

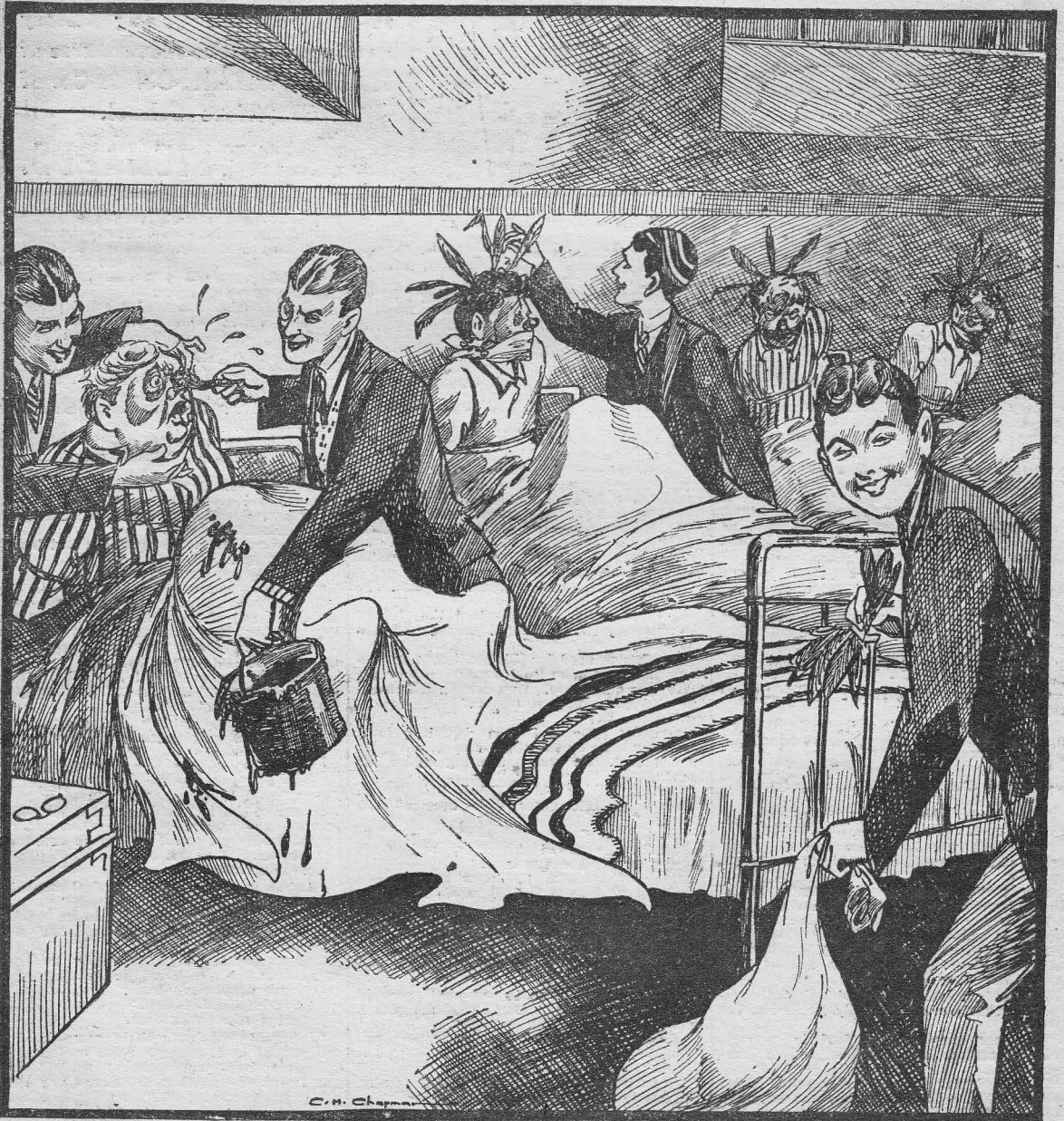
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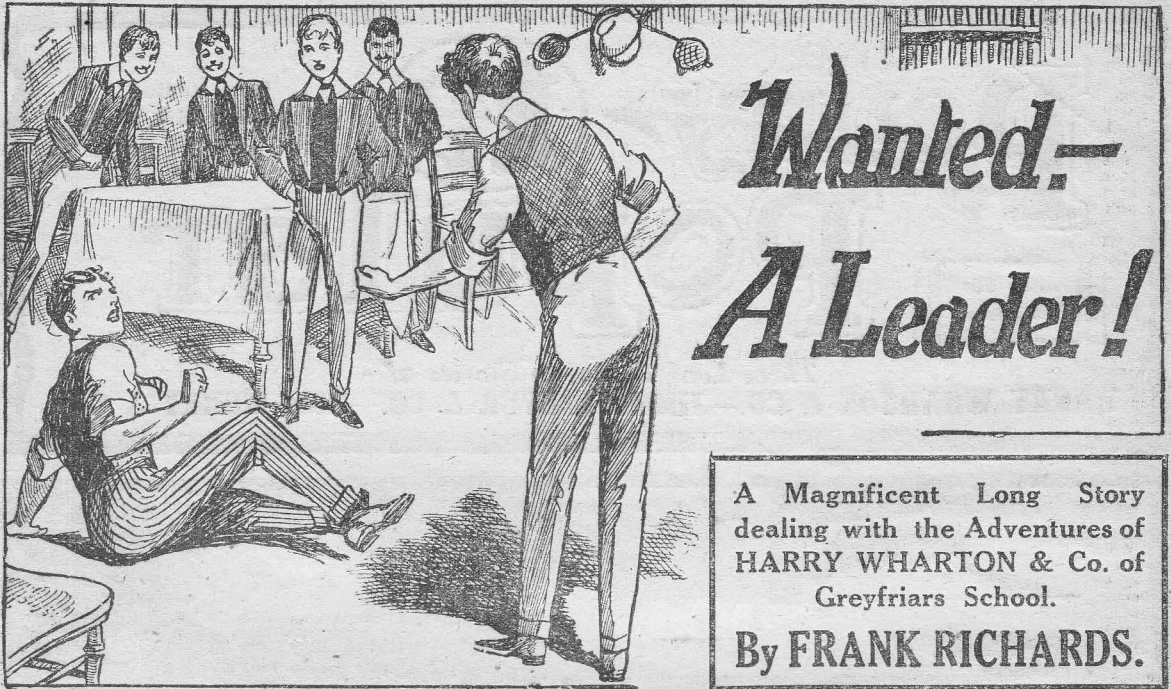
Week Ending
October 25th, 1919.

No. 40.
New Series.

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Greyfriars School.**

By **FRANK RICHARDS.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Ponsonby's Threat.

"**J**AM, this way!"
"Pass the sardines, Franky!"
"Hand over the paste made from the esteemed bloated fish!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

In Study No. 1 in the Remove passage at Greyfriars all was merry and bright.

The Famous Five, ravenous as the result of a keen game of football, were just starting on tea.

Harry Wharton & Co. were in funds, and the snowy-white tablecloth set off to advantage quite a number of delicacies.

"Well, for a practice game, this afternoon's performance wasn't at all bad!" remarked Bob Cherry.

The others nodded.
"If we continue in this progressive fashion," murmured Hurree Singh, "we shall have no difficulty in mopfully wiping up the ground with St. Jim's next week."

"Except for a slight weakness in one department, we've got a very workmanlike team," said Frank Nugent.

"Where's the slight weakness?" exclaimed Wharton.

Johnny Bull glared at Nugent across the table.

"Are you suggesting that I was weak?" he growled.

"Well, I won't put it quite so brutally as that," said Frank. "But you must admit you were a bit feeble."

"My hat!" shouted Johnny Bull. "He calls me feeble! I've put a man to sleep for less!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You must admit you were rather slow on your pins, Johnny!" said Bob Cherry.

"So would you be if you had a gammy ankle! I was bowled over early in the game, and—"

The conversation ceased abruptly as a knock sounded on the door of the study.

The Famous Five exchanged glances. Bob Cherry picked up a cushion, Harry Wharton did the same, and Frank Nugent thoughtfully handled a loaf. Hurree Singh availed himself of the study puke.

The juniors had little doubt that the intruder would prove to be Billy Bunter, of the Remove.

Whenever there was a feed in progress Bunter scented it from afar, like a war-horse.

The fat junior had evidently rolled along to Study No. 1 to see if there was anything going, and the occupants of the study had made up their minds to show him that there wasn't.

The knock sounded again, and this time

the knocker did not wait for an invitation to enter.

The door opened, and simultaneously two cushions and a loaf of bread whizzed through the air.

The Famous Five caught a fleeting glimpse of a human form being bowled backwards into the passage.

"Yaroooooooh!"

It was a wild yell from without, but it was not the familiar yell of Billy Bunter.

"My hat!" muttered Bob Cherry. "We've executed the wrong criminal!"

And he strode to the door to investigate. Sprawling in the passage, with fury in his face, was a junior. Not a Greyfriars junior, but Cecil Ponsonby, of Highcliffe!

"You—you—" spluttered Ponsonby.

Bob Cherry gave a chuckle.
"We seem to have made a little mistake," he said genially. "We quite thought it was Billy Bunter. However, there's no harm done."

"No harm!" hooted Ponsonby. "You've punctured me, you silly asses!"

"Then you'd better come in and be mended."

So saying, Bob Cherry seized the Nut of Highcliffe by the collar and yanked him into the study.

"There's no need for this gentleman to produce his card," he said breathlessly. "We know him quite well. He's Mr. Cecil Ponsonby, the eminent cards harper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Ponsonby, who had been deposited in a sprawling heap on the study carpet, struggled to his feet. He was muttering under his breath.

"No use talking Yiddish," said Bob Cherry. "Our tame interpreter isn't here at the moment."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Ponsonby clenched his fists, and stood glaring at the Famous Five.

Harry Wharton & Co. were surprised to receive a visit from the Highcliffe Nut, who was at daggers-drawn with them.

In coming to Greyfriars by himself without a bodyguard of any kind Ponsonby was walking into a hornets' nest.

"To what," said Wharton, "do we owe the pleasure of this visit?"

"I didn't come here to see you!" growled Ponsonby. "I merely wanted to ask you a question."

"Go ahead!"
"Which is Carr's study?"
"Eh?"

"Not getting deaf, are you?" said Ponsonby. "Which is Carr's study?"
Harry Wharton frowned.

He understood now the why and wherefore of Ponsonby's visit.
At one time Dennis Carr, of the Remove

had associated himself with the Highcliffe blades, and had become heavily involved in debt with Ponsonby. That debt had been paid in full, but Ponsonby was not satisfied. He wished to make a further effort to get Dennis into his clutches.

Ponsonby had discovered a small gold-mine in Dennis, and he did not mean to leave that gold-mine untapped. It was possible that Dennis Carr had acquired more money by this time, and Ponsonby was desirous of transferring some of it to his own pocket. Hence his visit to Greyfriars.

"I'm waitin'!" said Ponsonby, with obvious impatience.

"You'll have to wait a jolly long time, then!" said Nugent. "Carr's not here."

"Not here?"
"No; he's left Greyfriars."
Ponsonby looked astonished.

"Is that a polite way of sayin' that Carr's been sacked?" he said.

"He would owe it to you if he had been!" said Wharton.

"What do you mean?"
"You know quite well what I mean. You did your best to ruin Carr, and you came within an ace of succeeding. You lured him into joining your precious gang, and you fleeced him right and left! You dragged him down-hill as fast as you could!"

"That's not true!" said Ponsonby. "Carr joined our 'gang,' as you call it, entirely of his own free will!"

"Liar!" growled Johnny Bull, who was not given to mincing his words.

Ponsonby scowled.
"Where's Carr now, anyway?" he asked.

"He's at home, recovering from a serious illness," said Wharton. "As you seem to be ignorant of the facts I'll enlighten you. Carr was on the verge of being expelled, and one night, during an awful storm, he saved my life at the risk of his own!"

Ponsonby sneered.
"An' so his kind teachers gushed over him, an' let him get off bein' sacked?" he said.

"Very touchin', very pathetic, begad! Great pity he couldn't have saved somethin' more valuable!"

Bob Cherry signalled frantically to Harry Wharton. Bob's look said, as eloquently as any words could have done:

"Pulverise the boulder!"
Wharton rose to his feet.

"I know what your little game is, Ponsonby," he said quietly. "You're trying to get Carr into your clutches again. You can't succeed now, because Carr's not here; and, what's more, you're not going to succeed when he comes back to Greyfriars!"

"Who's goin' to stop me, pray?"
"We are! We ought to have chipped in before, by rights, but we stood aside, and let

Carr go to the dogs. That's not going to happen again. We're standing by Carr—"

"Through thick and thin!" said Nugent. "Now that you've heard our views on the matter," said Wharton, "you can take your coat off!"

"What in thunder for?"

"I'm going to lick you!"

Ponsonby laughed harshly.

"It's jolly easy to be aggressive when the odds are five to one!" he sneered.

"The others won't interfere, if that's what you're thinking."

"They will if you begin to get the worst of it."

"There's rather a big 'if' there!" chuckled Bob Cherry, as he went to the door and locked it.

Ponsonby saw there was nothing for it but to fight.

The prospects of standing up to Wharton's fists was not pleasant. Ponsonby was not lacking in courage, and he could give blow for blow when he was in fighting trim. But he was sadly out of condition now. Late hours and dissipation had taken toll of his energy.

Ponsonby removed his coat, and hung it up on the door.

A space was then cleared in the centre of the study.

The table was moved up against the bookcase, and the chairs were ranged round the room.

"Go it, ye cripples!" sang out Bob Cherry. Harry Wharton rushed to the attack.

He had long wanted to get to grips with Ponsonby, whose poisonous influence had so nearly caused disaster.

It was useless to request Ponsonby, by word of mouth, to go his own way, and leave fellows like Dennis Carr alone. Speech was wasted upon the cad of Highcliffe. The only language he understood was that which consisted of painful and repeated blows to the nose.

So Wharton went all out, and in the first minute he had his opponent tied up in knots.

Ponsonby found the pace much too hot, and he concentrated solely on defence. He was soon retreating backwards round the study, with Wharton following up with grim persistence.

Tramp, tramp!

Round and round the study went the combatants, and several items of furniture were rudely disturbed.

On one occasion Ponsonby ducked, and Wharton's fist came into contact with a painted vase on the mantelpiece. The vase nose-dived into the fireplace.

"Steady on, Harry!" cautioned Frank Nugent. "You're smashing up the happy home!"

"First time I've heard Pon's chivvy called a happy home!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ponsonby's face was certainly in danger of being smashed.

The Highcliffe junior warded off two blows in three; but the third usually found a billet on his nose or between his eyes.

By this time there was an incessant knocking on the door of the study. Quite a number of Removites had formed up in the passage outside, wondering if earthquakes were happening within.

"Let us in, ye spalpeens!" came a voice which obviously belonged to Micky Desmond.

"What's going on?" boomed the deep voice of Bolsover major.

"I say, you fellows, there's murder being done!"

It was Billy Bunter's high-pitched voice this time.

The Famous Five took no heed of the questions which were fired at them through the keyhole.

Even when Alonzo Todd solemnly urged the dear boys not to let their angry passions rise, the "dear boys" continued the fight, which, however, was fast drawing to a finish.

Twice Ponsonby measured his length on the floor of the study; and on each occasion he scrambled to his feet, and prolonged the agony, so to speak.

"Polish him off, Harry!" said Johnny Bull impatiently.

Wharton sailed in for the last time. His fist shot out straight from the shoulder; and this time Ponsonby went down, and stayed down. He had no stomach for further fighting.

"Now get out!" said Wharton.

There was a vindictive glitter in Ponsonby's eyes as he grovelled on the floor.

He picked himself up at length, and put on his coat.

"The matter doesn't finish here!" he said, glaring at Wharton, with an eye which

threatened shortly to turn black. The other eye was already closed.

Bob Cherry unlocked the door, and a chorus of excited exclamations arose from the crowd in the passage.

"It's Ponsonby!"

"Our dear old friend Pon!"

"Doesn't he look a pretty picture?"

"Another guy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ponsonby lingered in the doorway to utter a final threat.

"I'll get even with you for this, Wharton!" he snarled. "And not you alone, but with all of you! I'll get my pals at Highcliffe to rally round me, and then you can look out for squalls!"

"Rats!"

"Get out!"

"Go and eat coke!"

The juniors in the passage formed a path-way through which Ponsonby could pass; and they hissed him as he went.

Cecil Ponsonby was not popular with the Greyfriars Remove. Even Skinner and Stott, who sometimes consorted with Ponsonby, joined in the hissing.

Baffled and furious, Ponsonby limped away.

His threat to the Remove had not been an empty one, inspired by the fury of the moment. Ponsonby was quite determined that the licking he had just received should be avenged in full.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Wharton Declines to Take Action.

"WHAT are you going to do about it, Wharton?"

It was Vernon-Smith who put the question.

The juniors had been shepherded up to bed by Wingate of the Sixth, and they were in the act of turning in.

Harry Wharton looked mystified.

"I don't quite catch on, Smithy."

"I'm referring to Ponsonby's threat," said Vernon-Smith. "I was in the passage this afternoon when he made it."

"Blow Ponsonby!"

"Blow him by all means—to smithereens, if you like! But we can't afford to ignore his threats."

"Hear, hear!" said Peter Todd. "Pon means business. Didn't you twig the lovelight in his one sound eye? He's got his fangs into you, Wharton, and into all of us; and he means to make the Remove sing small."

"If he can!" said Squiff.

"That's just what we're out to prevent," said Vernon-Smith.

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Ponsonby's not worth bothering about," he said.

"That's where I don't see eye to eye with you," said Vernon-Smith. "I dislike Pon as much as anybody, but it can't be denied that he's a cunning dog. He's clever, too, in a way. He's already hatching a plot against us, you bet; and if there's going to be trouble we don't want to sit down and wait for it. We've got to defend ourselves against the wiles of the Highcliffe rotters."

"What do you suggest, Smithy?" asked Nugent.

"Attack," said Vernon-Smith, "is the very best form of defence. It's been proved over and over again. It applies to footer and to boxing and to raids on rival schools. 'Thrice is he armed who gets his blow in first,' as the poet says. This being so, I vote we go over to Highcliffe in force, and raid Ponsonby & Co. in their lair."

"My hat!"

Vernon-Smith's words made a profound impression. Plenty of fellows supported his suggestion.

"Faith, an' it's a good wheeze, entirely!" said Micky Desmond.

"Yes, rather!"

"We'll make the rotters sit up!"

"We'll pulverise them!" declared Billy Bunter; although it was a moot point whether the fat junior could pulverise anybody, except by sitting on them.

"If we go over to Highcliffe to-night," said Vernon-Smith, warming to his subject, "we'll give them such a drubbing that they'll be too sore to retaliate!"

"Hear, hear!"

"What about it, Wharton?" said Ogilvy.

Wharton gave a grunt.

"I think the whole thing's unnecessary," he said.

"Oh!"

"Of course, if you funk going over to Highcliffe—"

—began Bolsover major.

Wharton flushed.

"I don't funk it," he said. "I simply don't consider the scheme worth while, that's all. Think what it means! Forty fellows getting up in the middle of the night, breaking bounds, and going over to Highcliffe to kick up a shindy. It's not practicable, to begin with. It sometimes happens that half a dozen fellows can break bounds at night without being spotted; but when it comes to forty—"

"It's taking a mighty big risk!" said Bob Cherry.

"Precisely."

"We should be bowled out, for a cert!" said Nugent.

"And the chopper would descendfully come down!" added Hurreed Singh.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Vernon-Smith.

"I shouldn't have believed it possible that you fellows could be so faint-hearted. You talk about a risk. Of course there's a risk! And doesn't that add spice to the adventure? A night raid on a rival school would be a jolly tame business if we knew in advance that there was no chance of our being spotted!"

"I quite agree, Smithy!" said Peter Todd.

"Dash it all," continued Vernon-Smith, "the whole Form can't be sacked! It might mean a licking all round, or it might mean detention. And we should be quite willing to face the music."

"Absolutely!" said Bolsover major.

At this juncture, Wingate of the Sixth stepped into the dormitory to see lights out.

The captain of Greyfriars glanced keenly at the flushed faces of some of the juniors, but he made no comment, barring his usual "Good-night!"

"Good-night, Wingate!" said the Remove, in chorus.

As soon as Wingate's footsteps had died away there was a buzz of voices in the Remove dormitory.

"Now, then, Wharton!"

"Pull yourself together!"

"Smithy's quite right, and you know it!"

Harry Wharton could be very obstinate when he chose, and he was obstinate on this occasion.

Wharton saw no cause for alarm at Ponsonby's threat. That was not the first threat Ponsonby had launched, by any means. He was always threatening somebody or other. Why take any notice of him?

That was Wharton's way of looking at it; and the other members of the Famous Five upheld his view.

Vernon-Smith's speech had made a big impression on the majority of the Removites.

Even fellows like Squiff and Peter Todd, Russell and Ogilvy, who usually sided with Wharton, were in favour of Vernon-Smith's suggestion.

"I'm not in favour," said Wharton shortly. "There's nothing to fear from Ponsonby, and I, for one, am not going to tramp over to Highcliffe in the middle of the night!"

"Same here!" said Nugent.

"Ponsonby can go to Jericho!" growled Johnny Bull.

Vernon-Smith's eyes gleamed in the darkness.

"So you refuse to take action, Wharton?"

"Yes."

"And supposing the Highcliffe cads come over here and raid us?"

"They won't do that."

"But Ponsonby said—"

"Do you think I care tuppence what Ponsonby says?"

"Look here—"

"Oh, rats! I'm going to sleep!"

And Wharton suited the action to the word. He settled his head comfortably on the pillow, and, despite the constant hum of voices, he was soon in the arms of Morpheus.

"Wharton seems jolly unconcerned about it all!" remarked Peter Todd. "I think we ought to squash Highcliffe. Don't you, Dutton?"

"It doesn't interest me," came in drowsy tones from the deaf junior.

"Eh?"

"What do I care if you've found a blue button? You can find fifty, if you like! It leaves me cold."

"Why, you—your wooden-headed candidate for Colney Hatch!" shouted Peter. "Who's talking about buttons? I was suggesting that we went over to Highcliffe in considerable numbers—"

"You'd better not!" said Dutton warmly.

"What!"

"You'll get it in the neck if you disturb my slumbers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A roar of laughter followed Tom Dutton's threat.

Peter Todd did not laugh. He gave a violent snort.

"The sooner someone supplies me with a megaphone the better!" he growled.

"Not until the morning," said Dutton.

"My hat!" muttered Peter. "What's he babbling about now?"

"Fancy talking about letters at this time of night!" exclaimed Tom Dutton. "The postman won't be here till the morning.

Blest if I can make you out, Toddy. First you say you've found a blue button, then you talk of disturbing my slumbers, and now you're mumbling about letters. If ever there was a case ripe for Hanwell, it's here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peter Todd forced down a fierce desire to get out of bed and strew the dormitory with little pieces of Dutton. With a grunt, he turned over and went to sleep.

One by one the other occupants of the dormitory followed Peter's example.

Most of the juniors had been looking forward to a nocturnal adventure, and they were annoyed and exasperated with Harry Wharton.

The prevailing opinion was that the captain of the Remove was getting slack. He did not seem anxious that the Form should keep its end up against Highcliffe. He seemed to have lost some of his old energy and initiative. Possibly he imagined that his position as captain was secure. Had he but known it, however, he was on very thin ice. His refusal to take action against the cads of Highcliffe had caused feeling to run strongly against him.

Harry Wharton awoke from a dreamless sleep just as the first note of midnight boomed out from the old clock-tower.

Wharton was a light sleeper as a rule, and he wondered what could have roused him.

It was pitch dark, and Wharton's eyes were half-closed, but he became conscious that there were people in the Remove dormitory apart from the rightful occupants.

Queer, gurgling noises came from some of the beds, and there was a sound of stealthy footsteps.

What did it all mean?

Wharton sat up in bed, with the object of striking a match and making investigations; but before he could do this, a gag was thrust suddenly into his mouth, and a noose was thrown over his head and drawn tight, pinning his arms behind his back.

In vain Wharton tried to cry out. His struggles were equally vain.

He was a prisoner!

Peering with startled gaze into the darkness, the junior became aware of ghostlike figures gliding through the dormitory.

What was going on?

Wharton's heart thumped wildly against his ribs.

Was he about to be kidnapped and carried off by a gang of scoundrels? And, if so, with what object?

It seemed too wild a supposition to be entertained for more than a fleeting moment. But the fact remained that Wharton was bound and gagged, and he could do nothing more than emit a faint gurgle.

For perhaps five minutes Harry Wharton remained in his uncomfortable plight, and then the light was suddenly switched on, and the junior's eyes nearly bulged out of his head.

He had supposed that he was the only victim of the midnight marauders. In reality, however, the whole of the occupants of the Remove dormitory had been treated in precisely the same way.

A tremendous coil of rope extended round the room, and forty juniors were secured by forty nooses. The more they struggled, the more tight the nooses became.

The fellows were all awake, of course, blinking stupidly in the glare of the electric light. Like Wharton, they were gagged as well as bound, and it was impossible to raise an alarm.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a low chuckle from the fellow who had engineered this astounding raid—Ponsonby of Highcliffe.

There were no less than ten Highcliffe juniors in the dormitory.

Cads though they were, they deserved a certain amount of credit for their cleverness.

They must have come in via the school wall and the box-room window, an easy feat for

one fellow to accomplish, but not so easy for ten.

They were wearing plimsols, and their entry into the dormitory had been noiseless.

Each member of the raiding party had been allotted four Removites to deal with, and there had been no opposition because of the deftness and dexterity with which the rope had been employed. The gags had enforced silence, save for a few gurgles, which could not possibly be heard outside the dormitory.

Ponsonby's generalship had been perfect. He had timed everything to a nicety, and now he had the entire Greyfriars Remove at his mercy.

"Don't they look a set of beauties?" chuckled Gadsby.

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Bunter will want a new gag," said Merton. "He's eating the old one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites stared at each other in helpless chagrin.

It came at first that the affair was part of some strange dream—or nightmare. But the triumphant voices of the Highcliffians dispelled this illusion.

Ponsonby advanced into the centre of the dormitory, and made a mock bow.

"I told you I'd have my revenge, gentlemen," he said, "and I'm a fellow of my word. I rather think this is a score for Highcliffe, what!"

And once again Ponsonby's followers indulged in a chuckle at the expense of the helpless Removites, who writhed and chafed in their bonds, with feelings too deep for words.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Mr. Prout Sees Red.

"CLOSE the door, Gaddy!" said Ponsonby.

Gadsby obeyed.

"Now bring me the paint-pot."

Monson advanced with a large tin of red paint, and Gadsby handed the brush to his leader.

The eyes of the baffled Removites bulged more than ever.

They had imagined that the raid was complete—that the Highcliffe cads, having bound and gagged their victims, would decamp.

But that was not Ponsonby's way. Pen indited this to be a raid of raids—a raid that would rattle in the memory of the Greyfriars Remove for many a long day.

The Highcliffe leader approached the nearest bed, which happened to be Skinner's. He dipped the brush in the red paint, and with swift strokes commenced to give Skinner the complexion of a beetroot.

"Afraid I'm not much of an artist," murmured Ponsonby. "I can't spend much time on you, Skinner, when there are thirty-nine others requirin' attention. Still, it's the general effect that I'm aimin' at."

And there was a chuckle from Ponsonby's cronies.

Skinner protested against having his face painted.

"Gug-gug-gug!" he gurgled.

"Hark at him!" laughed Pon. "Like a croonin' infant, isn't he?"

"Buck up, old bean!" said Merton uneasily. "We mustn't stay here too long, in case a master or a prefect chips in."

Ponsonby passed from Skinner to Stott, and from Stott to Hazeldene.

In due course he came to Harry Wharton, and, remembering the thrashing Wharton had given him, he applied an extra coating of paint to the furious face of the captain of the Remove.

By the time he had painted twenty visages, Ponsonby's arm ached, and he handed the brush to Gadsby, who carried on the good work.

When it came to Bob Cherry's turn to be painted, Bob let out a savage kick, which Gadsby easily evaded.

Bob then endeavoured to get out of bed, but this was quite impossible, owing to the manner in which the rope had been manipulated. It looked as if there would be no escape for the Removites until morning.

Gadsby laid on the paint with a liberal brush, and at length every fellow in the Remove had received his share.

"Now the feathers!" said Ponsonby.

Drury dragged into view a sack of feathers, which Ponsonby and Gadsby proceeded to stick into the hair of the Removites.

The effect was startling in the extreme. The dormitory appeared to be occupied by a number of Red Indians.

"That concludes the merry entertainment," said Ponsonby at length. "We will now best a graceful retreat from the scene of our triumph."

"Gug-gug-gug!" said Bob Cherry.

"Not this evenin'!" said Ponsonby. "Some other evenin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gurg-g-g-g!" rumbled Johnny Bull.

"If you mean by that that Highcliffe's top-dog, Bull," said Ponsonby, "I quite agree with you."

Pon then signalled to his companions, and the Highcliffe fellows stole softly from the dormitory.

They would need to tread very warily, in case any Greyfriars master should be on the prowl.

In spite of all their caution, however, they caused a commotion when clambering through the box-room window.

"Quick!" muttered Ponsonby. "Run for it!"

The Highcliffians sprinted across the Close like hares, and they were soon safe on the other side of the school wall.

The noise at the box-room had awakened one person only—that was Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth.

Mr. Prout was not feeling at all happy that night. He had slept in fits and starts, and in his waking intervals he had imagined he heard noises.

"Bless my soul! I feel sure there must be burglars in the building!" murmured the Form-master. "I have distinctly heard on several occasions the most uncanny noises! I will investigate."

So saying, Mr. Prout slipped out of bed, and got into his dressing-gown and a pair of gaudy carpet-slippers. Then, with the aid of an electric-torch, he proceeded on a tour of the building.

In the Fifth Form dormitory, where Mr. Prout's own pupils took their slumber, all was still and silent.

"Is everything all right, my boys?" murmured Mr. Prout.

A sudden trumpeting snore from Coker of the Fifth gave the necessary assurance on this point.

Mr. Prout next visited the dormitory, occupied by Temple & Co., of the Upper Fourth, and here, again, there was nothing doing. The atmosphere was peaceful and serene.

"And yet," murmured Mr. Prout, as he shuffled away, "I am confident I heard noises. I will pursue my investigations as far as the Remove dormitory. That is the most unruly dormitory of all, and it is possible—nay, probable—that a disgusting midnight orgy is in progress!"

Advancing with caution, Mr. Prout went along to the Remove dormitory, and halted in the doorway without revealing his presence.

Strange sounds came to his ears—mysterious, inexplicable sounds.

"Gug-gug-gug!"

"Gurg-g-g-g!"

Mr. Prout jumped.

Had a straightforward snore greeted his ears he would not have been alarmed. But there was something distinctly uncanny about that gurgle.

Mr. Prout's impulse was to turn and flee, but he screwed his courage to the sticking-point.

"Boys!" he exclaimed.

"Gug-gug-gug!"

"Wharton! Cherry! Nugent!"

"Gurg-g-g-g!"

"Dear me!" muttered Mr. Prout. "This is most singular—most extraordinary!"

And he switched on his electric-torch.

A number of red faces and feathered heads met the Form-master's gaze.

For an instant Mr. Prout stood transfixed. Then, with a gasp of horror, he fled from the scene.

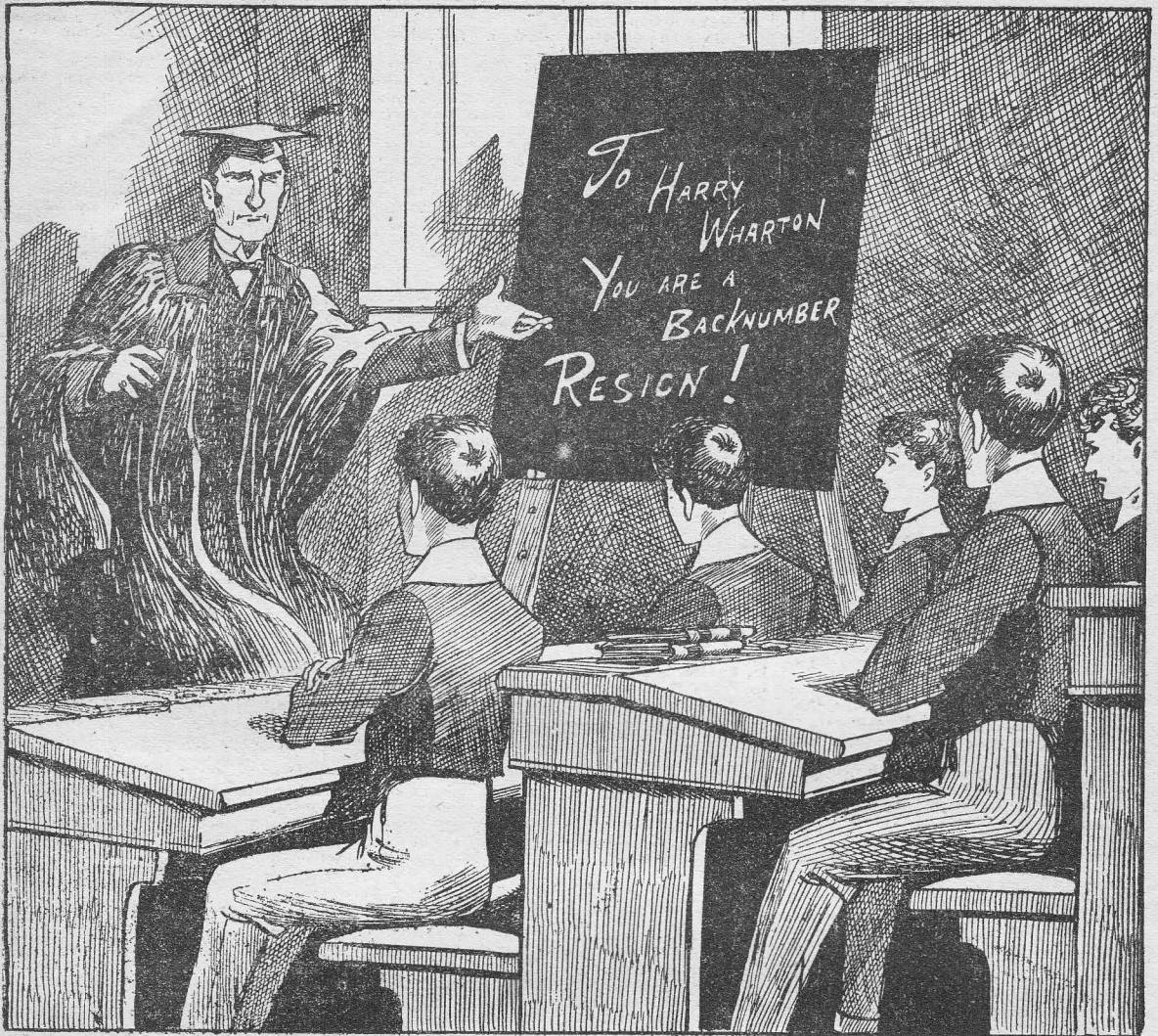
Straight to Mr. Quelch's bed-room he went, and the master of the Remove was astonished to find himself rudely awakened with the distracted figure of Mr. Prout bending over him.

"Why, my dear Prout, what has happened—what is the matter?" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Matter enough, sir!" said Mr. Prout. "I have just beheld a most terrifying—a most appalling sight!"

Mr. Quelch sat up in bed, and peered keenly at his colleague.

His first impression was that Mr. Prout was walking in his sleep; his second thought was that the master of the Fifth, before retiring for the night, had taken a substantial "night-cap." He dismissed both these



Mr. Quelch's gaze lighted upon the blackboard. He frowned, turned, and confronted the class. "I call upon the boy who inscribed that message upon the blackboard to stand forward!" he exclaimed. (See page 6.)

theories, however, and came to the conclusion that Mr. Prout was wandering in his mind.

"Really, my dear Prout, you appear to be the victim of hallucinations! I will assist you to your room, and—"

"Do you regard me as insane, Quelch?" almost shouted Mr. Prout.

"Well, I should not put it so bluntly as that. I should say that your brain was overtaxed in consequence of over-study. You have been—ahem!—seeing things which were not there."

"I have not!" roared Mr. Prout. "I cannot doubt the evidence of my own eyes."

"What was this terrifying sight you are alleged to have seen?"

Mr. Prout made a dramatic gesture.

"The Remove dormitory, Quelch, is peopled with Red Indians—"

"Nonsense!"

"With savages, sir! They have the red complexions and the feathered heads of a wild tribe. I did not notice if they had spears or boomerangs, but I should not be in the least surprised."

Mr. Quelch had donned his dressing-gown by this time. He placed his hand soothingly on his colleague's shoulder. Mr. Prout shook it off.

"My dear Prout, this very terrible—"

"It is!" snapped Mr. Prout.

"I mean, your condition. Your brain must be in a disordered state. It is neither logical nor reasonable to assume that a tribe of Red Indians could gain access to the Remove dormitory. Pray allow me to assist you to your room!"

Mr. Prout mopped his perspiring brow.

"I can see quite clearly that you doubt

my word, Quelch," he said. "But if you will accompany me to the Remove dormitory you will doubt it no longer!"

Mr. Quelch knew sufficient about lunatics to be aware that it is wise to humour them.

"Very well, Prout," he said. "We will proceed together to the dormitory."

"One moment!" said Mr. Prout. "I will fetch my Winchester repeater."

Mr. Quelch shuddered.

"No, no!" he said hastily.

The Remove master had a wholesome dread of Mr. Prout's repeater. That repeater repeated a good deal too often for the safety of those who happened to be in the immediate vicinity. In his youth Mr. Prout's marksmanship had been a sight to see and wonder at—if his own testimony were to be believed—but his hand had now lost its cunning.

"We dare not venture unarmed against such a vast and formidable tribe!" said Mr. Prout.

For answer, Mr. Quelch caught his colleague by the arm and led him forcibly away in the direction of the Remove dormitory.

Mr. Prout drew back when they reached the door. His companion, however, advanced into the dormitory and switched on the light.

"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Quelch halted on the threshold in sheer astonishment.

He did not, however, turn and flee, as Mr. Prout had done. His keen eyes took in the situation, and he saw that the owners of the red faces and the feathered heads were his own pupils.

"I am not surprised that you were startled, Prout," said Mr. Quelch at length. "How-

ever, there is no danger. These are my own boys." Some practical-joker has been at work."

Mr. Prout advanced into the dormitory, looking very sheepish. He saw that he had been deceived before by a hasty glance. Had he stopped to consider the matter on his previous entry he would have known that Red Indians do not wear pyjamas.

"You are right, Quelch! This is a 'jape,' as I believe the boys call it."

"Gug-gug-gug!"

The Removites were clamouring to be liberated.

"Come, Prout!" said Mr. Quelch briskly. "We must extricate these boys from their unfortunate plight!"

With the aid of pocket-knives the two masters succeeded in severing the juniors' bonds. The gags were removed also.

"Which is Wharton?" inquired Mr. Quelch.

"The one with the double coating of paint on his chivvy, sir!" said Bob Cherry.

"Here I am, sir!" said Wharton.

Mr. Quelch turned to the captain of the Remove.

"Who is responsible for this outrage, Wharton?"

Harry was silent. Ponsonby did not deserve to be shielded; but Wharton declined to betray him.

Billy Bunter, however, had no such fine scruples.

"It was Ponsonby, sir!" said the fat junior. "Ponsonby, and a whole crowd of Highcliffe beasts!"

"We have been visited with grievous bodily

harm!" moaned Alonzo Todd. "Oh, dear, I am aching all over!"

And a chorus of grunts and groans went up from all parts of the dormitory.

"This—this is monstrous!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "How did the Highcliffe boys gain access to this dormitory?"

"Through the usual channels, sir!" said Bulstrode. "The school wall and the box-room window!"

Mr. Quelch looked grim.

"I shall report this outrage to Dr. Voysey, the headmaster of Highcliffe!" he said. "Doubtless he will inflict condign punishment on the young rascals who are responsible. You had better cleanse your faces, my boys!"

The Removites turned out and stretched their cramped and aching limbs. Then they lined up in a long queue at the washstands, and for the space of half an hour there were sounds of continued rubbing and scrubbing.

Even at the end of that period the paint had not been wholly erased from the faces of the victims.

Mr. Quelch extinguished the light, and he and Mr. Prout took their departure.

The majority of the Removites were in a state of seething fury. And it was not solely against Ponsobny and his fellow-plotters that their fury was directed. It was against Harry Wharton!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

"Resign!"

WHEN the two masters had gone the juniors let off steam. They had been unable to speak for some time, owing to circumstances over which they had no control; and they at once proceeded to make up for lost time.

"Faith, an' this is Wharton's fault entirely!" said Nicky Desmond, setting the conversational ball rolling.

"Of course it's Wharton's fault!"

"He might have known this would happen!"

"Smithy warned him!"

"And he took no notice!"

"Precious fine captain—I don't think!"

"He deserves to be slaughtered—"

"And boiled in oil—"

"And flayed alive!"

There was no mistaking the Removite's feelings on the matter.

Wharton no longer basked in the sunshine of popularity. His Form-fellows—with a few exceptions—were fed-up with him; and they did not mince their words.

"Just think of it!" said Vernon-Smith, in ringing tones. "We've been dished, diddled, and done by a pack of outsiders from Highcliffe! We shall be taunted with this till the end of the term!"

"This is what comes of ignoring Ponsobny's threat!" growled Peter Todd.

"Yes, rather!"

"What does Wharton mean by it?"

"Explain!"

"Make him explain!"

"I haven't been able to get a word in edgewise so far!" said Harry Wharton. "All I've got to say on the subject is this. It was an error of judgment on my part, but Form-captains aren't infallible."

"Well, they jolly well ought to be!" growled Bolsover major.

"Hear, hear!"

"If you want the opinion of an expert," said Skinner, "Wharton's getting slack in his old age! He's been content to rest on his laurels. He thinks his job's safe, so he doesn't care tuppence about the prestige of the Remove."

"That's so," said Stott. "Wharton's a mere ornament—just a figurehead—that's all. He hasn't an ounce of gumption. Now, look at Smithy! If Smithy was skipper, he'd have organised a raid of Highcliffe this very night, and Ponsobny & Co. would have got it in the neck!"

The opinion of William Stott did not usually count for much; but on this occasion his sentiments were echoed round the dormitory.

"Stott's quite right!"

"Wharton's played out!"

"Smithy's the man for the job!"

"Make Wharton resign!"

Bob Cherry sat up in bed, clenching his hands in the darkness.

"You silly, hysterical asses!" he shouted. "You're talking tommy-rot! Wharton happens to make one mistake, and you turn and rend him! Do you call that playing the game?"

Bob Cherry's voice was drowned in the uproar which followed.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 40.

"Wharton's no good!"

"We're fed-up with him!"

"It's high time we had a real, live skipper!" said Peter Todd.

This, coming from the leader of Study No. 7, was surprising. Peter Todd had always been one of Wharton's staunchest yeomen. There had been occasions when he had rebelled against Wharton's authority; but these had been few and far between. It was rather curious to find Peter Todd going with the stream.

Vernon-Smith had no lack of champions. The one-time Boulder was as popular at this period as Wharton had ever been. His name seemed to be in everyone's mouth.

"Smithy's our man!"

"I guess he's a hustling, up-to-date citizen!" said Fisher T. Fish.

"I say, you fellows!" piped Billy Bunter. "If you're thinking of electing a new Form-captain, what about me?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It strikes me very forcibly," said Johnny Bull, "that you fellows have gone potty!"

"Something else will strike you very forcibly, if you don't dry up!" growled Bolsover major.

"What do you mean?" demanded Johnny Bull aggressively.

"My boot!" said Bolsover. "We're fed-up with the Infamous Five!"

"Yes, rather!"

"This is where Wharton's captaincy leads us to!" said Morgan. "How can we look anybody in the face after what's happened to-night?"

"Oh, go to sleep!" growled Bob Cherry. "You make me tired."

"Same here," said Nugent.

"They will recoverfully get over it by the morning," predicted Hurree Singh.

But he was wrong.

When the new day dawned, feeling ran as strongly as ever against Harry Wharton.

There were heated words in the dormitory; there were heated words at the breakfast-table. And there was every indication that words would lead to blows, and that the Remove would be plunged into civil war.

When the juniors entered the Form-room for morning lessons they found that the blackboard had been placed on the easel facing the class, and chalked on the board was the following message:

"TO HARRY WHARTON!
YOU ARE A BACK NUMBER!
RESIGN!"

Wharton's face flushed as he read that curt communication.

"What cad wrote that?" demanded Bob Cherry, his eyes flashing.

There was no reply. Most of the fellows were chucking. Moreover, they were quite in agreement with the terms of the message.

Frank Nugent, with a duster in his hand, started towards the blackboard; but before he was halfway to his goal the door of the Form-room opened, and Mr. Quelch swept in with rustling gown.

A hush fell upon the class.

"Nugent! Why are you absent from your place?" rapped out Mr. Quelch.

And then the Form-master's gaze lighted upon the blackboard.

Mr. Quelch frowned. He turned, and confronted the class.

"Who is responsible for this insult to Wharton?" he exclaimed.

Silence!

The Form-master's frown became more portentous.

"I call upon the boy who inscribed that message upon the blackboard to stand forward!" he exclaimed.

"And don't all speak at once!" murmured Ogilvy.

The culprit, whoever he was, did not stir. Probably he didn't like the expression on Mr. Quelch's face at that moment.

"I am waiting!" said Mr. Quelch.

"You'll have to wait a jolly long time, I'm thinking!" muttered Stott.

"Take a hundred lines for mumbling in class, Stott!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Mr. Quelch paused impressively. The Remove sat silent.

"Very well," said the Form-master, at length. "I have given the culprit every chance to confess, and he has not come forward. Since he chooses to seek refuge in silence, I have no alternative but to question each member of the class in turn. Bunter!"

"No, sir!" said Bunter promptly.

"What!"

"It wasn't me, sir, I assure you! Of course, everybody knows that Wharton's a

back number, and that he ought to resign, but I shouldn't dream of using this method of telling him so. I should tell him to his face, sir."

"I trust you would, Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch drily. "Your over-eagerness to convince me of your innocence leads me to believe that you know something of this affair. Am I right, Bunter?"

"Nunno, sir! You're quite wrong—as usual! I—I mean—I know nothing whatever about it, sir! You see, when Skinner wrote that message on the board, I didn't happen to be looking in the doorway at the time!"

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"So it was Skinner?"

"It may have been, sir. I really couldn't tell you. I was in the Close at the time."

There was a titter from the class. Mr. Quelch picked up a cane.

"You were here, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter jumped.

"Oh crumbs! Were you watching me, sir?"

"I was not watching you, you utterly stupid boy! Further prevarication is useless. You have said enough to convince me that you were present when that insulting message was chalked on the board!"

Billy Bunter turned appealingly to Skinner. "Own up, Skinny!" he said. "I've done my best to shield you, but you can see for yourself that he knows all about it!"

The look which Skinner darted at Billy Bunter was almost homicidal.

"Skinner!" rumbled Mr. Quelch. "Stand out before the class!"

Reluctantly, the cad of the Remove obeyed.

"You have behaved abominably, Skinner! You insulted the captain of your Form; you remained silent when I expressly asked the culprit to come forward; and you have caused the work of the class to be delayed by your perversity. I shall cane you severely! Hold out your hand!"

Skinner saw that a denial would only prolong the agony. He gingerly extended his hand.

Swish, swish, swish!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Skinner moaned and writhed as the cane bit into his palm.

"Now the other hand, Skinner!"

The performance was repeated.

"You will now erase those words from the blackboard, and apologise to Wharton!" said Mr. Quelch.

Frank Nugent handed Skinner the duster, and the message was wiped out.

After which, Skinner mumbled an apology to Harry Wharton.

"Go to your place, Skinner," said Mr. Quelch. "Lessons will now commence."

And they did. But the minds of most of the juniors were fixed upon a weightier problem than lessons.

Was Wharton to continue to hold the captaincy? And, if not, who was to be his successor?

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Who Shall Be Captain?

HARRY WHARTON became the centre of a noisy, clamorous throng when the Remove were dismissed.

The feelings of the Form seemed to find expression in one word.

"Resign!" hooted Bolsover major.

"Resign!" yelled Skinner and Stott and Trevor and Trelice in unison.

The word was taken up on every hand, until it fairly dinned along the passage.

"Resign!"

Wharton's head was in a whirl as he faced the crowd.

He noticed that half a dozen fellows stood aside from the rest, and took no part in the wordy demonstration.

Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, Hurree Singh—these four were with him to a man. They recognised that he had made a mistake—that he ought to have struck the first blow in the affair with Highcliffe; but they weren't going to desert him on that score.

The other two who took no part in the proceedings were Mark Linley and Dick Penfold. Both were level-headed—far too sensible to be swept off their feet by the wave of hysteria which surged through the Remove.

Wharton's bewilderment lasted only a moment. He regained his composure, and his voice rang down the passage.

"If you think I'm going to be bullied into resigning the captaincy, you're jolly well mistaken!"

"That," murmured Hurree Singh, "is the course, everybody knows that Wharton's a stuff to impartfully give them!"

An angry murmur arose, gradually swelling into a roar.

"Get out, Wharton!"

"You're a wash-out!"

"We're fed up with you!"

"Make way for a better man!"

Wharton set his lips.

"I'll make way for nobody!" he exclaimed.

"Bravo!" said Bob Cherry.

Peter Todd caught Wharton by the arm.

"Don't be a fool, Wharton!" he said, not unkindly.

"You can see that practically the whole Form's against you. It's not a bit of use sticking out. Put your confounded pride in your pocket, and climb down! This business will blow over in time, and then you'll be able to come back to the captaincy."

"Thanks!" said Wharton. "But I don't intend for one moment to resign it!"

Peter Todd shrugged his shoulders.

"Just as you like!" he said. "You'll soon wish you'd taken my advice!"

And Peter stood aside.

Bolsover major stepped up to Harry Wharton with an ugly expression on his face.

"In the name of the Form, I call upon you to resign!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, rats!" said Wharton impatiently.

"Stand aside!"

And he gave the bully of the Remove a sudden push.

Bolsover's temper, at all times uncertain, got the better of him now. His open hand came across Harry Wharton's cheek with a report like a pistol-shot.

The captain of the Remove staggered back, but only for a moment. He pulled himself together, and rushed at his assailant.

"Steady on, Harry!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"You can't scrap here. Quelch will be coming out—"

"It's a wonder he hasn't come out already," said Nugent.

Harry Wharton took no heed of his chums.

He was not thinking of Mr. Quelch at that moment. He was thinking solely of avenging Bolsover's blow, which had left a vivid mark on his cheek.

The next instant the two juniors were fighting hammer-and-tongs in the crowded passage.

The fight lasted for ten seconds—perhaps less.

In that remarkably short space of time Harry Wharton had done considerable damage to Bolsover's leering face. He would have added to his work of destruction had not Mr. Quelch suddenly stepped out into the passage.

"Wharton! Bolsover!" rumbled the astonished Form-master.

As if by magic the two juniors dropped their hands to their sides. Mr. Quelch's gimlet eyes dwelt upon them with stern disapproval.

"How dare you brawl in this manner? I cannot think what has come over my Form lately. I find the captain of it engaged in fisticuffs and the passage congested with spectators! Have you any explanation to offer, Wharton?"

"None, sir."

"Then you will take five hundred lines! If there is a recurrence of this hooliganism, I shall seriously consider the advisability of depriving you of the position you hold! You, Bolsover, will also take five hundred lines! Go and cleanse yourselves, both of you!"

It did not require a keen observer to see that Mr. Quelch was angry. He raised his voice as he addressed the crowd.

"Go away at once, or I will instruct the prefects to clear the passage!"

The juniors dispersed. Harry Wharton headed for the Close.

"Whither bound, Harry?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I haven't finished with Bolsover yet," was the reply. "We'll carry on the scrap behind the chapel."

"You jolly well won't!" said Bob Cherry.

"Look here, Bob—"

"You heard what Quelch said? If you're caught scrapping again it's good-bye to the captaincy! Most of the fellows would be glad if it happened; but we're not going to humour them—see?"

And Bob Cherry linked his arm in that of his chum, and led him away in the opposite direction to that taken by Bolsover major.

By dinner-time Wharton had cooled down somewhat. After dinner, however, he broke out again.

When the Famous Five entered Study No. 1 they found the following notice displayed in a prominent position on the mantelpiece:

"Harry Wharton is hereby warned that unless he voluntarily gives up the captaincy it will be taken from him by force! The Remove are fed up, and they mean business!"

There was no signature to this notice, but the handwriting appeared to be that of Vernon-Smith.

There was great indignation on the part of the Famous Five, and Harry Wharton's indignation was greatest of all.

"This is the last straw!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove.

He tore down the offending notice, and hurled it into the fire. Then he turned to the door.

Bob Cherry sprang after him.

"Where are you going, Harry?"

"To search for Smith!"

"It will mean another scrap—"

"I don't care!"

"But Quelch—"

"Hang Quelch!"

Bob Cherry saw that Wharton was not to be turned from his purpose this time.

Wharton's self-control was in rags, and the wrath of a hundred Form-masters would not have prevented him from taking action against Vernon-Smith.

The latter was run to earth in the Close. He was standing under one of the elms, chatting to Tom Redwing.

Vernon-Smith did not change colour when he saw Wharton striding towards him. He seemed to be quite unconcerned.

Harry Wharton brushed Redwing aside, and confronted his quarry. The other members of the Famous Five were coming towards the spot—likewise a considerable crowd of juniors, who scented a scrap.

Wharton said very little, and what he did say was to the point.

"If you want to criticise me in future, Smith, you'll oblige me by doing so to my face! You're a cowardly, underhanded cad!"

Vernon-Smith stared at the speaker in astonishment.

"Dashed if I know what you're talking about!" he said. "But I'm not going to be called names like that, anyway!"

And Vernon-Smith plunged his fist into the furious face of the captain of the Remove.

A moment later the couple were fighting like tigers.

"Settle it in the gym!" urged Frank Nugent. "You won't be interfered with there!"

But Nugent's voice was lost in the general commotion.

Wharton and Vernon-Smith tramped to and fro, breathing hard, and hitting harder.

Skinner & Co. were among the spectators, and they chuckled delightedly when Harry Wharton was sent to the ground by a powerful uppercut.

"Good old Smithy!" chortled Skinner.

"That's the stuff!"

Bob Cherry silenced Skinner with a back-hander, which made his teeth rattle.

Had the juniors but known it, it was Skinner who had written the notice which had caused all the trouble. Skinner was an expert in the dangerous accomplishment of forgery, and he had faithfully imitated Vernon-Smith's handwriting for the sake of making mischief. It looked very much as if he had succeeded!

Wharton was down, but he was still game. He struggled to his feet at length, and was soon engaged in giving as good as he got.

"Buck up, Smithy!" urged Bolsover major.

"Give him one for me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

By this time the faces of the combatants showed signs of wear and tear. And the faces of the onlookers were tense and excited.

"Stick it out, Smithy!"

"Give him a good hiding!"

"We're fed-up with Wharton!"

Johnny Bull laughed grimly.

"Strikes me it's Smith who will get the good hiding!" he observed.

"Yes, rather!"

"Keep it up, Harry!"

The crowd—like Billy Bunter during a hearty meal—was swelling visibly.

It was obvious that the fight could not go on undisturbed. The arrival of a master or a prefect was expected at any moment.

Wharton succeeded at length in flooring his opponent. Scarcely had he done so, however, when Mr. Quelch came striding on the scene.

The Form-master could scarcely believe his eyes.

"Wharton!" he gasped. "You—you are fighting again, in defiance of my orders! You have disobeyed my express commands! This is outrageous!"

Skinner could not repress his satisfaction.

"This is where Wharton gets sacked from the captaincy!" he exclaimed aloud.

Mr. Quelch turned to the cad of the Remove.

"Am I to understand, Skinner, that this trouble has arisen in connection with the captaincy of the Form?"

"That's so, sir," said Skinner. "We're fed-up with Wharton, and it's high time his innings was closed."

Mr. Quelch began to understand the position. He saw that the Form was in a ferment, and that unless prompt action were taken the unrest would continue.

"A crisis appears to have arisen in the Form," he said. "These outbreaks must be put down with a firm hand. I will consider what line of action to take. Meanwhile, Wharton and Vernon-Smith will follow me to my study!"

The juniors addressed followed the Form-master into the building.

When they rejoined their schoolfellows their palms were tingling, for Mr. Quelch had wielded the cane with great vigour.

The Remove-master made no further reference to the affair until the close of the afternoon lessons. Then he addressed himself to his pupils.

"With regard to the vexed question of the captaincy," he began, "I have arrived at the following decision."

The Remove waited breathlessly.

"Wharton appears to have given dissatisfaction recently," Mr. Quelch went on, "but I am prepared to give him a chance to retain his position."

There was a groan from Bolsover major.

"All boys who consider themselves to be suitable candidates for the position of Form-captain," continued Mr. Quelch, "will hand in their names to me by seven o'clock this evening. Each candidate—including Wharton—will hold the captaincy for a period of one week. In that time they will be able to give their schoolfellows proof of their abilities. When every candidate has been given a week's trial, the whole Form will decide by ballot which boy proved himself best fitted for the position of Form-captain. This is a novel arrangement, but I feel sure it will prove a satisfactory one."

Mr. Quelch's scheme became popular at once. It would give everybody a fair chance—including Wharton. Each fellow would have one week in which to make good.

If during his week's trial a fellow led the Remove to victory in various ways, he would stand quite a good chance of being elected to the captaincy. If, on the other hand, he made a hash of things—as certain candidates were bound to do—he would find himself without votes at the finish.

"The class will now dismiss," said Mr. Quelch.

As they trooped out into the passage the juniors chattered excitedly about the Form-master's scheme.

"I say, you fellows," said Billy Bunter. "I'm going to hand in my name to Quelch!"

"You silly ass!" growled Squiff. "You won't stand the ghost of a chance!"

"It's something to be Form-captain for a week, anyway!" said Bunter.

"You're putting up for it, of course, Smithy?" said Bolsover major.

Vernon-Smith nodded.

"Good!" said Bolsover. "I was thinking of having a shot myself, but I'll stand aside, and back you up instead."

"Very noble of you!" said Vernon-Smith, with a touch of sarcasm.

The Famous Five strolled away together.

"Are you going to send in your name, Bob?" inquired Wharton.

"No jolly fear! We're backing you up, old son!"

Several other juniors refrained from putting up for the captaincy on Wharton's account. Mark Linley, Squiff, Dick Penfold, Monty Newland—these four stood down, though each would have had a good chance.

By seven o'clock that evening five names had been submitted to Mr. Quelch. They were as follows:

H. Vernon-Smith, Peter Todd, Harry Wharton, Dick Russell, and Billy Bunter!

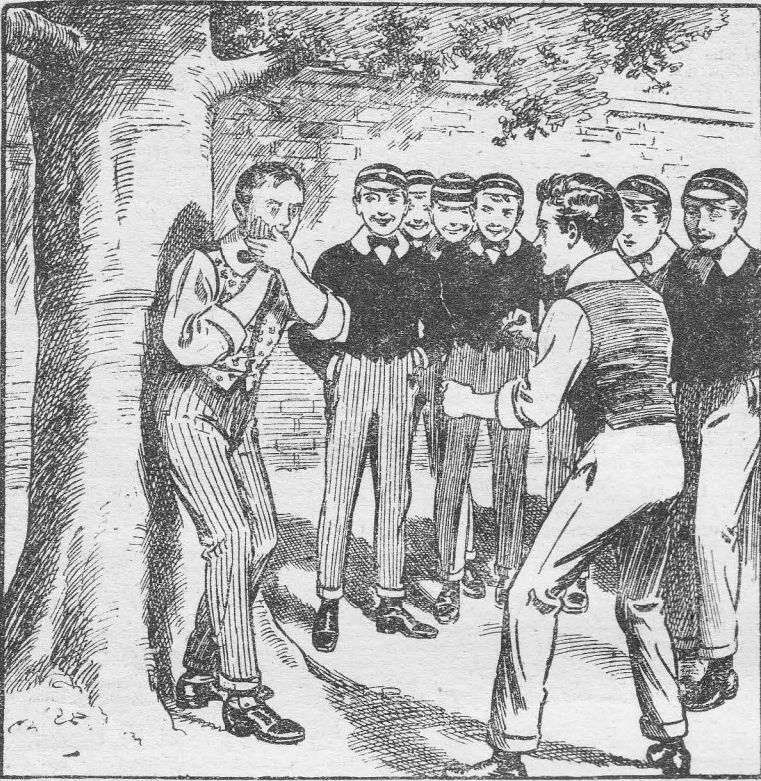
Wharton was out to retain the captaincy; the others meant to try and cut him out.

Shortly before bedtime a list of the candidates was posted on the notice-board, together with an announcement, in the handwriting of Mr. Quelch, to the effect that jobs had been drawn and the first trial week had fallen to Vernon-Smith.

The one-time Bouncer of Greyfriars possessed the undoubted qualities of leadership. Would he succeed in turning them to account?

THE END.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 40.



SMYTHE'S REVENGE!

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

By.....

OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The New Boy!

JIMMY SILVER of the Fourth came upon him suddenly in the quad.

In fact, he came upon him very suddenly.

The chums of the end study were getting tea in that famous apartment, when it was discovered that there was no tea.

So while Lovell and Raby and Newcome went on with the preparation, Jimmy Silver cut off at top speed to the school shop. He descended the stairs by way of the banisters, fortunately landed upon his feet, and bolted out of the School House like a stone from a catapult.

It was then that he came upon the new boy. He came upon him like a charging Highlander. The new boy was standing there looking at the place, with his hands in his pockets, and a downcast expression upon his face. Jimmy Silver was upon him before he saw him, and the new junior went over like a skittle.

There was a loud, bump and a yell as he landed on the ground. Jimmy Silver staggered back from the shock.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Silver.

"Oh! Ah! Yah! Ow! Groooh!" said the new boy.

"You fathead! What were you standing there like a stuffed dummy for?" demanded Jimmy Silver indignantly.

"Oh dear!"

"Didn't you see me coming, you ass?"

"Oh! Ah!"

Then Jimmy Silver realised that perhaps the fault had been partly his. Probably the new kid had not expected a fellow to come bolting out of the House like a runaway locomotive. So Jimmy Silver generously resolved to forgive him, and he even gave him a helping hand, and yanked him to his feet.

The new boy appeared in a somewhat

dazed state, which was not surprising under the circumstances. He was a good-looking lad of Jimmy's own age, and of sturdy build. He blinked round for his cap, and Jimmy picked it up for him, and dabbed it on his head backwards.

"Well, you must be an ass!" said the new boy at last.

"I!" exclaimed Silver indignantly.

"Yes. What did you bang into me for?"

"How was I to know that a silly ass was standing there like a boiled owl?" demanded Silver. "Fellows are supposed to keep their eyes open."

"You didn't keep yours open."

"Well, perhaps I didn't," admitted Jimmy Silver. "But I'm in a hurry. I hope I haven't hurt you," he added.

"Well, you have, as a matter of fact," said the new boy. "But it doesn't matter." He dabbed his nose with his handkerchief. "It's all right!"

Jimmy Silver nodded and passed on. He whipped into the tuckshop, and secured a packet of tea from old Sergeant Kettle, and came back towards the School House at a run. The new boy was still dabbing his nose.

The end study was waiting for the tea, and Jimmy Silver was in a hurry; but a kindly impulse made him pause. It was not so very long since he had been a new boy, and had not known a soul at Rookwood. This new kid looked rather forlorn, and there was no doubt that his nose was damaged owing to the hurry Jimmy Silver had been in. Jimmy resolved to let the end study wait a minute or two.

"Proboscis damaged?" he said sympathetically.

"Yes, a bit."

"New kid—what?"

"Yes."

"What's your name?"

"Oswald—Dick Oswald!"

"Classical or Modern!"

That was always one of the first questions put to a new fellow at Rookwood—whether he belonged to the Classical or the Modern side of the school. Jimmy Silver was one of the ornaments of the Classical side, and he was prepared to be kind to the stranger if the latter was also a Classical. If he was a Modern, of course, there was nothing for it but to knock his cap off and leave him.

"Classical," said the new boy.

"Oh, good!" said Jimmy Silver approvingly.

Oswald looked at him.

"You're a Classical?" he asked.

Jimmy Silver sniffed.

"You young ass! If you weren't a green new kid you wouldn't ask that question! Do I look like a Modern?"

"I don't know."

"Well, young hopeful, when you've been at Rookwood a bit longer you'll know that the Classics are the decent side, and the Moderns a set of worms and wasters," said Silver. "F'rinstance, if you thought I looked like a Modern it would be my duty to wipe up the quad with you. What's your Form?"

"Fourth!"

"Seen Bootles?"

Mr. Bootles was the master of the Fourth.

"Yes, I've just been with him," said Oswald. "I was having a look round, when you bumped me over."

"Been to school before?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

Oswald coloured.

"Do you always ask new fellows all these questions?" he inquired.

"Yes, as a rule, and they answer them unless they've got something to hide," said Jimmy Silver. "But I'm only asking you out of politeness, as a matter of fact. I don't really care twopence whether you've been to school or not, or where it is, or where it isn't. Just politeness!"

Oswald laughed.

"Know anybody here?" asked Jimmy.

"No."

"Feeling a bit lonesome—what?"

"Yes," said Oswald frankly.

"Had your tea?"

"No."

"Then trot along with me," said Jimmy Silver. "We're just going to have tea in our study, and you can come if you like."

"I say, that's awfully decent of you," said the new boy gratefully.

"Well, come on!"

And Jimmy Silver marched his new acquaintance up to the end study.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Quite a Good Sort.

LOVELL and Raby and Newcome turned inquiring glances upon Jimmy Silver and his companion as they came into the end study.

"Got the tea?" asked Lovell.

"Here you are," said Jimmy Silver.

"And this is a new kid."

"Where did you dig it up?" asked Raby, with a curious glance at the new junior, who was dabbing his nose again.

"In the quad! He had gone to sleep standing up like a horse, and I biffed into him and woke him up."

"I wasn't asleep," said Oswald indignantly. "I was just looking round."

"Did you bring that nose to Rookwood with you, young 'un?" asked Newcome.

"I did that," said Jimmy Silver. "My shoulder, I think. Just like a new kid to shove his nose in the way of my shoulder. But he'll learn more sense in time. His name's Oswald, he comes from goodness knows where, and he's as green as grass, and I've brought him in to tea. I hope there are enough sausages to go round."

"Just one of your weird ideas, planking down a new kid on the study," said Lovell.

Oswald coloured.

"I—I don't want—" he began.

Lovell stared at him.

"Don't be an ass! You're welcome. I suppose I can tell Jimmy Silver what I think of him without you chipping in, can't I?"

"Oh!"

"Don't mind Lovell, kid," said Jimmy Silver. "His bark's worse than his bite, and his manners are quite Modern."

"Why, you silly ass," began Lovell wrathfully, "if you want to start tea with a nose to match that new kid's—"

"Bow-wow! Get on with the sosses! I've brought the tea, and the sosses ain't ready!" said Jimmy Silver. "Here, sit down, you new kid! Don't stand on ceremony! Sit on a chair, my infant! How's your nose now?"

"Getting on all right, -thanks!" said Oswald, laughing.

He began to feel at home in the end study already. Jimmy Silver would have made anybody feel at home.

The sausages being done to a turn, and the toast finished, and the tea finally made, the Fistical Four sat down to tea with their guest. Dick Oswald had to pause to dab his nose occasionally, but he was taking that little accident with such cheery good-humour that it raised him in the opinion of the chums of the end study. Those tough young gentlemen did not like persons who were "soft," but it was clear that Oswald was not very soft.

Although Lovell had pronounced Silver's idea of befriending the new boy "weird," all the four chums did their best to make him feel comfortable on his first day at Rookwood. They took their cue from Jimmy Silver, who, though not generally a philanthropist,

had a very kind heart; and, besides, Jimmy felt that something was due to Oswald in compensation for his swollen nose.

Jimmy Silver & Co. talked football, and especially the forthcoming match with St. Jim's; but they did not forget their guest. Oswald knew nothing as yet about Rookwood or Rookwood games, and could not very well enter into the deep questions discussed so knowingly by the Fistical Four.

"You play footer, kid?" asked Lovell patronisingly.

"Yes," said Oswald. "I hope I shall have a chance to play here. I was considered rather good."

"In the nursery?" asked Lovell.

"At my old school, I mean," said Oswald.

"Where was that?"

The new boy paused a moment. The question was asked quite casually, not at all curiously. A similar question asked by Jimmy Silver had been evaded, though Jimmy had not noticed that.

"Minhurst," said Oswald at last.

"Minhurst?" said Lovell carelessly.

"Never heard of the place."

"I have," said Raby. "It's in the West Riding, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Oswald.

"Smythe's got a brother there," said Raby. "I've heard him speak of it."

Oswald started.

"Who's Smythe?" he asked nervously. "Smythe of the Shell!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "He's our prize idiot! A great nut! He used to be junior captain till we kicked him out! Smythe is *Arbiter Elegantiarum*. I suppose you know what that means, as you're a Classical?"

"Arbiter of Elegance," said Raby, for the benefit of the new boy, who was looking curiously thoughtful.

"You needn't translate to Oswald, Raby—he isn't a Modern," said Jimmy Silver. "I didn't know there were two Smythes. What a mercy and a blessing they ain't both at Rookwood!"

"What an escape for Rookwood!" said Lovell. "I've heard of Smythe's brother. He's younger than Adolphus, but he licks him in the holidays. I suppose that's the way his pater keeps peace in the family, shoving Smythe the major here and Smythe the minor up in Yorkshire. Did you know the chap, Oswald?"

"I knew a Smythe—I mean, just by sight," said Oswald. "He wasn't a friend of mine. He wasn't much of a nut—chap who was always going out with a camera."

"Well, if he was the only Smythe there, he was Adolphus' minor," said Raby.

Oswald compressed his lips.

"Does he ever come here?" he asked.

"Here? No! Why the dickens should he come here?" said Lovell. "It's a bit too far for a bike-ride, isn't it?"

"And there isn't much love lost between Adolphus and his minor from what I heard!" grinned Raby. "They write to one another, though. Adolphus writes to him for a quid he lent him last vac, and Algy writes back to ask him if he won't be happy till he gets it? It's a regular joke in Smythe's study."

"Your nose hurting you, young 'un?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"My nose? No."

"You're looking jolly down in the mouth all of a sudden."

"Am I?" said Oswald, with a smile. "Perhaps it's my nose, after all."

"Have another soss," said Lovell hospitably. "I say, have they put you into a study yet?"

"No. Mr. Bootles is going to tell me about it."

The Fistical Four exchanged glances.

When a new boy dropped in at Rookwood there was a danger of the sacred precincts of the end study being invaded by an outsider. The Classical four rather liked Oswald's looks, but they didn't want a fifth in their study. That wasn't to be expected.

"Then I'll tell you what," said Lovell. "Don't let Bootles put you in here. You see, we're four now, and I'm afraid you'd be uncomfortable."

"There's only two in the next study," Newcombe remarked — "Hooker and Jones minor. Hooker is a really nice chap, and Jones is a regular ripper. You'd like both of them."

"A nice study, too," said Raby. "Not so big as this, but cosy—very cosy."

"Nice pink wallpaper, too," said Jimmy Silver. "Jones minor did that. You'd like that study, Oswald, right down to the ground."

Oswald burst into a laugh.

"I understand. I'll keep out of this study if I can."

"Ahem! Of course, we don't want to be inhospitable," explained Jimmy Silver, "but the family circle is the family circle, you know. An Englishman's study is his castle."

"Exactly! I'll do my best."

"I must say the young 'un is quite a decent chap for a new kid," said Lovell. "More sense than most new kids. If you've finished, we'll take you for a walk round the place, and show you our picturesque views and famous sights."

The Fistical Four felt extremely friendly towards the new fellow who was willing to spare their study. They felt that they could not make too much of him—at least, until the question of his study was settled. Tea being over, and Oswald having given his damaged nose a final dab, the five juniors sallied forth together, the Fistical Four and the new kid on the best of terms with one another.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Adolphus Wakes Up the Wrong Passenger.

"BY gad! What have you got there, dear boys?"

It was Smythe—the great Smythe—Adolphus Smythe of the Shell, who asked the question, in his languid, drawling voice. Smythe and Howard and Tracy, the leading spirits of the Noble Society of Giddy Goats, were lounging gracefully under the old beeches when the Fistical Four and their protegee came along. Adolphus extracted his eyeglass from his pocket, and jammed it in his eye, and took a survey of the new junior.

The Fistical Four paused. They were always ready for a rag with Smythe & Co. The Fistical Four were energetic youths, and they were down on nuts.

"We've been looking for you, really," said Jimmy Silver. "We wanted to show you to the new chap. We're showing him the sights, you know. Oswald, my son, here you behold the great chief of the nuts—the rarest animal to be found outside the Zoo. The Head has received tempting offers from the Zoo, but he won't part with him on any terms."

Smythe of the Shell glared, and Howard and Tracy chuckled. Smythe turned his glare upon them, and they left off chuckling. The new boy burst into a laugh, and Adolphus then bestowed his glare upon him.

"What are you cacklin' at?" he inquired. "Do you want me to give you an ear to match that nose? I'd do it for two pins!"

Oswald fumbled in his jacket, and then held out his hand towards Smythe. Two pins reposed in his palm. Adolphus

turned his eyeglass upon them with a puzzled look.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver. "There's the two pins, Smythey."

"By gad!" Adolphus put his eyeglass back into his pocket, and pushed back his immaculate white cuffs. He was a head taller than the new boy, and had no doubt about being able to handle him. If he had had any doubts about it, he would have sheered off, for Adolphus was not of the stuff which heroes are made. But although he was not a fighting man, he was by no means averse to earning a little cheap glory by licking a fag who was not his match.

"Where will you have it?" he asked.

Oswald chuckled.

"Anywhere you can put it," he replied.

"Look out for your nose!" said Smythe.

"I'm looking out."

The Fistical Four and Howard and Tracy stood round in a ring. Tommy Dodd & Co. came scooting over from the Modern side at the first whiff of battle in the air.

It was surprising, indeed, how fast juniors gathered upon the spot. It was an unusual sight to see Adolphus engaged in fisticuffs. His tastes were not generally fistical, and the Rookwood fellows were interested.

The sight was indeed interesting, but it was unfortunately brief. Adolphus made a rush at the new junior, his fists sailing about like flails.

Oswald did not budge an inch.

His left came up and knocked Smythe's wildly-sailing fists into the air, and then his right came out and caught Smythe on the chin.

Smythe staggered back, and brought up against the trunk of a beech, and put his hand to his chin, and gasped.

"Bravo, young 'un!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

"By gad!" ejaculated Smythe.

"Go it, Smythey!" chorused the nuts. "Mop up the ground with him, Smythey!"

"I'm waiting to be mopped!" said Oswald.

"Now look out for blood and thunder!" yelled Tommy Dodd. "Smythe is going to slaughter him! I can see it in his eye! He's thirsting for gore!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tommy Dodd's remarks were intended in a humorous sense. For the great Adolphus, so far from being bent on slaughter, shook out his cuffs, and turned away. That one doughty blow had been enough for Adolphus. He realised that he had woke up the wrong passenger, so to speak, and he had had enough.

"Well, my hat!" said Lovell, in disgust. "Don't go yet, Smythey. You ain't licked!"

Even Howard and Tracy looked ashamed of their chum. Never had so inglorious a climb-down been seen in the quadrangle as Rookwood. Smythe had picked a row with the new kid, he had sailed in without provocation, and he had surrendered at the first whack. There was a howl of derision from Tommy Dodd & Co.

"The Classical side in this school is simply going to rot!" said Tommy Dodd scornfully. "Blessed if I ever saw anything like that!"

"Dash it all, Smythe—buck up and go for him!" whispered Howard.

"I decline to be mixed up in a hooligan scramble!" said Smythe, as loftily as he could, "I'm not lookin' for scraps with Fourth Form fags!"

"Nor with anybody, you Classical funk!" howled Tommy Dodd.

"Smythey, old chap—" urged Tracy.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 40.

"Oh, rats!" said Smythe.

And he walked away, his face a little red, but his step as swaggering as ever.

Howard and Tracy followed him slowly. Never had the great chief of the Giddy Goats cut so painful a figure.

"Well, that takes the cake intoirly," said Doyle. "What's Rookwood coming to?"

"Rookwood!" snorted Tommy Dodd. "Rookwood's all right—the Modern side. But I must say these Classicals are miserable funks!"

"Why, you Modern worm," said Jimmy Silver angrily, "we don't own Smythe! He ought to be a Modern! He's just suited for your side!"

The Fistical Four had nothing whatever in common with Smythe. But he was a Classical, and they were deeply mortified by the exhibition he had put up under the eyes of the Moderns. Smythe's pusillanimity reflected upon his side. They were inclined to prove to the Moderns, in the plainest possible way, that all the Classicals weren't funks, anyway.

"Backing down before a new fag—a kid that hasn't been here a couple of hours!" said Tommy Cook. "Well, I never did think much of these measly Classicals, but this does take the biscuit!"

"The sooner they abolish the Classical side the better for Rookwood!" remarked Tommy Dodd. "I think—"

"You think!" snorted Jimmy Silver. "You can't think! Why, you Modern worm—"

"You Classical ass—"

"If you want a pink eye, Tommy Dodd—"

"Ha, ha! You Classical funks—"

That was enough for Jimmy Silver. He rushed at Tommy Dodd to bestow upon him that weird article—a pink eye. Tommy Dodd was nothing loth. It was a whole day since he had had a scrap with a Classical, so he was more than ready for war.

In a twinkling they were going it hammer and tongs, and the Classical Co. joined in, and a Modern crowd, and then more Classicals and more Moderns, till a battle royal was raging under the old beeches.

Oswald stood looking on in wonder. It was his first experience of Rookwood and the state of warfare that existed between the juniors of the rival sides. But he was not allowed to stand neutral.

Towle of the Modern side collared him, and he was quickly scrapping with the rest.

"Go it, Moderns!"

"Buck up, Classics!"

"Yow! You worm! Take that!"

"Oh, my eye! Yah! Buck up!"

"Give 'em socks!"

It was then that Bulkeley of the Sixth came on the scene, with a frowning brow and a heavy ashplant. Bulkeley laid out with that asphalt on all sides, and the fiery combat came to a sudden stop.

The juniors stood not upon the order of their going—they scattered and fled in all directions. A few minutes later the Fistical Four found themselves safe in the refuge of the end study. They had lost the new boy, but they were not thinking of him. They nursed their noses and caressed their eyes.

"Oh," gasped Lovell, "we should have licked that Modern gang if that silly idiot Bulkeley hadn't chipped in!"

"Licked 'em hollow, of course!" groaned Jimmy Silver. "I've got a nose now! Look at it! And Smythe's fault!"

"Did you ever see such a rotten funk?" growled Raby. "And now the Moderns will have that up against us! They're always after some handle to use against us because we're top side!"

"Awful funk! He ought to be made to fight that new kid," said Lovell. "If his pals have any grit at all, they'll make him do it. Why, he's twice as big as Oswald!"

"Oh, my nose!"

"Oh, my chin!"

"Hallo! What the dickens is that?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, as a stone dropped in at the open window, evidently tossed in from the quadrangle.

He picked up the stone. There was a slip of paper attached to it. On the slip was written, in large letters:

"Classic funks!"

The Fistical Four glared at one another furiously, and rushed to the window.

Leggett of the Modern side was travelling away round a corner.

"We shall never hear the end of this! I wish that new kid had stayed at—where was it?—in Yorkshire! Of course, everybody knew that Smythe was a funk. But—"

"He's a disgrace to the side!"

"He's got to fight Oswald!" said Jimmy Silver determinedly. "That will shut the beasts up!"

"He won't!"

"We'll make him!"

Jimmy Silver spoke in a tone of finality, and when Jimmy Silver spoke in that tone, there was no more to be said.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Mysterious.

OSWALD took his place in the Fourth Form at Rookwood the following day. He had been assigned to the study of Hooker and Jones minor—much to the relief of the Fistical Four.

Oswald was well up in his Form work, and he won a few words of approval from Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth. Under normal circumstances, a new fellow in the Fourth would not have attracted much attention. But Oswald, as it happened, had got into the limelight at once.

The Fistical Four had taken him up, and were friendly to him, which was a distinction. Then the fact that he had coolly tackled a Shell fellow so much bigger than himself made him remarked. But the chief cause of the limelight that was shed upon him was the conduct of Adolphus Smythe.

Quite a number of fellows in the Fourth advised him to pull Smythe's nose or punch his head, or otherwise proceed in a warlike manner to the complete discomfiture of Adolphus. Adolphus Smythe was not popular outside his own select circle.

But Oswald, though able to take care of himself, as he had proved, was evidently of a peaceable nature, for he steadily declined to have any more trouble with Smythe.

The captain of the Shell, on his side, was only too glad to avoid further trouble. He carefully ignored the new boy, and seemed quite blind when he came across him, and probably severely repented him of having bothered Oswald at all. Never had an essay at bullying ended so unluckily.

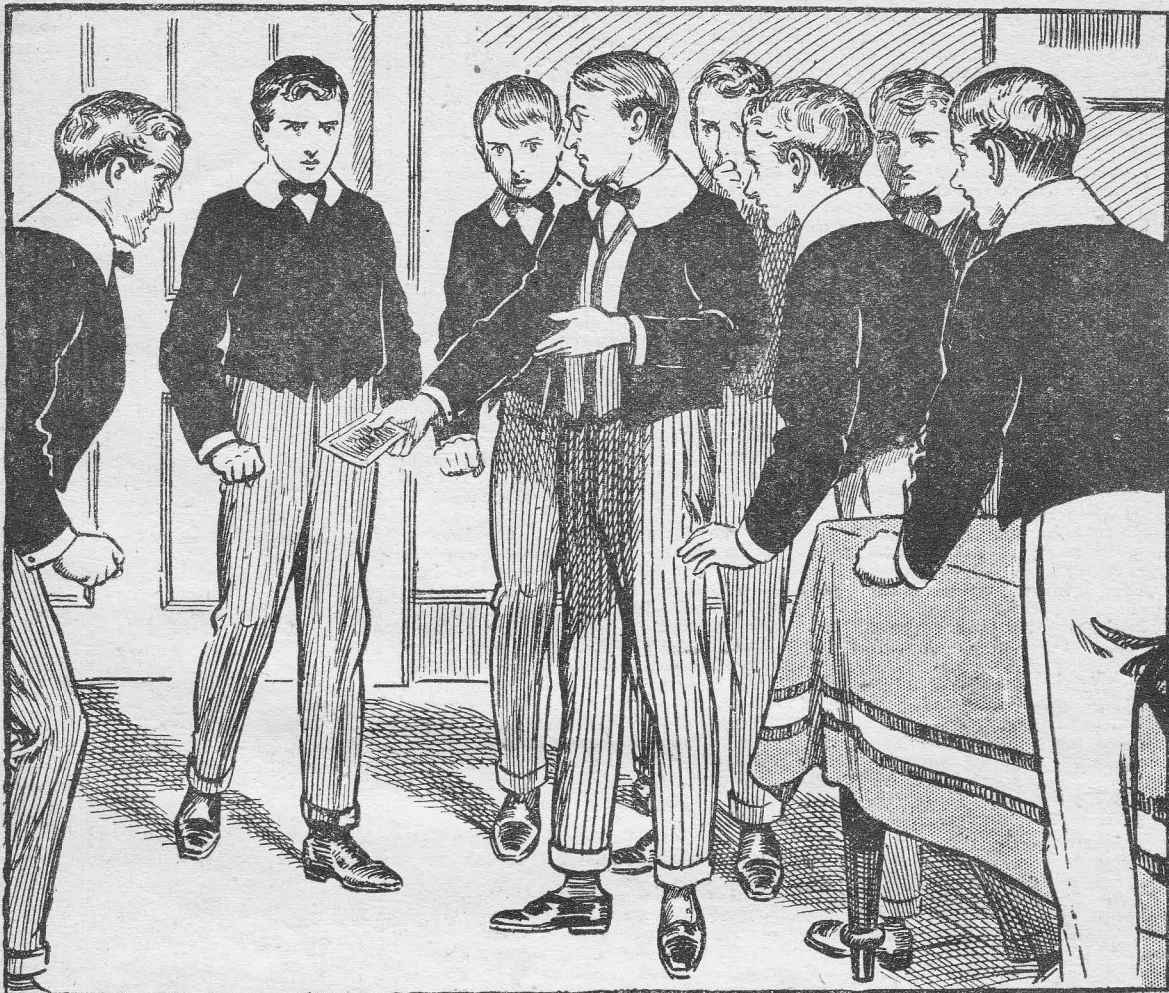
But Smythe was feeling very uncomfortable.

Even the nuts of the Shell, the Noble Society of Giddy Goats, were ashamed of him. There were limits.

But it was in vain that Adolphus's friends urged him to make mincemeat of the cheeky new kid.

Adolphus declined to be drawn.

Meanwhile, the Modern juniors did not let the matter rest. As a rule, they did not trouble their heads about a slacker like Smythe, and a new Classical kid was nothing to them. But it was a "handle" against the Classicals.



"Here's the photograph!" said Smythe. "I just want you to see I was telling the truth the other night!" A dead silence followed. The central figure in the picture was easily recognised as Oswald, his face downcast, his whole attitude suggestive of shame and humiliation. (See page 14.)

The slur of having an outrageous funk in their ranks was felt deeply by the Classic youths, and the Moderns took a fiendish delight in rubbing it in.

The more the Classics were exasperated, the more the Moderns delighted in rubbing it in, and there were probably more "scraps" over the matter than over any other cause of contention that had ever risen between the rivals of Rookwood.

The fiat had gone forth from the end study that Smythe of the Shell should wipe out the disgrace by "standing up" to the new kid in the gym with the gloves on.

The Fistical Four had threatened him with a record ragging if he refused.

Smythe shrugged his shoulders, and kept his own counsel. But when four warlike juniors came along to his study after lessons, somehow or other a perfect met them in the passage, inquired into their business, discovered what it was, and gave them two hundred lines each.

The Fistical Four retired to their study with feelings too deep for words. There was no doubt that Adolphus had "sneaked," and invoked the protection of the higher powers. There was no proof, but there was no doubt.

If Dick Oswald had been in the least aggressive or assertive, Adolphus would not have been able to avoid an encounter. But the new boy appeared to

be more anxious to keep the peace even than Adolphus.

It was noted that he avoided every chance of encountering Smythe, and, indeed, would turn deliberately away if he saw him coming.

This led some of the fellows to opine that he was as big a funk as Adolphus, and as much afraid of Smythe as Smythe was afraid of him.

A couple of days later, when Smythe and Howard and Tracy came into their study to tea, they found a prominent inscription inked across their looking-glass:

"HOME FOR FUNKS!"

Smythe scowled, and Howard and Tracy fumed.

"This study is getting a good name—I don't think!" growled Howard. "Look here, Smythe, you ought to tackle that kid!"

"Oh, rot!" said Adolphus uncomfortably.

"You're bigger than he is," said Tracy.

"Yaas. It wouldn't be fair to pile on him," said Smythe. "That's really what I've been thinkin' of!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Look here, Tracy——"

"You should have thought of that before you piled on him in the first place," said Tracy. "You look here, Smythe. That kid's afraid of you!"

"Do you think so, by gad?"

"I know he is. I've seen him dodging away when you come along. He's afraid that you're to go for him!"

"I never do seem to come across him somehow, since the first day," Adolphus remarked, very thoughtfully.

"He's a funk," said Howard. "You'd have an easy thing. And, dash it all, Smythe, this isn't pleasant for us!"

"If you think I'm a funk——" began Smythe.

"Ahem! Of—of course not! But——"

"This scrapping is rotten low," said Smythe. "I'm not a hooligan. I'm not going to be always punching and scrapping like those Fourth-Form fags. It's low!"

"Ye-e-es; but you ought to give the cheeky young cad a lesson," said Tracy. "And I know he's afraid of you. What does he dodge you for, if he isn't?"

"He does dodge me," said Smythe, with a nod.

"I know he does."

"It's a jolly odd thing," said Smythe, "but I've seen him before somewhere. I've heard his name, too—Oswald, you know. Tain't a common name. Can't remember where I've heard it, but I have. And I've seen him, though I really don't know him from Adam!"

"That's jolly queer!" said Howard, with a stare.

"Yaas, ain't it?" said Smythe, lighting a cigarette. "Don't run away with

the idea that I know the cad—I don't. But I've seen him somewhere, I know that—or a photograph of him at least. Anybody know where he comes from?"

"I've heard that he came from a school in Yorkshire."

"Yorkshire!" said Smythe reflectively. "Oh, my hat! I've got a minor at a school in Yorkshire. Was it Min-hurst this cad came from?"

"Yes, that's the place."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Smythe, with a sudden burst of merriment that astounded his two study-mates.

"What the thunder——" said Howard.

"What the merry dickens——" ejaculated Tracy.

"By gad!" said Smythe exultantly. "No wonder I remember his face! The cheeky young cad, to come here! The cheek of it!"

"Eh? Why the dickens shouldn't he come here?" demanded Tracy.

Smythe chuckled.

"The cheeky cad! I'll jolly soon put him in his place! As for fightin' him, I decline to do anythin' of the kind! And I'm quite ready to give all the fellows my reasons!"

"They fancy they know your reasons!" growled Howard.

"I've got jolly good reasons!" said Smythe. "There are some fellows that a gentleman couldn't touch!"

"Do you mean to say that you know something against that chap?" asked Howard in perplexity.

"You'll see if you come along to the common-room with me after tea," said Smythe. "The cad always shows up there in the evening. Those cads in the end study make him come there, thinkin' he'll run across me one evenin', and there'll be a row. Well, I'll let 'em see that I'm not afraid to meet the rotten outsider!"

And Smythe declined to explain any further; but he chuckled several times over tea, very much puzzling his study-mates. But they were glad, at all events, that the great Adolphus had decided to meet the new junior face to face. The stain upon the escutcheon of the Giddy Goats was to be wiped out, at least.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Accused!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were looking cross.

They were sitting in a row in the window-seat in the common-room. Evening preparation was over, and most of the Classical juniors were in the common-room.

The new Fourth-Former, Dick Oswald, was playing chess with Hooker, and looking quite cheerful.

Oswald had made many friends during the few days he had been at Rookwood. Jimmy Silver & Co. were very chummy with him, and he was on the best of terms with his study-mates, Hooker and Jones minor.

There was only one fault to be found with him—that he did not seek to draw Adolphus of the Shell into an encounter in the gym. But other encounters he did not seem to shrink from, for he had joined in several rows with the Modern juniors, and kept his end up in a style that was worthy of the Fistical Four themselves—than which there was no higher praise.

The clouds upon the youthful brows of the Fistical Four at this moment were caused by the chipping of the cheery Moderns. Why shouldn't the beasts let the matter drop? Jimmy Silver wanted to know. They had funks on their side, too—Leggett, for instance?

Why couldn't they go easy on Adol-

phus? As a matter of fact, it was simply because it exasperated the Classical Co. that the Moderns were keeping the matter of Adolphus alive.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Lovell suddenly. "Here he is!"

Jimmy Silver jumped.

Smythe of the Shell came into the common-room, with a choice bunch of the nuts—Howard, and Tracy, and Selwyn, and Chesney. Smythe had his monocle in his eye, and his usual lofty expression upon his face.

"Coming up to the scratch, by Jove!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "What's the giddy proverb about contempt piercing the shell of the tortoise? It's got through Smythe's thick hide at last!"

There was quite a buzz in the common-room. The juniors had not failed to observe that Smythe of the Shell had avoided that apartment of late, because evidently Oswald was generally there in the evening. Smythe's arrival now could mean only one thing—that he had screwed up his courage to the sticking-point at last.

There was satisfaction in the faces of all the nuts now. Their great leader was going to wipe out the stain at last. Townsend and Topham and several more of the choice fraternity joined Adolphus at once. Jones minor and Buller closed the door, and put their backs to it. Now that Smythe was there, he wasn't going to get away without a scrap, if they could help it.

Oswald did not look up from the chess-table, but Hooker jumped up at once. What was chess at a moment like that?

"Hallo! Here's somebody to see you, Oswald!" exclaimed Hooker, with a chuckle.

"Let's get on with the game," said Oswald, with his eyes still on the chess-board.

"Blow the game! Here's Smythe!"

"Don't let me interrupt you, pray," said Smythe, in a drawing tone. "You needn't keep your face glued to the board though, Oswald. Look me in the face, if you've got the cheek, by gad!"

"Bravo, Smythe!" chortled Selwyn.

Adolphus was fairly coming out at last, that was clear.

Oswald's cheeks burned, and he rose to his feet.

"Look you in the face!" snorted Jimmy Silver. "Why you've been sneaking about for days, not giving him the chance, you funk!"

Smythe laughed.

"Come on, Oswald, old scout!" said Jimmy Silver, dragging the new boy forward. "Look the silly ass in the chivvy! 'Tain't a very pretty chivvy to look at, but it won't kill you!"

"Look here, I don't want a row," said Oswald.

"My only hat! You're not funkng as well as Smythe, I suppose?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"He'd rather not see me now he knows that I know him," said Adolphus, with a grin. "I've got an explanation to make to you fellows. I've declined to have anythin' to do with this—this person——"

"You've funkng, you mean," said Lovell.

"There are some persons it is impossible to touch," said Adolphus loftily.

"This is one of them. I might have explained this before, but I haven't taken the trouble. But to avoid misunderstanding, I'm willin' to tell you fellows my reasons."

"We know your reasons," said Hooker.

"You're a rotten coward!"

"Yes, rather!"

Smythe sneered.

"That fellow isn't fit to touch!" he said. "I'll fight with any decent chap, but not with him!"

There was a buzz.

"And what have you got against Oswald?" demanded Jimmy Silver angrily and scornfully.

"Ask him," said Smythe. "He knows."

All eyes were turned upon Oswald. For a moment the new junior's face had worn a strangely troubled and harassed expression. But now he stood erect, his eyes gleaming and fastened upon Smythe. Certainly he did not look afraid of the big Shell fellow.

"What the dickens is the fellow driving at?" exclaimed Lovell, perplexed. "Has Smythe got anything up against you, Oswald?"

Oswald shrugged his shoulders.

"If he has anything to say, I suppose I can answer it," he replied—"or, rather, I sha'n't take the trouble to answer it. I'm ready to give him a licking, if that's what he wants!"

"That's what he needs, whether he wants it or not," said Jimmy Silver. "Cut off the gas, Smythe, and come to the hosses!"

Smythe drew away a pace. There was a dangerous gleam in Oswald's eyes that he did not like.

"One has to draw the line somewhere," said Smythe. "That fellow disgraced his own school, and he's come here to disgrace ours. He must have told lies to the Head to get admitted."

"What?"

"Rats!"

"Rubbish!"

"Tell him he's a liar, Oswald!" Jimmy Silver shook the new junior by the shoulder. "Don't think we believe a word of it, kid; we know you're the right sort. He's telling this yarn because he's a funk and a cad. Tell him he's a liar, and then wallop him!"

Oswald drew a deep breath.

"He is a liar if he says I've done anything to disgrace my old school, or that I told any lies to get admitted here," he replied, in a clear voice.

Smythe's lips curled.

"I've got it from my brother," he said, "my minor at Minhurst."

"If your brother says what you've said, he is a liar, too!" said Oswald.

"That's plain English!" grinned Lovell. "Bravo, young 'un! What have you to say to that, Smythe? What yarn are you going to make up next to sneak out of a fight?"

"I'm going to prove what I say," said Smythe. "That fellow was expelled from Minhurst."

"Bow-wow!"

"He was sacked for disgracing his school—acting like a rotten cad, breaking bounds at night, and going to public-houses," said Smythe.

"Pile it on!" jeered Lovell.

"Didn't he commit any burglaries or murders?" asked Raby sarcastically.

"He won't dare to deny it," said Smythe. "I know the whole story, though I'd almost forgotten it, only he's brought it back to my mind by coming here. My brother at Minhurst dabbles in photography, and he took a snap of this fellow when he was sacked. He sent a copy of it to me. I had it knocking about for a long time, but it went——"

"You haven't got it now, of course?" jeered several voices.

"No. I never took any care of the thing," said Smythe. "Why should I? I'm not gone on photographs. Of course it never occurred to me that the fellow would have the cheek to come here!"

"Roll 'em out!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Pile 'em on! You beat Ananias at his own game!"

"I remember the photograph distinctly!" said Smythe angrily. "Young Algy snapped him when he was clearing out. He was sneaking away like a whipped cur, with the fellows staring at

him—blubbing, too. You could see in the photograph that he was blubbing."

"Pile it on!"

"Young Algy told me all about it in his letter. The fellow's name was Oswald, and he was caught comin' in after midnight, and it came out that he was in the habit of hauntin' pubs, and had been seen squiffy—"

"Hear, hear!"

"What a giddy imagination!" said Jimmy Silver admiringly. "You ought to live by the seaside and write short stories, Smythe!"

"And he was sacked," said Smythe. "If I'd had the least idea the cad would have the nerve to shove himself in here I'd have taken care of that photograph to show him up. Of course I never thought of such a thing!"

"Pity you didn't!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "We might have believed a word or two of the yarn if you had."

"Hold on!" said Howard. "I've seen that photograph knocking about the study in a drawer some weeks ago. I didn't notice it specially, but it was just such a picture as Smythe describes."

"I think I've seen it, too!" said Tracy.

"Is that all?" asked Jimmy Silver. "That's all," said Smythe. "I've stated the exact facts—"

"The facts! Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I utterly decline to have anything to do with a fellow who was expelled from his school for blackguardly conduct," said Adolphus. "I wouldn't touch him with a barge-pole. Come away, you fellows!"

But Smythe of the Shell was not to get away just yet. Oswald stepped forward, and struck him across the face with his open palm.

"There's my answer," he said. "I sha'n't make any other, and the fellows can think what they like."

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Adolphus Faces the Music.

"By gad!" stuttered Smythe. The smack across his face had sounded with a crack like a pistol-shot.

The Shell fellow staggered back, panting.

Oswald faced him, his hands clenched, his eyes glittering. There was nothing peaceful-looking about him now.

"You cad!" he said, between his teeth. "I never wanted a row with you. You started a quarrel with me the day I came, and it isn't my fault if you funk'd seeing it through. Now, if you're not a cowardly hound, you'll put up your hands."

"Go it, Oswald!"

"Play up, Smythe!"

Smythe stood trembling with rage. He cast a longing glance towards the door, but the juniors were crowded in the way. Apparently it had not occurred to the lofty Adolphus that his story might not be believed.

If the Rookwood fellows had credited his statement that Oswald was an arrant blackguard, who had been kicked out of his former school for disgracing it, it would have made all the difference. They would naturally have resented his coming to Rookwood, and they would undoubtedly have made things warm for him. But, as it happened, nobody believed a word of the story.

Smythe of the Shell was known to be not over-particular in truth-telling, and the story came too aptly as an excuse for avoiding a fistical encounter with the new junior. That, indeed, was Smythe's reason for telling the story, and it had not occurred to him that that fact would throw doubt upon it. But the juniors

did not even give Smythe credit for believing it himself.

Smythe stared round at the mocking, incredulous faces, and realised that he had made a blunder. He was not believed, and he was regarded as a slanderer as well as a coward. That was all he had gained.

The juniors were pressing round in a ring, and there was no escape for the dandy of the Shell. Even his own chosen disciples, the Giddy Goats, looked incredulous. Smythe made a movement to back out of the ring. Jimmy Silver promptly shoved him back, and none too gently.

"I tell you I won't fight that cad!" exclaimed Smythe furiously. "He's a dirty blackguard, and was sacked—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Try a new yarn, Smythe!"

"Rotten funk!"

"Dash it all, you can't let him smack your face!" whispered Howard. "You've got to stand up to him."

Smythe rubbed his cheek, where the smack had fallen. It was burning. Oswald had declared that that was his answer, and that he would make no other. But the Rookwood fellows did not need any other. If Adolphus Smythe took that "lying down," the contempt that would be poured upon him would be so overwhelming that he would never be able to hold his head up again at Rookwood. Nobody would be likely to listen to any accusation from him after that. Smythe realised that he was in for it—that unless he showed some courage, his own chosen followers would fall away from him. Even slackers like Townsend and Topham were already looking at him with contempt.

"I—I'm not afraid of that cad," said Smythe. "I've stated my reasons—he ain't fit to touch!"

"Funk!"

"Rotter!"

"Rag the cad!"

"But if you fellows don't believe me—"

"Of course we don't!"

"Then I'll fight him," said Smythe, realising that there was no help for it.

"My reasons—"

"Oh, blow your reasons! Let's have a bit of pluck, and not so many reasons," said Lovell.

Smythe peeled off his jacket. It came off very slowly, perhaps on account of its excellent fit. The face of the great Adolphus was sickly. Oswald tossed his jacket to Jimmy Silver. Hooker locked the door. No prefects were wanted to come in bothering just then.

"I'm your second, Smythe, old chap," murmured Howard. "Now, mind you put up a good fight. You're bigger than he is, and if he's the kind of fellow you say, he can't have much pluck."

"If!" growled Smythe. "Don't you believe me, then?"

"Ye-es," said Howard, "I—I suppose so. Well, go in and win. If he's a pubby beast, as you say, he can't have much stamina, and you'll lick him. If you don't put up a good fight, anyway, you're done for at Rookwood. The fags of the Second will rag you in the quad if you show the white feather after this."

Smythe sullenly rolled up his sleeves. He had made up his mind to it, and though he shrank from damage to his classic features, and disarrangement of his beautifully-parted hair, he resolved to do his best. Howard had spoken so plainly that it was clear that even the Giddy Goats would have nothing more to do with him if he disgraced their select society by funk'ing now.

"Not too much row," said Jimmy Silver. "We don't want Bulkeley or Neville, or old Bootles dropping in. I'm your second, Oswald."

"Thank you!" said Oswald.

"You've got to knock his lies back down his throat," said Jimmy Silver, looking at the new boy's troubled face. "Cheer up, kid—nobody here believes a single word the cad has said. We all know it's only a yarn. Don't be down in the mouth—we all stand by you."

The new boy nodded.

"Even Smythe's own set don't believe him," said Lovell. "It's a rotten trick to tell a yarn like that, rotten even for a cad like Smythe. But you needn't be afraid anybody will believe it, Oswald. We know you by this time."

"I can say that I've never done anything to be ashamed of," said Oswald, in a low, earnest voice.

"You needn't tell us that; we know it," said Jimmy Silver. "Now, roll up your sleeves, and mind you hit hard."

"I'm going to," said Oswald grimly. Lovell took out his watch.

"Ready, gentlemen? Keep the ring there! Now then, seconds out of the ring!" Lovell was quite business-like. "Time!"

Oswald stepped briskly forward, and Smythe came on more slowly. The juniors looked on eagerly as they began.

Nobody would have been surprised if Smythe had allowed himself to be knocked down, and had then declined to come up to the scratch again. But Adolphus realised his position too clearly for that. To fall from his high estate, to be an object of scorn, pointed at with derision by the smallest fags—that was too bitter. Smythe of the Shell screwed up all the courage he had, and fought hard.

He had many advantages—he was a head taller than the new junior, he was longer in the reach, he was a good year older. He knew something of boxing, too—in the gym. But facing a pair of hard rapping fists, somehow, knocked his knowledge out of his head.

The juniors were surprised, and Adolphus' friends were pleased by the fight the dandy of the Shell put up in the first round.

Both the combatants received punishment, and both looked somewhat the worse for wear when Lovell called "Time!" and they separated.

Howard pulled his principal into a chair and fanned him. Smythe was looking very warm, and breathing hard. His wind was failing him, and Smythe bitterly regretted the cigarettes he had smoked since tea. Oswald was in perfect condition—which in itself seemed a good answer to the accusation Adolphus had brought against him.

"Time!"

Hammer and tongs in the second round. There were subdued cheers from the juniors, watching eagerly. They were very anxious not to be interrupted by a prefect or a master. The common-room was not really the place for affairs of this kind, and old Bulkeley would have been angry at seeing a fight without gloves. The special circumstances of the case would not have appealed to Bulkeley, probably.

Third round, and fourth: The Giddy Goats murmured approval of their chief, as the noble Adolphus stood up through round after round. Smythe of the Shell was surprising all the fellows, friends and foes; by putting up a good fight. Now that his courage was up to the sticking-point, it seemed to stick.

But the Shell fellow was steadily getting the worst of it. He was getting very flurried, too.

In the fifth round, he was knocked right and left, and his wild drives came nowhere near the Fourth-Former.

He sank into the chair, gasping, at the end of the round, and Howard whispered encouragement.

"Stick to him, old chap—you'll beat him yet!"

Adolphus groaned.
"You're putting up a splendid fight," said Tracy. "Let those rotters see that you're jolly well not a funk, Smythey."
"Time!"

Smythe stepped up reluctantly for the sixth round. Oswald came up coolly and cheerfully. His face showed signs of hard knocks, but he was quiet and determined, and evidently far from beaten.

"Our man wins!" Jimmy Silver murmured to his chums. "This will be a giddy lesson for the Giddy Goat. But he's got more grit than I thought, by Jove!"

"Time!"
Seventh round—and the last! The unfortunate Adolphus was knocked right and left. He finished the round on his back, laid there by a powerful drive on the chin which rattled every tooth in his head. Lovell counted, and Adolphus did not rise. He gasped and panted, and groaned.

"Eight—nine—out!"
Howard and Tracy picked their man up. Smythe collapsed into a chair. Oswald put on his jacket with Jimmy Silver's assistance. The Fistical Four patted him on the back.

"Jolly good scrap," said Jimmy Silver, with the air of a connoisseur. Indeed, Jimmy Silver was something of an authority on "scraps." "And you've licked him, and it will do him good. Now get to the dorm, and bathe your nose."

Oswald regarded Smythe hesitatingly. Smythe was blinking at him savagely through half-closed eyes. Jimmy Silver read the thought in the new junior's mind, and smiled, and nodded.

"Go it!" he said.
Oswald stepped up to the dandy of the Shell, and held out his hand.

Smythe stared at him.
"We've had a scrap, Smythe," said Oswald. "It's all over, and I'm willing to shake hands over it if you are."

Smythe gave him a look of hatred.
"By gad! I don't shake hands with pub-haunting bounders who are kicked out of their school!" he replied.

"Why, you cad!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver hotly. "Are you still sticking to that yarn?"

"Yaas. It's true."
Oswald flushed crimson. Jimmy Silver clenched his hands hard.

"You can't stand any more licking now, Smythe. But if you say that over again to-morrow, you'll have the gloves on with me. I never heard of such a cad! Come on, Oswald—don't mind the brute!"

The Fistical Four marched Oswald away to the dormitory. Smythe limped away with Howard and Tracy, his eyes glittering through the bruises round them. Smythe had been licked to the wide, but in his spiteful breast there was a savage determination to make his vanquisher sorry for it. And Adolphus thought that he knew the way.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER. Smythe's Triumph.

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were prepared for some more of Smythe's "rot," as they called it, but during the next few days Smythe held his peace. Perhaps he understood clearly

what he had to expect if he renewed his accusations without proof. He did not utter a single word on the subject of Oswald outside his own study. But Smythe had not forgotten.

Only Smythe's own chums knew that he was biding his time.

The other fellows concluded that he had decided to "drop it," and the matter was almost dismissed from their minds.

More than once the juniors assured Dick Oswald that they didn't believe a word that Smythe had uttered; but their assurances were received in troubled silence for the most part.

In the days that followed the fight in the Common-room Dick Oswald seemed to have lost the happy cheerfulness which had been his marked characteristic.

It was nearly a week after the "scrap" when the blow fell. Adolphus was looking his former nutty and elegant self as he lounged into the Common-room one evening with his friends the nuts.

Oswald was there, sitting with a book. Jimmy Silver & Co. were talking football.

There was something in the manner of Adolphus & Co. as they lounged in that attracted general attention at once.

"Gentlemen," said Adolphus, unmoved, "the other night I made a few remarks upon the subject of our young friend Oswald."

Oswald started up.
"You did!" said Jimmy Silver, "and Oswald knocked your lies down your throat. And if you repeat 'em now, I'll do some knocking!"

"The day after that little argument," said Smythe calmly, "I wrote to my brother at Minhurst."

"Has he settled the quid he owes you?" inquired Raby, amid a general chuckle.

"Never mind that," said Smythe. "I asked him if he still had the negative of the photograph he sent me some time back, and if he had, to get a new print from it, and send it to me, with all the particulars in writing."

"My brother's sent me the print," said Adolphus. "He always keeps his negatives. He's sent me a letter, too. I'll read it out. I want you to see that I was tellin' the exact facts the other night—I've got my reputation to think of. You fellows called it a lie."

"So it was a lie!" said Jimmy Silver hotly, but his heart sank as he glanced at Oswald. What was Oswald looking like that for?

"Very well. We'll see who's the liar," said Smythe, gritting his teeth. "Listen to this, from my brother at Minhurst."

"The chap you mention, Dick Oswald, was in the Fourth here. He was caught out of bounds at midnight, and proved to be a regular bouncer and pub-haunter, and a gambler, and all that. There was an awful row. He was sacked in disgrace. I snapshotted him as he was going, to keep as a souvenir. I'm not a particular chap, but I draw the line somewhere. This Oswald was a real bouncer. If it's true that he's come to Rookwood, he must have a nerve. Your headmaster can't know the facts."

A dead silence followed.
Smythe broke it.

"Here's the photograph!" he said.
In silence the Rookwood fellows looked at the photograph. It represented a school Close, with grey old buildings at the back. The central figure was a boy, easily recognised as Oswald. In the picture his head was drooping, his face downcast, his whole attitude suggestive of shame and humiliation. Other fellows in the photograph were standing round looking at him, many with scorn and derision, some with pity. There were traces of tears on the face of the wretched boy who was the centre of the picture.

It was Oswald!
There was a frozen silence. Jimmy Silver & Co. waited for Oswald to speak. Their minds were almost in a whirl. The letter from Smythe's brother could hardly be untrue, and the photograph spoke for itself. It seemed only too clear now that Smythe's story, amazing as it was, had been true all along, and that it was the new junior who had deceived his school-fellows.

The look on Oswald's face was proof enough.

"Well," said Jimmy Silver, at last, "Oswald? You've got something to say, I suppose?"

Smythe laughed jarringly.
"Shut up, you cad!" said Jimmy fiercely. "Let Oswald speak!"

Oswald's pale lips opened.
"I—I haven't much to say—nothing that you'd believe, anyway. I never did anything at Minhurst to be ashamed of, just as I told you."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Hooker. "Were you sacked, or weren't you?"
Oswald did not speak.

"If you say that Smythe's manufactured that letter and faked the photograph—" began Jimmy Silver hesitatingly.

"If he says that," said Smythe venomously, "I'll write to the headmaster of Minhurst, and you'll get the truth from him!"

"Speak up, Oswald, old scout!" said Lovell uncomfortably.

Oswald did not reply.
His pale face flushed under the gaze that was bent upon it from all sides, and he moved away with a stumbling step towards the door. Jimmy Silver drew a deep, deep breath.

Smythe of the Shell smiled. He had his revenge now for his defeat and his humiliation—a revenge as complete as he could have wished. It was the moment of Adolphus Smythe's triumph.

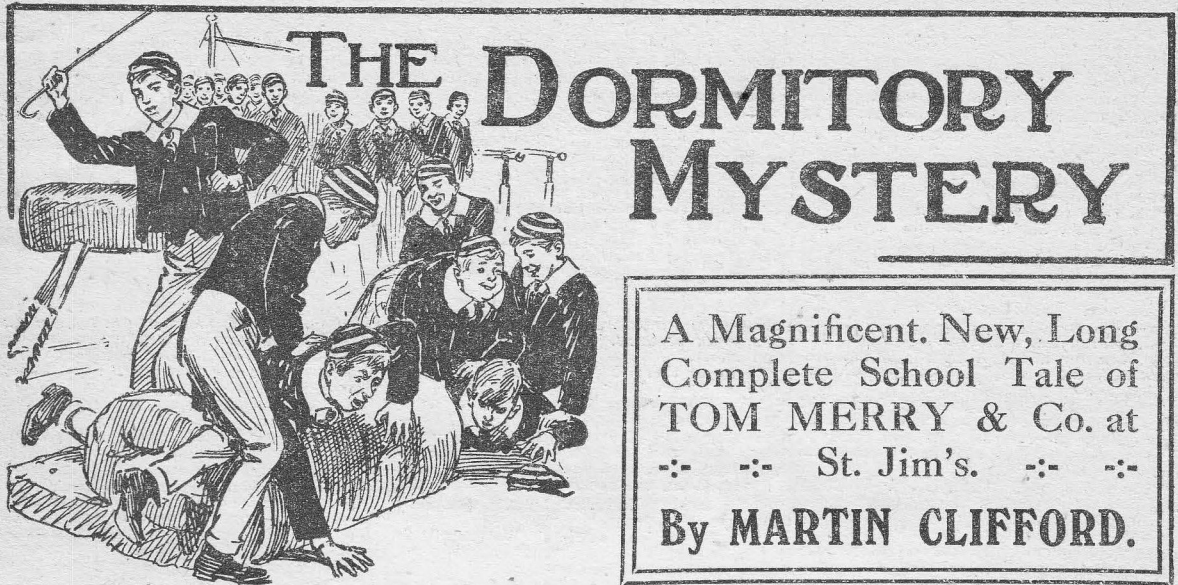
"Oswald!" muttered Jimmy Silver.
Oswald turned at the door, and looked at him for a moment—a hopeless look that went to Jimmy Silver's heart. But he did not speak. The next moment he was gone from the crowded room.

"I think that's settled," said Smythe, still smiling. "I think you fellows ought to be obliged to me for showing up that cad in his true colours, by gad!"

Jimmy Silver turned away in silence.
Oswald's footsteps had died away—the footsteps of the boy who was, from that moment, an outcast in his school!

THE END.

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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

In the Dead of Night.

TOM MERRY woke up with a start. The Shell dormitory at St. Jim's was very quiet. Nothing but the sound of regular breathing came to his ears now.

But he was sure that some other sound had awakened him.

Tom was not a heavy sleeper, but the healthy, dreamless slumber of youth does not cease on a sudden without some cause.

He sat up in bed.

It was the closing of the dormitory door that had awakened him. He felt certain of that now.

What did it mean?

A raid by the Fourth was always a possibility to be reckoned with. But if the Fourth came they would come in force, and if they were there in force they could not maintain such silence as this.

Indeed, once they were inside, and had found the Shell wrapped in slumber, there would have been no further need for silence. The raid would have begun.

Someone must have gone out, or have stolen in.

Tom felt in the pockets of his jacket, hung on the chair beside the bed, for matches. But he could find none, and an effort of memory told him that he had left the box on the study mantelshelf, after lighting the spirit-stove to boil the kettle for tea.

"It was a very dark night. Without a light he could see nothing.

To get out of bed was to risk warning any possible intruder. But it might be as well to do that. If anyone had stolen in with evil intentions, it would be better to stop him before they were carried out.

He got quietly out of bed, and went round the dormitory.

But he found out nothing. Every bed had its occupant, and there was nothing to indicate that anyone but the sleepers was there.

"Must have been mistaken," he thought. "Or perhaps it was someone coming in, not going out. I'll have a look into the passage, anyway."

He looked out; but the passage was dark and silent.

There was nothing for it but to go back to bed and try to get to sleep again. But it was some time before he slept.

In the bright light of morning the incident seemed small enough, and when he mentioned it to his chums, Manners and Lowther, at tea that day, he laughed at himself for attaching any importance at all to it.

"After all, it's no such uncommon thing for someone to break bounds at night," he said. "We've done it ourselves plenty of times."

"But always, Thomas, with the best possible intentions," Monty Lowther said gravely.

"Oh, that's understood, of course! It sounds uncharitable, perhaps, but the fellows I was thinking of can hardly be credited with quite such virtue as ours."

"Racke and Crooke have rather chucked it lately," remarked Manners.

"I didn't say anything about Racke and Crooke," replied Tom.

"Well, it was easy enough to guess what fellows you thought of, wasn't it?"

"Dare say it was. But what makes you think they've chucked it?"

Manners grinned.

"I don't say chucked it for good," he said.

"And I certainly don't mean to say that they're reformed. But visits to the Green Man cost money, and those two are very hard up just now."

"If they show signs of even such negative virtue as abstaining from pub-haunting, credit the improvement rather to Kerr than to them," put in Lowther.

"To Kerr? How's that?"

"You're dense, Tommy, my son! Wasn't it Kerr who forced them to shell out the cash that rascal Sholey had diddled out of Skimpy through their putting him on the silly ass's track?"

"Oh, yes! But it's a new thing for those two rotters to be made hard up by having to shell out twenty quid. Racke always used to have his notes by wads, and Crooke had money to burn."

"A change has come o'er the spirit of their dream," Lowther said. "I never listen to gossip, I need hardly say—"

"Better not say so!" snapped Manners. "It's a whacker. You're as bad as any old lady about that."

"But I can't help hearing it at times," went on Lowther, unruffled. "And I hear that there has been trouble in the marble halls which both Racke and Crooke inhabit when at home. Pa Racke has signified that there is a limit even to war profits. Pa Crooke has pointed out to his hopeful son that if he goes the pace to the extent he has been doing recently, the wherewithal to go the pace later on will be lacking. Twiggezzons?"

"How did you hear that?" asked Tom.

"I forget who told me, but I understand that the news percolated through Mellish and Trimble."

"Both liars!" snorted Manners.

"Agreed. But truth may come even through a liar."

"I believe it is true, too," said Tom. "Now I come to think of it, those two have drawn in their horns very considerably this term. That makes it all the less likely that it was them I heard last night. If it was they must have been coming in, not going out, or their beds would have been empty."

"Sure you haven't been done brown by the bolster trick, Tommy?" asked Manners.

"I've come to an age at which I fancy I know the difference between a bolster and a leg," answered Tom. "I thought of that, of course."

"Very likely you dreamed it," said Lowther.

"I suppose it's possible; but I don't think it's at all likely."

The effect of the conversation upon Tom Merry was rather a curious one. There was nothing in it to make what had happened—or what he had imagined—the night before

of any greater importance. What Lowther had said tended rather the other way.

And it really was not particularly Tom's business if Racke and Crooke had resumed their old ways. His office as junior captain did not force upon him police work, or even such work as might reasonably be asked of a prefect. He would not be blamed because fellows in his dormitory crept out at night.

It was true that he had now and then taken a hand in disciplinary measures in connection with such things. But he had never acted on his own authority in these cases; it had always been after consultation with the other leading members of the Form, and what had been done had been done with their support.

But, though he had no new cause for suspicion, and though he told himself that it did not matter to him, Tom could not feel easy.

His sleep that night was light and broken. Half a dozen times he partly woke, only to doze off again.

Then again came that sound—the closing of the door.

He sat up, holding his breath, listening intently for a few seconds.

But he heard no such sounds as must have come to him had anyone been stirring in the dormitory.

He scrambled out of bed, and, without even waiting to put on his slippers, made for the door. Very softly he opened it, and hurried along the passage to the box-room.

That was the usual way out by night for the juniors who went out, for the window of the box-room gave on to the leads, whence it was easy to drop to the ground.

He was just in time to catch the sound of that window being carefully closed. Hurrying to it, he fancied he could dimly discern a figure on the leads. But he was not sure, and he was quite unable to follow. Pyjamas and bare feet would not do at any time, let alone on a chilly night in October.

The window was unlatched. He made sure of that, and then went back to the dormitory.

"Wharrer marrer?" mumbled Manners, as Tom shook him by the shoulder.

"Someone's out again to-night!" whispered Tom in his ear.

"Well, what's the odds?"

"Wake up, you chump! I mean to see into this!"

"All right! I am awake, anyway—you've spoiled my night's rest. Spoil Lowther's now; I don't see why I should be the only one."

Tom grinned. It was like Manners to grumble. Lowther would not make so much fuss; but if he did not choose to get out of bed, he would stay there, whereas Manners could be counted on to back up even while grumbling.

"Eh? Someone gone out, you say?" said Lowther, when Tom had awakened him and told him. "Let 'em go. No affair of mine. Who is it, anyway?"

Then it struck Tom that he had not yet found that out.

"Light a match," said Manners, who had got on some of his clothes.

"Better not," objected Lowther. "You'll be waking chaps up."
 "We can go round and feel," Tom said. They went round and felt, Manners taking one side of the dormitory, Tom the other. Lowther had only got as far as sitting up in bed.

"Well, who is it?" asked Tom, as he bumped against his chum in the darkness. "Me, ass!" snapped Manners.

"You? Why?"
 "Oh, I see what you mean now!"
 "I can't see anything at all!" murmured Lowther.

"There's no bed empty on that side Manners said."

"Nor on this!"
 "My hat! That's queer. Are you quite sure—"

"Of course, I'm quite sure, fathead! The chap, whoever it was, went out of the box-room window."

"But nobody's gone from here!"
 "So it seems," Tom admitted. "All the same, someone's gone out, and it will be easy enough to catch him."

"Yes, we've only to wait in the box-room. Coming, Monty?"

"Thank you very much, but I am not," replied Lowther firmly.

"Oh, you slacker!"
 "Not at all, dear boy. Two of you will be quite sufficient to catch the villain, though what you are going to do with him when you catch him is more than I can guess. Get about it! Only allow me to remark that as no one is absent from this dorm, you can't very well catch on the hop anyone from here."

"Come along, Manners! No good arguing with the ass!" said Tom.

They went and Lowther turned over to woo sleep again.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Visit in Vain.

"IF anyone creeps in while we're away, Lowther will be sure to hear," said Tom, when they were settled down in the box-room to wait.

"If he doesn't snooze off again," returned Manners. "But it's no odds. As the fellow, whoever he was, went out this way, he'll come this way back for a dead cert. In fact, there is no other way!"

"It's a mystery," Tom said. "The only guess I can make is that it's some Fourth-Former, who comes along to speak to a fellow in our dorm before he sinks out."

"But why should he? Anything he had to say could just as well be said before bedtime, surely?"

"So it could, old man. And, if Racke and Crooke are in this, the only fellows in the Fourth who are at all likely to be in it with them are Mellish and Baggy Trimble. But those two are both such funks that I'm blessed if I can imagine either of them slipping out on a dark night like this—or on any night alone, come to that."

"Well, we shall soon know. I hope they won't stay out too long; it isn't exactly sultry here."

Conversation lapsed after that; and Manners, sitting on a box with his back to the wall, dozed.

But Tom Merry was wide awake all the time. He spent most of it arguing with himself as to whether it was really worth while to take all this trouble.

By this time, however, the mystery of the affair had taken a strong hold upon his interest. He felt that that mystery must be solved.

An hour passed, and Manners still dozed. He woke with a start a few minutes later.

Tom sprang to his feet at the same instant.

"What was that?" asked Manners. "Sounded like a window being shut somewhere," answered Tom.

In the hush of the night sounds which would have been inaudible by day came clearly enough. But it is more difficult to locate noises of any kind in the darkness than in the light.

They listened. Manners grabbed Tom by the arm.

"Footsteps!" he whispered.

From the passage came slight sounds such as might be made by anyone moving very cautiously.

"Let's cut out and pounce on the bouncer!" came Manners' eager whisper.

"No," answered Tom; "Monty will get him sure enough. We don't want to pounce. We only want to know who he is. Then we can find out later what he was up to."

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 40.

The footsteps, if footsteps they were—for that was not quite certain, so slight were the sounds—could no longer be heard. But to the ears of the two who waited came the sound of a closing door.

"If we go now—"
 "No, we can't go yet," said Tom. "That would give our game away. We must trust to Monty."

"What was that?" asked Manners. "Didn't hear anything then."

"I did. It sounded like the door again." Still they waited, why they hardly knew. But pursuit in the dark passages was at best a chancy business.

"We'll give the chap time to get into bed," said Tom.

"That's all very well, but what bed's he going to get into?" asked Manners. "Unless it's yours or mine. There are snoozers in the others."

"I hope there isn't a snoozer in Lowther's!"

"Shouldn't wonder if there was, though," Manners replied pessimistically. "I suppose you mean give the chap time to go to sleep after he's got into bed? Otherwise we might just as well go back now."

"Yes, that's the notion."

"It means another hour," grumbled Manners.

"Oh, not so long as that! We can risk it in half that time. And you can doze off again while you're waiting."

"Who was dozing, I'd like to know?"

"You were, old fellow," Tom said.

"Oh, well, perhaps I was a bit. But it was only a dog-sleep. I woke up directly there was a sound."

"Where can he have got in, I wonder?"

"There's the bath-room window," Manners said. "But he'd want a ladder to get up to that, and he'd have to leave the ladder there, which would be jolly suspicious."

"Let's have a look."

Glad of anything to break the monotony of waiting, Manners followed his chum to the bath-room.

Tom quietly pushed up the lower sash. The window was right over a bath, and he had to stand in the bath to deal with it.

"My hat! There is a ladder here!" he said.

"Why didn't the chap go out that way?" asked Manners, when they were back in the box-room.

"Probably didn't know of the ladder. Came upon it as he sneaked it, I suppose."

"But what about the catch of the bath-room window?"

"Well, it wasn't fastened just now when I tried it, and it may not have been when he came up the ladder. Anyway, I fancy the blade of a penknife would do the trick. And, when you come to think of it, getting up on to the leads isn't just easy for one fellow alone, though there's no difficulty with anyone to boost you up from below, or give you a hand from above."

"That's so," said Manners. "It will be rather interesting to see whether the ladder's still there in the morning. Oh, I say, now I remember how it came there! I didn't see him myself, but I heard someone say that the Head had got a man at work clipping the ivy."

The ladder had prevented their catching the night-walker; but they hardly thought that could matter much. Lowther was certain to have heard him come in and to have taken measures to find out who he was, they fancied.

But when they returned to the dormitory, chilly and tired, Monty Lowther was fast asleep.

"Let's wake the beggar up!" Manners said. "Hardly fair, is it?" answered Tom.

"I don't call his standing out fair myself."

"Oh, I wouldn't wake him! He'll tell us in the morning."

But there Tom was wrong.

"Find out anything?" asked Lowther, as soon as they were up and clear of the dormitory.

"Yes. And, of course, you found out something, too?"

"Me! How should I?"

"Why, you silly ass—"

"Oh, dry up, Manners! Do you mean to tell us that you don't know who the chap who slunk in was, Lowther?"

"How should I, when I was fast asleep? I don't even know that any chap did slink in."

"Of all the cross asses I ever met in all my life, you're the worst!" snapped Manners.

"I wasn't ass enough to go and spend half the night in the cold box-room, attend-

ing to other people's business, anyway!" retorted Lowther, with some heat.

A quarrel seemed imminent, for Manners was really angry. But at that moment Talbot joined them, and the two contented themselves by glaring at one another.

"Anything up?" asked Talbot.

Tom told him the story. The Terrible Three had few secrets from Reginald Talbot.

"The ladder's still there," Talbot said. "I saw it just now. It was a rotten bit of luck that it should be there, for you must have caught the fellow, but for that. And it seems certain it was an accident, more or less, that he used it; for if he had known of it when he went out, he would have gone down that way. Never mind, there may be another chance of catching him out, and I'm game to help if Lowther can't leave his warm bed for the adventure."

"Oh, I'm in it next time," Lowther said.

"Probably won't be any next time," growled Manners.

"A sounder morality would suggest to you that it would be much better there should not be," answered Lowther blandly. "We are agreed that it is unlikely the night-walker walks for any good purpose, and we ought, therefore, to prefer his not walking."

But Manners could not feel that way about it. He and Tom had had a vigil in vain while Lowther snoozed, and Manners found it hard to forgive his chum.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Raid that Failed.

"IT'S a jolly long time since we raided the Shell bouncers in their dorm," said Jack Blake, sitting up in bed in the Fourth Form dormitory.

"That's so," agreed Herries.

"Why not go for them to-night?" suggested Kerruish. "Railton's out, I know."

"And Kildare's got a supper-party in his study," said Royleance. "That means the prefects—or some of them, anyway—will be a bit later coming up to-night."

"Who's game?" asked Blake.

A score or more of voices answered.

"Right-ho! Bolsters are the weapons," Blake said.

Fellows scrambled out of bed, and pulled on trousers over their pyjamas or night-shirts.

"Who was that who went out of the dooh then?" inquired Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Didn't hear anyone," Digby said. "You're dreaming, Gussy!"

"Wats, Dig! I am not dweamin'. I most distinctly heard someone go out."

No one paid any heed to Gussy.

But Gussy was right, nevertheless. Someone had gone out of the door. Percy Mellish had gone.

Mellish was a sneak, and utterly undependable. But, though he went straight to the Shell dormitory, his object was not to betray the raid.

It was little enough Mellish cared about the raid. Bolster-fighting did not appeal to him. Had not some strong motive taken him out of bed, then he would have stayed there, as Baggy Trimble stayed.

But he went.

His errand took him but a minute or so. He whispered in the ear of a fellow in the Shell dormitory, and then hurried out again. So careful were his coming and his going that Tom Merry, though he lay awake listening for the opening or closing of the door, failed to hear anything.

Mellish did not risk re-entering his own dormitory at once. He might have run right into the arms of the raiders, had he done that.

He waited in the dark passage until the door opened, and Blake and his band stole forth.

Pressing close up against the wall, holding his breath, he heard them pass him, though he could not see them in the gloom.

"Blake, I felt Mellish's bed, an' it was empty!"

The whisper came to the ears of Mellish, and he knew that it was Arthur Augustus who spoke. He muttered something about Gussy that was not exactly friendly.

"What about it? My bed's empty, and so is yours. I suppose Mellish is with us," replied Blake.

But Mellish did not hear that, or the whisper from Digby which followed it.

"Getting suspicious in your old age, aren't you, Gustavus?"

"I am not at all a suspicious person, Dig, but I cannot remember that Mellish evan-



"Prisoner at the bar, you have been found guilty of a very serious offence against your Form," said the judge impressively. "The sentence of the court is that you receive a dozen strokes with an ashplant. (See page 18.)"

caahed much about bolstab-fightin'," replied the swell of the Fourth.

"Shrrup!" growled Blake.

They were approaching the Shell dormitory now.

Meanwhile Mellish had stolen in, and was getting into bed, when a voice said:

"Hallo. Mellish! Where have you been?"

It was the voice of Baggy Trimble, Mellish's study-mate.

What Mellish had said about Arthur Augustus was mild compared with what he thought about Baggy, but did not care to say.

"Nowhere," he mumbled.

"Oh, yes, you have! He, he, he! I know! I don't blame you for not going with those silly asses to be thumped on the head with bolsters. That ain't what I call pleasure. But you needn't have given them away to the Shell chaps."

"I didn't, you fat ass!" snarled Mellish.

"I'll bet anything you like that you did! You're jolly thick with Racke and Crooke just now, I know that. Look here, what will you stand me to keep dark?"

"Nothing!" There isn't anything to keep dark about."

"Oh, isn't there, then? Gussy heard someone go out of the door, and I heard you come back and get into bed after they had all gone. That's good enough. I rather think."

And Baggy chuckled a fat chuckle.

But he had spoiled completely his chance of blackmailing Mellish. He had said too much.

As Blake and the rest knew that Mellish's bed had been empty, and he—or someone—had been heard to go out ahead of the raiding-party, inquiries were certain to be made if the raid proved a failure through the Shell's being forewarned of it.

Mellish felt a distinct sense of injustice. He had not gone to warn the Shell of the raid. He had gone to speak to a Shell fellow on quite another matter. But he had mentioned the raid, and he had no confidence in

what he had told being kept dark by the fellow to whom he had told it.

"Just the sort of thing he would do, to let on, and curry favour with the chaps who are down on him," thought Mellish. "I shall have to cook up some lie to satisfy Blake and those bounders. Hanged if I'm going to give in to Baggy, though!"

"What will you stand me not to say anything?" came Baggy's voice again.

"Nothing! I don't care a hang what you say! I didn't warn the Shell."

"Where did you go, then?"

"What's that to do with you?"

"Here they come back!" exclaimed Baggy.

From the passage came sounds which suggested that the raiders were in confused retreat.

Thudding of bolsters upon heads and bodies—stifled ejaculations—scurrying of feet—then the bursting open of the door, and a rush of the Fourth into their own quarters, pursued by the Shell.

"Soek them!" cried Tom Merry.

And no doubt those who followed him did their best to obey. Quite certainly they "soeked" somebody—the continued thudding told that "soeking" was going on. But whether, in the darkness, they were hitting enemy or friend no one could tell.

It really did not matter much. The one thing that mattered was that the raid of the Fourth had been repulsed, and Jack and his band met on their entry into the Shell dormitory by foeman wakeful and armed, had been so taken by surprise that they had put up a very poor show indeed.

Mellish fairly quaked in his bed as he thought what the result of their failure was likely to be to him.

"Cave!"

At once the thudding ceased. The Shell fellows disentangled themselves from the confused mass, and sped back to their dormitory bolsters over shoulders. The Fourth Formers scuttled into bed, and lay there panting.

It was a false alarm. Someone had

imagined he heard footsteps on the staircase, and had given warning.

But that mattered little. The raid had failed, and the Shell had scored over their rivals. Even had the Fourth succeeded in driving out their opponents—and the darkness would have told heavily against any chance of their doing that—still the honours would have been with the Shell.

For three or four minutes not a word was spoken.

Then Reilly slipped out of bed, and went to the door.

"Faith, it was just nobody at all, at all!" he said, coming back. "There would have been a light in the Shell dorm if a master or a prefect had come along, an' there's never a light there."

"My hat! We were done brown that time!" Blake said.

"It was Mellish," piped up Baggy Trimble. "He went along and told them you were coming!"

"Bai Jove! Didn't I tell you that I heard the dooah open an' shut, an' that Mellish's bed was empty?" said Arthur Augustus. "Weally, you are a most uttah wottah, Mellish!"

"It's a lie! I didn't. I was never out of bed at all!" quavered the sneak.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Tried and Found Guilty.

"LIGHT a candle, somebody!" ordered Blake.

Herries produced and lighted a candle-end.

Everyone sat up.

"I say, look at the feathers!" said Digby. "We shall have to clear them up in the morning."

"Never mind the feathers!" snapped Blake. "It's that cad Mellish we're dealing with now."

"How do you know Mellish warned them, Baggy?" asked Hammond.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 40.

"Because I heard him come in and get into bed after you fellows had gone out," answered the fat junior.

"Did he speak to you?" inquired Roylance. "If he didn't, I don't see how you could tell in the dark that it was Mellish."

"Yes, he did, then! I told him I should let on if he didn't stand me—I mean, he offered to stand me a feed if I didn't let on. But, of course, my well-known big principles wouldn't allow me to accept a bribe!"

"Of course not!" said Lumley-Lumley sarcastically.

"But—"
"Dry up, Kerruish!" said Blake authoritatively. "This isn't a matter to be settled by a lot of gassing. We'll try Mellish for treachery, and jolly well slosh him if he's proved guilty!"

"It's all rot!" bubbled Mellish. "What should I want to do a thing like that for, I'd like to know? Baggy's lying; he always does lie!"

"Am I lyin', Mellish?" demanded Gussy hotly.

"Yes—I mean—no, old chap; of course you're not! We know you're not that sort. But—but you might be mistaken, I suppose."

"Dry up!" snapped Blake. "This is going to be a proper trial, and I'll be judge. Yank Mellish out of bed, someone, and bring him along here."

"I—I'll come!" said Mellish, thoroughly frightened. "But I don't think you ought to make me get out of bed. I—I've got a beastly toothache!"

And with that lie there came into his mind another lie—one that might serve his turn in this pass.

"Can't help your toothache," growled Blake. "You could get out of bed when it suited you, in spite of that. Come along here, or you'll be fetched!"

Mellish came, and stood at the foot of Blake's bed, shivering.

"Chuck him his trousers and jacket," Blake said. "It may take more than a minute or two to put this through."

Kerruish threw the garments mentioned at Mellish's head, and the sneak got into them.

"Levison, will you act as prosecuting counsel?" asked Blake. "You're a knowing bouncer, and Mellish can't get round you."

Levison signified his assent.

"We shall want a jury," Blake went on.

"Herries, Dig, Cardew, Clive, Julian, Lumley-Lumley, Roylance, Kerruish, Durrance, Hammond, Reilly. How many's that?"

"Eleven, unless Lumley-Lumley counts two," said Digby.

"Why should he? One more. You'll do, Smith minor."

"Weally, Blake, I fail'ntially to see why I should be omitted!"

"You're one of the principal witnesses, ass!"

"Oh, yaas, I had forgotten that!"

"Sure, an' I'll be clerk of the court," said Mulvaney minor. "Be silent wid ye, everybody!"

"It's not the clerk of the court who orders silence," Julian said.

"Begad, who is it then, entirely?"

"The usher, of course."

"Then it's him I'll be. Silence, there!"

As Mulvaney minor was the only person jiffing his voice at the moment, it was fairly evident that all he desired was an occasion to lift it.

But they did not want to listen to Mulvaney minor.

"Shrup, you wild Irish idiot!" snorted Blake. "Take your places, on the next two beds, asses of the jury. You can be foreman, Herries."

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "And anyone who wants to find that sneak there 'Not guilty' will jolly well get it in the neck from the foreman, so I warn him in advance!"

"Prisoner at the bar, you are charged with treachery to the Form," said Blake solemnly.

"Do you plead 'Guilty' or 'Not Guilty'?"

"Not guilty!" whined Mellish. "I say, who's going to defend me?"

"Never mind about that! There's no possible defence if you're guilty, and we all know you are, so it's not worth arguing about! Proceed with your case, my learned brother."

And Blake nodded to Levison as he spoke.

"I will not take up the time of the court long," said Levison.

"Better not, dear boy!" yawned Cardew.

"The jury's tired an' sleepy."

"Speak for yourself!" snapped Herries.

"The foreman's not sleepy, anyway."

"The charge against the prisoner at the bar," said Levison, "is that he treacher-

ously gave to the Shell such information as put them on the qui vive, and enabled them to repulse a raid which must otherwise have been a brilliant success. In order to prove his guilt it is necessary to show that he was out of bed. It may be argued that it is also necessary to show that he did not take part in the raid; but I do not consider that that question really arises, as we are all well aware that he always funks pillow-fighting. Usher of the court, call the Honourable Arthur Augustus FitzNoodle—er—beg pardon—I should say D'Arcy!"

"Sure, an' what am I to call him?" inquired Mulvaney minor.

"You had bettah not call him anythin' whatevah, Mulvaney—an' you, Levison, had bettah wefwain twom—"

"Cut the cackle, Gussy!" said the judge impatiently. "Ask him any questions you want to, Levison."

"Tell the court in as few words as possible what led you to suspect the prisoner, witness," said the learned counsel.

"While we were gettin' weady for the waid I heard someone go out of the dooah," said Arthur Augustus. "I do not know what led me to think—"

"You ought to find out, and get it to work again," put in Digby. "It's the first time on record that you ever did any thinkin'!"

"I appeal to his Honah whethah—"

"Isn't a juryman allowed to make a remark?" asked Dig innocently.

"Not wibald remarks! I wprost—"

"Nothing ribald about the juryman's remark," said Blake. "It was only unnecessary. We all know you can't think. But you can spout. Spout away!"

"I do not know precisely what made me think of asebathainn' whethah Mellish had left his bed," went on Gussy obstinately;

"but that is what I did."

"Wait a moment!" said Levison. "It was dark, and you couldn't see that Mellish had gone. How did you make sure?"

"I felt. Weally, that seems to me a most unnecessary, not to say idiotic, question!"

"Are you sure that you felt the right bed?"

"Yaas, of course I am suah!"

"How?"

"Because it is the bed diwectly opposite mine."

"Lest any doubt should be cast on the testimony of this witness, on the ground that he is incapable of forming an opinion, through lack of the wherewithal to form one," said Levison gravely, "I should like to state my own opinion that in his last reply he has given signs of intelligence greater than could have been expected from him."

"Weally, Levison, you wude ass—"

"Why, my dear chap, I was paying you a compliment!"

"Have you anything else to ask the witness?" asked Blake.

"No, I think not."

"Then he can stand down. One sign of intelligence is quite as much as can be expected of him."

"Bai Jove, Blake—"

"That's enough, and another word will be too much! I'm going to have this court respected. Proceed, my learned brother!"

"Usher, call Bagley Trimble."

"Sure, an' there's lashin's an' layin's of things I can be after callin' Baggy," said Mulvaney cheerily. "Baggy, ye pig, ye porpoise, ye prevaricator, ye poltroon, ye—"

"That's enough!" snapped Blake.

"I'm here!" squeaked Baggy. "I say, though, Blake, ain't anything going to be done to Mulvaney for calling me names like that?"

"Not a thing!" replied Blake.

"Tell the court what you know," said Levison.

"Mellish came in just after you fellows went out," said Baggy. "I should have gone with you, but I've got a beastly cold. Anyway, I told him what I thought of him for sneaking along to warn the Shell duffers that you were coming, and—"

"Wait a moment," said Levison. "How do you know he did that?"

"What else could he have gone for?" returned Baggy.

"That's a mere assumption. 'I've had enough of this witness, your honour. His uncorroborated testimony would be valueless, on account of his well-known untruthfulness. No high value could be placed upon the testimony of the other witness on account of his—er—"

Levison touched his forehead significantly, and the jury cackled, while two or three of the rest had to hold Gussy to prevent his making an attack upon the learned counsel.

"But the testimony, such as it is, all tells in one direction. We may, I consider, take it for granted that someone betrayed us to the enemy; and who could it have been if not the prisoner? Do you desire, prisoner, to give evidence on your own behalf?"

"Yes, of course I do!" replied Mellish, plucking up courage.

"Very well. Do you deny that you were out of the dormitory?"

"No."

Mellish had his lie ready. It was of no use to say again that he had never left his bed. He knew that.

"Do you deny that you went to the Shell dormitory?"

"Yes."

"Where did you go?"

"To my study."

"What for?"

"To fetch some stuff for my toothache."

"He didn't! He hasn't got any toothache stuff, and he hasn't got the toothache!" squeaked Baggy.

"Where is the stuff you fetched?" asked Levison.

"I—I didn't exactly fetch it," faltered Mellish. "I used it there."

"Oh, you used it there, did you? Then it's still there. Will a couple of you fellows go down with the prisoner to fetch the stuff he used?"

"Sure, I'll be one!" said Mulvaney minor. "I'll go!" volunteered Digby.

"I—I— Look here—"

Mellish's voice trailed off into a husky murmur.

He was bowled out, and he knew it. Baggy had told the truth for once. Mellish had neither toothache remedy nor need for it.

"That's enough! Guilty or not guilty, gentlemen of the jury?"

"Guilty!" said Herries at once.

Then he looked round to see whether anyone was going to have the hardihood to disagree with the foreman.

But no one wanted to disagree. Mellish's very face was a confession of guilt now.

"Prisoner at the bar, you have been found guilty of a very serious offence against your Form," said the judge impressively. "The sentence of the court is that you receive a dozen strokes with an asphalt. The sentence will be carried into execution after classes to-morrow morning!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Mystery Deepens.

"LET me alone!" whined Mellish.

Herries and Kerruish had seized him by the arms, and were hauling him off to execution.

The time had come for that, and Mellish had done his best to get out of it, naturally.

But he had been run to earth in a remote corner of the gymnasium, where he was hiding behind a pile of tarpaulin.

"What's the row, you fellows?" asked Tom Merry, coming from the parallel-bars to inquire.

Other members of the Shell followed him. No one suspected Herries and Kerruish of wanton bullying, and no one doubted that Mellish was likely to deserve whatever was coming to him. But all were interested.

The rain was pouring down upon the quad, making a sodden mass of the fallen leaves of the old elms. Footer was out of the question, and at such times diversion was always welcome.

"This chap's got to be put through it for an offence against the Form!" answered Kerruish.

At that moment a crowd of Fourth-Formers, headed by Blake, entered.

"Hallo! You've found him, then!" cried Blake.

"Yes. The funk was hiding here!" said Herries contemptuously.

"I told Herries I saw him slink in," Baggy Trimble said, plainly pleased with himself.

"Take that for sneaking!" snapped Gore.

And he gave Baggy a sounding cuff on the head.

Perhaps it was to Baggy as much as sneaking that Gore objected, though in these days sneaking was certainly not in his line. He still retained some of the roughness that had helped to make him disliked in the past. One thing was certain—it was no sympathy for Mellish that prompted him.

"Wow! Tain't fair!" howled Baggy.

But no one took up Baggy's cause.

"What is the worm's offence, Blake?" asked Lowther pleasantly.

"You fellows ought to be able to guess that," replied Blake.

"I really can't see how," said Talbot.

"Didn't he muck up our raid last night by sneaking along to warn you that we were coming?" demanded Levison.

"Yaas, wathah! An' he's been duly twice sentenced to twelve of the best with an asphalt for it!" said Gussy.

"Gussy and I bowled him out—didn't we, Gussy, old pal?" said Baggy ingratiatingly.

"I beg, Twimble, that you will not address me in that offensively familiar manner," returned Arthur Augustus loftily.

"Well, I'm not going to say that you're wrong, Blake," Tom Merry said. "But—"

"Oh, if Mellish doesn't deserve what's coming to him for that particular thing, he's dead sure to be deserving it for something else!" said Manners.

"Still, that's hardly justice," Talbot remarked quietly.

Mellish saw a gleam of hope.

"Look here, you fellows—Merry, Talbot, Noble, Grundy, and the rest of you—I appeal to you for fair play!" he said. "Did I come and tell you?"

"This has got to stop, Blake!" said Grundy importantly.

It flattered the great George Alfred to be appealed to with the recognised leaders of his Form. But it was hardly diplomatic on the part of Mellish, for Grundy's interference was to Blake like a red rag to a bull.

"Who says so?" snapped the Fourth-Form leader.

"Didn't you hear Grundy say so?" asked Monty Lowther. "That's the worst of you, Grundy; you won't raise your voice. I've told you about it ever so many times."

"Rats to you!" snorted Grundy. "You heard me, Blake. If there isn't anyone else here to stand up for fair play I'm going to!"

"You won't stand up long if you try meddling with us!" retorted Blake. "You'll go out on your neck!"

"And it's nice and muddy outside, Grundy, old top," Kerr remarked.

"But there really does seem to be a doubt whether Mellish is guilty," Talbot said.

"Of course there is!" roared Grundy. "I don't care a rap about Mellish! He's a worm! But I'm going to see fair play!"

There seemed some danger of a conflict between Shell and Fourth. The members of the Fourth present, School House and New House alike, rallied to Blake, and they considerably outnumbered the Shell fellows. That fact would not have held back Tom Merry and his crowd from an attempt at rescue had they felt sure that the charge against Mellish was unjustified. But there were circumstances that made some of them doubtful.

"Do you mind postponing execution till we've gone into this a bit, Blake?" said Tom.

"I don't mind, if you ask it," replied Blake. "We do take some notice of you—or of old Talbot, for that matter. But we're jolly well not going to be dictated to by an ass like Grundy!"

"Hear, hear!" cried the Fourth-Formers.

"Well, as far as I'm aware none of us had warning from Mellish last night," Tom said. Blake stared at him.

"Look here, Tommy, you were warned, you know!" he said. "You were all ready for us when we came in. Why, I wasn't fairly inside the door before I got a whack that nearly floored me!"

"Yes; we were warned, and there was something a bit mysterious about that warning," admitted Tom.

"There was," said Kangaroo. "How on earth did Racker know?"

"Oh, it was Racker that warned you, then?" Levison said. "Where is Racker? It would be rather interesting to hear what he has to say about it."

"My dear fellow, you don't expect to see Racker in the gym, do you?" said Monty Lowther.

"Somebody had better fetch him," Herries said.

"Had Racker been out of the dorm?" asked Blake.

"I don't think so. No, I'm pretty certain he hadn't," answered Tom.

"Then, unless someone from our Form came along and told him, he couldn't have known any more about it than the rest of you," Blake said. "And nobody but Mellish could have gone to him. I don't know why he did it, but I'm jolly sure he did!"

Tom's eyes had been upon the shifty face of Percy Mellish while Blake was speaking, and what he saw there made him feel certain that even so it had happened. He might not have felt so sure but for what had taken place on the two nights before the raid, though.

There was good reason to believe that a

Fourth-Former was mixed up in the mystery, and who was more likely than Mellish?

"Does anyone remember exactly what Racker said when he warned you?" asked Levison.

It was a shrewd question, and it set the Shell fellows thinking.

"I can't recall his exact words," said Talbot. "But I know it did puzzle me at the moment how he knew."

"So it did me," Kangaroo said. "But we all hopped out of bed directly to be ready for you bounders, and I thought no more about it."

"I think we ought to hear what Racker has to say about the matter," said Grundy.

"I don't," Tom Merry said. "I'm satisfied that Mellish did tell him, and I've nothing to say against Mellish getting what he's fairly asked for. I've no use for sneaks!"

"Really, Merry, I'm surprised at you!" roared Grundy. "I can't see that there's any evidence whatever against the fellow, and I'm not going to stand by and see him—"

"No need for you to do that!" snapped Blake. "You can go. But I tell you straight that if you try to interfere you'll get sat on—hard!"

"I'm going to interfere, so—"

"Collar him!" shouted Blake.

A dozen hands seized the great George Alfred, and he smote the floor with a bump. "Yaroooooh!" he bellowed. "Rescue, Shell!"

But no one went to his rescue—not even Gunn and Wilkins, his trusty henchmen. They felt, as did the rest of the Form present, that the guilt of Mellish, if not absolutely proven, was too likely for intervention to be justified if he meddled.

So Grundy was pinned to the floor by the weight of Patty Wynn, Clive, and Hammond, while Mellish roared and blubbered under the strokes which Blake dealt him, using an asphalt borrowed from a prefect's study.

Mellish slunk out when his ordeal was over, and Grundy went away spluttering threats.

Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, and Talbot departed together a few minutes later.

In No. 10 they took counsel.

"Mellish came along all right," said Tom. "I'm sure of that. His face gave him away when we began to talk about Racker."

"But he wouldn't have come along just to warn Racker of the raid," said Manners.

"No, not exactly of the raid; but that it wasn't safe to do anything last night on account of it, whatever it is."

"But that only deepens the mystery," remarked Lowther. "For certainly it isn't the dear Mellish who goes out by the box-room and comes back by the bath-room."

"And if it's Racker or Crooke, or both of them, how is it that there's no empty bed meanwhile?" said Manners.

They wondered afterwards why the very simple solution of that seeming mystery did not occur to them at once. But the fact remains that it did not.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Planning a Trap!

"SEE here, you fellows, I want to talk to you about something!" said Tom Merry, looking in at Study No. 6 on the Fourth Form passage after tea that evening!

"Don't!" said Blake. "Gussy's jaw's been going all day, and we're fed-up with chin-music!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"But Tom wants to talk about something, Blake," said Digby, grinning. "Gussy's jaw is all about nothing!"

"Your cwass wudeness, Digby—"

"That does make a difference, certainly!" said Blake, cheerily disregarding the protests of Arthur Augustus. "Come in and say your say, if you can get in a word with Gussy holding the floor all the blessed time!"

Tom went in and sat down.

"There's something rather mysterious up in our Form, and unless I'm greatly mistaken, one of your fellows is in it," he said.

"Who?" asked Blake.

"Mellish!"

"Oh, that cad! I shouldn't be surprised at anything he did."

"Has it anything to do with last night?" inquired Herries.

"Yes, I fancy Mellish's warning of the raid was only given to Racker on account of it."

"You mean that he wasn't just trying to spoil our game?" said Digby.

"That's what I mean. But he gave it away all the same, though I don't suppose he thought Racker would let on. I can't make

out yet why Racker did, for that matter. Racker doesn't care what happens to the Shell."

"Well, I'm glad you didn't say anything about this until Mellish had had his dozen, Tommy!"

"Why, Dig?"

"Because he might not have got them if you had."

"You bet he would have, though!" snapped Blake. "I don't see what real difference this makes. He gave us away—why he did it is no odds!"

"I quite agree with you there, Blake," said Tom.

"I am not such that I do," remarked Gussy thoughtfully. "You see, dear boys, the question of whether Mellish was mowally guilty is—"

"Like the flowers that bloom in the spring—nothing to do with the case," cut in Digby. "Mellish gave us away, and that's enough. Go on with your yarn, Tommy!"

"I haven't had a chance to start it yet, Dig. And I don't know that I should have told you fellows anything about it, only that I want you to watch out for Mellish, and let me know if he leaves the dormitory, and when he comes back."

"Want us to collar the bounder?" asked Blake.

"Well, no, I think not. It's a mixed-up affair altogether, and I fancy you may think we're butting in by bothering ourselves about it."

"If it's Racker and Crooke up to their old games, I do," replied Blake bluntly. "Don't try to stop them; just give them rope enough, and they'll hang themselves sooner or later. There's no hope for those two; they're rotters through and through."

"I don't deny that, and yet—well, I think when you've heard the yarn you'll understand why we want to get to the bottom of it. It's too jolly mysterious to be left where it is."

And Tom proceeded to tell the story, while all four of the chums of No. 6 listened attentively.

Manners and Lowther came in, looking for Tom, as he finished speaking.

"Do you know, Tom Mewwy, I wathah fancy I can tell you what part Mellish plays in the mystery," said Gussy.

"Go on, then! Tell away!"

"Mellish lies in Wacker's bed while Wacker is away, so that he shall not be missed."

"My hat!"

"Well, I'm hanged!"

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings," said Lowther solemnly.

"Oh, wats, Lowthah! I am neithah a babe nor a suckin', and I fattach myself that for a mattach of this kind I have bettah bwaains than any of you boundahs!"

"I do believe he's right," said Digby. "Not about the brains, though!"

"Of course, I am right! There is not the slightest reason to doubt it!"

And, really, it did seem likely that Arthur Augustus was right. The part assigned by him to Mellish was just the part that the sneak of the Fourth would be willing to play. It was difficult to imagine him stealing out alone at night; but he might easily be bribed to occupy the bed of another fellow who wanted to steal out safely.

"We can knock this game on the head in a jiffy," said Blake. "If Mellish tries it on to-night, we'll let you know at once; and, among us, we can make sure of nabbing both him and Racker. I suppose it is Racker? Crooke's in it, somehow, as well, though, I'll bet!"

"I think they're both in it, though only one goes out at a time," Tom said. "But I don't like your plan, Blake. If we do as you suggest, we may never find out what those are up to."

"Weally, that goes without sayin', suahly, Tom Mewwy? It is the old Gween Man game, natchuwallly."

"I don't think so, old top. They always go together for that. And they have been rather off it lately, as far as I can make out. I fancy it's something deeper."

Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"It's all one to me what those cads do," he said. "Glad they don't belong to my Form, though I'll admit we've got Mellish and Trimble, who aren't much better. Might be interesting to find out what their game is, if it's not the old one. But what's your notion of finding out?"

"We've thought of a trap for the chap who goes out to-night, if anyone goes," said Manners. "That ladder's still about. The fellow who's clipping the ivy seems to be making a life's work of it. It was a bit

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 40.

away from the bath-room window to-day, but it's easier to move a ladder than to get up on the leads without help."

"And even if the mystery-man gets on to the leads, we'll see to it that he doesn't get in through the box-room window," Lowther said.

"So he will have to get in by the bath-room. And what are you going to do there to trap him?" Blake asked.

"There's a bath right under the window, as you know," answered Tom. "We're going to fill that, and the night-bird will drop into something more than he counts upon. And you know the big airing-cupboard? Two of us can hide in that easily enough. It would be a pity that no one should get the benefit of the unexpected plunge act."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The thought of the unexpected plunge tickled them all.

"You don't mean to jump on him, then?" inquired Digby.

"No. Our notion's to make sure who the bouncer is, so that we can track him later, if he tries it on again after that lesson."

"Have it your own way," Blake said. "It seems rather a long way round to me, if all you're after is to stop his little game. But there are points about that bath wheeze."

"Mine," said Lowther, bowing.

"But you're not going to hide in the airing-cupboard, if it is yours," Manners said. "I'm going with Tom. You wouldn't come the other night, and you can jolly well stay and snooze again to-night!"

"Right! I'll toss for it," answered Lowther.

"Right-ho! Let's toss now. Heads or tails?"

And Manners spun a florin.

"Tails!" said Lowther.

But it was heads, and perhaps the humorist of the Shell was not as greatly disappointed as Manners would have been had he lost. Lowther's lively imagination enabled him to get quite a lot of change out of the idea of that plunge without his witnessing it. Indeed, Tom and Manners could hardly hope to witness it. They would only hear what the victim of their trick had to say about it.

"Mellish must sink into your dorm without any of you hearing," said Blake.

"Yes, it seems so," Tom replied. "But everyone knows what a sly, cat-footed bouncer he is!"

"You seem to think we can tell when he leaves our dorm, though!" said Blake. "Queer how you Shellfish have to admit that we're ahead of you when it comes to anything that really wants doing!"

"Yes, it is queer, isn't it?" returned Tom good-humouredly. "But we don't mind that, as long as you'll let us know."

"There's one drawback to any arrangement about lettin' these fellows know," said Arthur Augustus. "Mellish will be suah to have his ears poked up as he lies in Wacke's bed, an' he will tumble."

"Oh, no, he won't!" Blake said. "I'm going to take a leaf out of Mellish's own book. When I go along, it will be to ask Tommy for his toothache stuff. And I'm going to act frantic jawache directly I get upstairs, so that Mellish won't suspect anything."

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Cold Bath for Racke!

"I SAY, Tommy, are you awake?" It was Blake's voice, breaking the silence of the Shell dormitory at eleven o'clock that night.

Mellish lay in Racke's bed, and trembled with fear.

"I'm awake. What is it, Blake?" replied Tom Merry.

"Got that toothache stuff?"

"If you'll come along here," Tom said.

Blake went along. He bent over Tom and whispered:

"He's here! Came a quarter of an hour or so ago. I thought it best to give them that time."

"And the other cad's gone out," answered Tom. "I heard them to-night, though it was precious little row they made. It was through knowing what to expect that I heard, I suppose."

"He'll take alarm when you two go out," Blake whispered.

"I don't think he'll move from where he is till Racke comes back, though he may get into a funk. Anyway, we've got to risk that."

"Thanks, old chap," said Blake, aloud.

And he departed.

Mellish was immensely relieved, and it was possibly due in part to the relief he felt that he dozed off almost at once, and did not hear Tom and Manners leave the dormitory.

They went straight to the bath-room, and made sure that the ladder was against the window to start with.

It had not been there at dusk, but it was there now.

Then Manners went to make sure that the box-room window was fastened, while Tom made ready the bath.

The sound of running water in the silence of the night might have reached ears that it were better it should not reach. But there was no sound of running water, for Tom put a big bath-sponge under the cold tap before he turned it on, and the water percolated through this without hardly a murmur.

Soon he had to hold it under the tap. The water was very cold, but he did not mind that. The colder the better—for Racke's benefit.

"Jolly good dodge!" said Manners, when he came back. "You've got nearly enough now, haven't you? Better not get it so full that he slops a lot over and makes a beastly mess here."

"Yes, I think there's enough. It's rather more than half-full."

Half an hour later Tom and Manners were safely ensconced in the roomy airing-cupboard, waiting Racke's arrival.

They had not long to wait. It was evident that Racke's errand was not a visit to the Green Man, for he could hardly have got there and back in the time that he had been absent.

The window-sash was pushed up with very little noise. The gloom was less intense that night, and the two watchers were just able to discern the figure of the fellow who came as a black blotch against the starry sky.

Then—splash!

There followed language that might well have been learned in the tap-room of the Green Man, though it had not been, for Racke had come to St. Jim's fully equipped

in respect of strong language, whatever he had come lacking.

Tom Merry and Manners did not find it easy to restrain their laughter, but they managed it somehow.

Racke emerged from the bath chilled and dripping. They could hear the water pattering in his clothes as he stood there and said things.

He went, and Tom and Manners came out of their hiding-place.

"Good egg!" chuckled Manners. "There wasn't any doubt about the success of that little dodge, was there?"

"No possible, probable shadow of doubt," answered Tom.

They did not return for close upon an hour, but Lowther was awake when they got back.

"The dear Racke came in highly disgruntled," he said. "Oh, you need not be afraid of his hearing; he's asleep now! But I caught a few words of his communication to Mellish, and I may say that he certainly did not appear to be pleased. I say, don't be in a hurry to get up in the morning."

"Why not?" asked Tom.

"Never mind why not, but just trust to your Uncle Montague that lying late will serve a purpose."

On the morning that followed Racke had a problem to face. He had thrust his soaked clothes under the bed. There was no chance of their being fit to wear in the morning, of course; and he would have to get out others, and to smuggle the wet garments downstairs for drying in the study.

"Aren't you fellows getting up to-day?" inquired Talbot, fully dressed, of the three still in bed.

"Some time to-day. Not yet," yawned Tom.

"Slackers!" snorted Kangaroo.

By-and-by only Racke, Crooke, and the three were left in the dormitory.

Racke chafed and fidgeted. If they left it much longer he would be late for breakfast.

"Time we shinned out, you fellows!" said Tom, after a glance at his watch.

It was indeed time. They would have to wash and dress in a hurry if they were not to be late.

Crooke got out also. Racke still lay there. "I trust you are not unwell, Racke?" said Lowther, winking at his chums as he towelled himself.

"No. I'm going to get up in a minute. What business of yours is it, anyway?" replied Racke ill-temperedly.

The breakfast-bell was ringing as they hurried down, and Racke had been still between the sheets when they left the dormitory.

He appeared five minutes later at table. His usually carefully-brushed hair was in disorder, his collar and tie were ill-fastened, and it was plain to the three that he had cut out washing.

Directly the meal was over he rushed off to his study. They could guess why easily enough—the wet clothes were there, and he had not had time to hide them before breakfast.

"That worked out all right, I think," said Lowther, as the three joined Talbot.

"Not the most important part, though," answered Tom. "I'm not going to leave it here. It's up to us to find out what those sweeps are playing at, I think."

But how that was found out another story must tell.

THE END.



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