly, "because I see possibilities in him that you fellows don't."

"Oh, bother Carr!" growled Harry Wharton. "Where's your coat, Linley?"

"In Ponsonby's study."

"We shall have to go to Highcliffe in force, later on, and recover it," said Nugent.

"Yes, rather!"

"Meanwhile," said Bob Cherry, "we'll give you a helping hand back to Greyfriars, Marky."

"Thanks!" said Mark. "I feel just about dead-beat."

Harry Wharton darted a keen glance at the speaker.

"You're not feeling too groggy for the St. Jim's match to-morrow, I hope?"

"Afraid so," said Mark Linley.

"Oh, crumbs!"

There was consternation written on the faces of the Famous Five. Mark Linley was a half-back, and one of the Remove's best players.

"It's not so bad as that, surely?" said Bob Cherry. "You'll be as fit as a fiddle by to-morrow!"

But Mark Linley shook his head.

"I'd rather cry off at once," he said. "I know I should simply be a passenger if I played."

"Who on earth can we get in your place?" exclaimed Wharton, who was always up against some new difficulty, and who found the position of football captain anything but a bed of roses.

"What's wrong with Carr?" said Mark Linley.

"Carr? Why, he's quite outside the pale. I shouldn't dream——"

"There you go again!" said Mark, mustering a smile. "You won't give the fellow a chance! He's proved himself to be hot stuff at footer, yet his own Form won't give him a show!"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"I've got no use for bold, bad blades in the Remove eleven," he said.

"But you don't see," protested Mark Linley, "that if Dennis Carr could get a regular place in the team he wouldn't want to be a bold, bad blade, as you call it. He'd have other and more healthy things to think about. Why not give him a trial?"

"Why not?" said Frank Nugent, impressed by Mark Linley's eloquence. "After all, Carr's a stunning footballer."

"And we want to put a strong side into the field against St. Jim's," said Bob Cherry. Wharton wavered.

"Of course, if the fellow's been smoking cigarettes——" he began.

"He hasn't!" said Mark Linley quickly. "Not enough to affect his speed and stamina, anyway."

"In that case he shall have a trial."

"Good! I'm sure he'll rise to the occasion!"

The procession had reached the gates of Greyfriars by this time, and Mark Linley, whose head was still throbbing painfully, nodded to the Famous Five, and went along

to his study for an Eton jacket, to replace that which Ponsonby & Co. had appropriated. In the Remove passage he met Dennis Carr.

Dennis glanced eagerly at his chum.

"Any luck?" he asked. "Did you succeed in——"

But the words died on his lips.

Mark Linley's dishevelled appearance told its own tale. He had received a rough handling at Highcliffe, that was certain. And it was equally certain that he had come empty away.

"I did my best," said Mark simply. "But——"

"Ponsonby's still got the I O U?"

"Yes."

"Confound him!" muttered Dennis. "The cad means to ruin me!"

"The worst hasn't happened yet."

"But it will!"

"You don't want to meet trouble half-way."

But Dennis Carr would not be comforted. He was suffering agonies of suspense as a result of his dealings with Ponsonby.

If only he had kept clear! If only he had heeded Mark Linley's warning in the first instance!

But it was too late for vain regrets. He had played the fool, and he must face the consequences of his folly.

"It was very decent of you to try and get me out of this tangle," he said. "I'm awfully grateful!"

"Don't mention it!" said Mark Linley; and he passed on to his study.

Dennis noted his unsteady gait, and the fact that his hand was pressed to his forehead, and a fierce hatred of Ponsonby surged up within him.

"I'll get even with the cad, sooner or later!" he muttered. "And I'll never go on the razzle with him again!"

That evening Dennis Carr received quite a shock.

He happened to drift up to the notice-board, round which were clustered a number of juniors, and he read the following announcement:

"GREYFRIARS v. ST. JIM'S.

"This match will be played on Little Side to-morrow afternoon.

"The Remove team has been selected as follows:

"Goal, Bulstrode; backs, Bull and Redwing; half-backs, Cherry, P. Todd, and Nugent; forwards, Hurree Singh, Field, Wharton, Vernon-Smith, and Carr.

"Greyfriars expects that every man will do his duty!

"(Signed) Harry Wharton, Captain."

Dennis Carr blinked at the notice in astonishment.

His own name seemed to leap out at him. Frank Nugent, who usually played forward, had been placed in the half-back line, and he—Dennis Carr—was down to play on the wing.

"Of course," Bolsover major was saying, "it's a mistake on Wharton's part!"

"That's so," said Billy Bunter, who had returned from his expedition to Friardale. "It's a slip of the pen. The name looks like Carr at first sight, but if you look into it more closely you'll see that it's meant to be Bunter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It can't be Carr, anyway!" Ogilvy said. "Wharton is at daggers drawn with him. He wouldn't have him in the team at any price! And neither should I, if I were skipper."

"But then, you see, you're not!" interposed a quiet voice.

Ogilvy spun round, and saw Dennis Carr smiling at him.

"Oh, it's you, is it!" he growled. "Talk of angels!"

"I say, Wharton!" Bolsover major had sighted the captain of the Remove standing in the offing. "Is this a joke?"

Wharton looked round.

"If you're referring to your face—yes!" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bolsover scowled.

"Don't be funny!" he said. "I mean this!"

And the bully of the Remove levelled a big forefinger at the notice.

"You've got Carr's name down," he said. "Well?"

"You—you mean to say you're going to play an outsider like that?"

"I'm going to play Carr on his merits as a footballer."

"My hat!"

Bolsover major was nearly overcome. He could not think of anything to say suitable for the occasion. Had the weather been hot he would have attributed Wharton's action to the heat of the sun; but the weather was decidedly chilly.

"You must be potty, Wharton!" said Ogilvy. "You've done some pretty queer things in your time, but this is about the queerest!"

"Hear, hear! I never clapped eyes on such a putrid team in all my life!" said Billy Bunter. "Why, you've left me out altogether!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Carr's playing, and there's an end to it!" said Harry Wharton.

Dennis Carr turned away from the notice-board.

"Thanks very much!" he said to Wharton in passing.

And he went on his way, with one thought dominating his mind, even to the exclusion of the affair with Ponsonby.

He meant to justify his inclusion in the Remove eleven, and to play the game of his life on the morrow!

THE THIRD CHAPTER. The Match—and the Sequel.

"DELIGHTED to meet you again, dear boys!"

This cheery greeting emanated from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of St. Jim's, who had arrived with the visiting team.

"The pleasuah, dear boy," said Bob Cherry, with a faithful imitation of Gussy's accent, "is ours, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Chewwy——"

"Who's the new recruit, Wharton?" asked Tom Merry, indicating Dennis Carr.

Wharton introduced Dennis to the St. Jim's fellows. They liked the look of the slim, fair-haired junior, and they had no notion of the havoc he had caused since his arrival at Greyfriars.

"We will now adjourn to the slaughter," said Monty Lowther, of St. Jim's. "Needless to say, the slaughterers will be our little selves!"

"Rats!" said the Greyfriars juniors, in chorus.

"We are hopefully expecting to mopfully wipe up the esteemed ground with you!" said Hurree Singh.

"Yes, rather!"

On Little Side the rival elevens, which had met together in so many stirring and historic tussles, lined up.

The touchline was thronged with spectators.

Mark Linley was there—still pale and shaken as a result of his experiences at Highcliffe.

Coker & Co. of the Fifth were there, also, to criticise and give advice.

Dennis Carr experienced a glow of satisfaction as he walked to his place on the wing.

He had led a pretty dingy sort of existence of late, but in his heart he knew that football was a far finer game than nap, and that ability to spot the winner did not constitute true happiness.

So engrossed was Dennis in the match which was about to begin that he had quite forgotten the burden of debt which had haunted him for many nights and days. He was active and alert, and his eyes were sparkling.

For a partner on the wing he had Vernon-Smith, and he could not have had a more understanding collaborator.

Straight from the kick-off these two took the ball down the field between them. Their passing was perfect, their judgment faultless.

"Good old Smithy!" roared the crowd. "Drive her through!"

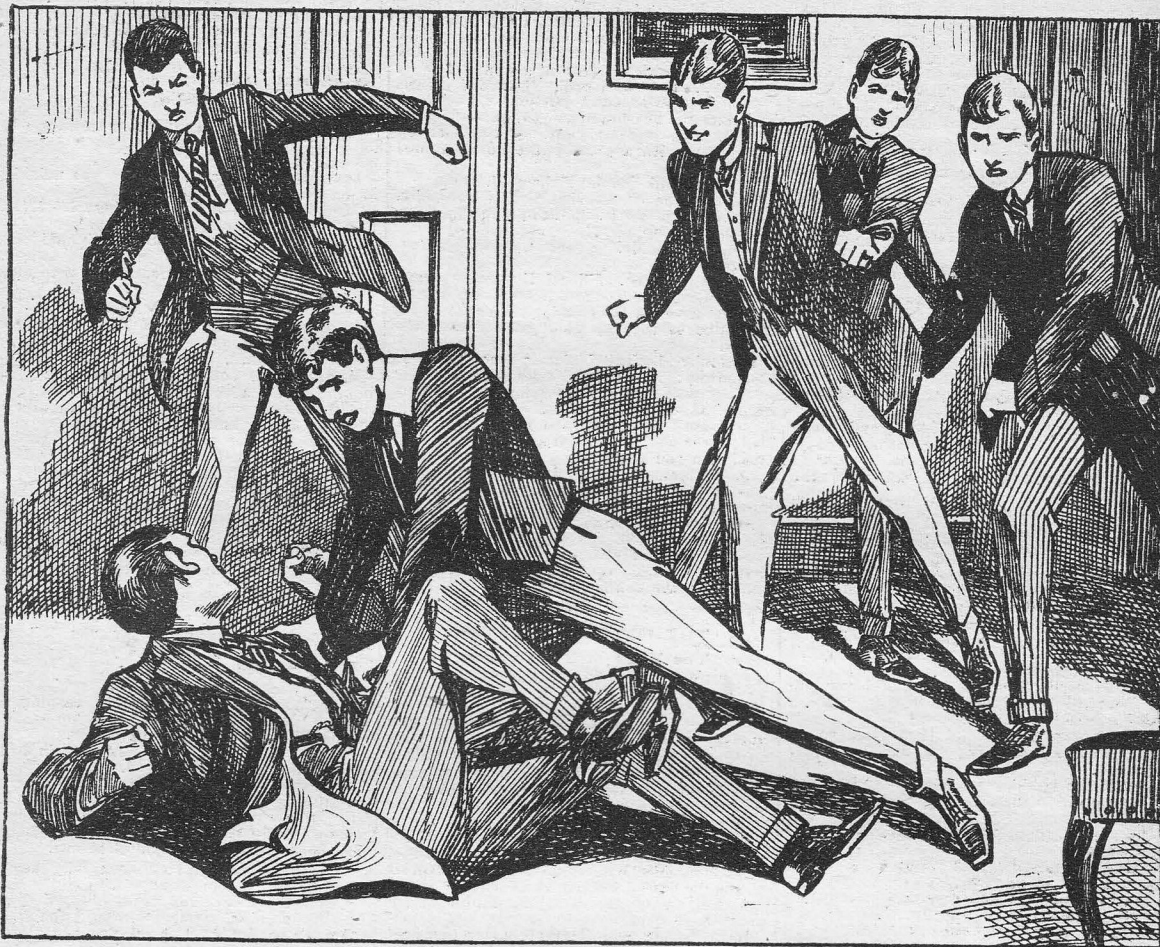
There were no shouts for Dennis Carr, although he was playing equally as well as the Bounder. Had Dennis made a slip there would soon have been shouts of a hostile nature.

Figgins, the long-legged junior who played at back for St. Jim's, came charging up. Dennis Carr calmly waited for him, and then the couple came into violent collision, though not before Dennis had touched the ball to Vernon-Smith, who scored with a fast drive.

"Goal!"

"First blood to the Remove!"

"Well played, Smithy!"



Mark Linley pinned Ponsonby to the floor with one hand, and with the other he groped feverishly for Pon's breast pocket. "All together!" sang out Gadsby. There was a sudden rush to seize Mark Linley. (See page 3.)

"And well played, Carr!" came a solitary voice—the voice of Mark Linley.

Tom Merry & Co. made wry faces. They had not bargained on being a goal to the bad in the first five minutes of the game.

Hurree Singh grinned across at Tom Merry.

"You will have to heavefully pull up your esteemed socks, my worthy friend!" he said.

"All right, you ace of spades!" growled Tom. "Just you wait!"

The ball was set in motion again, and this time it was the visitors' turn to attack.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, forging recklessly ahead, regardless of his monocle, came a very complete cropper by bumping into Johnny Bull, and shooting off at a tangent.

But Talbot rescued the ball, and he drove it into its appointed place—the yawning net.

Bulstrode, in goal, could not see the ball coming, much less save it.

"Goal!"

"We're level, deah boys!" panted Arthur Augustus, picking himself up.

"Go hon!" said Monty Lowther. "Detective D'Arcy makes a wonderful discovery—one goal to each side makes us quits! Where does Gussy get all these brilliant brain-waves from?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think he must have studied Euclid a lot in his younger days," remarked Dick Redfern.

The game was resumed, and the Saints, warning to their work, set up a fierce bombardment.

Bulstrode fairly blinked as the shots rained in upon him from all angles. He was a good goalkeeper, but his ability was being sorely taxed now.

He saved from Tom Merry, he saved from Talbot, and he saved twice in swift succession from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

And then Jack Blake seemed to spring up suddenly from nowhere, and head the ball into the net.

"Hurrah!"

"This is where we execute a jazz, to the strains of martial music!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Does your heart good, doesn't it? We're leading—and on an alien ground!"

Tom Merry did not lose his head.

"We've got to keep the pot boiling," he said grimly. "You know what these Greyfriars fellows are. If they were half a dozen goals to the bad they wouldn't give up."

There was resolution on the faces of Harry Wharton & Co. as they lined up again. They told themselves that this sorry state of affairs wouldn't do at all.

Dennis Carr and Vernon-Smith launched another attack on the St. Jim's goal.

But Fatty Wynn, the custodian, had his wits about him, and the attack did not materialise.

Vernon-Smith hit the crossbar, and Dennis Carr struck the upright, but the citadel remained intact.

Shortly afterwards the whistle sounded for half-time.

"We're winning!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully, as the Friars came off.

"How do you make that out, ass? We're a goal behind."

"True, O King! But we shall last better than the St. Jim's fellows. Most of them have got bellows to mend already. They've run themselves off their legs. Fatty Wynn, in particular, looks like a pricked balloon. We gave him plenty of work to do."

"And he's going to have plenty more in the second half," said Dennis Carr. "So much more, in fact, that he'll either ask for a rise or go on strike."

"You're playing well, Carr," said Wharton.

"Thanks!" said Dennis. "I shall treasure up that compliment. It's the first I've had from you since I came here."

"You haven't deserved any before," said Wharton rather shortly.

The whistle then sounded for the resumption.

As Bob Cherry had pointed out, the visiting team were certainly rather fagged, but they had not exhausted their reserve of energy.

D'Arcy sprinted along the touchline with the ball at his toes, and Talbot ran level with him. Talbot shouted "Pass!" Gussy passed. Talbot shot, and—what was more to the point—Talbot scored.

A groan—a deep and prolonged groan—sounded from the crowd on the touchline.

That third goal, so unlooked-for and unexpected, seemed to finish the Remove's chances.

Harry Wharton looked witheringly at Bob Cherry.

"If this is what the Saints can do when they're played out," he said, "I shouldn't care to meet them when they're at the top of their form!"

"Cheer up!" said Bob. "Don't look like a fellow who's swallowed his tooth-stoppings! We're only two goals behind."

"Only two! My hat!"

Bob Cherry seemed to have no sense of the tragic.

A spell of desultory play in midfield followed, and then the Carr-Smith partnership came into evidence once more.

These two, by means of a swift interchange of passes, took the ball down the field at an almost breathless rate.

When within shooting distance, Vernon-Smith drove the leather in.

Fatty Wynn's ready fist got in the way, and the ball rebounded into play again.

Then, before anyone could fully realise the fact, Dennis Carr pounced upon it, and sent it whizzing in with a force which nearly broke the net.

"Goal!"

The spectators groaned no longer. They cheered, and cheered heartily.

Was there yet a chance of saving the game? The Remove returned to the attack. In fact, it was all the Remove now. Tom Merry & Co. seemed to be right out of the picture. They had to fall back and relieve the pressure on their goal. As an attacking force they were non est.

Ten minutes from time Harry Wharton scored the third goal for the Friars with a powerful shot.

"Level!" chortled Bob Cherry. "What did I tell you? Now for the winning goal!"

But that winning goal seemed a long time coming.

The Remove forwards continued to attack, but they could not get past Fatty Wynn. The fat junior's fist or boot was in the way every time.

The spectators had resigned themselves to the prospect of a drawn game. The referee was consulting his watch. And there were only two minutes to go.

But in those two minutes great things happened.

Hurree Singh secured the ball, and raced away with it like a lightning flash.

The St. Jim's backs, realising the danger of the situation, rushed up to intercept the dusky junior.

For one breathless instant Hurree Singh paused. Then he swung the ball right across to Dennis Carr on the opposite wing.

Dennis was upon it like a terrier.

He was a perspiring, dishevelled figure; but the joy of battle had him by the throat, and he felt capable of anything. He slammed the ball towards the goal, and Fatty Wynn punched it out again. He slammed it in a second time, and on this occasion it crashed past the goalie into the net.

Just as Fatty Wynn, with a rueful countenance, was fishing it out, the whistle sounded, and the game was over.

The spectators fairly let themselves go. Cheer upon cheer rang out as the players came off.

Playing an uphill game, Greyfriars had won by four goals to three!

And the biggest factor in their victory was Dennis Carr—Dennis the outcast—Dennis the unwanted.

The spectators detested Dennis as a fellow. They almost worshipped him as a footballer.

Through his individuality the game had been snatched out of the fire. Victory had been wrested from the jaws of defeat.

And when Mark Linley exclaimed "Well played, Carr!" the cry was taken up on every side.

Dennis came off the field with a light step and a light heart.

This was the first time he had been really in the limelight—the first time his school-fellows had cheered him to the echo.

Detest him as they would, the Removites could not ignore his latest achievement.

Even the great Coker conceded a point, and admitted that Dennis Carr was almost, though not quite, as good a footballer as himself.

And this, coming from Coker, was praise indeed.

But in the very moment of Dennis Carr's triumph Fate prepared for him a knock-out blow.

Coming towards him, as he was in the act of leaving the field, was Cecil Ponsonby. And there was a far from pleasant expression on Ponsonby's leering face.

Harry Wharton & Co. had gone on in advance, escorting the visiting team into the building.

The crowd was dispersing, too; and Pon and his visitors were practically alone.

"Sorry to have to throw a damper on this touchin' demonstration," said Pon. "But I biked over to see you concernin' that little debt. You owe Gaddy and me ten quid, an' you were to square on Saturday. That's to-day."

There was a pause.

The colour had gone out of Dennis Carr's cheeks, and he stood at bay like a hunted animal.

"I've not got the money!" he muttered at last.

Ponsonby raised his eyebrows.

"Not?" he said. "Oh, I say, that's bad—for you!"

Dennis Carr glanced at the cold, hard face of his creditor.

"Can't you show a fellow a little mercy?" he asked.

Ponsonby gave a harsh laugh.

"The quality of mercy," he said, "is a thing I have no use for. I'm waitin' for that ten quid, which, with Gaddy's permission an' approval, I've come to collect."

Dennis made a gesture of impatience.

"I haven't got the money, I tell you!"

"In that case, I shall write to your pater, an' paint you in your true colours. I'll enclose him that little document—the I O U, you know. He'll be awfully bucked!"

Dennis experienced a passionate desire to hurl himself at Ponsonby—to hammer that leering face, and to close up those steely eyes. But with a great effort he restrained himself.

"Give me till Monday!" he said.

"What's the use of that?" said Ponsonby. "If you can't settle up now, you won't be able to settle up then."

"Oh, yes, I shall!"

"How?"

"Leave it to me. I'll get the money somehow, if I have to cadge it from the fellows I despise. Give me till Monday evening, and I'll guarantee to turn up at Highcliffe with the money."

Ponsonby hesitated for a moment. It seemed an age to the unhappy Dennis.

"Very well," he said at length. "Monday evenin' at six o'clock is the time-limit. An' if you don't show up with the money then, that letter will go to your pater by the next post! Do you get me?"

Dennis nodded dully. And Ponsonby, with a mock bow, collected his bicycle, and pushed it out into the roadway.

And Dennis Carr, as he watched the Highcliffe "nut" take his departure, fervently hoped—though it was rather a forlorn hope—that both bicycle and rider would come a cropper in the nearest duck-pond.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Voice of the Tempter!

"TWENTY pounds!" said Harry Wharton. "That's a nice little nest-egg, if you like!"

"I should say so!" said Bob Cherry. "You're in clover, Harry, and no mistake! You'll be able to go about buying house property now, besides investing some cash in the ninety-ninth War Loan which has been floated since Peace Day!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five stood in front of the letter-rack early on Monday morning.

A remittance had arrived for the captain of the Remove—not the usual sort of remittance, but a cheque from the Editor of the Companion Papers.

In his leisure time Harry Wharton had been writing contributions for the "Greyfriars Herald"—and this substantial cheque was his reward.

"It couldn't have come at a better time," said Harry. "Our select circle was broke to the wide. Even Inky, who's usually rolling in lucre, had come to the end of his resources."

"Blessings on the editor's devoted napper!" said Bob Cherry. "And may I be the next victim of his generosity!"

"That's an awfully nice-looking cheque, Harry!" said Johnny Bull. "Are you going to frame it?"

"You burbling chump! Where's the sense in sticking a cheque in a frame?"

"Cheques for twenty quid don't roll up every day," said Johnny. "Like Christmas, they come once a year—and not so often as that, in most cases. I strongly advise you to put the thing in a gilt frame, and hang it up in the study!"

"Yes, and go without tuck for a month!" said Wharton scathingly. "I don't think!"

"Going to start a big banking account?" asked Nugent.

Wharton shook his head.

"Where's Mauly?" he said. "I'll ask him if he can cash this cheque for me. He's usually overflowing with fivers and currency-notes."

"Mauly!"

Bob Cherry's dulcet voice boomed along the Hall.

Quite a number of juniors heard the shout, including Dennis Carr.

Dennis, moody and miserable, was standing a short distance away.

"Did somebody call, begad?" inquired Lord Mauleverer, in sleepy tones.

"Oh, there you are!" said Bob Cherry. "Step this way, Mauly, and produce your shekels!"

The schoolboy earl lounged up to the Famous Five.

"Will you cash a cheque for twenty pounds for me, Mauly?" inquired Wharton.

"Delighted, dear boy!"

Mauly groped for his wallet, but drew blank. He groped again—in another pocket this time—and once more drew blank. A puzzled expression came over his aristocratic countenance.

"Now, where on earth—" he began.

Bob Cherry gave a shout.

"You mean to say you've lost your wallet?"

"Mislaid it, dear boy."

"Where?"

"Goodness knows!"

"Think!" hooted Johnny Bull.

"Don't ask him to do that, Johnny," said Nugent. "He hasn't the necessary apparatus."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lord Mauleverer's noble brow was wrinkled in deep and earnest thought.

"I—I'm dashed if I know where I left the beastly thing!" he said at length.

"Why don't you Spelmanise?" said Bob Cherry. "Then things wouldn't happen. You'd better forward your think-box to Spelman House for alterations and repairs."

Harry Wharton began to look alarmed.

"You're a careless chump, Mauly!" he said. "I hope the wallet's safe."

"Perfectly safe, dear boy!" said Mauly. And then he turned and rushed away, as if seized with a sudden inspiration.

The juniors watched Mauly's rapidly-retreating figure in amazement. It was most unusual for the schoolboy earl to hustle.

Some fellows went through life at a gallop; Mauly went through it after the manner of a snail attending the funeral of a relative.

In less than three minutes Mauly was back again at the letter-rack. In his hand he flourished the wallet.

Wharton gave an exclamation of relief.

"You found it all serene, then?"

"Yaas, begad!"

"Where was it?" asked Bob Cherry.

"On my bed, dear boy."

"What! You mean to say you left unlimited quids lying about on your bed?"

Mauly nodded.

"If it wasn't for the fact that you're going to do Wharton a favour by cashing his cheque," said Bob, "we'd bump you—hard!"

The schoolboy earl grinned feebly.

"How will you have it, Wharton—in fivers or currency notes?" he asked.

"Currency notes every time!" said Harry.

Gallantly aided in his task by the Famous Five, Mauly counted out twenty notes of one pound. These he handed to Harry Wharton, who passed him the cheque in return.

The transaction having been duly accomplished the juniors dispersed.

Dennis Carr, with his hands plunged deeply into his pockets, strolled out into the Close.

Small wonder that he felt down in the dumps and at war with the world!

The toils were closing in upon him fast.

He had undertaken to hand Ponsonby the sum of ten pounds by six o'clock that evening. And his sole resources did not amount to ten pence!

How was he to get the money? Where was he to get it?

He had told Ponsonby that he would obtain it somehow, even if he had to cadge it from fellows he despised. But he knew that he could not bring himself to cadge. His pride stood in the way of that. And even if he sunk his pride, and went the rounds of the Remove in quest of money, it was extremely problematical whether he would succeed in raising ten pounds.

There were fellows in the Remove—several, in fact—who had more money than was good for them. There was Vernon-Smith, there was Mauly, to mention only two. But would they be prepared to part with some of their money to shield a scapegrace? Mauly might, if properly persuaded. But Vernon-Smith—never!

Dennis Carr shrank from approaching Mauly. The schoolboy earl was his study-mate, and had treated him with contemptuous disdain. Careless and easy-going though he was, Mauly would think twice before giving Dennis a helping hand.

And even if Dennis did succeed in borrowing the money, how was he going to repay it?

He had already mortgaged his supply of pocket-money for some time to come; and to save such a sum as ten pounds would be not only difficult, but impossible.

With his brain in a whirl the wretched junior tramped up and down in the Close.

He could see no way out of his terrible predicament.

Mark Linley had done his best to help him, but the Lancashire lad had failed. He had told Dennis not to despair, but the junior was very near to despair at that moment.

His thoughts began to run riot, and one thought haunted him more than all the rest.

Harry Wharton had in his possession the sum of twenty pounds!

The voice of the tempter whispered in Dennis Carr's ear:

"Why should Wharton have all that money? He had written a number of articles, true. But why should a mere schoolboy be paid for contributions to a schoolboys' paper?"

Dennis tried to disregard that voice, but it was persuasive—insistent.

"Take it, Carr, you fool! Take it, and get clear of your debt! Now's your chance! Wharton has probably locked the money in his desk. There will be no check on the notes. He hasn't taken the numbers of them. There's absolutely no risk of detection. Be sensible, and save yourself from ruin!"

With burning cheeks and a hammer in his brain Dennis Carr continued to pace to and fro.

A bell rang in the distance, and he came to himself with a start.

It was time for morning lessons!

Dennis hurried into the building and went along to the Form-room.

He was late by a few seconds; and Mr. Quelch, who was the soul of punctuality, and expected others to be likewise, frowned at him.

"You are late, Carr!"

"Yes, sir. I—I've had a fearful headache. I've been walking it off in the Close."

Mr. Quelch darted a keen glance at Dennis Carr's white, troubled face.

"Very well, Carr," he said. "You may go to your place."

Dennis sat down, resting his throbbing head between his hands.

All the time he was conscious that the tempter was at his elbow, prompting him, urging him to rifle Harry Wharton's desk in Study No. 1.

Never in his life had he stolen anything; but never in his life until now had there been any need to do so.

He was a gambler; he was in many respects an outcast; he was a hot-blooded and irrational being.

But he wasn't a thief!

He felt that if he laid a finger on Wharton's money his conscience would reproach him to the end of his days.

And then the tempter spoke to him again. Dennis could almost feel his icy breath upon his cheek.

"This is your last chance! Unless you make up your mind to collar that money to-day you will be doomed! Ponsonby will write to your father. The letter is already drafted out. At six o'clock to-night it will be dropped into the pillar-box, and your school career will come to a sudden full stop. All your shortcomings and follies will be dragged into the light of day. Your father will be furious. You will be branded as a ne'er-do-well. You will be removed from Greyfriars—fired out—finished!"

And then Dennis Carr "saw red."

His pluck failed him. He could not face such a terrible prospect.

He must wriggle out of his sorry plight somehow, even if it meant being a thief!

This was his last chance!

"I'll do it!" muttered Dennis aloud.

"Carr! You were talking!" rumbled Mr. Quelch.

"I—I— Only to myself, sir!" stammered Dennis.

"Talking to oneself is a very dangerous habit," said the Form-master. "You do not appear to be at all well this morning, Carr. You had better take a stroll in the fresh air."

"Thank you, sir!"

And Dennis Carr, followed by many glances—some scornful, some sympathetic—stumbled out of the Form-room.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

On the Stroke of Time.

WINTER sunshine flooded the Greyfriars Close.

A stillness, as of some brooding fate, hung over the school and its immediate surroundings.

Pale-faced and agitated, Dennis Carr paced up and down, scarcely knowing where he was or what he was doing.

This was by far the blackest day of his life. He felt that he was going mad.

And then, when he was in a condition of mental and physical exhaustion, and least able to offer any resistance, the tempter drove home his final thrust.

"Now—now! Do it now!"

Dennis Carr stopped short in his stride. This was his opportunity. If he allowed it to slip through his fingers, he might not get another.

Harry Wharton & Co. were in the Form-room. They would be there for another half-hour yet. And No. 1 Study was deserted.

For perhaps half a minute Dennis Carr stood irresolute.

Then he turned, and strode into the building.

His mind was fully made up.

He would borrow the sum of ten pounds from Harry Wharton's desk—"borrow" seemed a very comfortable way of putting it—and he would replace the amount when time and opportunity permitted.

It occurred to him, as he turned into the Remove passage, that Wharton's desk might be locked, in which case he would have to force it open.

He would be acting like a cracksmen! But, after all, from gambler to cracksmen was not a big step. It was, in fact, a natural process.

Dennis Carr pushed open the door of No. 1 Study, and entered.

The famous apartment was empty.

After a quick glance round the study, the junior strode to the door and locked it on the inside.

There was nobody about; at the same time, he could not afford to take the slightest risk.

Then, re-crossing the study, he gave an upward push at Harry Wharton's desk.

The twenty currency notes, white and clean and new, were within.

Dennis Carr's fingers closed over them.

It was perfectly simple to count out ten of them and transfer them to his own pocket, but Dennis Carr's nerve almost failed him. He stood bending over the desk, with the money clutched in his hand—incapable for the moment of further action.

"Go on! There's the money! Take it! Take it! It's yours!"

'I've words dinned in his brain like a horrid chorus.

And then he realised that he must not hesitate much longer.

With feverish fingers, Dennis counted out the notes.

He slipped ten back into the envelope, which he replaced in the desk; and the other ten were tucked into his pocket.

The deed was done! And the voice of the tempter seemed to be shouting, "Bravo!" But the voice of conscience said something far less cheering.

Dennis closed down the lid of the desk, and went out again into the winter sunshine.

The fresh air revived him. He began to think more clearly, and to be more sanguine of the future.

Not a soul had seen him take the money. Not a soul would have the slightest suspicion of him when the theft was discovered. So Dennis hoped, anyway.

There were shouts in the distance, growing rapidly nearer.

The Removites had been dismissed from morning lessons.

A moment later they poured into the Close, revelling in their freedom.

Bob Cherry carried a football under his arm, and a rough-and-tumble game was soon in progress.

Mark Linley stepped across to Dennis Carr.

"Feeling better?" he asked.

"Heaps better, thanks!"

"I can quite understand the weight you've got on your mind," said the Lancashire lad. "You're worrying about the money you see Ponsonby. If only I could have recovered that IOU—"

"Never mind," said Dennis. "I'll get the money somehow."

"But how?"

"Oh, I—I'll raise it," said Dennis vaguely. Mark Linley looked gravely at his school-fellow.

"I hope you'll be careful," he said.

Dennis flushed.

"What do you mean?"

"I know exactly how a fellow feels when he's driven to the wall, like you are. I've been through the same sort of thing myself. When a fellow gets desperate, and all other means of raising money fail, he thinks of—thrift."

"I hope you're not suggesting that I'm a thief, Linley?" said Dennis, his colour heightening.

"Not at all," said Mark. "I simply wanted to warn you to fight down the temptation—if, and when, it comes."

Dennis Carr was silent.

What would Mark Linley say if he knew that the theft had already been committed, and that ten pounds—the property of another—reposed in Dennis' pocket at that moment? Surely it would mean a swift and sudden ending to their friendship?

"When temptations of that sort come along," said Mark Linley, "they fairly sweep you off your feet unless you're on your guard against them. I know what I'm talking about. Nearly all my life has been a continual battle with poverty, and I've more than once been tempted to take money from someone who wouldn't feel the loss of it."

"And you've not given way?"

"No, thank heaven! It's up to every fellow to go through life with a straight bat. There are some things which come right outside the code of decency—and stealing is one of them. Honour before all, you know!"

The words seemed to stab Dennis Carr like a dagger.

Throughout all his hardships and struggles, Mark Linley had preserved his honour inviolate. And he—Dennis Carr—had sacrificed his. He was a thief—not fit to associate with any decent fellows.

He turned away. A sudden nausea had come over him, and he could not bear to prolong the conversation.

Dinner came and went. Afternoon lessons did likewise—although it was a much slower and more tedious process.

Throughout the afternoon Dennis Carr sat like a fellow in a dream.

As in the morning, he could not concentrate his mind upon lessons. And Mr. Quelch was again lenient with him.

Dennis was hoping that the moment the Remove were dismissed he would be able to cycle over to Highcliffe, and square his debt with Ponsonby.

He had to wait, however, until the coast was clear. He was restless and uneasy. To his imaginative mind, it seemed that every fellow he saw was a detective, engaged in shadowing his movements.

At half-past five, however, he could not afford to hesitate any longer. Ponsonby was not prepared to wait a moment after six o'clock.

Dennis mounted his machine and rode out of the gates.

The shrill, squeaky voice of Billy Bunter followed him, demanding to know where he was going. Dennis Carr's only reply was to scorch harder than ever.

He dismounted at the gates of Highcliffe, and pushed his machine through the quadrangle.

Ponsonby met him on the School House steps.

"I've brought the money," muttered Dennis.

Ponsonbated.

"My hat! You managed to raise it, then, after all?"

"Yes," said Dennis.

Ponsonby nodded. A queer smile played about his features.

"I won't press you for details," he said.

"Come along to the study. It's not safe to be seen jawin' here."

Dennis Carr accompanied Ponsonby to the latter's study, where he handed over the ten pounds.

"Much obliged, I'm sure!" drawled Ponsonby. "Good evenin'!"

"One moment!" said Dennis. "There are just two things I want done before I go."

"Well?"

"Firstly, I want your receipt for the ten quid, and, secondly, I want to see that IOU thrown on the fire."

Ponsonby grinned.

"You're not such a greenhorn as I thought," he said.

The receipt was written out, and the IOU destroyed. And then Dennis Carr, somewhat lighter of heart, yet with shadowy apprehensions looming up in his mind, cycled back to Greyfriars.

He tried to comfort himself with the reflection that he had successfully got out of his fix.

But had he?

The theft remained to be discovered—and what then?

Would the finger of accusation point towards Dennis Carr? Would he be found out, and promptly expelled from Greyfriars?

The solutions to these questions another story must reveal.



HANSOM'S MOTOR-BIKE!

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

BY OWEN CONQUEST.



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Causing a Sensation.

"My hat!"
"Great Scott!"
These exclamations escaped Jimmy Silver and Edward Arthur Lovell as the Fistical Four turned out of the gates at Rookwood. Raby and Newcome were engaged in deep conversation, and they looked up inquiringly at Jimmy Silver and Lovell.

"My hat!"
This time the exclamation came in unison from the lips of Raby and Newcome, as they followed the gaze of their leader.

Coming along the Coombe road about two hundred yards away from the school gates they descried a motor-bike swerving and wobbling dangerously from one side of the road to the other, but what surprised them most was the figure of Edward Hansom, the lofty Fifth-Former, astride the machine.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
The Fistical Four roared with laughter as they beheld the "do or die" expression on the face of Edward Hansom. It certainly appeared to them that the machine was running away out of control, and the same thought evidently entered the mind of Hansom as he tugged frantically at several levers in a vain endeavour to slacken the speed of the motor-bike.

Pop-pop-pop! Whizz—bang!
The engine misfired as Hansom lifted up the exhaust, then seemed to gather speed. The Fifth-Former had unconsciously opened wide his gas.

"The silly ass will be doing some damage soon," said Jimmy Silver, with a frown.

"Look out, Hansom!"
Arthur Edward Lovell uttered the warning cry as a market-cart pulled out of a side turning, right in the path of the oncoming motor-bike.

But the warning came too late.
The sleepy-headed driver was unaware of his danger, and the old horse plugged away steadily in the centre of the road.

Honk, honk!
Edward Hansom pressed away on the horn in desperation, and in so doing he had to relinquish one hand from the handle-bars. It was as much as Hansom could do to drive the machine with two hands, and the machine, seeming to feel the lack of control, swerved so suddenly that Edward Hansom was nearly thrown off.

"Oh, crikey! He'll barge, right into the blessed thing!"
Crash!

The front wheel of the motor-bike crashed into the off wheel of the market-cart. There was a rending and tearing of splintered wood, and Edward Hansom, describing a perfect somersault, shot over the handle-bars and headed straight for a ditch—a ditch covered with green slime of long standing.

Splash!
"Ouch!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. rushed up just in time to see the head of the luckless Fifth-Former appear above the surface of the ditch. He spluttered and gurgled as some of the foul-smelling liquid found its way into his gaping mouth.

"Grrrough, gggggggg!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four roared with laughter as they beheld the ludicrous spectacle he presented.

Edward Hansom, covered in a thick, green

slime, clambered out of the ditch, squelching mud and water at every step.

The driver of the market-cart, with a wrathful face, made straight for him, brandishing his fists.

Hansom backed away.
"You young raskill!" roared the driver.
"I'll flay you! Look at my cart!"

Hansom and Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at the cart.

The old horse appeared to be dozing contentedly between the shafts, no doubt pleased at this sudden interruption in his labours, and enjoying a rest. Scattered all over the road were potatoes and cabbages, whilst the off wheel reposed in a broken heap two yards away. The motor-bike lay on its side, oozing a steady stream of petrol, seemingly little the worse for its contact with the market-cart.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
As the juniors gazed at the wreckage the funny side of the affair appealed to them, and they burst out into roars of merriment. Not so Edward Hansom—he was looking very miserable.

"Good old Hansom!" murmured Jimmy Silver, with difficulty. "You ought to be in a lunatic asylum!"

"Lunatic asylum, did you say!" roared the angry driver. "Which as 'ow 'e ought to be locked up!"

All this time Hansom had been standing as one in a dream, but the tones in which the infuriated driver gave voice to his utterances would have aroused anyone.

"I'm s-s-sorry!" mumbled Hansom. "The rotten thing ran away with me!"

"Sorry, are yer!" broke in the driver threateningly. "You'll be sorrier afore I've finished with ye, you scoundrel! Who's going to pay for this? That's what I'd like to know!" And he accompanied his words with a dramatic flourish of the hand in the direction of the broken market-cart.

"You'll have to stump up, Hansom," said Lovell.

With a frown on his face which was discernible through the green slime, Hansom pulled out his wallet.

"What compensation do you want for the damage?" he growled ungraciously.

The driver scratched his head reflectively, keeping one eye on the contents of the wallet.

"Now you're talkin', young gent," he remarked, changing his tone to amiability, no doubt caused by the sight of the currency notes. "I reckon this wheel 'll cost me a quid, as prices go nowadays, and, what's more, I shall lose a day's custom, which I'll put as low as another quid."

"Go it!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Then there's my 'orse; he must have suffered from the shock. Look at him now, he can hardly stand up!"

Which was true. The old horse had propped himself against one of the shafts, and the "shock" he had suffered had had the effect of sending him to sleep.

Hansom's face was a study as he listened to the driver, and keeping count with the quids.

"That will be another quid for the 'orse, as I shall have to put him in the meadow for a week."

"I should put him in the museum, if I were you!" exclaimed Lovell, with a grin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is that all?" inquired Hansom sarcastically.

"Well, I reckon as 'ow I'm letting you down very lightly, young gent," replied the

carter, unmoved. "I'm not taking into account the severe shock I have suffered myself."

"Here's your three quid, and be hanged to you!" growled Hansom. And he handed over three rustling notes, which were eagerly accepted by the driver.

Then he turned to the motor-bike, and Jimmy Silver & Co. assisted him in putting it to rights, at the same time keeping a safe distance from the obnoxious odour which proceeded from the Fifth-Former's clothes.

"Hard cheese, Hansom!" said Raby. "Shall we help you push it back to the school?"

"I don't want any assistance from you fags," said Hansom, with a return to his lofty manner.

The lofty manner was entirely lost in its effect on the Fistical Four. They replied emphatically if not politely:

"Rats!"
"Go and eat coke!"

Edward Hansom, with a warlike expression on his face, advanced towards the Fourth-Formers, but Jimmy Silver & Co. backed away with their fingers pinching their nostrils. The smell that emanated from Hansom was too much for them.

"I should advise you to go and scrub your neck!"

"Eh?"
"You can do with a bath!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

For the moment Edward Hansom had forgotten his unfortunate dip into the ditch and its results, but it returned to him in a flash, and he looked uneasy. His dignity would suffer, he knew, if any Rookwooders chanced to see him in that condition.

There was a big cake of mud under one of his eyes, and his once beautifully parted hair ended with a point covered with thick, green weeds. His clothes were ruined, and his collar hung limply about his neck, plastered with mud.

"Better get a move on," suggested Arthur Edward Lovell, "or you may be taken for an advertisement of Carter's home-grown seeds!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hansom pulled out his watch. In a quarter of an hour's time the fellows would be coming off the playing-fields, and would be sure to encounter him. There was no time to be lost. With a snort, he turned and mounted the refractory motor-bike, and with a whizz and a bang left the juniors in a cloud of dust.

Still swerving from one side of the road to the other, the juniors lost sight of him as he swept through the gates.

"The chump will do some more damage before he's finished!" remarked Newcome.

"He'll break his giddy neck!"
"Jolly good job, too!"

The Fistical Four made their way back to the gates at a leisurely pace, and there floated to them from the distance the sound of a triumphant honk, konk!

"He's at it again," said Lovell. "I wonder where on earth he got the beastly thing from?"

"From Coombe, I expect," replied Jimmy Silver. "I heard Muffin saying something about it this morning."

"Well, if he goes on at this rate there won't be much left of the jigger or Hansom, either!" said Raby thoughtfully.

"Hear, hear!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER. More Trouble.

HONK, honk!
Edward Hansom swept in at the gates of Rookwood at a dangerous pace, missing Timmy, the old porter's pet cat, by a hair's-breadth. The motor-cycle seemed to enter the spirit of the thing as it leaped forward at increased speed.

A few yards ahead in the drive, Mr. Bootles, with his back to the oncoming motor-bike, was talking earnestly with old Mack, the porter, close by the fountain.

Honk, honk!
Hansom pressed desperately upon the horn. He had been so busy keeping an eye on the different levers that it was not until he was three yards away from Mr. Bootles and the porter that he became aware of their existence.

"Hi, sir!" roared Hansom helplessly. Then he was upon them.
Mr. Bootles leaped back with a startled ejaculation, and the next moment reposed in a most undignified heap in the fountain. The water splashed around him merrily, drenching him entirely.

"B-bless my soul— Oh dear!" gasped Mr. Bootles.

Old Mack, the porter, had also leapt back, and in so doing had stumbled over the edge of the lawn. He descended with a thump that shook every bone in his body.

"Oh, lor'! 'Elp, 'elp!"
Pop-pop-pop!

The sound of the motor-bike came back to old Mack, and he shook his fist in the direction indicated by a cloud of dust. Hansom was still going full out.

Jimmy Silver & Co., entering the gates, stopped dead, as they caught sight of their Form-master.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "I'll bet you Hansom's responsible for this!"

"Shouldn't like to be in his shoes," remarked Lovell, as the four juniors set off at a run to the assistance of Mr. Bootles.

"No jolly fear!"

"This is scandalous—outrageous!" roared Mr. Bootles, as the Fistical Four helped him out of the fountain. "I have been the victim of some mad person's wild escapade on a motor-cycle. Bless my soul! I have never experienced the like in the whole of my career!"

Old Mack, the porter, struggled to his feet, caressing himself tenderly.

"Which as 'ow I've had the shock of my life, I have. The dangerous young rip ought to be locked up—that's what I says!"

Mr. Bootles' face was furious. His gown was ruined and his mortar-board was swimming round the fountain like a toy-boat.

"Hadh't you better change, sir, before you catch cold?" ventured Jimmy Silver, fishing the mortar-board out of the fountain.

Mr. Bootles did not hear that suggestion, or, if he did, he made no acknowledgement. He was staring along the drive with an incredulous expression on his face.

Edward Hansom was the cause of that expression.

He came towards the Fourth Form master, still squelching with water, with a very uneasy look on his face.

Mr. Bootles gasped.

"What does this mean, Hansom—I presume it's Hansom?" he demanded.

Edward Hansom came to a halt.

"I—I—I've come to apologise, sir!"

"What?"

"I—it was my fault, sir, and I'm very s-sorry. You see, sir, the blessed—ahem—I mean the bike ran away with me!" mumbled Hansom uncomfotably.

"What?" roared Mr. Bootles again. "Then you are the mad person who came tearing up the drive on the motor-cycle?"

"Y-yes, sir!"

"Then I must say, Hansom, that I'm surprised at your behaviour. I have suffered a severe injury."

"I—I'm s-s-sorry, sir!" repeated Hansom meekly.

"And, pray," resumed the master, "how do you happen to be in that—that filthy condition?"

"I—I fell into a ditch, sir—ahem!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on with suppressed chuckles. They were enjoying the usual lofty Fifth-Former's discomfiture.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Bootles drily. "You seem to have had a chapter of accidents. I shall report this matter to your Form-master; in the meantime I should advise you to remove the filth that seems to have attached itself to you."

"Yes, sir."

"You may go, Hansom!"
And Edward Hansom went, with a heavy heart. Knocking over a master was a severe offence, and the Fifth-Former felt uneasy in his mind as to the ultimate result of the unfortunate incident.

Mr. Bootles watched him disappear, then turned to the juniors.

"Thank you, my boys, for your assistance!" he said.

"That's all right, sir!" replied Jimmy Silver.

It was on the tip of his tongue to say "Pleasure, sir!" but he corrected himself with an effort. Mr. Bootles might look upon that answer in a different light.

Gathering up his gown, which left a watery trail behind it, the master of the Fourth walked over to the Classical House.

Old Mack, the porter, went off growling and grumbling to the lodge at the gates, no doubt to console himself with a little "cold tea."

"Old Hansom looks like getting it where the chicken got the chopper!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Shouldn't like to be in his shoes, anyway," said Raby.

"No fear!"

"Hallo, here's Lumsden and Talboys!" said the leader of the Fistical Four.

Lumsden and Talboys, chums of Hansom, came across the quad.

"You fags seen anythin' of Hansom?" inquired Talboys loftily. Talboys always addressed juniors in that manner.

"Just a little bit!" replied Jimmy Silver sweetly.

"What do you mean?"

"We saw him smash into a cart on a giddy motor-bike!"

"What!"

"And we saw him swimming in a ditch, about two seconds later!" chimed in Lovell.

"Eh?"

"Then he appears to have knocked Bootles into the fountain!" went on Jimmy Silver, grinning.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated the great Talboys.

Lumsden's face was a study. He had cautioned the hot-headed Hansom to be careful when that worthy had mentioned to him his intention of hiring a motor-bike from Coombe. But he did not expect the subsequent occurrences to be so serious.

"Where is he now?" he asked anxiously, with a change in his lofty manner.

"Having a bath, I should say!"

"He certainly wanted one when I saw him last!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "I always said that the Fifth Form behaved like fags and never washed their little necks."

"Cheeky young rotter!" remarked Talboys.

"Rats!"

"Eh?"

"Oh, run away and play!" said Jimmy Silver.

Talboys and Lumsden looked warlike, but they did not want a scrap with the heroes of the Fourth just then; besides, the odds were two to one. They stopped, and with a sniff of contempt that was entirely lost upon the exuberant Fistical Four, they sauntered over to the Fifth-Form quarters in search of Edward Hansom.

They found him in the bath-room, scrubbing away industriously, with a face as red as the proverbial lobster. He made no sign that he was aware of their existence. He was too busy.

"What happened?" asked Talboys, at length.

Scrub, scrub!

The great Hansom ignored the question.

Talboys and Lumsden waited patiently, quite accustomed to their leader's peculiar ways.

When at length Hansom desisted he had removed practically the whole of the foul-smelling slime he had collected. The process, however, had not improved his temper, which was fiery at the best of times. He changed into a fresh suit of clothes and glared at his chums.

"Hard cheese, old man," said Talboys sympathetically.

"Um!"

"How did it happen?" ventured Lumsden.

Edward Hansom snorted.

"The beastly thing ran away with me, and I upset old Bootles. The silly idiot fell into the fountain."

"That means trouble!"

Snort!

"It was old Bootles' fault. He should have hopped out of the way when I sounded the horn!"

"Where's the bike now?"

"In the blessed bike-shed!" growled Hansom.

"Master Hansom!"

It was the voice of the pageboy at Rookwood.

"Well, what is it?" asked the Fifth-Former ungraciously.

"Which as 'ow Mr. Greely wants to see you, sir."

Edward Hansom growled out a response that was not intelligible, and, followed by Talboys and Lumsden, went over to Mr. Greely's study.

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

And Hansom walked into the Fifth Form master's study.

"Ah, Hansom!" began Mr. Greely. "I have just received a serious complaint from Mr. Bootles, to the effect that through your recklessness driving on a motor-cycle in the precincts of the school he had the misfortune to—ahem!—sustain a wetting in the fountain. What have you to say?"

Hansom fidgeted uneasily.

"I—it was an accident, sir!" he blurted out awkwardly. "The motor-bike got a trifling out of control coming in at the gates, and I did not see Mr. Bootles until it was too late."

"I sounded my horn," resumed Hansom, "and—and—well, I didn't think Mr. Bootles would—er—er—"

He stopped, at a loss for words.

"I understand, Hansom," said Mr. Greely, with a faint twinkle in his eyes. "I believe it was an accident, as you say, my boy. Mr. Bootles evidently thinks the same."

"Thank you, sir!"

"And he requested me not to punish you, which I think is very lenient of him."

Hansom breathed an inward sigh of relief, and his opinion of Mr. Bootles went up by leaps and bounds.

"I have sent for you to give you a word of advice. This kind of thing must not happen again, or a serious accident may be the result. You must be more careful, Hansom, in the future. I know you have a tendency for being very rash, but it must be overcome!"

Hansom coloured to the roots of his hair as he heard these words, but managed to blurt out:

"Yes, sir!"

"You understand me perfectly, Hansom?"

"Yes, sir!"

"You may go, Hansom."

Hansom left the study, feeling much easier in his mind than when he had entered it. Talboys and Lumsden met him, and their faces cleared as they noted his expression.

"How did it go?"

"Oh, old Bootles is a sport! He asked Greely not to punish me!"

"That was jolly decent of Bootles," said Talboys.

"What did Greely say?" inquired Lumsden.

"Oh, he jawed me for a bit about being careful!"

"Lucky for you it wasn't old Manders you bowled over!" said Talboys, with a grin.

"Hear, hear!"

Mr. Manders the "catty" master of the Sixth, would have taken an entirely different aspect of the case they knew.

The three Fifth-Formers sauntered over to the bike-shed, and Hansom related to them his experiences with the market-cart, and the compensation that followed.

Any average person would have had enough of motor-cycling for one day after such experiences as those that befel Hansom. Not so with the Fifth-Former. Hansom was not an ordinary person—at least, many of the juniors said so.

He pushed the motor-bike out of the shed, and, after turning on the petrol, began to run by the side with the exhaust lifted. Then he released the exhaust, and the machine shot forward like a bolt from a gun, with the great Hansom being dragged alongside. More by luck than anything else he brought it to a standstill, with the engine running.

Lumsden and Talboys dashed up.

"Be careful, old man!" cautioned Lumsden.

"That's all right! I've got the hang of the thing now!" said Hansom.

"Looked as if it were getting the hang of you about a couple of seconds ago!" grinned Talboys.

Hansom did not seem to hear that remark.

"I'm just going down to Coombe for a run. Would either of you care to come on the back?"

"No, thanks!" ejaculated Talboys and

Lumsden.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 36.

Lumsden together. They did not relish the prospect of a likely smash.

"See you later, then," said Hansom.

"We hope so!" murmured Talboys, with a chuckle.

Hansom pushed down the gear, and, with a wave of the hand that nearly upset him, he was soon lost to view in a cloud of dust.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. And Still More Trouble.

"I've got it!" Jimmy Silver made that remark in the end study as the Fistical Four were at tea, and he accompanied it with a bang that set the tea-things rocking.

"Got what, fathead?" "I tell you I've got an idea!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver excitedly. "You know Tubby Muffin has told us that Hansom has just come back from Coombe, and that he scared the wits out half the people there on his blessed motor-bike!"

"Well, what about it?" demanded Raby. "That's his bizny."

"That's just where you make a mistake!"

"What about putting an advertisement in to-day's 'Coombe Gazette'?" Jimmy Silver exclaimed triumphantly.

"An advertisement?" "Yes."

"Oh, he's potty!" said Lovell.

"Blessed if I can see what you are driving at," remarked Raby, with a frown.

"What do you want to put an advertisement in the paper for?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell.

"That's just it!" grinned the leader of the Fistical Four. "I've been thinking, and the idea has struck me—"

"I should say it was the sun!" chimed in Raby sarcastically, tapping his forehead.

"That," went on Jimmy Silver quite unperturbed, "if we put an advertisement in the paper, asking all people who have suffered at the hands of Hansom through his blessed stink-bike, to apply at his study after four o'clock to-day, where they will be compensated—"

"I get you!" hooted Lovell, bursting into a chuckle as he saw light, so to speak.

"They will turn up in their hundreds with all sorts of imaginary injuries."

"Exactly!" conceded Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ripping!"

Jimmy Silver beamed.

"I thought you chumps would see it in time," he said.

Arthur Edward Lovell looked at his watch.

"We shall have to look sharp if we are going to get that advt. in to-day's issue. We'd better cut off now."

"That's the ticket!"

The Fistical Four grabbed their caps, and five minutes later were well on the road to the printer's in Coombe.

The old printer looked up when Jimmy Silver walked over to the counter.

"What can I do for you, young sir?" he asked genially.

"I want to insert an advertisement in to-day's issue of the 'Coombe Gazette,'" said the leader of the Fistical Four.

"You're only just in time, sir. Five minutes later, and I am afraid it would have been impossible!" replied the printer.

"Good!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. bent over the counter and put their heads to work compiling the advertisement. It ran:

"Any persons who have sustained injury through the result of a runaway motor-cycle apply to Edward Hansom, Fifth-Form passage, Rookwood School, after four o'clock, where such persons will receive compensation in full."

The Fistical Four surveyed their handiwork with chuckles.

"That will fetch them!" mused Raby.

"Hear, hear!"

They strolled leisurely towards the gates, and waited for four o'clock.

Jimmy Silver & Co. strolled leisurely towards the gates, and waited for four o'clock.

It wanted five minutes to the hour, and they knew that the "Coombe Gazette" was already on sale.

"Do you think it will work?" asked Raby as the clock now pointed to five minutes past four, and, as yet, there showed no sign of any "injured person" appearing.

"Look!"

The exclamation came from Lovell, who was gazing down the road. The juniors

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followed his gaze. About three hundred yards down the road they saw two people coming in the direction of the school.

"Bet you they're coming here!" chirruped Jimmy Silver.

And the leader of the Fistical Four was right.

"Scuse me, young gent, but can you tell me where Mr. 'Ansom is to be found?" asked a beery-looking specimen of the bookie variety.

"What's all this 'ere?"

It was old Mack, the porter, who broke in thus.

"I've come to see Mr. 'Ansom," said the first victim, whose name was Jelks.

"Oh, 'ave yer," replied Mack, with an attempt at sarcasm. "And who are you?"

Mr. Jelks looked him up and down.

"I've called in answer to his advertisement!"

"Better show him up, Mack," advised Jimmy Silver.

Mack scratched his head perplexedly, and, followed by Mr. Jelks and the Fistical Four, went over to the Fifth Form quarters.

"Come in!" roared Edward Hansom, as there came a tap at the door of his study.

Mack entered the study.

"Gentleman to see you, Master Hansom!" he announced.

"To see me?"

"Yes, Master Hansom."

Hansom, Talboys, and Lumsden exchanged glances.

"Show him in, Mack!" commanded Hansom.

Mr. Jelks walked into the study with a beaming smile.

"Good afternoon, Mister 'Ansom!" he began, cheerfully.

"Eh—what!"

"I've come to claim compensation for a slight hinjury I received the other day, when you knocked me over on your motor-bike!"

said Jelks affably.

Hansom's face was a study.

"Injury—compensation!" he spluttered, as if in a dream.

"That's it," went on Mr. Jelks. "I had to lay up in 'ospital for a day or two. The surgeon, 'e advised me to put my case in the 'ands of the police, but I says to myself, says I, 'the young gent will see me right,' and so I've called!"

Mr. Jelks beamed.

"Is he mad?" gasped Hansom, staring helplessly at his chums, who were likewise looking, staring incredulously.

"My time is precious," said Mr. Jelks, looking at an imaginary wrist-watch, "so I'll trouble you to fork hout the compensation!"

"What?"

"If you don't, I shall call in the police!" added Mr. Jelks, with an attempt at bluff.

The bluff succeeded.

Edward Hansom could not call to mind knocking over Mr. Jelks, but he had a great respect for the police.

Talboys, Lumsden, and Hansom conversed in low whispers.

"Better give him a quid, and clear him out!" suggested Talboys.

Hansom and Lumsden nodded.

"Here you are, my man," said Hansom, faking out his wallet and extracting a pound currency note. "I don't remember knocking you down, but I'm sorry if I did."

Jelks's face lit up with greed, as he pocketed the note.

"That's quite all right, sir. This money will just pay my doctor's fee!" he lied glibly. "Good afternoon, sir!"

Mr. Jelks gave Jimmy Silver & Co. a cheery nod as he lumbered down the passage and out into the quad.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four doubled themselves up with laughter. Their wheeze was working famously.

Hansom, Talboys, and Lumsden wiped their brows, and resumed tea.

"Glad that's over!" remarked Hansom.

Tap-tap!

"Come in!"

The door opened, and once more Mack appeared.

"Another gentleman to see you, sir!"

Before Hansom could recover from his surprise, an old man on crutches hobbled into the study.

The Fifth Formers gasped.

"Good afternoon, young sirs. Which is Mister Hansom, please?" commenced the stranger.

"I'm Hansom. What do you want?" asked Jimmy Silver, faintly.

"Which I've called in answer to your advertisement, sir."

"Advertisement!"

"Yes, sir."

And the new-comer thrust the "Coombe Gazette" into the hands of the bewildered Fifth Former.

"Great Scott!"

The exclamation came simultaneously from the three Fifth Formers, as they perused the advertisement.

"Who put this in?" roared Hansom, beginning to see light.

The new-comer watched the excited seniors curiously.

"I demand compensation!" he began.

"The other day I was selling matches, when you came along on a motor-bike. I had the narrowest escape of my life. In leaping back, I broke one of my crutches, and it's cost me fifteen shillings to have it repaired!"

"Get out!" roared Hansom, excitedly.

"You'll get no compensation from me!"

"Then you were having a joke by putting in that advertisement?" said the man on crutches, grimly.

"I tell you—"

"People don't play jokes on me twice!" bellowed the cripple, getting excited.

"You've wasted my time, and it's a long walk for a man like me to this 'ere school!"

"I never put any blessed advertisement in the paper!" exclaimed Hansom dazedly.

"It's in black and white, and it says your name. You're Hansom, aren't you—and this is Rookwood School, ain't it? Take that—and that!"

The cripple accompanied his words with two vicious lunges with one of his crutches.

One caught Hansom in the region of the belt, and the other came with a resounding whack across his shoulders.

"Yow-ow! Chuckit!"

Lumsden and Talboys leapt to their feet, and Hansom, recovering somewhat, assisted them.

The old cripple was shoved out into the passage, struggling all the while.

Talboys and Lumsden received thumps in plentiful from the whirling crutches, but at last they got him down to the gates.

Jimmy Silver & Co. followed at a safe distance, doubled up with merriment.

"That's him!"

"What about our compensation?"

Hansom stared about him wildly. Talboys and Lumsden had had the sense to keep the right side of the gates. Not so Hansom.

He was fairly in the middle of the excited crowd.

"I tell you I never put the advert. in the paper!" roared Edward Hansom.

"Scoundrel!"

"Mop him up!"

A forest of fists were brandished, and Hansom, gazing about him desperately, began to run.

Hansom swerved and bolted down the road, followed by the crowd, in chase.

Hansom ran as he had never run before. All elder track records were broken in that wild sprint.

Half an hour later, Edward Hansom, looking very much the worse for wear, appeared in his study. He sank into the arm-chair, gasping for breath.

He was covered in mud. To escape the crowd, he had swam a ditch. It had stopped the crowd, but Hansom had collected quite a good proportion of the mud that had accumulated in it.

"Oh dear!" he gasped. "I thought I was nearly killed!"

"You would have been if that crowd had caught you!" said Talboys reflectively.

"I have had enough of motor-bikes!" spluttered Hansom.

"Good!"

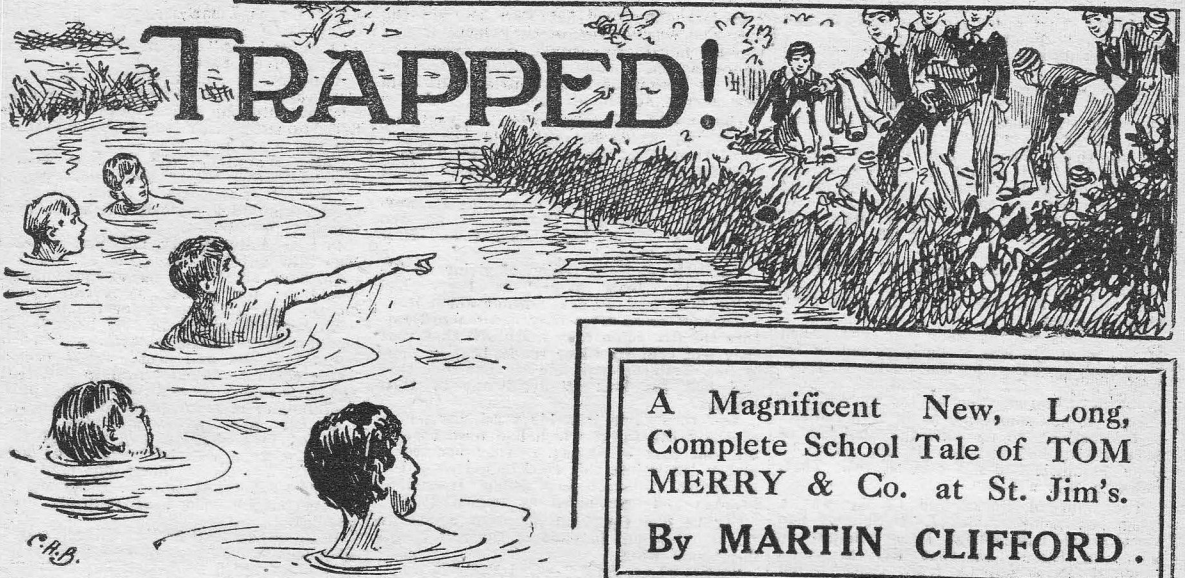
"You want a wash, old chap!" grinned Lumsden.

A bath would have suited the case better, and five minutes later Edward Hansom was busily engaged scrubbing some of the mud away for the second time that day.

He never found out who was responsible for the advertisement, but the next day he pushed the motor-bike—the cause of all the trouble—back to its owner. Jimmy Silver & Co. chortled over their success in the end study, and Raby suggested a toast to Uncle James of Rookwood, to which Newcome and Lovell conceded a hearty, "Hear, hear!"

THE END.

(Another Splendid Story next week.)



A Magnificent New, Long,
Complete School Tale of TOM
MERRY & Co. at St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Racke's Wheeze.

"THEY'LL all get into a dashed fine row, by gad!"

It was Aubrey Racke, of the Shell and the School House at St. Jim's, who spoke thus to his particular pal, George Gerald Crooke.

Crooke grinned. It would have been easy for anyone who knew Crooke to deduce from that grin, without knowing who "they" were, that "they" were certainly not friends of the said George Gerald Crooke.

For Crooke was a spiteful young dog, though not more spiteful than his pal Racke. "Some of them are Railton's particular pets; but it's not a bit likely that he's going to stand this sort of thing, even from them."

"Not so sure, Aubrey," answered Crooke. "If they catch those bouncers and bring them back, they'll be excused for their dashed night out."

Kerruish, of the Fourth Form, after getting himself into trouble that was really not half as bad as he imagined it, had run away. His chums, Julian and Kerr, of the New House, had gone after him, less with the idea of bringing him back than with that of shepherding him till he was willing to come back.

Then Figgins and Fatty Wynn had gone after their chum Kerr.

And then practically all the Shell and Fourth, with a contingent of the fag tribe, and a number of Fifth and Sixth Formers, had gone after the five fugitives, with intent—for their own good—to recapture them. The Fifth and Sixth Formers had returned at night. So had about half the Shell and Fourth, including Racke, Crooke, and their special circle.

But the rest of the juniors had not returned. Only Owen, of the New House, had arrived, crooked, to say that the others meant to camp out somewhere and renew the chase first thing in the morning.

It really was rather a serious matter, and Mr. Railton could hardly take it lightly.

For the defiers of authority included Tom Merry, Manners major, Lowther, Talbot, Gore, Grundy, Gunn, Wilkins, Noble, Dane, Glyn, and Thompson, of the Shell; Blake, D'Arcy major, Herries, Digby, Levison major, Cardew, Clive, Roylance, Durrance, Lumley-Lumley, Hammond, Reilly, Redfern, Lawrence, Pratt, French, Clarke, and Koumi Rao, of the Fourth; D'Arcy minor, Manners minor, Levison minor, Hobbs, Jameson, Curly Gibson, and Joe Frayne, of the Third—thirty-seven of them in all, which, with the five they were chasing, made a total of forty-two St. Jim's boys roaming at large over East Sussex.

And the Head was away, owing to the serious illness of a near relative. Not that that made much difference to Victor Railton, master of the School House, and acting as Head in the absence of Dr. Holmes, for Mr. Railton never shirked or feared re-

sponsibility. But Mr. Ratcliff, his colleague of the New House, and Mr. Selby, the Third Form master, added to his worries by their interference, as futile as it was needless; and Mr. Linton, of the shell, and Mr. Lathom, of the Fourth, though they refrained from troubling him, were not helpful, not knowing how to be.

There were fellows in the Shell and Fourth who regretted having tamely returned the night before, but Racke and Crooke were not among these.

Racke and Crooke liked their little comforts, and had no taste for the semi-hardships that appeal to the real boy. They did not desire to sleep upon straw in a barn, or eat food cooked over a camp fire.

"Are they going to catch them, though?" asked Racke.

"Can't very well be off it, by gad!" returned Crooke.

"I don't agree with you. There's the longest-headed chap in the Shell or Fourth among those five, and if they're not nabbed in the first twenty-four hours, I don't see how they dashed well ever will be!"

"Doesn't matter much to us, does it, dear boy?" said Crooke, lighting a cigarette. It was past nine o'clock, but there were no classes that morning.

Hours ago Mr. Railton had set out in a motor-car, with Kildare and Darrel, prefects, to round up the straying flock. Messrs. Linton and Lathom had decided to cut classes, and Monteith, head prefect of the New House, and Baker, of the School House Sixth, had been allowed to organise a second search party, each member of which was put upon his honour to return by night-fall.

Racke, Crooke, Scrope, Clampe, Chowle, Mellish, and Trimble were among those who had not joined the expedition to-day. They had been glad enough to go the day before, but then they had spent their time in a way much more to their taste than chasing runaways, and they had avoided classes. But now they could avoid classes without even the exertion of riding a few miles, and Crooke, for one, had no particular notion of leaving the school precincts.

But it appeared that Racke had.

"I don't feel quite like that," Racke replied. "I'd give somethin' to take down Kerr's number."

"Didn't you mean Kerr when you talked about the longest-headed chap, then?" inquired Crooke, letting out a wreath of smoke.

"Of course, I did! That's not to say that I'm sweet on the foxy beast, is it?"

"It would be a rummy thing if you were, Aubrey—dashed rummy! Not so long ago that he bowled us out completely by makin' up as the printer-cad, is it?"

"An' we haven't got even with him yet, by gad!" snarled Racke.

"I saw the printer-cad yesterday," said Crooke. "You remember I dropped a bit behind when we were comin' home. He slunk up to me in the village, an' tried to bite my ear for half a quid."

"Down on his luck?" asked Racke, without any appearance of sympathetic interest.

"So he said. Looked it, too."

"What's he doin' round this way again? Thought it had got rather too hot to hold him."

If the neighbourhood had grown too hot to hold the individual of whom Crooke spoke so pleasantly as "the printer-cad," Racke and Crooke had helped to make it so by their employment of him in dirty work of their own.

"Tried to establish a small business in the village, as far as I could make out. No go—old Typer's got all there is to get."

"Did our nice little friend get the half-quid, Gerry?"

"What do you think?" returned Crooke, with a hard laugh.

"It might have been good policy to let him have it, y'know."

"That ain't precisely the way I spend my oof, Aubrey."

"Never mind! Perhaps it's as well he didn't get it. He'll still be stony, an' I've a use for him. He might funk it if he had any chink, but he won't if there's no bread an' cheese about for him."

"Beer," corrected Crooke, "or gin. Much more his line than grub. What have you got up your sleeve, old top?"

"Somethin's just come into my mind. I shall have to think it out a bit first, but— Let's see, who are those five, Gerry?"

"There's Kerr."

"We've a down on him."

"An' Figgins."

"As bad as the Scotch beast! I've had to put up with a heap from that long-legged rotter!"

"An' Wynn."

"Well, he goes with the other two. Nothin' to love him for, anyway."

"Julian!"

"I hate Julian! What's a hog-nosed Jew, that he should look down on me? I've as much oof as he has, an' my pater will cut up better than his uncles."

"Shouldn't call Julian a hog-nosed Jew. There aren't many better-lookin' chaps at St. Jim's, matter of fact. But I bar him as much as you do. He ain't even barely civil to me."

"An', of course, there's Kerruish," said Racke. "I can't stand any of that crowd. Yaas, it would be quite a score to get them caught."

"But how do you think you're goin' to do that, dash it all? An' where does the little printer-cad come in?"

"Look here, Ge! !"

Racke took a sheet of paper and wrote rapidly.

The eyes of Crooke opened widely, and his nose and upper lip wrinkled in a sneering grin.

"By gad, I see!" he said. "But why don't you say 'alive or dead'?"

"Idiot! That would give the whole dashed show away! Think it will do?"

"Where do you mean to post it?"

"Oh, it's not a case of 'it.' I shall have a score or more of the things printed. And we'll get them posted pretty far out, ahead of the flectin' five. Needn't fag ourselves bikin'—there are trains."

"Oh, that's better," said Crooke, plainly relieved. "I had enough exercise yesterday to last me a long time. Let's go along now an' see if we can find Snipe-nose!"

"I take it that your tired feelin' will allow you to ride as far as the village?" sneered Racke.

"It's easier than walkin'," answered Crooke simply.

No one but Skimpole was in the quad when they went out.

The genius of the Shell had not joined in the hunt. It was really quite out of his line, and, moreover, he was unable to spare time for it. His latest—and, of course, greatest—invention was on the anvil, so to speak. It had something to do with radium, and something to do with the abolition of hard work; but just how it was all to be done Skimpole had not decided yet. That, however, was a detail.

The sight of Racke and Crooke was a much less important detail. If Skimmy had been asked half-an-hour later whether he had seen those two that day, he would probably have had to reply that he did not remember. Yet their visit to the bike-shed did impress itself upon some part of his brain not actually at work at the moment, as such things will, and a memory which might matter had been formed.

The cads of the Shell paid no heed to Skimmy. They ran their bikes to the gates, mounted, and rode off for Rylcombe.

"Snipe-nose," was easily found. He was lounging in front of the Green Man, with Messrs. Joliffe and Banks, the landlord and his bookie pal, and cherishing a hope that presently he might be asked inside to have a drink.

He scowled at Crooke on first sight. The refusal of yesterday had hurt his feelings. But when Racke drew him aside and explained what was wanted of him, he ceased to scowl.

He did not look quite comfortable, however.

"Sir," he said, "it is a grave offence you are asking me to commit. The posters cannot bear my name and address as printer, according to law, for I apprehend that you have no magisterial authority for the notice you propose."

"By gad, no!" replied Racke. "But what's it matter? No one can ever find out who printed the things."

Snipe-nose shook his head.

"Of that we cannot be sure," he said, "but I am on the rocks, and I must take the risk. The price must rule accordingly, however. I must charge you five guineas, Mr. Racke."

"Oh, by gad!" ejaculated Racke. "But in the event he paid the sum demanded."

Racke would always pay high to gratify his lust for revenge.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Hunter on the Track!

THE five fugitives had very narrowly escaped Mr. Railton and the two prefects with him. It was only the sudden breakdown of the car which carried the trio that had given them any chance of escape, indeed.

That had been a very narrow squeak, and it left all five somewhat more serious than they had been.

All saw that the game they were playing meant heavy trouble in the long run.

But it meant heavy trouble anyway. All saw that also.

And their pride was roused. They felt it a point of honour not to be caught.

Let St. Jim's pour out its scores to raise the dust of the summer roads, to peer into barns and thickets, to hunt them down!

They would show St. Jim's that they were not so easily caught!

As far as most of the pursuers were concerned, the chase was an absolutely friendly one, of course. They knew that. Their feelings towards most of the pursuers were also absolutely friendly.

But all that made no difference.

Moreover, it was coming to make less and

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ever less difference that Kerruish was the only real original runaway. Perhaps it was curious, but Figgins & Co., who were more or less at the bottom of Kerruish's trouble, were in almost as full sympathy with him now as was Julian, his best chum.

They would go back, or would give themselves up, when Kerruish said the word. Until then, they would hold on with him.

As for Kerruish, he had forgotten all about making for the Isle of Man and his home.

He had no notion now of making for anywhere in particular. It was not he who chose what road they should take. Kerr usually did that.

But if he had any notion of giving up the game—"the fools' game," as Figgy had called it at first—he said nothing about it.

An hour or so after they had escaped capture the five came to a halt. All that time they had kept to minor roads, bearing more or less north-easterly; and all that time they had had the luck to avoid any of their hunters.

Now they came to a big wood, a remnant of the great forest which had once covered all that part of Sussex. They penetrated pretty deeply into this wood by narrow paths, and came at length to a hollow fringed by bracken and surrounded by mighty trees.

"Looks like the kind of place where we might safely put in most of the rest of the day," said Kerr.

"What about grub?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"And what about drinks?" demanded Figgins. "My blessed throat's like a lime-kiln."

"I think I want a bathe more than anything else," Julian said. "I feel filthy!"

"There's something wrong with my bike—at least, Figgy's bike," announced Kerruish.

Koumi Rao, Jam of Bundelpore, the member of the Fourth Form and the New House, had lent the fugitive his bike, thereby, in some sort, incurring the guilt of treachery towards the rest of the hunters. But those of them who had learned of it had taken a lenient view of what he had done, well knowing how staunch was his friendship for Figgins.

Before that there had been only four bikes among the five—a heavy handicap for them. Now Figgins had the Indian's bike, and Kerruish had Figgy's.

Kerr looked round him.

"This is a jolly nice place," he said, "but I admit that I don't see any sign of a shop where one could get grub and drink, or a bike repairer's, or even a place to bathe. I also admit that I feel hungry, thirsty, and dirty. But my bike's in going order."

It was quite a nice place, as Kerr said. The sun, shining down through the foliage, made patterns on the floor of the hollow; a light breeze brought grateful coolness now and then; and, if they had only been provisioned, a stay of a few hours there would have been uncommonly pleasant.

But they were not provisioned, and that made all the difference.

"We shall have to go somewhere for grub," said Fatty.

"And for pop, though plain water would be a treat to me now," added Figgins.

"And to get my bike mended," Kerruish said. "It must have been damaged when that lout of a bobby pulled me off it last night. It's gone hard ever since; but for the last half-hour or so it's hardly gone at all."

Julian said nothing.

"On the whole," said Kerr coolly, "it doesn't seem a fat lot of use to have found this place, does it?"

"I've wondered all along where you were leading us to," growled Figgins.

"It wasn't much like you not to say anything if you'd a grumble in your mind," returned Kerr sharply.

Julian hastened to pour oil on what were becoming trouble waters.

"Not so sure about the place being no use," he said. "Have you any notion where the nearest village is, Kerr? Some of us—or all of us for that matter—could go to it, and then come back here."

Kerr thought hard for a moment.

"He's lost his bearings at last," said Figgy, not too kindly.

"No, I haven't!" Kerr replied. "But I had to think for a moment and take a squint at the sun, to tell where we were. It isn't all plane-sailing once you get well into a wood. But I can guarantee to lead you to a village within an hour and a half. Of course, I can't be dead certain that we shall find all we want there."

"Let's go, anyway," said Kerruish.

"As far as I can see, we've got to go," Figgy said.

"I know I can't live much longer without grub," agreed Fatty.

Again Julian said nothing. But his eyes met Kerr's with a smile in them, and Kerr felt that Dick Julian was quite a good fellow to have along when things were not going too well.

"Let's see what can be done with the jigger before we start," Kerr said.

"Better let me see. I understand the thing," growled Figgy. But it was a better-tempered growl now.

It took fully twenty minutes to get the bike into anything like running order, and even then there was no certainty that it would run for as long as it had taken to fix up. But they hoped for the best.

No one was willing to stay behind. That would mean waiting something like three hours for food and drink—unless drinkable water could be found. And to find that is not so easy in Sussex as on the hills of Scotland, or in many parts of England.

So off they went, all five. Kerruish pedalled very gingerly, and was apt to get behind. Then Julian, or Kerr, or Figgins would drop back to him. But never Fatty Wynn! Fatty felt that he really must get in the neighbourhood of grub as soon as possible.

He was the first in the village, and they found him already established at the window of a place which held itself out as supplying the needs of the inner man, when they rode in.

There was a cycle repairer's almost opposite, and to this the crooked machine was at once taken.

Fatty had ordered a dozen bottles of aerated waters. They were very mixed, and they seemed to exhaust the resources of the shop in that direction, which did not promise well for more substantial necessities.

And the performance was not ahead of the promise. Stale pastry and staler bread, with margarine, and some ham of a distinctly elevated character, were all that could be offered. The five were too hungry to despise even such poor provender; but the meal they made was by no means a satisfying one.

It should have been, though, if one might judge by the bill presented for it. But Dick Julian, who was not without some of the business instincts of his race, queried successfully some of the items, and got it knocked down a trifle.

While Julian was at this, and Kerruish and Figgins were standing by to give him their moral support, Kerr suddenly pulled Fatty away from the window.

Seven cyclists were passing, pushing their bikes—Wally D'Arcy, Frank Levison, Reggie Manners, Hobbs, Curly Gibson, Jameson, and Joe Frayne—the only Third-Formers among the pursuers. And the seven would not have been there, save by open defiance of authority, if Wally had not wilfully misinterpreted a sarcastic speech of Mr. Selby's into a permission that it was very far from the master's mind to grant.

The seven were not in view. But their appeared also to be hungry and thirsty. They were looking around them as they paced up the sleepy street; and Kerr, peering through a hole in the curtain which screened him and Fatty, saw Wally's nose elevated, as answer to an obvious suggestion from Hobbs that the teashop might do.

"Well, anyway, those kids can't capture us and take us back," said Fatty comfortably.

"Of course they can't! But we don't know how near some of the rest may be," answered Kerr.

A hurried council was held. Then Kerr stole out to reconnoitre.

The seven were not in view. But their bikes were stood against the wall near a grocer's shop.

Now, the fugitives had intended to visit that shop, which seemed to be the only one of its kind in the village, before returning to the shelter of the wood.

Such a course was quite out of the question now. The only thing for it was to do their best to get away unperceived.

Kerr ran across to the cycle repairer's. Figgy's bike had been put into going order, and the Scots junior paid for the repairs, and ran the machine across.

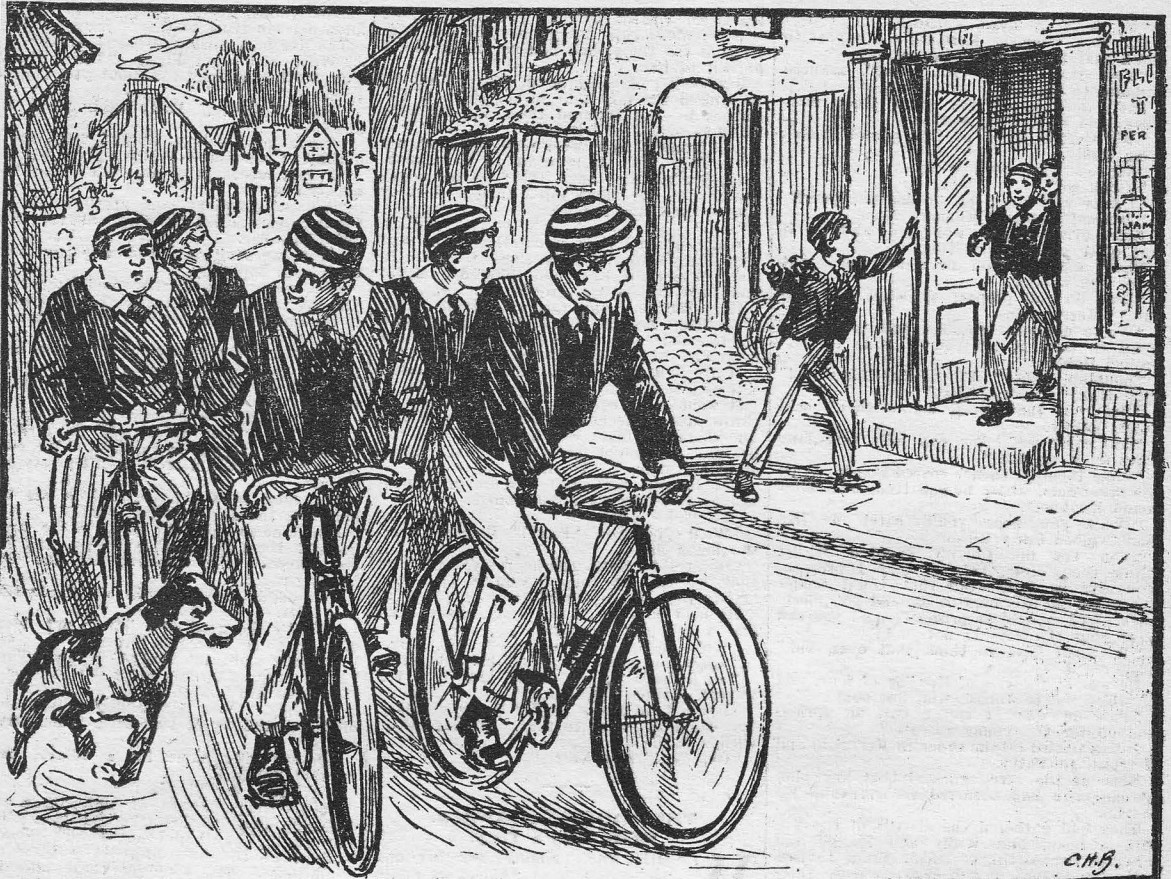
The other bikes were hurriedly fetched out from the teashop yard.

The seven had not come out of the grocer's yet.

The five mounted, and rode off.

From the garden of a cottage a dog rushed out, and grabbed at the trousers of Figgy.

Missing in his grab, he gave vent to a long,



C.H.F.

"Wally—Franky—all of you! Here they are!" yelled Jameson, shrilly: The five runaways put on speed, raising a cloud of dust as they went; leaving the snapping mongrel behind. (See below.)

mournful, ear-splitting howl, and then scampered after them, plainly meaning to try again.

Perhaps it was that howl which brought Jameson out of the grocer's. Anyway, out he popped, and they heard him yell: "Wally—Franky—all of you! There they are!"

The five put on speed. They left the dog howling far behind. They raised a cloud of dust as they rode.

"I can't stand this pace—long!" jerked out Fatty.

"Got to!" snapped Kerr.

**THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Not Exactly a Capture!**

"My hat! I'm done to the wide!" As he spoke, Fatty Wynn threw himself down upon the turf at the side of the road.

The five had travelled at least half a dozen miles at top-speed. All of them were wet through with perspiration and pretty well bucked; but Fatty really was at his limit.

Kerruish was not far off his; but the other three could have done another mile or two without slackening.

There seemed no need of that, however. They had reached the top of a hill, from which a wide view of the country around was possible.

Six or seven roads were visible; but on none of them was there any sign of the hunters.

But down in the valley ahead of them gleamed a silvery stream, and the eyes of four of the five fastened themselves with longing upon that twisting ribbon of water.

"Let's get down there and have a bathe," said Kerr.

"Right-ho! Stir yourself, Fatty!" Figgins said.

"I—I can't! I must have a little time to rest! My inside feels all churned up!" answered the Welsh junior.

"We can't rest here. 'Tisn't safe!" said Julian,

"Besides, it's all downhill to the water, and a free-wheel down will help to cool you," Kerruish said.

Fatty groaned, and got up slowly. "Hurry up! We're pretty conspicuous up here!" said Kerr sharply.

Truer words he had never spoken. Their figures stood out against the skyline, and far down below the keen eyes of seven pursuers, hidden from them by a double belt of trees, saw them!

They mounted again, and swished down the hill. At its foot was an old stone bridge, and near the bridge a gate leading into the meadows skirting the stream.

Through the gate they passed, and mounted again, to ride over the bumpy turf. But it soon became too rough for riding to be practicable, and they jumped off.

"Here's a jolly nice pool!" said Fatty.

Kerr glanced back. "Also plainly visible from the road and bridge. And, apart from the fact that we haven't any bathing clobber, we can't afford to risk all that!"

They pushed on again. Every now and then Kerr would look back; but they had gone quite a long way before he decided that it would be safe to undress and plunge in.

And it would have been safe enough had no one been upon their track.

But by this time Wally & Co. had reached the bridge. As they came down the hill they had caught a glimpse of two of the five making their way along the bank of the stream.

"They'll bathe, for a dead cert!" said Wally. "And, once they're in, we can easily stalk them. Bag their clobber—and there you are!"

It sounded quite a bright idea, and not even Reggie Manners cavilled at it.

The seven stood on the bridge, their eyes just above its parapet, saw the five halt and begin to disrobe, and fairly chortled in their joy.

"Crumbs! Won't it be a score when we catch them!" said Reggie exultantly.

"We haven't caught them yet," replied

Frank Levison. "I wish my major and Clive and Cardew were here. I'm not so jolly sure that seven of us are enough for those five!"

"Funk!" sneered Reggie. "If my giddy major were here, I'd jolly soon order him off, you bet!"

"And if my major blew in just now I'd up-end him into the water and leave him there!" said Wally darkly. "This is our bizney, and no one else's, and don't you forget it, young Levison!"

"Right-ho!" Frank replied. "I'm no more a funk than Reggie is; but I don't quite see now how we're going to handle those five!"

"Collar their clobber. They'll have to make terms then!" Wally said.

By now the five were in the water, splashing about gleefully, glad exceedingly to get rid of the feeling of perspiration-choked pores and griminess.

They forgot all about possible pursuers; and the configuration of the banks favoured Wally & Co.

For a hundred yards or so above the deep pool in which the five swam—the bridge was down-stream—the banks were high, and by keeping under the northern one the Third-Formers were able to creep up unseen.

Then a rush and a pounce, and they had collared the clothes of the five.

"Oh, look out!" cried Kerruish, first to perceive what had happened.

Fatty glanced round, swallowed a gallon or so of water in his dismay, and disappeared under the surface, to come up again, blowing like a grampus.

Figgins, close to the other bank, drew himself out of the water, and wondered next moment why he had done so. Most certainly he could not escape without his clothes. The weather might warrant doing without them; but there were other things besides the weather to be considered.

Kerr, Julian, and Kerruish swam straight for the enemy.

"Don't you come out!" yelled Wally. "If you do we'll buzz off with your clobber!" added Reggie.

"My hat!" groaned Kerruish.

But Kerr grinned. Kerr did not appear to think that the contest was lost yet.

"You stay where you are!" shouted Jameson to Figgins.

Fatty had joined the other three now. They held on to the bank.

"What's the name of this game?" asked Kerr coolly.

"Copped!" answered Wally.

"Think so?"

"I jolly well know it! So do you, Kerr!"

"Rather!" chortled Manners minor.

But Levison minor wondered whether it was quite such a sure thing.

There was a gleam in Kerr's eyes that made him wonder.

"How do you propose to effect the capture?" Kerr asked.

"We've got your clobber, and you're not going to have it till you've made terms!" replied Hobbs.

"Shut up, Nobby! I'm bossing this show!" said Wally autocratically.

"But you can't keep our clothes," said Julian mildly.

"Oh, can't we? We can jolly well fling them in, if we like!"

"Fling them in, then!" roared Figgins, from the other side, where he squatted, with arms round his knees.

"Don't you hope you'll catch us like that?" gibed Curly Gibson.

"You dry up, Curly!" snapped Wally.

"Now then, Kerr, this is what I propose. You give us your word that you'll render yourselves up prisoners to us, and go quietly back to the school as prisoners, and you can have your clobber. If not—not!"

"We shall have to think that over, kid," answered Kerr.

He was at the end of the line of four, and he whispered to Julian, who was next:

"Pass on—when I spring out, all spring, and go for the young rascals!"

Julian passed on the order to Kerruish, and Kerruish to Fatty.

None of the seven guessed that any plan of campaign had occurred to Kerr and his band.

They had gathered the clothes of the five into a heap, and Wally and Reggie and Jameson were sitting on them. Frank Levison and Joe Frayne lay backs upwards, their chins supported by their hands, and their elbows on the ground. Gibson, almost tired out, lay on his back. Hobbs alone was standing.

"Well, done your little bit of thinking yet, Kerr?" asked Wally.

"Yes!" replied Kerr.

And with that word he gave a sudden spring, and pulled himself up the bank.

Julian and Kerruish were not a second behind him. Fatty fell back, and went under again. But Figgins had plunged in, and was swimming across at top speed.

"Pick up the clobber, and bolt!" yelled Wally.

Taken by surprise, he was yet not without resource.

He and Jameson were well away with an armful of miscellaneous garments each before the enemy were upon them. Hobbs grabbed and bolted. But Reggie caught his foot in a tussock, and fell headlong; and the other three were still in the act of getting up when the foe arrived.

"Come on, Julian! Keep those young bouncers busy till the other chaps turn up, Kerruish!" yelled Kerr.

Kerr and Julian went hotfoot after the flying three. Kerruish hurled himself upon Frank and Reggie, and collared each round the neck. Two of them were as many as he could hope to manage.

But as Joe Frayne snatched at more of the clothes, the hand of Fatty Wynn seized him by the neck, and the voice of Fatty Wynn gasped:

"Got you!"

Gibson made a bolt with a pair of trousers—Figg's trousers.

Figy knew them for his—they were longer than those of anyone else among the five—and as he pulled himself up the bank he gave a roar of wrath. Then he went in hot chase of Curly, behind whom the bags streamed like a banner in the wind.

It had not occurred at first to any of the youngsters what an advantage their bare condition would give to their seniors in the matter of pace.

Except Figgins, none of the three in pursuit was among the best sprinters of the Fourth, though Kerr and Julian had some pace and plenty of stamina. But Kerr gained rapidly on Jameson, who was quite one of the Third's best runners, and Julian seemed to

travel three yards for every two Hobbs made.

Wally alone kept his ground. He was midmost of the three, and had no one in direct pursuit of him.

But Wally, glancing down, groaned as he recognised the fact that in the share of the clothes he had collared there was no such thing as a pair of trousers!

And trousers alone were really of much use to bargain with, if it came to bargaining.

With five pairs of bags, the fugitives might contrive to get along for a time a shirt or vest or even jacket short.

"Ah!"

Wally uttered that ejaculation as he saw that Figgy had run down Curly Gibson. In another moment Kerr had collared Jameson and bore him to the ground.

Hobbs dodged, and twice eluded the clutch of Julian. But the third time was fatal to Hobbs, and he went down, and Julian sat upon him to keep him safe.

Wally looked at the scene from the other side of a hedge now.

It would have been easy enough for him to throw across the garments he had, and bolt for where the bikes had been left near the bridge. He might even have taken those garments along as trophies.

But he had too great a sense of responsibility as leader for either course.

"Pax!" he cried.

"We'll give you 'Pax'!" shouted Kerr, shaking a fist.

"Oh, it's no good getting ratty! I'll own that we haven't copped you, if that will satisfy you. Do you want these rags?"

He held up a shirt, two vests, some socks, and a couple of jackets.

"We're going to have them!" said Kerr.

"When you make it 'Pax'—not before!"

"We'll hurt all the other kids into the water!" howled Figgins.

"I can stand that!" replied Wally, grinning.

"So can they, come to that. We can all do with a bathe!"

"Oh, pax!" said Kerr.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Fallen Into a Trap.

WITHIN three minutes the five and the seven were discoursing quite amiably.

"How did you get on our track?" asked Kerr.

Wally sniffed.

"Dead easy that!" he returned. "We know the marks your tyres make. Couldn't see 'em all the way, of course; but they're all different, and where we picked up the five together we hadn't any doubt."

"Good hunting!" said Kerr approvingly.

"Then we spotted you at the top of the hill," Frank said. "You chaps should be more careful."

"Can't expect everybody to be as careful as you are, Frank!" gibed Reggie.

"Young Levison wished his brother and Cardew and Clive had been with us when we were stalking you, Kerr."

"Well, they couldn't have made a much poorer job of it than you kids did!" growled Figgins.

"If they had been here we should have been fairly in the cart," said Kerr.

Frank beamed at him.

"Can't see it," Kerruish said.

"Can't you? Well, look at it this way. These kids are seven; we are five. Allow for our being a bit heavier and stronger, and they aren't quite a match for us. But with those three thrown in, they'd have been overweight."

"It strikes me," remarked Julian, "that we're not going to be caught very easily. Honest Injun, you kids, you won't give away to anyone what I'm going to say?"

"Honest Injun, we won't," spoke Wally for the seven, and the rest murmured assent.

"Well, then, as far as we can make out, you fellows have broken up into small squads. I suppose the Terrible Three have Talbot with them?"

"Yes," replied Frank.

"Well, it would take those four all their time to hold us if they came up with us, and as for taking us kangaroo our wills—just ask yourselves! Kangaroo & Co. are pretty hefty, but they couldn't do it. Your brother and Clive and Cardew couldn't, Frank, my pigeon. See?"

"Nobody seems to have thought of that," said Reggie Manners.

"They want Kerr with them. He'd have thought of it," said Fatty.

"I didn't, though. It was Julian."

"And we've sworn not to tell!" said Jameson disconsolately.

"Oh, you're all on your honour, and we know we can trust to that!" Kerr replied.

The five had finished dressing by now.

"We're off!" said Figgy. "Ta-ta, kidlets! You won't brag a fat lot about your capture, I reckon."

"Have a bathe," Fatty said. "You look grubby."

"It's a good notion, though we're not so grubby as you were," Wally replied.

"I say, which way are you going?" inquired Reggie.

"Ask no questions, and you'll be told no terminological inexactitudes," answered Kerr, pulling his ear.

"Well, we shall see which way you start," Curly said hopefully.

The seven were hastily undressing now. The five started along the bank, but not back to the bridge. The meadows seemed safer for the time being.

"Look out for yourselves when we catch you up again!" yelled Wally after them.

"Shall we go back to that place in the wood?" asked Kerruish.

"It's a longish way from here," Kerr said doubtfully. "And we've got to strike a village first to get in supplies. We might make for it again after that—it's pretty good cover."

But they were not destined to see that hollow in the ancient forest again.

A mile or so along the banks of the stream brought them to another bridge, and here they forsook the meadows for the road, heading north.

"We ought not to be far off Blayds Hill," said Kerr.

"What's the good of a hill to us? Plenty of them about," Figgins returned.

"A jolly sight too many!" groaned Fatty.

"Don't take us up any more hills, Kerr."

"Blayds Hill happens to be a village," Kerr said coolly. "You fellows don't know much of the geography of this little island, seems to me."

"Dashed silly name for a village, too!" growled Kerruish.

They made for Blayds Hill.

At the very moment at which they were discussing that place, Racke and Crooke were leaving it. They had brought with them to it some of the bills printed by their ally "Snipe-nose," and three of those bills had been posted in conspicuous positions in the village. The schemers were now on their way to distribute more.

They had not done the work of posting themselves. It had not been at all a difficult thing to find someone else to do it for a consideration. And, of course, it was much safer that way. Racke and Crooke had no wish to appear too prominently in the affair.

Now, a gentleman well known to all St. Jim's stood before the wall of an unoccupied house contemplating one of these bills.

St. Jim's knew Mr. Erasmus Zechariah Pepper better than St. Jim's liked him.

Mr. Pepper was a miser, and something of a cheat. He had a mean, cunning face, and a mean, cunning mind. Short of putting himself in peril of the law, there were not many things he would not do for money.

His small eyes gleamed under their bushy eyebrows as he stood before that bill, and read over and over again:

"£50 REWARD!

"Whereas five juniors of St. James' School have run away from the scholastic establishment, and are now believed to be somewhere in this neighbourhood,

THE ABOVE-MENTIONED REWARD

is offered to anyone who will detain them and communicate with the authorities at St. James' School.

"No reward will be given for mere news of their whereabouts at any time. It is essential that they should be detained, and anyone so dealing with them

WILL BE INDEMNIFIED

for any trouble raised under any Act of Parliament affecting the liberty of the subject.

"The boys are all of about the same age, between fifteen and sixteen. Their names are

GEORGE FRANCIS KERR, GEORGE FIGGINS, DAVID LLEWELLYN WYNN, RICHARD JULIAN, and ERIC KERRUISH.

"Figgins is taller than any of the rest. Kerr is shorter, and has auburn hair. Wynn is extremely fat. Julian is dark, and obviously of Jewish extraction.

"The reward will be paid upon hand-

ing over the five boys to the accredited representative of the headmaster of St. James."

"Ah!" said Mr. Pepper; and he stroked his bristly chin. "Fifty pounds! Ah! And I know all five of those boys, and— But such luck as that don't come the way of a poor man like me. Fifty pounds! My eyes!"

The bill was not just as Racker had drafted it. "Snipe-nose" had suggested several modifications and additions. There were things in it which might have aroused the suspicion of a man of the world not so eaten up with greed as Mr. Pepper; but Erasmus Zechariah never doubted that Dr. Holmes had been the person responsible for it.

He trotted along to do his business in the village—some matter of overdue rent, or a tenant who would not get out when requested, for the poverty-stricken Mr. Pepper had a good deal of house property in Sussex—but all the time his mind was busy with that bill.

It was about half an hour later that the five rode into the village, and the first person who noted them was Mr. Pepper himself.

They did not see him, for he dodged at once into a yard.

He peered out after them as they rode on, his eyebrows bristling as he frowned.

"Here's a chance!" he muttered. "Now, how's it to be worked?"

Crafty as Mr. Pepper was, a full-fledged scheme for entrapping and holding safely five able-bodied boys naturally did not leap into his brain on the instant.

But when he had contemplated that bill the reward had seemed to him like some golden dream. Now it was almost tangible—something so near to his hand that to lose it would sear his very soul.

Some way or another they must be trapped. He watched them go into a grocer's shop.

At least, four of them went in—Fatty stayed outside to watch the bikes. Blayds Hill was not exactly a town, but it was quite a good-sized village, and bicycle thieves were not impossible there.

Fatty's watching was all right as far as the bikes were concerned, but it did not go beyond them. He took a seat upon an empty packing-case in front of the shop under the sun-blind, and to Mr. Pepper's eyes he appeared to go to sleep at once.

Anyway, Mr. Pepper stole past him without being seen.

And now the brain of Erasmus Zechariah was working swiftly.

"There's Looker," he muttered. "He'd stand in. Might want too big a share of the reward—halves, I dare say. But half a loaf is better than a stale roll, as they say. If I can get hold of Looker—"

He hurried on up the sunny street seeking Mr. Looker.

The house of that gentleman was next door to a baker's shop—a fact which had its bearing upon what followed.

Moreover, its front windows, owing to the curve of the street, had a full view of the grocer's lower down, and while Messrs. Pepper and Looker talked, the Rylcombe man kept a sharp look-out upon Fatty Wynn.

He saw Fatty rise to his feet as the other four came laden out of the shop. He watched them fasten their parcels to their bikes. Then he saw them come towards the baker's.

"If I could see any way of gettin' them inside, I'd find one of keepin' them there," said Mr. Looker, who had a bald head, a red nose, and very thin legs. "But I don't see no way, Pepper, that's a fact."

Mr. Pepper saw no way, either, at present. But he watched with vulture eyes the five wheel their bicycles into the space between the house he was in and the baker's. A cart stood there, and they put the machines behind the cart, so that they were not likely to be seen by anyone passing up the street.

Erasmus Zechariah did not see that. But he saw something else that struck him as very much to the purpose.

Down the street came four cyclists wearing the St. Jim's colours. He knew them all—Tom Merry, Talbot, Manners, and Lowther.

And at once he saw a chance. He blessed his lucky stars as they stopped in front of a tea-shop.

Out of the house by a side-door he skipped, with an agility that surprised Mr. Looker, and into the baker's shop he popped.

He noted the bikes on his way, and saw that they were well enough concealed.

"Afternoon, young gentlemen!" he said affably.

All five swung round at that familiar

voice, which always creaked as if it were rusty.

"Hallo, Mr. Pepper!" said Kerr. None of them wanted to see Pepper, of course. None of them wanted to see anyone from the St. Jim's neighbourhood.

But it was quite possible that the fellow knew nothing of their running away, and they did their best to look unconcerned.

That pose only lasted a moment, however, for Mr. Pepper said, in a hoarse whisper:

"Master Merry and three more just ridden in. You don't want them to see you, do you?"

It was Kerr who answered, making up his mind at once.

"We don't. I say, can you—"

"I can help you to doge 'em, my sons—I can help you! Of course, you'll make it worth my while—a poor man like me can't afford—"

"We'll do that," replied Kerr, hastily.

"Cousins," said Mr. Pepper to the baker, who chanced to be a tenant of his, "will you let me take these young gentlemen out by your private door? They're friends of mine!"

"Oh, cert'nly, Mr. Pepper," answered the baker, in some surprise. He had not heard what had passed between the miser and Kerr, and he had not seen the bills; but the request was rather an odd one.

Mr. Pepper led the way on the instant. The private door was just opposite the side door of the worthy Mr. Looker's house.

He whisked them through it, behind the cart, and into the house with great celerity.

"Have a look for yourselves," he said, leading them into a room on the ground floor, and pointing out of the window.

They just looked out, and saw four bikes in front of the tea-shop, and Talbot just going in, last of the four riders.

"My hat! That was a narrow squeak!" Kerr said.

"I say, Mr. Pepper—" began Figgins, meaning to say something about the bikes outside.

But he found that Mr. Pepper had disappeared.

Even then, however, the five did not realise that they had fallen into a trap!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Rounding Them Up!

"GRUNDY!" snapped Mr. Railton. George Alfred Grundy lifted a perspiring and worried face from the bike he was tinkering with by the side of the road.

"Yes, sir," he said meekly. It was not often that Grundy felt at all meek, but he did feel that way at that moment.

"I ordered you home hours ago!" said the master.

He, and the two prefects with him—Kildare and Darrel—had run down several of the hunters early in the morning, before the first car they had hired had met with misfortune.

They had secured another car now, and were still engaged on the rounding-up business.

"Yes, sir," answered Grundy. "But my bike's broken down."

He did not intend to prevaricate, but the stern look on the face of the master showed that he was suspected of such an intention.

"But you are miles farther away from St. Jim's!" said Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir," Grundy was too honest to pretend that he had missed his way. "I—I didn't think it was quite fair, sir."

"Where are Wilkins and Gunn?" "They've gone back, sir."

Grundy looked—as he felt—scornful. It was a safe prophecy that Wilkins and Gunn would hear more about their desertion of their chief.

"Can we carry that machine?" asked Mr. Railton of the chauffeur.

"That's easily enough done, sir," answered the man, getting down and laying hands on Grundy's bike, with the intent to fasten it in the rear of the car.

"You leave it alone!" bellowed Grundy. "Grundy!"

"Yes, sir?" "Get in here at once!"

Koumi Rao was no longer with the rounding-up party. After the breakdown of the first car, just at the moment when it had seemed that the fugitives must be caught, he had been sent back by rail.

Grundy obeyed, not wholly loth. At worst, this was better than going back.

The bike was made safe, and the car sped on.

Grundy was not a specially observant fellow, but he did not fail to note that Mr. Railton's face soon relaxed from its set, grim look. As for the two prefects, they were plainly enjoying their day out.

"More of them, sir!" said Kildare, twenty minutes or so later.

The four chums of No. 6 were ahead, trailing out in single file. Blake foremost, Arthur Augustus in the rear, and nearly a hundred yards between them.

In less than three minutes the faces of all four were turned in another direction. They did not venture to protest, but they grumbled to one another as they took the homeward way. And each of them envied Grundy.

Arthur Augustus spoke the final word. "I weally do not see how he expects to capchah them without us! My respect for Waitton is still high, but I candidly confess that it is lowah than it was."

And now the pursuers of the hunters had quite a run of luck. In less than two hours they came upon and headed for home Kangaroo, Dane, Glyn, Lumley-Lumley, Redfern, Lawrence, Roylance, Gore, Reilly, and Hammond.

After the latest capture, Mr. Railton consulted a list in his pocket-book.

"Merry, Manners major, Lowther, and Talbot," he said. "I have very little doubt that if we can find those four, they will be found together."

"Yes, sir," said Kildare. "And there are the Third Form youngsters, too. We can count on their hanging together, and apart from the rest."

"Levison major, Clive, and Cardew—three more inseparables," the master remarked. "Then there's Durrance."

"He's with them, sir," said Grundy. There was no harm in telling that, and Grundy was beginning to feel that it was time more friendly relations were established between him and his captors.

"Ah, Grundy!" said Mr. Railton; and now he smiled outright. "I really think you are getting more of the fun than you deserve. But you will be punished for your disobedience, and I don't want to nag you."

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Prisoners!

MR. PEPPER looked into the room in which he had left the five fugitives.

"Master Kerr," he said, his voice as honeyed as he knew how to make it, "would you mind coming this way for a moment?"

Kerr did mind. Like the rest, he was interested in watching for the reappearance of Tom Merry & Co.

But he supposed that Erasmus Zechariah wanted to make sure of his reward, though he had no notion of the much bigger reward that was in the hoary old schemer's mind—and he went.

"Oh, my hat! We're in luck to be here!" gasped Figgins.

A car had just stopped outside the tea-shop. And in that car were Mr. Railton, Kildare, Darrel, and Grundy!

"Tommy's copped!" chortled Fatty. "They've got 'em, sure enough," said Julian. "And I shouldn't wonder if they've raked in quite a crowd more by this time."

"In they go!" Kerruish said. "This is like having front stalls for the performance."

"Keep back, chump, or you'll be spotted!" growled Figgy.

Mr. Railton and the prefects went into the tea-shop. Grundy stayed in the car.

Perhaps half a minute had passed when the master came out with the four Shell fellows.

He was talking to them, and his face was stern. But somehow it did not seem to Figgy and the rest that he was really very angry.

They knew that this adventure of the hunters, flagrant though its defiance of rules might be, was the kind of thing that no man of Victor Railton's type, with much of the boy still in him, could really reprobate indignantly.

Tom Merry said something, and the master smiled. Talbot spoke, and Mr. Railton's hand rested lightly on his shoulder for a second. Monty Lowther was grinning.

They were to be sent home, of course; but they were not going in dire disgrace.

Then, to the amazement of the watchers,

they went back into the shop, and Mr. Railton beckoned to Grundy to come in also.

"The amazement lasted only a moment. It was easy to understand that move.

"They're all going to have tea together, and I shouldn't wonder a bit if Railton foots the bill for the crowd," said Figgy.

"He's about the best sportsman I ever met," Julian said.

Fatty licked his lips.

"Wish I was going to have tea with them!" he said wistfully. "It wasn't anything worth calling a meal at that miserable little hole where the kids spotted us!"

"Well, you can go, if you want to!" snapped Figgins.

"I didn't mean that, ass!"

Kerruish stood silent.

Something was working in his mind. If he had been quite sure of the attitude of his comrades, he would have offered to give up what Figgins had called the "fools' game" then. It was time to give it up, really—he knew that.

But did they want to give it up?

Would they think him a funk for suggesting it?

While he wavered the door opened again, and Mr. Pepper said:

"Will you young gentlemen have the kindness to step this way? Master Kerr—well, I really don't know what to make of him at all. Seems to me he must have got a touch of the sun."

They went in haste. He led the way upstairs, and none of them suspected anything at all.

He opened a door. Kerr lay on a bed, with his back to them.

They jostled each other in their hurry to see what was wrong with their leader, but Mr. Pepper dropped behind them.

Figgins was the first to bend over Kerr.

"Why, he's gagged!" he cried.

And then they saw that he was bound also. And at that moment the door shut with a slam, and the key grated in the lock!

"Oh, I say!"

"What did he do that for?"

"The old traitor! He's seen Railton, and he's going to give us up!"

So spoke Fatty and Julian and Kerruish.

Figgins said nothing. He was taking the gag from Kerr's mouth and cutting his bonds.

Kerr sat up.

"That does it!" he said. "We've come to the end of the game at last! The old slyster will keep us here till he's sent for someone to give us up to."

"Railton's here!" said Figgins gloomily.

"Here? What—?"

"Not in the house," Kerruish said. "He came up with Darrell and Kildare and Grundy in a motor-car, and fairly caught Tom Merry and those other three. Look here, you fellows, it doesn't really matter very much, does it? I don't want to drag you any farther."

"Matter? I should think it does matter!" snapped Figgins.

"Rather!" Kerr agreed. "We're not going to be handed over like sheep for the slaughter—not if I know it! Let's shin out of the window, and render ourselves up, if we must chuck it—not be given up by that old scoundrel!"

There was a rush for the window.

But it did not take them five seconds to see that no immediate escape was possible in that way.

For a fair-sized room the window was a

small one. It was divided into four sections, and the lower two were of casement pattern. These were not big enough to admit of the passage of any one of the five—even Kerr, quite the smallest and slightest of them. And the upper sections were not only of less size than the lower, but they did not open at all!

The window was in the back of the house, too. Otherwise they might have yelled to those outside, though all of them would have hated to do that.

"Oh, well, I suppose we shall have to make up our minds to be given up!" said Fatty resignedly. He added, visibly brightening: "Railton's no end decent. He might stand us a tea over there."

"You fat worm!" said Figgins scathingly.

"Do you want to chuck it, Kerruish?" asked Kerr, aside.

"In some ways I do. Look here, Kerr, I know I've been a silly ass; and I know you

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STILL OBTAINABLE!

fellows have stood by me a heap better than I deserved. I was mad with you three. But all that's past now. After Dick, here—and perhaps Hammond and Reilly—I shall reckon you the best friends I have from this on."

"We'll be pleased and proud!" Kerr answered quietly.

"But I hate chucking it like this," went on Kerruish. "To be trapped by that old brute, and handed over prisoners—it's beastly!"

"I think we all feel alike about that," Kerr said. "But, do you know, old man, I'm not so sure that's Pepper's game? He mumbled something about a reward to the red-nosed bouncer who helped him to nab me and bring me up here; and they started their game before Railton showed up, I fancy."

"What's that, Kerr?" asked Figgins.

The Scots junior repeated what he had said to Kerruish.

"Oh, rot!" said Figgins crossly.

"I'm not so sure," remarked Fatty. "Kerr's generally right."

Then they waited. Kerr took out his watch. Slowly, as it seemed to them all, the seconds ticked themselves off, became minutes, grew into half an hour.

And still nothing happened!

"I don't fancy Railton would have stayed to have his tea before coming over here when once he knew," said Kerr.

And he put his watch away.

"There's something else in the wind," he said. "We shall hear presently."

Again they waited, all rather depressed and anxious.

A full hour had passed when there came a tap at the door.

"Come in!" called Kerr, with more cheeriness than he felt.

"Said the spider to the fly," quoted the mocking voice of Mr. Pepper from outside. "I'm an old man, and I daren't venture myself in among you young ruffians, unless you'll give me your word of honour that you won't handle me, and won't try to escape."

"Jolly likely, that!" replied Figgins bitterly.

"If I get my hands on you—"

"Ah, well, perhaps a little starvation will take down your spirits, my bonnie lads! You can stamp on the floor when you begin to feel that your insides ain't getting along quite nicely."

And with that Parthian shot Mr. Pepper left them.

They waited. They waited while the sun moved from off their window, while it dropped low in the sky and the shadows of the trees in Mr. Looker's garden grew long. They waited till sunset was a thing of the past and twilight was drawing in.

At last:

"Let's stamp!" said Fatty desperately.

"May as well," said Kerr.

And Fatty stamped—hard.

They found Mr. Pepper—his confederate kept out of the way—a very able negotiator. No fool could they get till he had their word of honour to keep at the other side of the room while he put it in.

What they did get then came mainly from the supplies they had bought at the grocer's. Their drink was water—plenty of that, anyway.

Mr. Pepper informed them, through the locked door, that a reward of fifty pounds had been offered for their apprehension, and that he and his friend Mr. Looker meant to share that reward. He did not add, though he might have done, that he and Looker had already come to loggerheads over their respective shares, and that this fact might prolong the imprisonment of the five.

But they felt quite sufficiently dismal without that intimation.

Fatty and Kerr were least dismal. Fatty could not be utterly down while there was plenty of grub about. And Kerr said:

"There's a screw loose somewhere! It isn't like our old man—or Railton, if he's in charge—to offer a reward for us. Beastly bad for the school's good name, you know. And we may do down Pepper and his red-nosed pal yet!"


It was very late when Mr. Railton, the two prefects, and Grundy got back that night.

They had met with no further success after leaving Blayds Hill.

Somewhere out there still wandered the seven majors. Somewhere out there Levison mager, Cardew, Clive, and Durrance—a hefty quartet—still held on their way uncaptured.

And in the fact that the four of the seven were still at large was hope for the five—as the next story will show!

THE END.



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