

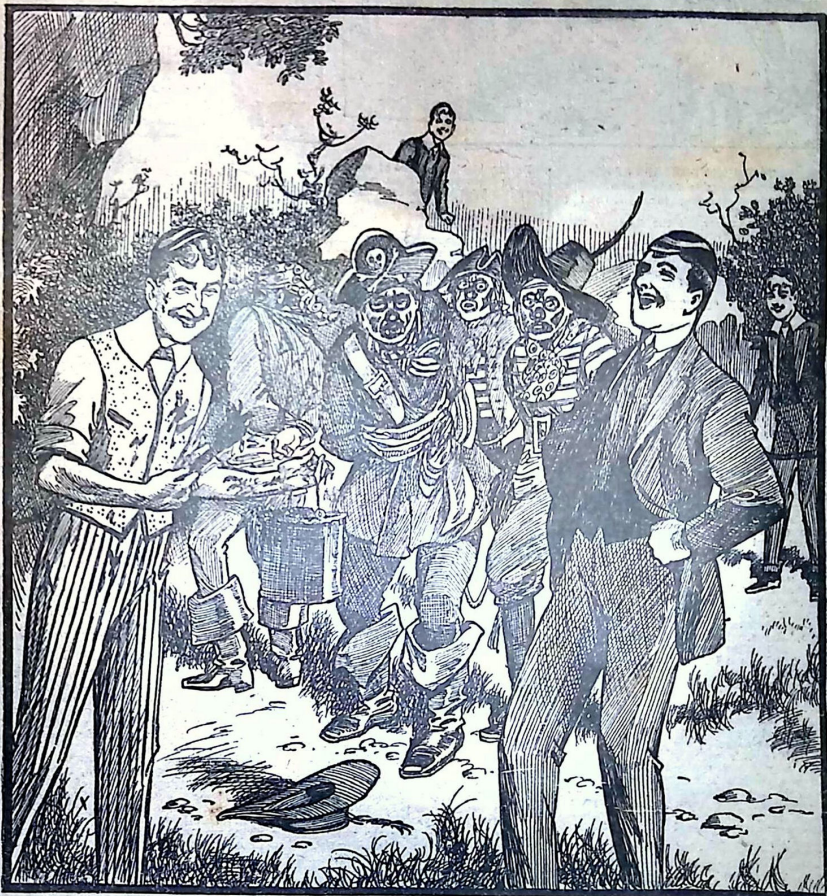
# 3 GRAND LONG SCHOOL STORIES!

# The Penny $1\frac{1}{2}$ Popular

Week Ending  
November 1st, 1919.

No. 41.  
New Series.

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



## THE PIRATES OF GREYFRIARS!

(A Screamingly Funny Scene in the Magnificent Long Complete Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)



# Vernon-Smith's Week!

A Grand Long Complete  
Story, dealing with the  
Adventures of the Boys  
of Greyfriars School.

... By ...  
**FRANK RICHARDS.**

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

### The Bouncer Entertains.

**S**MITHY'S starting in style, and no mistake! Bob Cherry, of the Remove, made this observation.

The Famous Five, together with a number of their school fellows, were clustered around the notice-board, on which was pinned the following announcement:

#### "NOTICE.

#### A FREE FEED

will be given in my study this evening at seven o'clock sharp. All members of the Remove are cordially invited. Roll up in your dozens! There will be ample refreshments for all.

(Signed) H. VERNON-SMITH,  
Captain of the Remove."

Johnny Bull gave a grunt.

"It's like Smith's check to style himself captain of the Remove!" he exclaimed. "Anybody would think he had the job permanently, instead of being on trial for a week!"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"It's not difficult to see what Smith's little game is," he said. "He means to get on good terms with the fellows at the outset. He's got money to burn, and if he can't get the captaincy any other way he'll burn it."

"That's so," agreed Frank Nugent. "Smith's a cute customer. He knows that standing a free feed will go a long way towards making him popular. But never mind, Harry. We're backing you up, old man, and after every candidate for the captaincy has had his trial week you're bound to be re-elected."

Wharton shook his head doubtfully. "I wish I could think so," he said. "But I realise only too well what I'm up against. Besides Smith, there's Toddy and Dick Bessel putting up for the captaincy."

"There was a snort from Dick Cherry. "They haven't an earthly!" he exclaimed. "The only fellow you need fear is Smithy, and you needn't fear him overmuch. He'll no doubt have a successful week, but when it comes to your turn you must go one better, that's all."

Hurree Singh indicated the announcement on the notice-board.

"Are you going to partakefully share in the feast, my esteemed chums?" he asked. "No jolly fair!" growled Johnny Bull.

And the others shook their heads also. Harry Wharton & Co. intended to go their own way, and to ignore Vernon-Smith's invitation.

During his brief term of office as captain of the Remove the Famous Five were prepared to back him up, especially on the football field. This was only sportsmanlike. But they were under no obligation to eat at Vernon-Smith's table. There would be plenty of others only too willing to do that. Billy Bunter read Vernon-Smith's invitation, and his fat face beamed like a full moon.

Bunter was himself a candidate for the captaincy, but the talk of getting a free feed he was quite prepared to pretend to be one of Vernon-Smith's staunchest supporters.

"I say, you fellows, this is awfully decent 'round 'er 'ere, but I ain't afeared to say 'Faith, an' I'm on to this like a shot!'"

"Same here!"

"Free feeds aren't given every day of the term," remarked Bolsover major. "It's up to us to digest Smithy's grub and his words of wisdom at the same time."

"Yes, rather!"

At least twenty fellows signified their intention of joining in the feed.

There would be difficulties in the way of accommodation; but Vernon-Smith's study was more spacious than most, and he could be relied upon to squeeze everybody in. The feed was timed for seven o'clock; but Vernon-Smith's study was packed out long before the first stroke of seven boomed out from the clock-tower.

The table was already laid with crockery and dainty serviettes, but there was no sign of the actual feed or of Vernon-Smith. The guests were hungry. Many of them had foregone their tea in order to do justice to the feed.

"Wish Smithy would buck up!" growled Hazeldene.

"Hope he's not pulling our leg about this feed," remarked Morgan.

"It is he," said Wibley grimly. "There will be dead Smith lying about the passage!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, I'm famished!" said Billy Bunter peevishly. "I shall make a start on the serviettes in a minute!" Then the study door opened, and Vernon-Smith, Skinner, and Stott entered, carrying between them a huge hamper. Their faces were flushed and perspiring.

A cheer went up from the waiting guests.

"Been buying up Mrs. Mimbble's shop, Smithy?" inquired Bolsover major.

Vernon-Smith shook his head.

"I've no use for Mrs. Mimbble," he said. "This is a feed, not a mouse's snack. We've been to the provision stores in Courtfield."

"Hurrah!"

"Make way for the hamper, you fellows!" panted Skinner.

The juniors stepped back, and the hamper was dumped on to the floor. Willing hands commenced to unpack it.

Vernon-Smith had certainly made his purchases on style. Rabbit-pies, fruit-pies, cakes of all sorts and shapes and sizes, mince-pies, and an assortment of non-alcoholic wines were set out on the table.

"This is ripping!" murmured Billy Bunter, smacking his lips.

And the fat junior, unable to hold out any longer, started excavation work on one of the rabbit-pies.

Vernon-Smith turned a flushed face to the crowd.

"Make yourselves at home!" he exclaimed. A dozen juniors promptly seated themselves round the table. The others sought the window-sill, and Micky Desmond perched himself on the coalscuttle.

"The feed was soon progressing merrily. Vernon-Smith beamed at his guests, but he made no attempt to interrupt them.

It was not until the last bottle of orange-wine had been consumed that he addressed the company.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows—"

"Hurrah!"

"On the ball!"

"It has been my pleasure and privilege, as temporary captain of the Remove—"

"Permanent!" shouted somebody.

"To stand this little spread, which I trust you have thoroughly enjoyed."

"What-ho!" said Bolsover major.

"Now that the feed is over," continued Vernon-Smith, "I want to talk business."

"Fill in."

"As you know, gentlemen, we were raided in our dormitory the other evening by a crowd of Highlife cads—"

A loud tinnur ran through the study.

The juniors recalled only too well the events of the evening in question. A gang of Highlife juniors, headed by Ponsonby, had entered Greyfriars by stealth, and had succeeded in making the Remove prisoners. The faces of the juniors had been painted red, and feathers had been stuck in their hair. As if this were not enough, they had been bound and gagged.

Vernon-Smith had previously warned Harry Wharton of the possibility of a Highlife raid, and Wharton refused to take action. That was why he had fallen from favour and caused his claims to the captaincy to be contested.

"It is up to us, gentlemen," said Vernon-Smith, in ringing tones, "to teach Ponsonby & Co. a sharp lesson. We are not going to leave them masters of the situation—"

"No, rather not!"

"And that raid of theirs must be avenged at the earliest opportunity."

"Hear, hear!" cried the fat junior.

"I have already thought out a little scheme for getting our own back—"

"Good old Smithy!"

"And I rely on you fellows to give me your support."

"That's all right," said Bolsover major.

"We mean to back you up—"

"All along the line!" cried Skinner.

Vernon-Smith glanced round the crowded study. He noticed that Billy Bunter, having fed not wisely but too well, was dozing in the corner. Vernon-Smith was relieved, for Bunter was to be entrusted with any secrets. The fat junior was utterly unscrupulous, and he might warn Ponsoby of a trap which was being prepared for him.

"It's a half-holiday to-morrow," said Vernon-Smith, "and I happen to know how our Highcliffe friends propose to spend it. They used to smoke and gamble in the barn in the wood which they called 'The Retreat.' That barn was burnt down. But they've got another lair now. It's a disused fisherman's hut, close to Fegg Bay. There are three there to-morrow—eight or ten of them—to have a little flutter."

"Good!" said Bolsover major, who guessed what was coming.

"I vote we go there in force," said Vernon-Smith, "and take the cads by surprise. We'll repay them for that affair of the other night—with interest!"

"At this juncture Billy Bunter stirred, and Vernon-Smith paused until the fat junior had settled down to sleep again.

"We'll tie them up," continued the temporary captain of the Remove, "and we'll force them to put on some comic togs."

"There was a chuckle from the Removites.

"It so happens," said Vernon-Smith, "I've got a number of nice costumes. They were used last year, you remember, when we played 'The Pirates of Penzance.' We'll run the Highcliffe bouncers up in those, and they'll have to get back to Highcliffe as best they can. What do you fellows think of the idea?"

"Top-hole!" cried the juniors promptly.

"We must take some red paint along with us," said Wibley. "There's nothing worse than having red paint smudged on your chivvy. It takes hours and hours to scrub it off."

Vernon-Smith grinned.

"There will be plenty of red tints of it in the woodshed."

"Ripping!"

"We must all stand together in this mind," said Vernon-Smith. "If there's a traitor in the camp, and the Highcliffe cads are warned of what's in store for them, the whole thing will fall through. Any fellow who doesn't want to take a hand in the business has only got to say so."

No one spoke. Everyone present was strongly in favour of Vernon-Smith's scheme.

"I don't mind admitting," said Vernon-Smith, "that I'm very keen on becoming captain of the Remove for good. I had a shot at it before, but the unscrupulous in my methods then. I hit Wharton below the belt. I've found out since that those methods don't pay; and I'm going to make an honest bid for the captaincy this time. But I can do nothing unless you fellows rally round!"

Vernon-Smith's frank speech made a good impression. A good number of the juniors were fed-up with Harry Wharton, and they wanted to see the ex-bouncer reigned in his stead.

"I want this to be a record week!" said Vernon-Smith. "I shall not be content with turning the tables on Highcliffe. There are other things to be done. I want to carry out a night raid against Coker & Co. the Fifth; and I want the Remove to win the footer match with St. Jim's on Wednesday. If everything comes off successfully, I shall stand quite a good chance of being elected Form-captain. If not—"

Vernon-Smith paused.

"You mustn't think of failure, Smithy!" said Bolsover major. "We'll back you up with everything, and you'll come through with flying colours!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Rely on us, Smithy!"

Vernon-Smith surveyed the eager, enthusiastic faces, and was satisfied.

"Many thanks!" he said quietly. "I should like you all to report to me to-morrow, after dinner, in this study."

The feasters then dispersed—with the ex-

ception of Billy Bunter, who still sat in the corner, yawning deeply.

But Vernon-Smith was too elated to think of kicking Bunter out. He was congratulating himself upon having opened his campaign in style.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### A Lively Afternoon.

"REALLY, dear boys," of the Highcliffe Fourth, who asked the question, as he bore down upon his cronies in the grey quadrangle.

"Ready, eye ready!" said Gadsby, with a grin.

And Vavasour, in his parrot-like way, chimed in with the refrain.

"Absolutely!"

"Come along, then!" said Ponsoby briskly. And he headed for the school gates.

Behind him came Gadsby, Vavasour, Monson and Merton, and Drury and Fustall. The two last-named were not thorough-paced blackguards like Ponsoby, but they had both been concerned in the recent raid on the Remove dormitory.

"Got the cards, Pont?" inquired Gadsby.

"Of course!"

"An' the smokes?"

"Trust me not to forget those!"

"Good! We ought to have quite an enjoyable afternoon, by gad!"

"We shall!" chuckled Pen.

The football season was in full swing, and the Highcliffe nuts had no use for football.

It regarded it as a useless expenditure of energy. It suited them better to sit and smoke in a stuffy fisherman's hut.

Ponsoby & Co. struck off along the road leading to Fegg.

They little suspected that they were walking into a trap. They imagined—if they thought about it at all—that Harry Wharton was still captain of the Greysfriars Remove, and that he would take no steps to bring them to book.

The old hut came in sight at length—a ramshackle, deserted building, forsaken by the fishermen who had owned it, and who had now got better quarters.

Behind a heap of boulders a short distance a number of Greysfriars juniors lay concealed.

Bulstrode, peering round the side of the ash, the Highcliffians approaching, and he acquainted Vernon-Smith of the fact.

"Shush!" muttered the Bounder. "Wait till I give the order!"

It was in the act of opening the door of the hut when Vernon-Smith rapped out his word of command.

Instantly the place became alive with rumbling.

Ponsoby saw the danger, and he instructed his cronies to cut and run, because of the overwhelming numbers of the enemy. But before the Highcliffe juniors could get clear, the Priars were upon them.

"Soak it into 'em!" boomed the voice of Bolsover major.

Pen turned swiftly, like a hunted animal at bay. But Morgan and Wibley leaped upon him, and he was overpowered and borne to the ground.

"Froot! derrot me chest!" panted Ponsoby.

"Not this time!" chuckled Wibley. "We've got you, my son, and what we have we'll hold!"

Morgan's only reply was to seat himself heavily on Pen's chest.

The leaders of the Highcliffians made a desperate effort to rise, but it was futile. Meanwhile the fight was raging furiously.

Vavasour had fallen an easy victim to the Greysfriars onslaught. But the others put up a fairly creditable display against an opposition which was certain to wear them down in the long run.

At length the whole of the Highcliffe juniors lay sprawling on the grass.

A dismal chorus of groans floated across the otherwise silent shore.

"O my nose!"

"My jaw!"

"Gerrof, you beasts!"

The "beast" refused to budge. They were awaiting further instructions from Vernon-Smith, who strolled up and down with a triumphant smile on his features.

Ponsoby's face and excited gaze met that of the Bounder.

"What does this mean, by gad?" hooted Ponsoby.

Vernon-Smith smiled.

"A little report for what you did the other night!" he said.

"I don't understand you!"

"Then I'll refresh your memory. You came to the Remove dormitory while we were asleep, and you painted our faces and stuck feathers in our hair. Altogether you caused us great inconvenience. This is our revenge!"

"Oh!"

Vernon-Smith disappeared behind the boulders, and emerged shortly afterwards with a large bundle in his arms.

Ponsoby eyed the bundle in some apprehension.

"What's in there?" he asked.

"What's new and dainty raiment—very becoming to dandies like yourselves!" chuckled Vernon-Smith.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Smithy!" said Ponsoby desperately. "You're a pal of mine—"

"First I've heard of it!" said the Bounder coolly.

"Be a sport, and let us go!"

"Hear, hear! This is doocid uncomfortable, don't you know?" muttered Gadsby.

"I thought they'd be shouting 'Kamerad, before long!' said Bolsover major.

"They'll shout in vain!" said Vernon-Smith. "I intend to be deaf to the voice of the 'sharm!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bring hither the paint, Bulstrode!"

"Hain't we better string them up first?" suggested Bulstrode.

"No! that will do later!"

Bulstrode produced the red paint, and Vernon-Smith, removing his jacket and rolling up his sleeves, got to work with the brush.

"Eigh!" gasped Ponsoby. "You're not going to splash that beastly stuff upon our chivvies, are you?"

"Right on the wicket!" said Vernon-Smith. "I'll start on you, I think!"

"Mind you don't muck up my togs, Smithy!" said Morgan, who was still seated on Ponsoby's chest.

"Don't worry!" said the Bounder. "I'm a skillful artist. One of these days, I hope to be a painter."

"Eh?"

"In the Academy, I mean!"

"Oh! Go ahead, Smithy!"

Vernon-Smith, who was quite satisfied with an unsparring hand, he daubed the red paint on Ponsoby's convulsive features.

It was quite useless for the victim to struggle. Morgan and Wibley effectively pinned him to the grass.

Vernon-Smith did not spend a good deal of time in painting about, but it was quite sufficient to effect drastic alterations in that youth's appearance.

"Gadsby next!" murmured the Bounder.

"Hands off!" howled Gadsby. And he started to struggle.

"Keep still!" growled Vernon-Smith. "How can I transform your chivvy into a beetroot if you struggle like that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bulstrode and Hazeldene pinned Gadsby down, while Vernon-Smith applied the brush.

One by one the other Highcliffians were dealt the same way.

Ponsoby & Co. raised red and furious faces to their grinning tormentors.

"Now I suppose you're satisfied!" muttered Ponsoby.

"Not quite," said Vernon-Smith. "We're going to dress you up in these togs!"

The pirate garb was produced from the bundle. Ponsoby nearly choked with rage and chagrin.

"I won't put them on!" he exclaimed wildly.

"Your mistake; you will!" said the Bounder, with a pleasant smile. "Lend a hand, Morgan! Likewise you, Wib! Stick a pin in him if he tries to struggle!"

"All right," chuckled Wibley.

Ponsoby was made to don the pirate costume over his Etons.

It was a slow and difficult process, and the garments were torn a good deal; but the task was completed at length.

"Now for the others!" said Vernon-Smith. The remainder of the Highcliffe Nuts did not offer so much resistance as Ponsoby had done.

In due course they were all converted into the most ruffianly-looking pirates.

Hats bearing long and cross-bones designs were worn on their unwilling heads, and black circles were drawn in crayon round the eyes of the victims.

When the transformation was finished the Greysfriars juniors roared with laughter.

Ponsoby & Co. looked really funny. To

anybody not "in the know" they would appear to be a set of desperate ruffians. "We'll pay you out for this!" hissed Ponsonby.

At the same instant Gadsby shot up his fist, and gashed Bulstrode on the point of the jaw, and knocking him backwards.

"Ow!" gasped Bulstrode. Vernon-Smith promptly sprang forward to take his schoolfellow's place.

"Time we strung these up, I think!" he said. "Fetch the rope!"

Micky Desmond brought the rope, and the Highfellians were tied up in turn. The rope was looped round each of their backs, and using their hands behind their backs, and the whole gang was linked together by the same rope. Only their legs were free.

"That does the trick!" said Vernon-Smith, with approval. These bounders will think twice before japing the Remove again. "You haul!" snarled Ponsonby, who felt his humiliation keenly.

"Don't they look a precious set of gu?" chuckled Bolsover major. "Best if I should care to run into them on a dark night!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "We'll send them marching home, I think," said Vernon-Smith. "They'll have to walk in single file all the way, owing to the manner in which they are strung together. But we've done our best to do the little cars comfortable, haven't we?"

And there was a fresh outburst of laughter. "Quick march!" said the Bounder. And the Highfellians shuffled away in the direction of their own school, with Ponsonby leading.

"Faith, an' if Ozer happens to spot that little lot he'll lead 'em to the police-station!" chuckled Micky Desmond.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Ponsonby & Co. stumbled and staggered along the road."

"Farewell!" shouted Vernon-Smith, waving his hand. "If anyone sees you, you'll be taken for nice, genteel pirates fresh from the Spanish Main!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Ponsonby was setting a furious pace, and the fellows behind him were falling over each other. They tried frantically to get their hands free, so that they might untie their bonds, but Micky Desmond had done his work only too well.

"This is a pretty go," growled Ponsonby. "All your fault," snapped Gadsby. "My fault! What do you mean?"

"You led us into a trap—" "I didn't know."

"It's your place to know! Precious fine leader you are—I don't think!"

The conversation continued in this amiable strain as the Highfellians wended their way painfully in the direction of their own quarters.

The victims were hoping that they would soon meet somebody who would release them from their sorry plight, but the long road was deserted.

Half-way to Highlife, however, a fat figure was sighted cycling towards the unfortunate juniors.

"Bunter!" muttered Ponsonby. And the rest of the victims fairly shouted the name.

"Bunter?" "The fat junior came on, pedalling briskly. He was too short-sighted to observe the Highfellians until he was almost upon them, and then he gave a started gasp, as nearly fell off his machine. One word escaped his terrified lips.

"Pirates!" "We're not pirates, you ass!" hooted Ponsonby.

But Billy Bunter did not wait to hear Pon's explanation. He sped on like a whirlwind, yelling at the top of his voice.

"Help! Rescue! I'm being chased by pirates! Oh dear!"

The fat junior was soon lost to sight on the dusty road. He feared that the "pirates" were after him in full pack, so to speak, and he did not slacken his speed until the gates of Greyfriars came in sight.

Ponsonby & Co. stumbled on their way. They were a few hundred yards away from Highlife, when Frank Courtney and the Caterpillar came into view.

The Caterpillar stared at the strange procession in amazement. He clutched his clum by the arm.

"Am I dreamin', Franky?" "What the merry dickens—" gasped Frank Courtney.

"Pirates, by gad!" muttered the Caterpillar. "They've stepped out of the pages of 'Treasure Island'!"

"Untie us!" hooted Ponsonby. THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 41.

"Let us loose!" marled Gadsby. "Don't stand gawling there like a pair of moonstruck silly idiots!" panted Merton. "You can see what sort of a fix we're in. Get us out of it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Frank Courtney and the Caterpillar, when the identity of the victims had been made known.

"Untie us, you cackling asses!" shouted Ponsonby. The Caterpillar shook his head.

"It would be a great pity to spoil the effect," he said. "Don't you agree, Franky?" Frank Courtney nodded. He could not speak for laughing.

"This," murmured the Caterpillar, "is a sight for gods an' men an' little fishes! I wouldn't have missed it for whole hemispheres!"

Ponsonby was almost foaming at the mouth. "Are you goin' to let us march into the school like this?" he hissed.

"Certainly, dear boy! You'll make quite an impression on your kind teachers!" "You—y—y—"

Ponsonby was at a loss for further speech. Realising that he could expect no help from Frank Courtney and the Caterpillar, he resumed his journey, and his companions in misfortune tottered after him.

It was not until all Highlife had enjoyed the joke that Ponsonby & Co. were released. Muttering avenging imprecations, they trooped up to their dormitory to remove their quaint garb and the redness of their complexions.

"We'll make those Greyfriars rotters sit up for this!" growled Gadsby.

And there was something in his tone which showed that he was uttering no empty threat.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. At Dead of Night.

LUSHED with success, Vernon-Smith led his followers back to Greyfriars.

But Bolsover was in high feather. He had been allotted one week in which to prove his worth as a Form-captain, and even his worst enemy had to admit that he had got off with a marvellous style, the triumph over the Highfellians had been crushing and complete. When the election of a permanent Form-captain eventually took place, this story was one of the viva school might turn the scales in Vernon-Smith's favour.

But the Bounder did not mean to let matters rest there.

His ambitions were far-reaching. He wanted to conquer Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's, in the forthcoming football match; and before this came about he intended to carry out a night-raid against the Fifth.

In the Remove dormitory that night Vernon-Smith expounded that scheme.

"The Fifth went taking down several pegs," he declared. "They've been strutting about just for the sake of the mark."

"And it's up to the Remove to show them that they're not!"

"Hear, hear!" "I suggest that we wait until eleven o'clock," Vernon-Smith went on, "and then go up in force to the Fifth-Form dormitory, and seek it into 'em with pillows and things!"

"Yes, that'll do," said Smiddy darlint! exclaimed Micky Desmond.

"Same here!" "Count me in, Smiddy!"

"I'll give you the Fifth!" "We'll strew the hungry churchyard with their bones, as Kipling says!" declared Bolsover major.

"It wasn't Kipling, ass; it was Shakespeare!" growled Whaley. Vernon-Smith turned to Harry Wharton.

"Are you backing me up in this, Wharton?" Wharton hesitated.

"If you really want me to," he said. "But I think you'll be able to carry it through without my help!"

"Oh, very well," said Vernon-Smith, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I'll show that we're independent of the Famous Five, as you choose to call yourselves!"

"Matter of fact," said Skinner, "we shall get on a jolly sight better without them!"

Vernon-Smith selected a score of fellows without much difficulty. The Famous Five stood down, and so did several others, but there was a lack of volunteers.

Wingate of the Sixth saw lights out, and the stalwart captain of Greyfriars did not suspect that at least twenty fellows had slipped off to bed, partially clad.

"Good-night, kids!" he said, as he extinguished the light. "Good-night, Wingate!" A good many of the prospective raiders dropped off to sleep in the long interval

between lights out and eleven o'clock. Vernon-Smith was not one of them. He remained wide awake, propping himself up on the pillows; and the first stroke of eleven booming out from the old clock-tower found him ready.

"Tumble out, you fellows!" he exclaimed, getting out of bed.

"Taw-aw-aw!" came in a drowsy mumble from Hookey major.

Skinner yawned, too. "Don't you think it would be as well to put it off till another night, Smiddy?" he asked.

"No, I don't!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "If we let this chance slip through our fingers, we may not get another."

The night was bitterly cold, and through the dormitory windows the juniors could see the moon struggling to assert itself through a bank of clouds.

"Groot!" shivered Morgan. "It's simply freezing!"

"You'll soon get warm!" said Vernon-Smith reassuringly. "Get your pillows, all of you—and for goodness' sake don't make more noise than the Desmond boys!"

Vernon-Smith's supporters quitted their snug beds, and armed themselves with pillows and bolsters.

"Ready?" asked the Bounder. "There's a general nodding of heads in the gloom."

"Follow your leader!" The juniors stole noiselessly from the dormitory, with the exception of Bolsover major, whose feet fairly thudded on the hard floor.

"Tone it down, Bolsover!" muttered Vernon-Smith. "Getting flat-footed in your old age!"

"Yes! I've got a beastly corn—" "Well, you needn't advertise it!"

The raiding-party advanced towards the Fifth-Form dormitory. They were out for scalps, but the Desmond boys—"Before they reached their destination their leader delivered a brief address.

"You're to do as much damage as you can within five minutes," he said. "Then I shall give the signal to retire. If any fellow remains in the dormitory after that, it will be his own fault if he gets it in the neck!"

"Yes, O chief!" murmured Skinner. "Come on, then!"

In the Fifth Form sleeping quarters all was hushed. As a rule, the more of Horace Coker reverberated through the dormitory. But on this occasion the great Horace was slumbering placidly.

Bimble, the captain of the Fifth, lay asleep with his head resting on his arm. He was dreaming of victories on the football-field. And his awakening was a rude one.

Bolsover major's pillow caught him a fearful clump.

No sooner had Bolsover's flow been delivered than the whole of the raiders got busy.

"Biff! Thud! Biff! Thud!" "What on earth—" began Coker dazedly, sitting up in bed.

Clump! "Vernon-Smith's pillow effectively silenced the great Coker."

The first person to realise clearly what was happening was Potter.

"A raid!" he exclaimed. "Turn out, you fellows!"

Potter himself turned out, only to be floored by a swipe from Micky Desmond.

The Fifth were in greater numbers than the raiding party, but they were so completely taken by surprise that they had no chance to resist. In time, they would have been able to do so with their assailants, but they were not given time.

When the raid was five minutes' old, Vernon-Smith paused breathlessly.

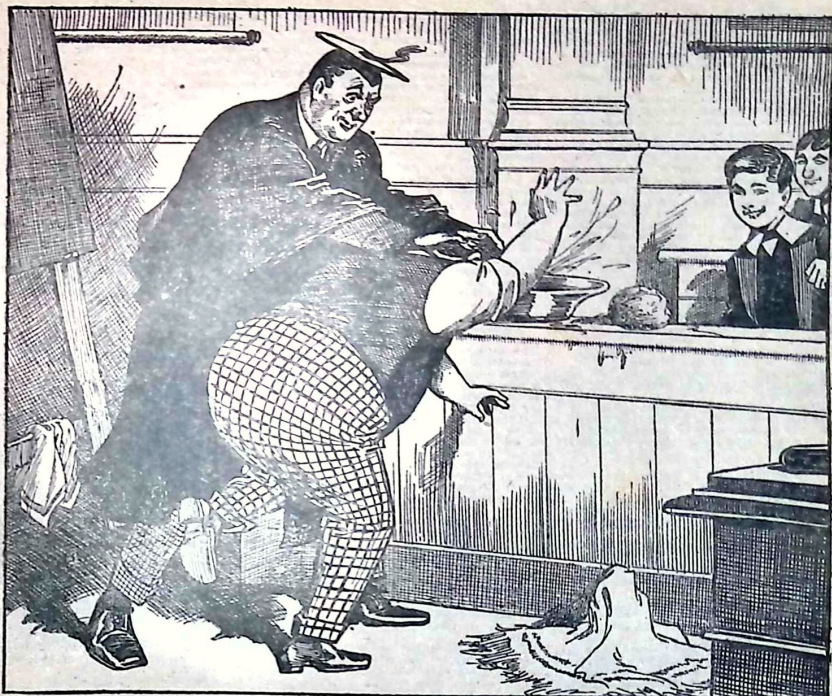
"Retire!" he rapped out. And the fellows, slumping at their success, scuttled away to their own quarters, leaving the Fifth to sort themselves out.

Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, was pulling his hair up the stairs, just as the juniors were in the act of descending.

According to the laws of gravity, it is impossible for two bodies to occupy the same space at the same time. This being so, a collision was inevitable, and Bolsover major, being the heavier, was the one with an impact which caused that gentleman to turn giddy.

The master of the Fifth reeled against the balustrade. "What's my soul?" he gasped. "Who—what—"

Bolsover did not wait to tender an explanation. He followed his Form-fellows with all speed to the Remove dormitory.



Mr. Dunn strode up to the unfortunate Bunter and forcibly ducked his head into the bowl. "Put some ginger into it!" he snapped. "I shall send for a scrubbing-brush if you are not careful!" (See page 7.)

"Into your beds—quick!" muttered Vernon-Smith.

The juniors obeyed in the twinkling of an eye. And when a few moments later Mr. Prout entered the dormitory, he found it still and silent, save for the unmusical snore of Billy Bunter.

Mr. Prout paused suspiciously on the threshold.

"Boys!" he ejaculated.

There was no response.

"Dear me!" murmured the master of the Fifth. "I was almost positive that a number of Remove boys were absent from their dormitory!"

Mr. Prout advanced towards the nearest bed, and shook the occupant, who happened to be Micky Desmond.

"Gerraway, you duffer!" murmured Micky drowsily. "Tain't time to get up yet!"

"Desmond!"

"Why—my hat!—It's Mr. Prout!" exclaimed Micky, in well-feigned astonishment. "Is anything wrong, sir?"

"Have you been absent from your bed?" demanded Mr. Prout severely.

"Faith, an' I'm too tired to answer conundrums, sir!" said Micky Desmond.

"Do not be impertinent, boy! Answer my question!"

"Yes, sir," said Micky meekly.

"Ah! When were you absent from your bed, Desmond?"

"All day, sir!"

Bolover major, in the next bed, succeeded in converting a chuckle into a yawn.

Mr. Prout glared at Micky Desmond.

"Was it you who collided with me on the stairs a few moments previously?" he demanded.

"No, sir!" answered Micky truthfully.

To the intense relief of the juniors; Mr. Prout did not pursue his inquiries any further. Had he done so he might have made some interesting discoveries.

"I am sorry I disturbed you needlessly, Desmond!" he said.

"Don't mention it, sir!"

Mr. Prout retired from the dormitory, satisfied that he had been labouring under a misapprehension.

When the master's footsteps had died away, a score of juniors slipped out of bed, to the accompaniment of a score of chuckles, and discarded their shirts and trousers in favour of pyjamas.

"Jove, but that was a narrow squeak!" said Skinner.

"Micky, my son, you turned up trumps!" said Vernon-Smith gratefully.

"It's safe enough to go to sleep, I suppose!" said Wibley.

"Yes, rather! The Fifth won't worry us to-night while Prout's on the warpath!"

The juniors turned in, and one by one they dropped off to sleep.

Vernon-Smith was the last fellow to remain awake.

The Bounder's eyes gleamed with triumph as he lay staring into the darkness. The successful raid against the Fifth was the second feather in his cap.

"If things go on in the way they've begun," reflected Vernon-Smith, "the captaincy of the Remove will be a dead cert for me. I reckon I deserve it, too. I'm as good a leader as Wharton any day!"

The Bounder had quite forgotten the old and very true proverb that pride goeth before a fall!

**THE FOURTH CHAPTER.**  
**Going Strong.**

"YOU'LL play, Harry, of course!" It was Bob Cherry who asked the question.

The Famous Five, who had been considerably overshadowed of late, were strolling together in the Close on the day of the match with St. Jim's.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"We'll all play, since Smithy's been good enough to include us in the team," he said, with a touch of irony. "We've taken no part in the raids, but footer's another matter. There's the reputation of the Remove to consider. It's up to us to put it across St. Jim's!"

"Hear, hear!" said Frank Nugent.

"We will shoot for goals as kickfully as ever!" declared Hurree Singh.

Had the Famous Five chosen to be disloyal, and to withdraw their services, they could seriously have jeopardised Vernon-Smith's chances of winning the captaincy. But Harry Wharton & Co. were loyal to the core, and although it rankled a little to be under the orders of the Bounder, they meant to play with their usual dash and vigour.

Vernon-Smith had posted up the list of players, and he had made no alteration from the Remove's usual eleven, which was a very strong one.

Quite a crowd of fellows turned out to speed the Remove team on its way.

"Good-luck, Smithy!"

"Mind you put it across St. Jim's!"

"If you win, the captaincy's yours, for a cert!" said Skinner.

The Bounder grinned.

"Set your minds at rest," he said. "Unless we run up against a chapter of bad luck—"

men injured, and so forth—we shall pull it off all serene. If we win, I'll send you fellows a telegram. If no telegram arrives, you'll know that we've either gone under, or the match has fizzled out in a draw. So-long!"

"So-long!" chorused the Removites, as the eleven, looking very fit and businesslike, passed the old gateway.

"The journey to St. Jim's was rather a long one, but the footballers forgot their discomfort when they were greeted at the other end by Tom Merry & Co."

Greetings were exchanged, and the rival teams trooped into the little bunshop in Rycombe for refreshments.

"It was a tight squeeze for twenty-two, but no one seemed to mind."

"I'm standin' 'tweat, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of St. Jim's. "Don't be afraid to ordah what you like!"

"Good old Gussy!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Stab the same Good Samaritan! Mine's a strong lemonade, with a dash of home-made tottee!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mine's a couple of sugary doughnuts!" said Bulstrode.

But Vernon-Smith intervened.

"Nothing stodgey is allowed!" he said firmly.

"Oh, just two!" pleaded Bulstrode.

But the Bounder was adamant.

"You can't train on doughnuts," he said.

"You can have a cup of Bovril, if you like."

"Good!"

Tom Merry stared at Vernon-Smith.

"You seem to have sprung into authority all of a sudden, Smithy!" he exclaimed.

"As captain of the Remove—" began the Bounder.

"Eh?"

"As captain of the Remove and of the footer team, it's my duty to see that the fellows keep themselves fit!" he said.

"Bah Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Since when have you been skippah, deah boy?"

"I'm on probation for a week," explained Vernon-Smith.

Tom Merry turned to Harry Wharton.

"Is this one of Smithy's leg-pulling stunts?" he inquired.

Harry Wharton explained that he had been detroned from the captaincy, and described the conditions under which the vacancy was being sought for.

"My hat!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"You seem to have been having lively times at your Home of Incurables. Smithy will naturally want to win the match this afternoon."

"Of course!"

"Then we'll do our best to disappoint him!"

"Yass, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus.

Having refreshed themselves, St. Jim's to the full and the Greyfriars juniors in moderation—the two elevens walked up to the school together.

When they arrived on the ground, spectators were already swarming in. Matches between St. Jim's and Greyfriars were always productive of keen tussles.

A cheer went up as the teams took the field—the Saints in their red-and-white striped jerseys and the Friars in dark blue.

"Play up, Saints!"

"Put it across a team!"

"Give us an early goal, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus mentally promised to do his best to oblige. He was a very speedy and useful forward, and directly the game started Tom Merry swung the ball across to him.

Away went the swell of St. Jim's—away and away—with the ball at his toes, and the cheers of his schoolfellows dinning in his ears.

"Go it, Gussy!"

"Right through, old man!"

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth with annoyance as Arthur Augustus outtwitted the Greyfriars halves, and sped for goal.

"Stop him, Bull, you idiot!" rapped out the Bounder.

Johnny Bull was not used to being addressed in this manner on the field of play.

When Harry Wharton captained the side, he gave his men encouragement—not abuse. Vernon-Smith believed in the domineering method.

"You clumsy ass!" shouted the Bounder, as Johnny Bull, flustered at being called an idiot by his captain, miskicked, and let Gussy through.

"Shoot! Shoot!"

The crowd shouted in chorus.

Arthur Augustus steadied himself, and drove the ball past Bulstrode into the net.

The PENNY POPULAR, No. 41.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Firi, blood to us!"

The St. Jim's partisans were exuberant. In practically the first minute of the game, their players had established the lead.

"The crowd was screaming as the teams walked back to the centre of the field.

"Brilliant sort of defence we've got, I must say!" he observed sarcastically.

Johnny Bull flared up.

"Think you think we can do ourselves justice when you keep yelling at us?" he exclaimed. "Shut your rat-trap, and we shall have a chance to give satisfaction. As it is, it's no fun at all for a licking!"

Vernon-Smith continued to frown, but he made no reply. The ball was set in motion once more.

That early goal had stimulated the Saints. They were undoubtedly playing better football than their opponents. They combined together with perfect cohesion, whereas the Friars were all at sea.

It was not surprising, therefore, that within twenty minutes Tom Merry put his side two up, sending in a shot which Bulstrode could scarcely see, let alone save.

The visiting forwards made a few bursts, but they were too erratic to be dangerous. And half-time came with the Saints enjoying a comfortable lead of two goals to nothing.

Most of the players congregated in the middle of the field, and mucked lenses. But Vernon-Smith stood remote from all, clenching his hands in baffled rage.

If the Friars lost the match, his trial week, which had opened so full of promise, would be spoilt. His chances of securing the captaincy of the Remove would slip away.

During the brief interval Vernon-Smith formed a desperate resolve.

"I'll have a shot at winning the match on my own!" he muttered. "It's no use relying on the others. They're putting up a putrid show! It almost looks as if they're deliberately trying to let me down!"

When the game restarted, the Bounder put his scheme into effect.

Gaining possession of the ball, he endeavoured to get it through on his own. He broke through the St. Jim's halves, and the backs loomed up to meet him.

"Pass, Smithy!" rapped out Harry Wharton, who was standing unmarked in the goalmouth.

Vernon-Smith refused to comply. He was sent sprawling by a powerful shoulder-charge, but he recovered himself—and the ball—and sent in a shot which even Fatty Wynn, good goalie as he was, found himself unable to cope with.

The ball travelled swiftly into the net.

"Well played, Smithy!" said Bob Cherry.

"You got through all right, but you were jolly selfish about it, you know!"

"It 's business pays!" was the Bounder's grim retort.

And as the game progressed, it seemed that there was something to be said for his point of view.

Once again he broke through; and once again he declined to part with the ball.

Although he received some hard knocks in the process, he managed to fight his way through the defence, and worked up with a shot which made Fatty Wynn gasp and the net quiver.

"Goal!"

"By Jove!" said Peter Todd.

"Smithy seems to believe in the one-man game," said Wharton.

"Selfishness pays!" repeated the Bounder.

"Sometimes!"

"Not having now, and chance it!"

Vernon-Smith had high hopes of netting the winning goal. But the St. Jim's defence, having been fooled twice in succession, were on their mettle.

Try as he would, Vernon-Smith could not break through again. He was a marked man, and the opposing backs did not stand on ceremony when checking his rushes. Not once, but half a dozen times, the Bounder rolled in the mud.

The St. Jim's forwards occasionally came into the picture, but their attack had lost its sting.

"Looks like being a draw," remarked Frank Nugent.

Vernon-Smith spun fiercely upon the speaker.

"I draw might suit your wishes," he said, "but it won't suit mine! We're going to win!"

But the referee was already consulting his watch, and the end was at hand.

In the last minute, however, Figgins, of St.

Jim's, had the misfortune to handle the ball in the penalty-area.

The crowd groaned as the referee pointed to the penalty-mark.

"Who's going to take the kick?" asked Bob Cherry.

The question was superfluous. Vernon-Smith had already placed the ball in position, and was preparing to take the run.

The crowd watched with bated breath. Unless Fatty Wynn brought off a miraculous save at close range, victory would go to Greyfriars.

But!

The leather went whizzing in, and Fatty Wynn clucked at it. But he clutched in vain. It swerved past him into the jawning net.

Goal!

The Friars had won, and Vernon-Smith had scored all the goals for his side!

Although they did not approve of the Bounder's methods, his schoolfellows gave him a cheer as the final whistle rang out and the players trooped off the field.

That evening two telegrams arrived at Greyfriars.

One was addressed to "The Remove Form," and ran thus:

"Greyfriars won on the post by three goals to two.—VERNON-SMITH."

The other was addressed to Mr. Quelch. It was worded as follows:

"Join me at Hotel Majestic, London, immediately.—LOCKE."

"Bless my soul!" murmured the Remove-master. "What can Dr. Locke want with me, I wonder?"

The Head of Greyfriars had travelled to London that day to attend a conference of headmasters. He was not expected back for a couple of days, and he had summoned Mr. Quelch to join him in town. Perhaps he was ill, and needed the Remove-master's assistance.

The telegram came as a surprise to Mr. Quelch, the message from Dr. Locke seemed urgent.

Mr. Quelch stood not upon the order of going, but went at once. He realised that he would be late, a surprise awaited them, the last train from Courfield Junction.

The Remove-master slipped a few necessities into an attache-case, and put on his hat and coat.

Mr. Prout, however, was nowhere to be found. Consequently, Mr. Quelch, being pressed for time, went off without delivering the message.

Later on in the evening, when the footballers, tired but triumphant, arrived back from St. Jim's, a surprise awaited them.

Vernon-Smith went along to Mr. Quelch's study to ask if the members of the eleven might be excused prep.

A gruff and unfamiliar voice bade the Bounder enter.

Vernon-Smith obeyed.

Seated at Mr. Quelch's writing-table was a man in cap and gown—a repulsive-looking man who glared at the junior as he came in.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

"I came to ask Mr. Quelch—"

"Mr. Quelch has been called away!"

"My hat!" muttered Vernon-Smith.

"He will be away for a few days, and I am taking his place in the meantime."

"Oh!"

Vernon-Smith looked astonished, as well he might. He did not look best pleased either.

Mr. Quelch's deputy looked more like a prize-fighter than anything else. The cap and gown quite failed to give refinement to his appearance.

"My name is Mr. Dunn," said the master. "and I have been given to understand that the Remove is a most unruly form."

"No more unruly than the others," growled the Bounder.

Mr. Dunn rose up in wrath.

"I am accustomed, at the school which I have just left, to being addressed as 'sir'!" he exclaimed.

"My name is Mr. Dunn," said the master.

"What is your name, boy?"

"Vernon-Smith," said the Bounder sullenly.

"Vernon-Smith what?"

"Mr. Vernon-Smith, Esquire, if you like!"

Mr. Dunn's not-over-clean hand groped for a cane.

"This is insolence!" he thundered. "Hold out your hand!"

The Bounder's eyes flashed defiance, and it

looked for a moment as if he would refuse to comply with the command.

But wiser counsels prevailed. Vernon-Smith reflected that he would only be stirring up trouble for himself by defying Mr. Quelch's deputy. The latter would be certain to report him on Mr. Quelch's return, and the Bounder, having set his heart on becoming captain of the Remove, could not afford to run foul of the authorities. Accordingly he held out his hand.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

The cane descended with brutal force, and even the Bounder, who would normally testify punishment without flinching, had to squirm.

"I will show you that I am not a man to be trifled with," said Mr. Dunn, as he put down the cane. "Any further act of insubordination on your part, Vernon-Smith, will land you into serious trouble. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said the Bounder.

And Mr. Dunn, note with a look of malicious satisfaction that he did not omit the word "sir" on this occasion.

"You may go, Vernon-Smith," he said. "We shall renew our acquaintance later in the Form-room."

With clenched hands and burning cheeks, Vernon-Smith strode out in to the passage.

### THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

#### Mr. Dunn Makes Merry.

"ALLO, hallo, hallo!"

The Famous Five were passing Mr. Quelch's study as Vernon-Smith came out.

Bob Cherry caught the Bounder by the arm.

"Smithy, what's happened?"

"Has Quelch let us off the prep?" asked Jimmy Bull.

Vernon-Smith displayed to view his right hand. Three red weals had formed across the palm.

"Licked!" ejaculated Harry Wharton, in amazement. "What the merry dickens—"

Vernon-Smith looked almost homicidal.

"It's none of Quelch's," he explained. "Quelch's been called away for a few days, and there's a beastly upstart called Dunn taking his place. He looks what he is—a beastly, low-down ruffian! He lammed me because I wouldn't call him 'sir'!"

"My hat!"

Vernon-Smith's news was staggering.

"But—but where's Quelch gone?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Goodness knows! Bunter says a telegram came for him earlier in the evening, so that may have something to do with it. But this fellow Dunn's a tartar!"

The Famous Five were soon to find that out for themselves.

"Nothing was seen of Mr. Dunn that night. For some reason best known to himself, he preferred to remain in Mr. Quelch's study. The manner of his arrival at Greyfriars had been mysterious, and his movements, now that he had arrived, were equally mysterious. The Remove dormitory was in a buzz that evening.

"Blessed if I can make head or tail of this affair!" said Peter Todd. "Why weren't we told this fellow Dunn was coming?"

"Give it up!" grunted Vernon-Smith. "All I know is that he's here; and you'll know all about it, too, in the morning!"

"Looks as if we shall have a warm time in class," said Wharton.

"In that case I'll come to the rescue with my ventriloquism," said Billy Bunter. "You fellows know what a ripping ventriloquist I am!"

"Dry up, porpoise!"

Wingate saw lights out in the Remove dormitory, and the juniors dropped off to sleep in a state of profound apprehension. If Vernon-Smith's statements were correct, they could expect no mercy at the hands of the mysterious Mr. Dunn.

When the rain-bell clanged out, the temporary master at Greyfriars was still the only topic of conversation.

"I suppose we shall get a glimpse of the merchant at brekker," said Bob Cherry.

But there was no sign of apprehension, when the fellows trooped into the hall. The seat at the head of the Remove table was vacant.

Eventually the bell rang for morning lessons, and for the first time the juniors came face to face with Mr. Dunn.

"My hat!" muttered Frank Nugent, as he dropped into his seat. "What an unwholesome specimen!"

Mr. Dunn looked something like the in-

famous Judge Jeffreys must have looked as he presided at the desk. His massive face was set in a frown, and he was unshaven. Altogether he looked as unlike a public schoolmaster as possible.

The juniors eyed him with some trepidation. Mr. Dunn eyed them, in turn, with extreme disapproval.

"You fellows, mob, I must say!" was his cordial greeting. "Stand up, you!"

This last remark was addressed to Billy Bunter, who sat in the front row.

The fat junior rose to his feet. He did not know why he had been singled out, but his knees were fairly knocking together.

"You haven't washed your neck this morning," said Mr. Dunn sternly.

"Oh, really, sir—"

"I cannot tolerate slovenliness in a boy! Go and get a basin of water, and bring it to the Form-room—likewise some soap!"

"O, my!" gasped Billy Bunter.

Mr. Dunn picked up the pointer.

"Do not stand mumbling at me, sir!" he thundered. "Do as I tell you!"

Mr. Dunn, with upraised pointer, took a quick step in Billy Bunter's direction. The fat junior promptly scuttled to the door, and disappeared along the passage.

A few moments later he returned, carrying a brimming basin, in which floated a sponge. There was also a large tablet of soap.

"Put it on the desk!" rapped out Mr. Dunn.

Billy Bunter obeyed.

"Now take off your coat, roll up your sleeves, and cleanse yourself thoroughly in my basin," commanded Mr. Dunn.

The juniors remained quiet while Billy Bunter "got on with the washing."

The Owl of the Remove gingerly applied the sponge to his bushy features, whereupon Mr. Dunn strode up to him and forcibly ducked his head in the bowl.

"Gug-gug-gug!" gargled Billy Bunter.

"Get some ginger into it!" snapped Mr. Dunn. "I shall send for a scrubbing-brush if you are not careful!"

Accordingly, Billy Bunter exerted himself at the bowl, and at length his tormentor was satisfied.

The fat junior's face fairly glowed when he had finished towelling himself.

"That's better," said the master. "Let the water run to you to keep yourself clean in future. Take that basin away, and if you are absent more than three minutes I shall come you!"

Billy Bunter staggered out of the Form-room with the basin. He was already vowing vengeance on Mr. Dunn.

Lessons had commenced when the fat junior returned.

The first lesson was English History, a subject concerning which Mr. Dunn seemed profoundly ignorant. His knowledge of English was, rather, his lack of knowledge—raised several smiles.

Those smiles, however, soon faded.

Mr. Dunn dropped heavily on several of his pupils, and he did great execution with the pointer. He informed the class that he didn't believe in giving impositions.

"A liberal application of the pointer is the only remedy for your shortcomings," he exclaimed.

The juniors began to writhe.

In the course of an hour nearly every fellow in the class had been punished, under some pretext or other, and in almost every case the punishment was undeserved.

Skinner, who was seated next to Billy Bunter, gave him a nudge.

"Time to turn the tap on!" he muttered.

"Give him some ventriloquism!"

The fat junior nodded.

Presently, without any preliminary warning, there was a sound as of a dog snapping close to Mr. Dunn's feet.

The juniors knew that the schoolboy ventriloquist was at work, and they expected to see Mr. Dunn spring off his stool in alarm. But the master sat perfectly still, with a grim smile playing about his features.

Again the dog seemed to snap, and again Mr. Dunn took no notice.

"Time to turn the tap on!" he muttered. He produced a most hideous snarl, followed by a noise which seemed to suggest that the master's trousers were being ripped by a savage dog. But the master sat perfectly still, with but without the slightest trace of alarm.

"Quite a clever exhibition, Bunter," he said, "but not quite clever enough to deceive me!"

Bunter's jaw dropped.

The fat junior was never more surprised in his life. He did not even know that Mr. Dunn knew his name.

"Stand out before the class!" commanded Mr. Dunn.

Billy Bunter obeyed, looking very sheepish.

"Hold out your hand!"

"Hum-hum-my hand, sir?"

"Yes!"

The scene which followed was distinctly painful—for Bunter. The yells of the fat junior echoed and re-echoed through the Form-room.

"Now go to your place," said Mr. Dunn, "and do not dare to imitate a mad dog again!"

Mr. Dunn rolled dismally to his seat, and Billy Bunter got busy on the blackboard, which was turned away from the class.

The juniors sat nursing their injuries, secretly daring to speak even in an undertone, lest Mr. Dunn should pounce upon them. Seldom in the history of the Remove Form had such a painful and unpleasant morning been experienced.

Mr. Dunn's next movements were extraordinary. He suddenly veered the easel round, so that the blackboard faced the class. Then, with a last "Good-morning!" he turned on his heel and quitted the Form-room.

The Removites blinked at each other in blank astonishment.

"Who the—"

"Who the—"

"How the—"

Then their eyes lighted upon the blackboard, and their bewilderment changed to fury.

For this was the message Mr. Dunn had left behind him:

"THIS IS HIGHCLIFFE'S REVENGE!  
(Signed) U. R. DUNN,  
Agent for Messrs. Ponsoby, Gadsby & Co."

"Spoofoed!" yelled Vernon-Smith, springing to his feet. "After him!"

The class rose as one man, and fairly stampeded through the doorway and along the passage.

Mr. Dunn, however, had received a good start, and he was nowhere to be seen.

Finally, his pursuers were compelled to abandon the chase. They pulled up, panting, in the Close.

Bob Cherry was the first to find his voice.

"Well, I'm figgered!" he gasped. "That bounder wasn't a master at all!"

"No more a master than I am!" said Wharton. "He was an agent of Ponsoby, hired by Ponsoby to play the part!"

"And successfully, too!" groaned Vernon-Smith. "We've been dished, dished, and done!"

"It's all your fault!" snarled Bolsover major.

"My fault!" echoed the Bounder. "How do you make that out?"

"You ought to have had your wits about you, and prevented the Form from being fooled!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It's Smithy's fault, entirely!"

Most of the fellows seemed only too willing to make a scapegoat of Vernon-Smith. He had met the bogus master the previous evening, and instead of questioning his right to be at Greyfriars he had walked blindly into the trap.

But when he was acting as captain of the Remove, yet he had allowed Highcliffe to work off one of the most gigantic japes of the term.

"It's quite obvious what's happened," said Peter Todd. "Ponsoby arranged for a telegram to be sent to Quelch, calling him away, and he hired that precious scoundrel to come to Greyfriars and take Quelch's place. Result: We've been completely and utterly spoofoed!"

"Thanks to Smithy!"

"Look here, you silly asses!" protested the Bounder. "How was I to know—"

"Oh, bump him!" shouted Bolsover major in tones of exasperation.

And Vernon-Smith was seized by many hands and bumped on the hard flagstones. And as he picked himself up and limped painfully away he realised that his week's trial as captain of the Remove had been crowned with disaster, and that he could not hope, when the voting took place, to win the position he coveted.

That day Mr. Quelch returned from London, and made no attempt to discover the sender of the spoof telegram. But these efforts ended in smoke, likewise the efforts of the baffled and furious Removites to discover the identity of "U. R. D. Dunn."

THE END.

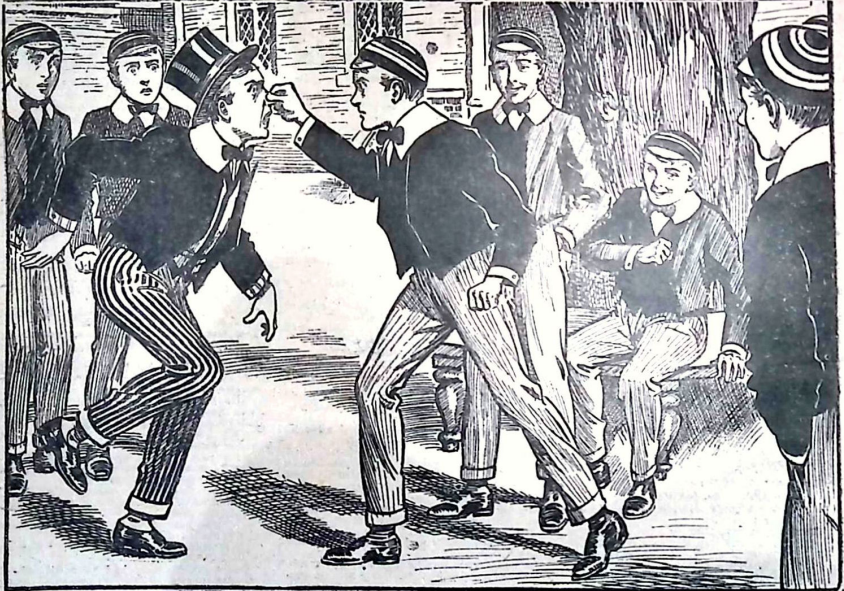
(Another grand, long, complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. next week. Order your copy in advance!)

THE PENNY POPULAR—No. 51.

# Just Like Jimmy!

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

By OWEN CONQUEST.



Lovell made a sudden dive at Smythe's prominent nose, and seized it with a thumb and forefinger. "Yowwww!" wailed Adolphus. "Ow, by dose—by dose!" Tracy and Howard stood by grinning. (See page 13.)

## THE FIRST CHAPTER. Trouble Ahead.

**J**IMMY SILVER was worried. He was morose.

It was so extraordinary for Jimmy Silver, the most sunnily-tempered junior at Rookwood, to be either worried or morose that his chums were astounded, and, indeed, almost alarmed.

Hitherto the end study in the junior passage had sheltered a happy family, who did not seem to have a care in the world. The Fistical Four had always seemed satisfied with themselves and things generally. Lovell and Raby and Newcome were cheery youths, and Jimmy Silver especially always gave the impression that he found life exceedingly well worth living.

But now, apparently, a change had come o'er the spirit of his dream, to put it poetically.

He was worried and morose.

Lines did not worry Jimmy Silver. Lickings only worried him temporarily. Even detention only dashed his high spirits as long as it lasted. But now his

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worry was plain, and his moroseness was evident.

When he sat at tea in the study with a thoughtful wrinkle on his brow, and without speaking a word, the first time it happened his chums naturally thought that he was planning some deep scheme up against the Moderns, Jimmy Silver & Co. being the great champions of the Classical side at Rookwood.

But when Jimmy Silver left the study after tea without speaking a word, they were surprised. And when Lovell asked him later whether he had a "wheeze" for making the Modern bounders sit up, Jimmy Silver only replied:

"Blow the Moderns!"  
"But it's time we gave 'em a fall," said Lovell warmly. "There's Tommy Dodd, Frinrance—"

"Blow Tommy Dodd!"  
"He's getting his ears up, we've let them alone so long," said Lovell indignantly.

"Blow his ears!"  
And Jimmy Silver shoved his hands deep in his pockets, and tramped away, leaving his best chum in a state of astonishment.

"He's seedy, I suppose," Lovell told

Raby and Newcome. "Perhaps it was those kippers. I thought they were—well, rather 'off,' you know!"

But the next day it was clear that it couldn't have been the kippers, for Jimmy Silver was still worried and morose, and the effect of the kippers, if it had been the kippers that caused the trouble, should have worn off by that time.

Besides, Lovell and Raby and Newcome weren't feeling any ill-effects from the kippers. It was clear that it wasn't the kippers at all. It was something deeper and more serious.

To questions concerning what was on his little brain, Jimmy Silver only replied "Rats!" or "Bow-wow!"—replies from which no information could be gleaned.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome consulted anxiously on the subject. For Jimmy Silver to be "in the blues" for two whole days was such a phenomenon that it was evident that something was very much out of gear.

"He can't have been getting into one of Smythe's little sweeps, and losing his tin," said Lovell. "He's not ass enough for that!"

On the third day of Jimmy Silver's



amazing moroseness his chums could stand it no longer. They intended to have it out, and they arranged to corner Jimmy in the study, and make him explain. In case of obstinacy on Jimmy's part, it was agreed that Raby and Newcome should hold him, while Lovell wielded a cricket-stump. By that means they expected to get at the facts.

About tea-time they watched for Jimmy Silver at the study doorway. The stump was on the table all ready. "Here he comes!" murmured Lovell. "Let him get in, but mind he doesn't get out again. He's jolly well not going to worry his pals like this!"

They watched. Jimmy Silver came along the passage, his hands deep in his pockets, and that unaccustomed wrinkle in his brow. A junior came out of the next study—the new boy in the Fourth, Dick Oswald. He was passing Jimmy Silver with averted face, when Jimmy woke up out of a reverie, and stopped him.

"Hold on, Oswald!"

Oswald held on.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome looked at one another. Oswald had been sent to Coventry—for excellent reasons, as they considered—and it was just like Jimmy Silver to set himself up against the verdict of the Form in this way. What was he speaking to the fellow for?

"How are you getting on?" asked Jimmy Silver, apparently unconscious of the fact that his chums were frowning at him from the end study.

Oswald flushed.

"All right," he replied, "thanks!"

"How are Hooker and Jones treating you in your study?"

Oswald's flush deepened.

"They don't speak to me," he said.

"Isn't it rather rotten?"

"Yes," said Oswald. "I know you mean kindly, Silver, but you'd better not speak to me, or you'll get into trouble with the rest. The whole Form's down on me, and I don't want to drag you into my troubles."

"Blow the Form!" said Jimmy Silver. Oswald smiled.

"You've been keeping out of my way," said Jimmy.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because—because I've heard some of the fellows saying that if you keep on speaking to me, you'll be sent to Coventry, too," said Oswald. "You'd better let me alone, like the rest."

"Do you mean that you don't want me to speak to you?"

"No, I don't mean that. If you'd ever been sent to Coventry, you'd know how glad I am to see that you're not the same as the rest," said Oswald. "But—but it isn't fair to you."

"I can look after myself, I think," said Jimmy Silver. "Well, I'm going to speak to you. If you dodge me any more I'm going to look for you specially, and punch your head—see?"

"You'll be cut by the rest!"

"Let 'em cut and be blowed!"

"But—"

"Blow your 'buts'! Just remember what I've told you, that's all!" said Jimmy Silver. "I'm not a duffer! I know it looks pretty bad about you, but I believe I know a decent chap when I see one, and I know you're one!"

"Thank you," said Oswald, in a moved way. "And—and you're quite right, only—I can't explain, you see. It's true that I was sacked from my last school, and on a serious charge, just as Smythe got it in that letter from his brother at Minhurst. I can't deny it!"

"You mean to say that you didn't do what they accused you of—pub-haunting, and that sort of thing?"

"I never did! But—but I can't go into it; there's circumstances I can't explain. The Head did quite right, as he believed, and—and I hadn't anything to say!"

"But why hadn't you, if you were innocent?"

Oswald was silent.

"You're a queer animal," said Jimmy Silver, after a pause. "But I believe in you all the same. If you've taken me in, I'm not such an awfully clever chap as I think I am."

And with a nod to the new boy, Jimmy Silver walked on to his own study. There he was immediately seized by three pairs of indignant hands, and whirled into the study, and three separate and distinct glares were fixed upon him.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were indignant, and they meant to make their study-leader understand that without the possibility of a mistake.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### A Study Licking.

"JIMMY SILVER, you ass!"

"Jimmy, you fathead!"

"You duffer!"

Jimmy Silver jerked himself away from his indignant study-mates, and regarded them morosely.

"Well, what's the excitement about?" he demanded.

"Look here, Jimmy Silver—"

"I'm looking, fathead!"

"We've got a bone to pick with you," said Lovell. "In the first place, you've got to explain why you've been going about like a bear with a sore head, two or three days of it now, and we're fed up!"

"And what have you been jawing to that new cad for?" demanded Newcome.

"You know he's sent to Coventry," added Raby.

"You know what he did," said Lovell. Jimmy Silver yawned.

"Did you ever see such an exasperating ass?" ejaculated Lovell. "Collar him, and I'll try the stump!"

"Hold on!" said Jimmy Silver. "No larks! I'm worried!"

"Well, what are you worried about?" demanded Lovell. "That's what we want to know, and that's what we're jolly well going to know, as well as about you jawing to that worm Oswald!"

"I've been thinking about him," said Silver.

His chums stared at him wrathfully.

"Do you mean to say that that's what's been the matter with you?" exclaimed Lovell hotly. "You've been bothering about that new kid?"

"Yes."

"And that's the trouble?" howled Raby.

"That's the trouble!" assented Jimmy Silver. "You see—"

"No, I don't see," said Lovell. "I don't see at all. I thought there must be something the matter, from your idiotic manners and customs the last couple of days. You ass!"

"There is something the matter," said Jimmy Silver. "I can't make it out, but I think it's up to us."

"What's up to us?"

"To stand by that kid Oswald."

"Oh, you fathead!"

"He's out by the whole Form—all the Lower School, in fact," said Jimmy Silver seriously. "I suppose you know it ain't nice to be sent to Coventry!"

"Serve him right!"

"What did he expect?"

"The question is, does it serve him right?" said Jimmy Silver slowly.

"Of course it does! Wasn't he sacked from his last school for disgracing it, and hasn't he wedged himself into Rookwood to disgrace us, too?" exclaimed Lovell

angrily. "I think you're a silly idiot, Jimmy Silver."

"Thanks! Look here, let's talk this over seriously. That kid seemed decent enough when he came here. We all liked him. Smythe of the Shell was down on him, but that's in his favour rather than otherwise. Well, Smythe got it from his brother at Minhurst that Oswald had been sacked from there for pub-haunting and playing the giddy ox generally. Now, Oswald's been here about a fortnight, and he hasn't shown any sign of playing the giddy ox."

"He's had his lesson, I suppose," snorted Lovell. "Afrail of getting the sack from here, too."

"He'll break out, you know, sooner or later," said Raby.

"We took him for a really decent sort—"

"He took us in."

"That's a reflection on this study, Raby," said Jimmy Silver sternly. "This study is never taken in. If we admit that this study has been taken in by a new kid, what becomes of our giddy prestige? I decline to admit the possibility of this study being taken in!"

"Well, that's all very well," said Lovell, after a pause. "But the fellow was sacked from his school—he admits it—and fellows ain't sacked for nothing. If he was decent he'd be at Minhurst now!"

"Then," resumed Jimmy Silver, "Smythe says the Head must have been bamboozled, to let him in at Rookwood after he'd been sacked from Minhurst. Well, I don't believe it! The Head must have known!"

"Rats! He wouldn't have let him come here, I suppose Rookwood ain't here simply to take the refuse of other schools, is it?"

"He must have known!" persisted Jimmy Silver. "That shows there must have been some point in the chap's favour—a doubt of some sort—and Dr. Chisholm has given him the benefit of the doubt. Well, why can't we do the same?"

"Look here!" roared Lovell. "That fellow Oswald is in Coventry! If we take him up, the fellows will send us to Coventry, too, and serve us right. He ought to get out of the school. He's a disgrace! We're not going to take him up. And you're not going to take him up, Jimmy Silver. You're going to give us your word, honest Injun, not to speak to him any more!"

"Rats!"

"Or else you'll get a study licking!"

Raby and Newcome nodded assent, and Jimmy Silver frowned at his chums. The concord in the end study seemed on the point of being seriously broken, and all on account of a new fellow who was really nothing to them. But there was a strong regard for justice in Jimmy Silver's breast, a keenness to help those who were wrong; and, believing in the outcast of the Fourth as he did, he felt that he could not desert him. It was possible that he was making a mistake—he acknowledged that—but he did not think so, and he felt that he had to act according to his convictions.

There was a silence in the study, but the Co. watched in vain for any sign of yielding on Jimmy Silver's face. He was as firm as a rock, as he would have said—or as obstinate as a mule, as his chums would have expressed it.

"Well," said Lovell at last.

"I'm sticking to that chap!" said Jimmy. "I believe he's all right, and I'm not going to turn my back on him."

"You'd rather turn on us?" exclaimed Lovell.

"I want you to back me up."

"Bosh!"

"Then we'll agree to differ," said Jimmy. "No need to row about it."

"You're going to chuck up speaking to him," said Lovell. "The whole Form will be down on us."

"Blow the whole Form!"

"They'll say we're all tarred with the same brush, and it's a case of birds of a feather if we speak to him."

"Let 'em!"

"I see talking's no good," said Lovell. "Callar the silly idiot, you chaps, and we'll give him a study licking!"

"Here, hold on—"

Bump!

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were fed up. Their strong regard for Jimmy Silver, more than anything else, made them determined that he should not get himself into a sea of troubles by championing the unpopular new boy. A study licking seemed to them the best way of dealing with the situation, and they proceeded to administer it.

Jimmy Silver, however, was not the kind of person to be licked with impunity.

There was a terrific struggle in the end study.

The chairs were flying, and the table things were deposited in the grate with grievous damage.

Crash! Bump! Thud! Yell! Bump!

The din from the end study brought a crowd of the Fourth along the passage to see what was up. Hooker and Jones minor and Flynn and Townsend and Tonham and a crowd more gathered outside the open door, and looked in with keen interest.

"The sight of the Fistical Four using their fistical prowess on one another seemed to afford entertainment to the Classical Fourth."

"Go it, Lovell!"

"Go for him, Silver!"

"Pile in Raby!"

"Back up, Newcome!"

"Arrah! Pile in, be jabbers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver was down at last, and Newcome held him by the arms and legs, while Lovell administered correction with the cricket-stump.

Whack, whack, whack, whack, whack! Jimmy Silver roared and struggled, and the crowd in the passage roared, too, with laughter. Nobody thought of interfering. The domestic concerns of the Fistical Four were their own business—the end study was a law unto itself.

"There!" panted Lovell. "Now, you silly idiot, are you going to do the sensible thing and be pally?"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Do you want some more?"

"Yarrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Sure, ye'll bust the stump, Lovell!" yelled Flynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jimmy Silver, you ass, are you going to chuck up that new rotter?"

"No!" roared Jimmy Silver.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yooooooooo!"

"Cave!" yelled Hooker from the passage. "Here comes Bulkeley!"

The crowd melted away into the studies in a twinkling.

Bulkeley of the Sixth came striding up to the end study. He found the Fistical Four looking very red and flustered. The Fourth looking very blue and dejected. Jimmy Silver was manfully suppressing his groans. The prefect stared wrathfully into the study.

"What's all this thundering row about?" he demanded.

"Row?" said Jimmy Silver vaguely.

"Somebody was yelling—"

"Was—was he?"

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"It was you, Silver!"

"I—I might have been speaking rather loudly," admitted Jimmy Silver cautiously.

Bulkeley looked at the four juniors in a puzzled way. He could see that there had been a war in the study.

"You've been fighting?" he demanded.

"A—a—little argument," said Jimmy Silver. "Quite a family affair; no need for you to worry, Bulkeley."

"Well, you must make less row with your little arguments," said Bulkeley. "You'll take two hundred lines for yelling, Silver; and the other young sweeps will take a hundred each. And if there's any more noise from this study I'll come back with a cane."

And the great man walked away. Jimmy Silver went in his wake. He didn't desire to remain alone with his devoted chums any longer.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### The Outcast of the Fourth.

OSWALD of the Fourth gave Jimmy Silver an anxious glance that evening in the dormitory when the Classical juniors went up to their beds.

He had heard of the trouble in the end study, and he knew that it was upon his account, and it evidently troubled him.

All four of the Classical chums were showing signs of damage, for Jimmy Silver had hit hard before his devoted followers had succeeded in administering the study licking.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome looked very cross. In the innocence of their hearts they had expected Jimmy Silver to do the sensible thing after that forcible demonstration of the point of view of his study-mates. But Jimmy Silver was as far as ever from doing the sensible thing. He was determined to understand the celebrated Don Quixote apparently. He was going to stand up for the unpopular Oswald, just as if nothing had happened. The study licking was a sheer waste.

In the dormitory he caught Oswald's eye turned anxiously upon him, and he gave the new junior a cheery nod.

"I'm sorry you've been rowing," said Oswald, in a low voice.

"Bless your little heart, we live on rows—thrive on 'em!" said Jimmy Silver.

"By gad!" said Townsend, the dandy of the Fourth. "There's Silver talking to that chap again! You know what's been agreed—Silver?"

"Bow-wow!"

"You'll have the whole Form down on you if you don't chuck it!" said Topham. "We're not goin' to stand it, I can tell you!"

Oswald winced, and turned away from Silver.

"Oswald!" said Jimmy.

"Yes?" said the new junior, turning back.

"Nothing particular—just talking, that's all," said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Nice weather we've been having, haven't we?"

"Yes," said Oswald, laughing, in spite of himself.

"Very fine to-day, Oswald."

"Ye-es."

"If the weather keeps on," pursued Jimmy Silver, "it will be ripping for the football."

The Fourth-Formers glared at Jimmy Silver. He was discussing the weather, of course, simply to talk to Oswald. Lovell and Raby and Newcome exchanged glances, and frowned darkly. They were seriously angry with their chum. They were accustomed to following Jimmy Silver's lead, but for Jimmy to set himself against his study in this way was a little too thick.

Neville of the Sixth came in to see lights out; but when the prefect had gone there was a buzz of voices in the dormitory.

Remarks were addressed to Jimmy Silver from all sides, and they were not complimentary remarks.

Jimmy Silver did not trouble to reply.

He had marked out his line for himself, and he meant to follow it, and he appeared indifferent to public opinion in the Classical Fourth.

The next morning, when the juniors turned out at the clang of the rising-bell, Jimmy Silver chatted to Oswald while he was dressing.

Oswald answered him in a constrained manner.

To the junior who was in Coventry, who was not spoken to even in his own study, it was a boon and a blessing to find somebody to speak to him. But he was worried about the consequences for his champion.

Generally Jimmy Silver's lead was followed by the Classical side, but this time there was not much prospect of that. If Jimmy had calculated on his influence to that extent he was destined to be disappointed.

In other matters he could carry the whole Form with him. In this matter the Fourth Form was not to be either led or driven.

Even in his own study Jimmy had no backing now.

When he strolled out into the quad with Oswald before brekker the Co. looked after him morosely.

Jimmy Silver beckoned to them to join him, and they stood unmoved, frowning. They were not going to walk with Oswald.

"So we're thrown over!" said Lovell bitterly. "We're given the order of the boot for the sake of that cad!"

"The silly ass!" said Raby. "It's only his dashed obstinacy."

"Let him stick to the cad if he likes!" said Newcome tartly. "If he does he can't stick to us, too."

"It's too thick!" growled Lovell. "He ought to come into line with the rest of us. You, that chap is really a rotten outsider, and we can't look over what he's done. Sacked from his own school, and sticking himself in here. It's too thick!"

The Co. agreed that it was. It looked as if there would be a break in the Co. at last.

Oswald was silent as he walked with Jimmy Silver; but Jimmy kept up a cheery chat. They came back towards the House when the breakfast-bell rang, and then Oswald spoke hurriedly.

"You'd better chuck it up, Silver. You'll get yourself into trouble with everybody!"

"Bow-wow!" said Jimmy.

"Your own pals are down on you!"

"They'll come round."

"But the other fellows—"

"Let 'em rip!"

"I don't want to get you into trouble," said Oswald miserably. "I—I'd leave the school if I could. But my pater would be disappointed—he'd take me away if I asked him; but—but I can't ask him, and tell him what a muck I've made of things. I've got to stick it out somehow. But you—"

"I'll help you," said Jimmy.

"It's jolly kind of you, but it means a lot of trouble."

"Let it!"

They went in to breakfast.

At morning lessons it was plain that there was something on in the Fourth. Mr. Bootles, the Form-master, found an unusual amount of whispering going on. Many glances were directed towards Jimmy Silver.



Lovell & Co. discovered Silver under the beeches in the quad chatting with Oswald. "I want to speak to you, Jimmy," said Lovell. "Me!", ejaculated Silver. "But I'm in Coventry!" (See page 12.)

After lessons Townsend tapped Jimmy on the shoulder when the Fourth came out.

"Meeting in the Common-room," he said. "Everybody's wanted."

"Oh, I'll come!" said Jimmy Silver. Ten minutes later the Classical Fourth and a crowd of Shell fellows were gathered in the junior Common-room. Jimmy Silver came in last. Oswald was the only member of the Classical Fourth who was absent.

"Here he is!" called out Topham, as Jimmy Silver came in.

Silver smiled grimly. He understood that the junior meeting was called on his account. Lovell and Raby and Newcome were looking downcast but determined. They had made up their minds.

Townsend rapped on the table. "We're all here!" he said. "Shut the door, young Hooker. Now we'll get to business, Jimmy Silver."

"Oh, do!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully.

And the Classical juniors got to business.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Sent to Coventry.

**S**MYTHE of the Shell put his eyeglasses in his eye, and fixed a very stern look on Jimmy Silver. Adolphus Smythe was taking the lead in the proceedings. "You're called up here, Silver, to

answer for your conduct," said Smythe loftily.

"Go hon!" said Jimmy, with undiminished cheerfulness.

"It's been agreed by all the Classical side to send that new cad, Oswald, to Coventry!" resumed Smythe. "Fourth and Shell are in it together. The fellow ain't fit to speak to, and he oughtn't to be here, anyway."

"Hear, hear!" said the meeting.

"I was down on him from the first," went on Smythe.

"Yes; you wanted to bullyrag him, and he licked you," assented Jimmy.

There was a chuckle from the meeting, and the lordly Adolphus frowned.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this meeting has been called to deal with Jimmy Silver, who persists in disregardin' the verdict of the whole school. Is Rookwood goin' to be dictated to by Jimmy Silver?"

"Why not?" asked Jimmy.

"Never!" howled Townsend.

"Rather not!"

"The new cad, bein' in Coventry, nobody is allowed to speak to him," said Smythe. "In the long run, we hope he'll get fed up and get out of the school."

"Hear, hear!"

"It's been agreed that any fellow who speaks to him shall be sent to Coventry, too. Silver's floutin' the whole school. We've given him a chance. He's had

plenty of time to mend his ways, and he laughs at us."

"That's your fault for being such a funny merchant, Smythe," said Jimmy Silver.

"I'm not goin' to argue with you," said Adolphus. "You're here to listen to the verdict of Rookwood. Now, are you goin' to cut that cad Oswald, like the rest of us?"

"I don't think he's a cad."

"That ain't the point. Are you goin' to cut him?"

"No."

"You know what we've all decided?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And you're goin' to set yourself against the lot of us?"

Jimmy Silver nodded.

There was a deep and angry murrain in the crowded room. For once, feeling was all on the side of Adolphus Smythe and against Jimmy Silver. Adolphus smiled. He was exceedingly pleased to have his old enemy "down" in this manner. Never before had an opportunity come his way of putting Jimmy Silver in his place. But it had come at last.

"Gentlemen," said Smythe, "you hear what he says. He's goin' to set himself against the verdict of the whole school. I rather think that we're goin' to show him that he can't dictate to us."

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"Yes, rather!"  
 "Hear, hear!"  
 "Send him to Coventry, too!"  
 "Kick him out!"  
 "You hear the verdict, Silver," said Smythe. "You speak another word to Oswald, and you're in Coventry, too."

"Bow-wow!"  
 "We're all in this," said Smythe. "Your own pals think the same as the rest of us."

Jimmy Silver glanced at Lovell and Raby and Newcome. Most eyes, in fact, were turned upon the three. The Fifeal Four had been inseparable.

Lovell reddened.  
 "Look here, Jimmy, why not do the sensible thing?" he urged. "You can't set yourself against all the Form."

Jimmy Silver shook his head.  
 "Think it over, old chap," said Lovell. "I've thought it over, and I think I'm doing the right thing," said Jimmy Silver. "If I'm wrong, I can't help it. But I believe Oswald is all right, and I'm not going to be down on him."

"Then you can go to Coventry along with him," said Smythe. "That's the verdict. Gentlemen, Jimmy Silver is sent to Coventry, and from this moment he's goin' to be cut by the whole school."

"Hear, hear!"  
 "That's settled," said Townsend.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were silent. Jimmy Silver gave them a glance, and then walked out of the Common-room, with his hands in his pockets, whistling. Apparently the sentence of Coventry had not worried him very deeply. His three old chums looked more worried than Jimmy.

Oswald met Silver in the passage.  
 "Well?" he said.

"I'm in Coventry, too," said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "We'll keep each other company there, old chap, till they come round."

"They won't come round," said Oswald, with a shake of the head.

"Then they can rip," said Jimmy Silver. "I'm not giving in."

"I'm sorry for this, Silver."  
 "Nothing to be sorry for. Come and have a ginger-nop."  
 Jimmy linked his arm in Oswald's and marched him off to Sergeant Kettle's little tuckshop. The sight of Jimmy Silver and Oswald crossing the quad with linked arms was the finishing touch, so to speak. The Classical juniors simply boiled with wrath. From that moment the sentence was put into execution, and Jimmy Silver was in the cold shades of "Coventry."

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### Parted Chums.

JIMMY SILVER came into the end study at tea-time with a cheerful brow.

The worry and moroseness that had lain so heavily upon him of late seemed to have disappeared.

Perhaps it was because he found relief in having made up his mind. His path was marked out and decided now, at all events, unpleasant as it might be.

He felt that he was doing right, and that was enough to uphold him. If he was making a mistake, it couldn't be helped. To err is human. If the fellows chose to take his action badly, that couldn't be helped, either.

Perhaps, under the exterior of smiling cheerfulness, Jimmy Silver felt his position more keenly than he showed.

Several times that day it had been rubbed in.

Forgetting that he was in Coventry, he had spoken to several fellows, only to be met by a blank stare.

On such occasions he had restrained

the desire to plant his knuckles in the face that stared at him so blankly. It was not of much use to begin a series of "scraps" with the whole of the Fourth and the Shell.

He shrugged his shoulders and took it quietly.

He felt it deeply, he did not show it. His outward manner was more cheerful than it had been for some time past.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were in the study when he came in to tea. They turned very red as he came in, but did not speak.

"Tea ready?" asked Jimmy, in quite his old way.

The Co. looked at one another, almost guiltily, and did not answer. Jimmy Silver surveyed them in turn.

"Dead?" he asked.  
 "No reply."  
 "Dumb?"

Silence.

"Well, this is the first time I've had tea in a deaf and dumb asylum," Jimmy Silver remarked. "It will be an experience, anyway."

Lovell and Raby and Newcome shifted uneasily, but they did not speak. Jimmy Silver proceeded with his tea.

He took out a book, and began to read over his tea.

His chums stole glances at him from time to time, but he did not look at them. Having given them the chance to speak, which they had not taken, he ignored their existence.

He ate and drank and read with perfect calmness, apparently quite unconscious of their presence in the study.

After tea, Jimmy Silver strolled out of the study, whistling.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome looked at one another.

"That's all right, this can't go on, you know," remarked Raby uneasily.

Lovell snorted.

"Why don't the silly ass give in, then?" he growled.

"He's such an obstinate beast," remarked Newcome.

"Well, we'll be obstinate beasts, too, and we'll see who holds out longest," said Lovell. "The silly ass has no right to stick out against the whole Form."

Raby rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"I—I say, suppose Jimmy should be right after all?" he said slowly. "That chap Oswald does seem a decent sort, from what we've seen of him. A good bit better than Adolphus in every way."

"Wasn't he sacked from his school?"  
 "Well, yes!"

"Well, then, what right had he to wedge in here, as if Blackwood is a home for fellows who can't be stood anywhere else?" said Lovell wrathfully.

"It's up against us to have him here," said Newcome. "No good jawing, Raby—he's got to be in Coventry, and if Jimmy sticks to him, Jimmy will have to stick it out with him. Jimmy will soon get tired of it."

"This is a pretty rotten change in this study, though."

"All Silver's fault," said Lovell.

"Yes, that's so. But I don't believe he'll give in."

"He'll get tired of it first," said Lovell confidently.

Lovell did not feel quite so confident as he appeared. The three chums, having sent Jimmy Silver to Coventry along with the rest, ought logically to have ceased to bother their heads about him at all. But they didn't. They worried about him a good deal more now that they were not on speaking terms.

When they came across him, they eyed him anxiously, looking for a sign of Jimmy's "coming round."

But Jimmy Silver gave no sign. He seemed to be quite contented with

That added fuel to the fire, so to the new state of affairs. If he was not really contented, he kept the secret of his discontent locked up in his own breast.

In the Common-room he played chess with Oswald that evening, with lowering looks from the other Classics of the Fourth Form.

Oswald's face was much brighter since Jimmy Silver had chummed up with him in this open manner. True, Jimmy had never cut him like the rest. But now they were always together. Oswald had felt his loneliness keenly, and now it was gone—one pleasant chum was quite enough to make all the difference.

All that troubled him now was the thought of what Jimmy Silver was giving up for his sake.

But upon that point it was useless to argue with Jimmy. Whether it was the firmness of a rock, or the obstinacy of a mule, Jimmy was not to be moved from the path he had marked out for himself.

The next day was a half-holiday, and there was a football match in the afternoon. Classical juniors were playing Modern juniors. Tommy Dodd, the junior captain, captained the Modern side; and under ordinary circumstances Jimmy Silver would have captained the Classical side.

But it was evidently impossible for a footer team to work with a captain with whom there were not on speaking terms.

Jimmy Silver, however, was prepared to do his duty. Before the game commenced, there was a meeting of the junior committee, and Jimmy Silver dropped in.

"Do you want me to skipper the side?" asked Jimmy calmly.

There was a general shaking of heads. Nobody spoke. Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders and sauntered out.

"There goes our best man," said Raby. "The Moderns will walk over us this afternoon; another feather in their cap."

"Oh, we'll put up a fight!" said Jones minor. "Anyway, we can't be skippered by a chap in Coventry."

"Of course we can't!" said Lovell, but rather half-heartedly.

"Let's make the Moderns a present of the match," said Raby satirically. "They used to walk over us before old Jimmy came here, and now they can begin again. It will be quite like old times."

"Look here, do you want to let that fellow out of Coventry?" demanded Topham.

"Well, I'm getting rather fed up with this."

"Sure, and I was thinkin' the same," remarked Flynn.

"We're really following Smythe's lead in this," said Raby. "Smythe was the cause of all the trouble. Why couldn't he shut up about his fatheaded brother at Minhurst, and his tales about a chap? We found Oswald all right till we heard that yarn about him."

"Oh, rot!"

But it was with misgivings that the Classical junior eleven went over to the field to encounter the Modern heroes. There was no doubt that their best man was left out, and that made a tremendous difference in dealing with Tommy Dodd & Co. The Moderns were very keen, and as hard as nails.

Jimmy Silver strolled down with Oswald to witness the match. They looked on at the defeat of the Classics, for it was a defeat, and a bad one.

The Moderns had two goals to spare at the finish, and the Classics were beaten to the wide.

That added fuel to the fire, so to

speak. All the fellows felt that the watch would have ended differently if Jimmy Silver had been in his old place. And he had left them in the lurch for the sake of that new beast who had been expelled from his own school. That was how they put it. Never had Jimmy Silver's popularity been at such a low ebb.

Jimmy looked very thoughtful as he walked away from the field. He took the defeat to heart quite as much as any other classed. But he had done his best—he had offered his services, and they had been refused.

And the more he came to know Oswald, the more assured he was that he was in the right. There was not a trace of anything "shady" about the new junior. In every way, in word and deed, he was a thoroughly decent fellow. His expulsion from his old school was simply a mystery—undoubtedly some terrible mistake. Jimmy Silver considered. And, come what might, Jimmy Silver was determined that he would never be down on a fellow who did not deserve it. He would do what he felt was right, and chance the consequences. It was just like Jimmy.

### THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

#### Mahomet Goes to the Mountain.

"WHY don't the silly bruck chuck it?"

Lowell asked that question, in aggrieved tones, in the end study three or four days later. During all that time, not a word had been exchanged between Jimmy Silver and his old chums.

Jimmy had ceased to visit the end study.

He had his tea in Hall, with Oswald; he did his preparation in the Form-room with Oswald. Excepting during lessons, he did not pass a hard day. When they came on him they gave him anxious glances; in fact, almost beseeching glances. But Silver did not appear to see them.

He was quite ready to make it up, when they were. But he was not going to abandon Oswald to please anybody.

"Why don't he chuck it?" repeated Lowell. "He won't be in like this for a week, and the silly brute is as obstinate as ever. What's to be done?"

"He won't give in," said Raby.

"Looks like it, the ass!"

"Well, suppose we give in?" Lowell grinned angrily.

"And swallow that fellow Oswald?" he demanded.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Can't be did!"

"Look here, we don't want to break with Jimmy for good," said Raby.

"Dash it all, Lowell, you remember how he lugged you out of that old quarry—perhaps saved your life?"

"No perhaps about it. He did save my life!" growled Lowell.

"Well, then, he's an obstinate ass! But he was a good help," said Raby.

"And—and I can't help thinking the silly idiot may be in the right, you know."

"Do you think Oswald was sacked for nothing, fathead?"

"Well, there might have been a mistake or something. Perhaps Oswald got hauled up for another fellow—Smythe's brother, perhaps," said Raby brightly.

"If Smythe's brother is anything like Smythe, it's likely enough, Jimmy's awfully keen, you know, and he believes in the kid. You can't say that Oswald's done anything since he's been here."

"Not that we know of, you mean?" growled Lowell.

"Well, we should know of it. We

know about Smythe smoking and betting on gee-goes," said Raby. "Smythe would be sacked just like Oswald if the Head knew about him. The only difference is that he hasn't been found out yet."

"Tain't only that. It's the nerve of the fellow, coming into Rookwood, after being sacked from another school—as if Rookwood's a place any blackguard can come to."

"Well, what with Smythe and his pals, and Knowles on the Modern side, we've got some pretty blackguards here!" said Raby. "One more don't make much difference."

"So you're willing to swallow the cat whole, are you?"

"Well, we needn't quite do that, only we can't go on like this with Jimmy."

"We shall be sent to Coventry along with him," said Newcome. "Not that I care for that, for one."

"They couldn't keep that up long," said Lowell. "If we come round, the whole Form will come round in time. That's what that fathead Silver thinks, I suppose, and he's just holding out till we come round."

"If Mahomet can't get to the mountain, the giddy mountain must come to Mahomet," said Raby.

"Fathead! You've got it wrong! If the mountain can't get to Mahomet, you mean?"

"Oh, blow Mahomet, and the mountain, too! The question is, what are we going to do about Jimmy Silver?"

There was a grim silence. Lowell broke it at last.

"Come on!" he said.

Raby and Newcome followed him without asking questions. It was evident that Lowell had come to a decision. As the mountain would not come to Mahomet, Mahomet was going to the mountain!

The three chums looked for Jimmy Silver. He was discovered under the beeches in the quad chatting with Oswald. The trio bore down on them, looking very grim. Smythe and Howard and Tracy of the Shell paused to look on, and they looked grim, too.

"I want to speak to you, Jimmy," began Lowell.

Jimmy Silver looked surprised.

"Me!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, you fathead!"

"But I'm in Coventry."

"Oh, don't be a silly ass!"

"Look here, Lowell," bawled Smythe, "you're speaking to that fellow! You know what you'll get!"

Lowell turned on the great Adolphus with a blaze in his eyes. His temper had suffered of late, and Adolphus' interference came just in time. Lowell was longing to punch somebody's head.

"What have you got to say, you tailor's dummy?" he demanded.

"By gad!" said Adolphus.

"You say I'm not to speak to Jimmy Silver—what?"

"Yas."

"Well, that's what I think of you," said Lowell. And he made a sudden dive at Adolphus' prominent nose, and seized it with a thumb and forefinger.

"There!"

"Yowwwww!" wailed Adolphus.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Groo-hoo!" Leggs shrieked.

"Ow, by loss—by dose! Yooow! Draggimoff, Tracy, you grinnin' idiot! Ow!"

Tracy and Howard were certainly grinning. But they came on to the rescue, and Raby and Newcome came on to stop them; and then Jimmy Silver came on, and so did Oswald. In a

minute or less the three Shell fellows were being for their lives, Smythe holding his nose as he fled.

"Now, Jimmy Silver," panted Lowell, "I've got a bone to pick with you!"

"Pick away!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully.

"I'm sick of this."

"Same here, old chap."

"Are you going to chuck up that chap Oswald?"

"No!"

"You'd rather keep on bad terms with us all the fellows?" exclaimed Lowell hotly.

"Hold on! 'Tis the game," said Jimmy.

"Hold on!" broke in Oswald.

"Jimmy, I can't allow this. I've told you before that you're doing more than any fellow can be expected to do. It isn't fair for you to have my troubles on your shoulders."

"There! The fellow's talking sense," said Lowell. "Take his tip, Jimmy, and do the sensible thing."

"And I've told you, Oswald, that you're an ass!" said Jimmy Silver.

Oswald's lips quivered.

"It's a rotten shame for the fellows to treat you like this because you're decent to me!" he said.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Lowell.

"Haven't you been sacked from your school? Why can't you go home or go to Jericho, and save all the bother?"

"He can't go home," said Jimmy Silver. "He's got his people to consider. Besides, I wouldn't advise him to go home. It's up to a chap to stick it out and take it smiling when he's done nothing wrong."

"Are you going to chuck him, Jimmy Silver?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"That's final, you fathead?"

"Yes."

"You won't give in?"

"No; I can't!"

"You mean you won't!" roared Lowell.

"Well, if you like it better that way, I won't, plain!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Then there's only one thing to be done," he said. "You're sure you won't give in?"

"Quite sure!"

"Then we will."

"Eh?" ejaculated Jimmy Silver, in astonishment.

"Don't you understand English?" hooted Lowell. "If you won't give in, we will. Isn't that good enough?"

Jimmy Silver grinned.

"Quite good enough," he said. "I don't mind admitting that I hoped you'd come round."

"But you wouldn't come round!" hooted Lowell.

"Well, I couldn't. I'm in the right, you see."

"Why, you cheeky ass—"

"Shush!" said Raby. "It's all over now, and you're coming to the study to tea, you fathead, Jimmy! We've got a good tea going."

"Jolly glad, too," said Jimmy. "I always have tea with my friend Oswald, though. Is my friend Oswald welcome?"

"I won't come," said Oswald quickly.

"Yes, you will," said Jimmy Silver coolly. "I shan't go without you."

"Of—of course he's welcome!" stammered Lowell. "In—in fact, we want him to come. We're going to speak to Oswald, of course."

"Nice afternoon, Oswald!" grinned Raby.

"Lovely weather we're having, Oswald!" remarked Newcome.

"How do you do, Oswald?" sneered Lowell.

"How does it feel to be sacked?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now then, no larks!" said Jimmy Silver. "Oswald's going to be one of us."

He comes into the Co. on my recommendation, and you chaps know that I have nearly all the brains of the study."

"We know you've got nearly all the cheeks," said Lovell. "But it's a go. We'll take your blessed friend Oswald to our chests and weep over him if you like."

"I—I—" began Oswald.

"Oh, you dry up!" said Lovell. "Don't you make any more bother. You've made enough. Do as Jimmy Silver tells you. The obstinate mule always gets his way in the long run."

Oswald smiled, and Jimmy Silver chuckled.

The five juniors walked off to the School House together, apparently on the best of terms. Angry and indignant glances from the other juniors followed them.

So far as the Fistical Four were concerned, Oswald was out of Coventry. The question was whether the rest of the Fourth would follow the lead of their old leaders. But that would not happen if Adolphus Smythe could help it.

### THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

#### A Roland for an Oliver.

**F**IVE juniors were gathered round the festive board in the end study.

The table was well spread. Lovell and Raby and Newcome had killed the fatted calf, so to speak, for the returning prodigal. It was not a repentant prodigal who came back, as you find in the Bible, but a study; it was Lovell & Co.'s return to do the repenting. But that was our detail.

Certainly it was a merry little party. All the chums were glad that the estrangement was over, and Oswald was very glad indeed to see his champion on the old terms with his friends.

There was a buzz of merry voices in the end study, and that little feed was probably the most cheerful that had ever taken place in that famous apartment.

The Co. had, in fact, for the moment forgotten all about the rest of the Form and the sentence of Coventry.

But it was not forgotten outside the study. Tea was nearly over when there came a tramp of feet in the passage. There was a bang on the door, and it was hurled open.

The five juniors looked round. The passage was crowded with fellows of the Fourth and the Shell. The great Smythe in the lead, his eyes gleaming in his eye, and his nose very red from the recent application of Lovell's finger and thumb.

"By gad, here they are!" said Smythe.

"What have you fellows brought that here for?" asked Jimmy Silver. "This

isn't the monkey-house, nor yet the museum. Take it away and bury it."

"Don't answer him!" said Smythe loftily. "He's in Coventry. Lovell, we want to know what this means. The whole school wants to know."

"Yaas, by gad!" said Townsend. "We're not standin' it, you know, Lovell. If you talk to those cads you'll be sent to Coventry, tob, don't you know."

"And we're going to wreck the study as a lesson to you to begin with," said Tracy.

Lovell rose to his feet and picked up a ball. Jimmy Silver took hold of the inkpot, and Raby annexed the teapot.

"Come in and begin the giddy wreck," said Lovell. "There'll be a good many wrecks here by the time you've finished."

"Walk up, gentlemen!" invited Jimmy Silver. "You first, Smythe."

"We're givin' you a chance, Lovell," said Howard. "You know you can't stand up against the verdict of the school."

"We're going to try," said Lovell. "The fact is, we're fed up. We think Oswald's all right, and you fellows are silly asses not to think so too."

"You're goin' to kick that cad out," said Smythe, "or else you're goin' to have a study raggin', and then Coventry. Take your choice!"

"Boy-wor!"

"Take your face away, Smythe," urged Raby. "You know it's a worry."

"Well, you're goin' to have a lesson," said Smythe. "Pile in, you fellows."

"Pile up!" rapped out Jimmy Silver.

"The Fistical Four and Oswald lined up."

There was a rush, but the rush stopped. A bat and a stump and a poker, an inkpot and a teapot looked rather dangerous at close quarters. The student ragers paused and blinked at one another. Fellows in the passage behind urged on those in front, but those in front seemed to have their doubts about the matter.

"Come on!" said Jimmy Silver invitingly. "Forward, Adolphus! I can see the fighting blood of the Smythes is boiling in your veins! Forward!"

"Get on, Smythe!" yelled Hooker from the passage. "Collar him!"

Smythe hesitated.

"Well, you can have the ink, anyway," said Jimmy Silver, as Smythe, pushed from behind, advanced reluctantly into the study.

"Swish! Splash!"

There was a wild yell from Adolphus as the contents of the inkpot swamped over his face, his elegantly-parted hair, and his well-cut waistcoat and trousers. The dandy of the Shell staggered.

"Oh, dear! By gad, you ruffian! Oh! Ah! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Charge!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

The five juniors charged at the crowded doorway. There was a wild scramble of the ragers to escape. Jimmy Silver seized the inky Adolphus, and whirled him off his feet. Smythe struggled furiously, but Raby gripped his ankles, and he was swept off the floor.

"Chuck him out!" yelled Jimmy. "One, two, three—go!"

Smythe of the Shell went flying. He bumped on the crowd in the passage, and his elbows crashed on Tracy's nose and his arm was flung round Hooker's neck.

Jimmy Silver slammed the study door. "Not much of a ragging," he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Angry and excited voices were heard from the passage, but the door was not opened again. The ragging was evidently "off."

Smythe of the Shell had retired to a bath-room, and the rest of the ragers gave it up. The Fistical Four and their guest finished their tea in peace and in a cheery mood.

The ragging was certainly off, but the Classical juniors had not done with the end study yet. When the five chums came out after tea they found a sheet of cardboard stuck on the door, with an inscription daubed on it in large letters. It ran:

**"THIS STUDY IS IN COVENTRY!  
ANYBODY SPEAKING TO THESE  
CADS WILL GET A FORM LICK-  
ING!"**

Whereas the Fistical-Four started contentiously.

The card was promptly reduced to ashes, but ten minutes later a new notice was pinned up in the junior Common-room in the well-known handwriting of Jimmy Silver. The Classical juniors gathered to read it with breathless indignation. It simply took their breath away, for it ran in this wise:

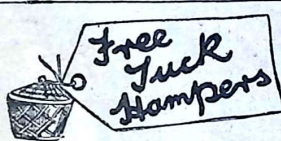
#### "NOTICE!

"The Shell and the Fourth have been sent to Coventry!

"(Signed) JIMMY SILVER,  
"EDWARD LOVELL,  
"GEORGE RABY,  
"ARTHUR NEWCOME,  
"DICK OSWALD."

The Shell and the Fourth read that notice with feelings almost too deep for words. The check, of it amazed them. Certainly there was only one fellow at Rockwood who would ever have conceived the idea of sending the two junior Forms to Coventry "on his own." But it was just like Jimmy!

THE END.



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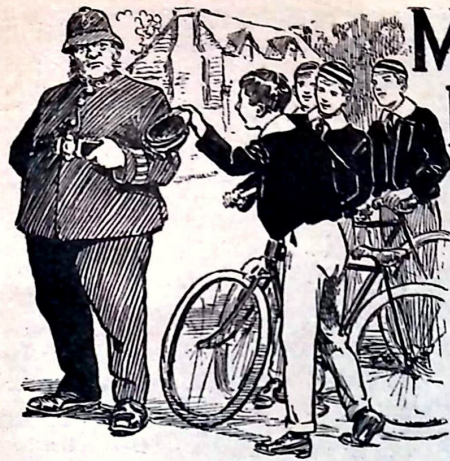
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## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

## Terrible Talks.

"I SAY, you fellows!"

It was Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, who spoke, thrusting his ugly face in at the door of Study No. 10 in the Shell passage—the apartment which had the honour of housing, Tom Merry, Harry Manners, and Monty Lowther, known to the school as the Terrible Three.

"Scat!" said Manners.

"But, I say—"

"Scat! Do you hear?" But Baggy refused to scat. He stood his ground, though he quivered like jelly when Manners arose in evident wrath and drew near him.

"Ow! Don't, Manners! Make him stop it, Tom Merry!"

"I'm not doing anything yet," said Manners. "When I do begin, Tom Merry won't make me stop it!"

"Let's hear what the fat toad has to say, Manners," suggested Lowther.

"Sure to be lies!" snapped Manners.

"Well, even fiction has its uses. Proceed, Baggy de Trimble!"

"Tain't lies!" said Baggy, carefully closing the door.

"What changes the era of peace brings!" murmured Lowther.

"It's something about Racke and Crooke?"

Baggy went on.

"We know as much as we want to know about them," said Manners.

"What about Racke and Crooke?" asked Tom Merry.

Tom was not much in the way of encouraging Baggy's tendency to gossip. But just then he was rather specially interested in the two Shell fellows whom the fat Fourth-Former had named.

Mysterious things had been going on. Racke—or Crooke—one at one time, one at another, it seemed likely—had been stealing from the dormitory at night, and yet had left no empty bed to arouse suspicion.

How this had been done had at length been discovered. Percy Mellish, of the Shell, who toadied to those two, had slunk up to occupy the bed which would otherwise have been vacant.

Mellish was not yet aware that this had been discovered, and the eads of the Shell did not know that so much had been found out. Racke had had a quite unexpected cold bath in his clothes, while getting in at the bath-room window, and he may have suspected that it was not an accident that the bath under the window held water. But he could only suspect; he did not know that Tom Merry and Manners, hidden in the airing-boarding, had dimly seen him enter by the window, and had quite clearly heard the very strong language he used after his plunge.

So matters stood at the time when Baggy came along with his tale to Study No. 10.

The motive of Racke's night-walking was still unknown.

Tom thought it possible that the fat fellow's news might throw some light upon that motive.

"I saw them taking a hamper to the station," said Baggy.

"My hat! Did you see them eating, in fact this morning?" Manners sneered temptuously.

"Yes; but that's got nothing to do with it," replied Baggy puzzled.

"It's about as important as what you've told us," Manners said.

"I'm not so sure," put in Lowther. "Fetching a hamper from the station—or, anyway, getting a hamper—is much more in the line of those two than sending one away. To send one away looks like giving someone something, and I shouldn't be in a hurry to accuse them of doing that. They aren't exactly bursting with generosity."

"That's true," admitted Manners. "Still—"

"What was in the hamper, Baggy?" Tom inquired.

The fat junior shook his head.

"I don't know. I'd have found out if I could, but I didn't get the chance. I say, Merry, if they send another away, what will you stand me to find out what's in it?"

"They won't send another away," Tom said.

"But if they do, what will you—"

"Nothing doing! I don't hire spies!" Baggy sighed.

"I'm beastly hard up," he said. "I suppose you chaps couldn't lend me a trifle?"

"There seems to be nothing at all the matter with your proposer-to-day," answered Lowther blandly. "We couldn't—or, at any rate, we won't."

Baggy sighed again, more heavily than before.

"I might get a loan from Racke or Crooke, I dare say," he said insinuatingly. "If they're up to something wrong they won't want it talked about. But it's against my high principle to have anything to do with what isn't on the straight."

"Besides which your high principles wouldn't allow you to accept a bribe to keep your clapper still when it's already been wagging to us," Lowther said.

Baggy sniffed. If Baggy had any principles they were high enough to make anyone sniff—quite rotten, in fact.

"If you can get half-dollar out of either Racke or Crooke to keep your tongue silent, I'll give you another half-dollar," said Tom.

Manners and Lowther stared at him. This was utterly unexpected, and they could not understand what he was at.

"Do you mean it?" asked Baggy doubtfully.

"Isn't my word good enough for you?"

"Oh, yes! Yes, of course, but—"

"What profit will you have that he got it

from one of those sweeps, Tommy?" asked Manners.

"I— Oh, you know very well nobody will lend me money unless I can—I mean, everybody's saw mean?" jumbled Baggy.

"That's his only source of income, isn't it?" Lowther said.

"It really was something very like that, wasn't it?"

"There they are, coming across the quad!" he said. "I'll go and tackle them now, and if I get the half-dollar you'll see one of them hand over."

And he bolted at once.

"What on earth are you after, Tommy?" demanded Manners.

"If those two shell out blackmail to Baggy it will show that there's some mystery about that hamper," Tom replied. "And if there is, it may connect up with the dormitory mystery."

"He's got what the eloquent American word films call 'a hunch,'" said Lowther, grinning.

"It is something like that," Tom owned.

"A sort of feeling that the hamper does come into it, though I'm blessed if I can explain why I feel like that about it. Hallo, Baggy's tackling them!"

All three stood at the window to watch. They saw Crooke scowl, and the movements of Racke's lips as he answered Baggy did not suggest kind words.

Then Crooke shook his head vigorously, and made a motion as if to use his foot to the fat junior. But Racke laid a hand on the arm of his precious pal to check him, and the argument went on.

Racke's hand was thrust into his pocket at length, and Baggy's pugny paw was outstretched.

"I thought so," said Tom.

The blackmailing attempt had come off. No innocent person submits to blackmail unless he is an utter coward. Racke and Crooke were not heroes by any means; but they were not innocent, either, and unless they had something to hide, Baggy would have played his game in vain.

Two minutes later the podgy face, wreathed in smiles, appeared at the door of No. 10 again.

"I've got it!" said Baggy triumphantly.

"So we saw!" said Tom. "Here you are!"

And he tossed Baggy another half-crown. Baggy had never been known to hold a catch on the cricket-field, but he caught that coin deftly enough.

"What did you say to them?" asked Manners.

"Ah, that's telling!" returned Baggy, looking sly.

"You're a crafty boulder!" said Lowther. "You soon made Racke shell out!"

"That speech flattered Baggy. He beamed upon the speaker.

"Funny, wasn't it?" he said. "I am a bit wide, but I'm hanged if I know why just saying 'Feathers' put them in a funk!"

"White feather as a result of a remark about feathers," Lowther said. "It certainly is curious."

"What made you say 'Feathers, Baggy'?" inquired Tom.

"Ah, that's telling!" said Baggy.

"And he mizzled, chuckling."

"What on earth can there be behind that?" Manners said wonderingly.

"I don't know, but I'm going to," answered Tom.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### "Feathers!"

"O LD Crump looks jolly important to-day," said Manners. "The Terrible Three and Talbot had ridden into Rylcombe together after classes that afternoon."

"Always does," said Tom. "There are degrees, even in the swank of Crump," observed Lowther. "And on this occasion the degree seems to me the superlative."

"He's looking at us in rather a curious way," remarked Talbot.

"The consciences of the four were clear. There was no reason why the stout Rylcombe constable should regard them with suspicion. Nevertheless, he seemed to be doing so."

"Let's have a yarn with him!" said Tom, grinning cheerily.

They dismounted, and Lowther spoke affably to P.-c. Crump.

"Give these good-day, worthy officer of the watch!" he said then.

"O're you gettin' at; do you reckon?" growled the policeman.

"I should not dream of trying to reckon at you, O most renowned and efficient guardians of the peace and arms of the law!" replied the humorist of the Shell.

"Look ere, Master Lowther, not so much of it!"

"I'm busy, I am not always free. I wonder at times that you do not faint under your heavy burden of responsibility!"

"Well, now you come to mention it," said Crump, wiping his mouth. "I do feel a bit faint. A drop of something short."

"Tut, tut! Let me call it lemonade!" said Lowther, passing over a shilling.

"Oh, I'll call it what you like, sir!" replied the mollified Crump.

"What's up, Crump?" asked Manners.

"Manners always was a trifle impatient with the methods of Lowther, who had an annoying way of talking a good deal without saying anything in particular."

"Trouble!" grunted Crump.

"What kind of trouble?" Tom inquired.

"You young gent's ain't in it, I 'ope?" said Crump.

"We hope not," answered Talbot, smiling.

"We also think not."

"Humph! I dunno but what you might have done it for bark. It's a rum 'un to me that you boys thinksarked."

"What's happened?" asked Tom.

"Poultry-stealin'—that's what's 'appened, Master Jerry!"

"Feathers!" breathed Lowther in the ear of Tom, and the captain of the Shell nodded.

To them both there had occurred at once the significance of this news, in view of what Trinkle had told them.

"I can assure you, Crump, that none of us have been stealing poultry," Talbot said.

"Well, I didn't really think it of you, you're mischievous enough for anything, but I ain't jest the sort of thing I'd look for you to do."

"What wonders a bob will work!" murmured Lowther.

"Who's been losing poultry?" queried Manners.

"Well, that's a rum 'un, in a way, for the three people who have laid complaints, all live within a stone-throw of the school!" said Crump portentously.

"Feathers!" breathed Lowther again.

"Who are they?" Tom asked.

"There's Badgett, at the new poultry-form. He's been pretty hard hit. An' there's Mrs. Carter, at Moses, an' Relph, at Black Barn."

"Can't be foxes, I suppose?" suggested Crump.

"A reward offered?" said Manners.

"Now don't get pokin' of your nose into other folks' business, Master Manners! Supposin' as there be a reward offered, who ought to 'ave it? That's what I asks you."

"Well, the chap who gives an information leading to the conviction of the thieves, of course," replied Manners.

"An' who ought that there person to be?"

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 44.

"It ought to be the local body, if he's got eyes in his head and tregon'orth of brains," answered Manners, getting nettled by P.-c. Crump's arrogant manner. "But I don't think it will be you, Crump!"

"Oh, you don't, don't you, Master Manners? Well, then as I've long will see most—that's what I say."

"We shall need to live very long to see you promoted sergeant, I should think!" Talbot said with a smile.

"If but some would guarantee that I shall live till I see that, I could hope for immortality!" murmured Lowther.

But if P.-c. Crump heard that, he failed to get on to its meaning.

"I ain't sure but what promotion might come to me out of this 'ere case," he said heavily. "I got a clue already."

"There are rewards offered, of course?" Tom said.

But Crump did not want to talk about it. It was tolerably plain that he hoped for both rewards and promotion out of the case. The St. Jim's juniors could not affect one thing without affecting the other, for if they were after the rewards and secured the Crump could be left out in the cold both as regards cash and credit.

"If 'ere be," he said, "I make no doubt as you'll fear of them in due course."

"Well, then wouldn't like us to help you to find out the root-robbers, I suppose, Crump?" said Tom.

Crump snorted emphatically.

"I ain't no opinion of us for work as wants brains!" he said, without excessive politeness.

"Do you ever bet, Crump?" inquired Lowther.

"Eh?"

"Bet. Don't you know what betting is?"

"Oh, now I git your meanin'! I 'ave 'ad a bob on now an' then."

"I don't mind betting you five bob to one that we find out the poultry-thieves for you?"

"Silt ass!" hissed Tom, in his chum's ear.

"I'll take you, Master Lowther, an' I reckon the money's as good as in my pocket."

They parted from Crump then. They scarcely suspected that he had bills announcing rewards in his pocket. But that really did not matter much. It was not of the rewards Tom Merry & Co. were thinking.

"You are an idiot, Lowther!" said Tom, when the matter was out before him.

"I don't see it, old fellow."

"You can't win that bet—not if it's as we think. For we couldn't give away to Crump the fact that it was none of our chaps."

For the sake of St. Jim's that will have to be kept dark."

"Do you think it was any of our fellows, Tom?" asked Talbot gravely.

"Racke and Crooke!" said Manners, before Tom could answer.

Tom nodded.

"I say, that's pretty black if you're right!" Talbot said.

"No blacker than lots of other things those sweeps have done!" returned Tom. "We may be wrong of course; but our theory does seem to explain things."

"Let's go back through the wood," suggested Manners.

"Oh, late for that, but it?" Tom replied.

"Oh, never mind about tea. I've a notion that we may see something that matters there."

Manners would say no more. The other three agreed to do what he wanted, and within ten minutes he had jumped from his bike before an old shed near the outskirts of Rylcombe Wood.

"I'm sure I shall find anything here; but I think we may," he said.

"Hallo, there! Tommy—Talbot, hallo!" The shout came from the road, and they saw that it was Jack Blako who halted them.

With Blake, as usual, were Digby, Herries, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Those chaps know about the night-walking," said Tom. "No harm in letting them into this, is there?"

"Gussy is such an ass!" objected Manners.

"Well, I won't pretend that I think him as useful as Kerr for a job of this sort. But he'll have quite a brilliant idea about Mellish."

"A fluke!" growled Manners.

"Come along here, you fellows!" shouted Tom.

The new-comers pushed their bikes along the leaf-strewn path towards the other four.

"What's up?" asked Herries.

"We're making investigations," answered Tom.

All pressed into the shed.

Manners scrutinized the ground with care.

"Here you are!" he said, and he picked up two or three feathers.

"If that's what you wanted you might have found 'em lying on our dorm floor—or on yours—a morning or two ago," remarked Digby.

"But nobody's been bolster-fighting here!" Lowther said.

"Shouldn't think so," Blake replied. "What do you imagine anybody has been doing?"

"There's been poultry-stealing going on round here," Tom said.

"And we—"

"Bal Jove! Wacke!"

"Something will happen to you before long, Gussy," said Lowther solemnly. "That's the second idea you've had within a week—perfectly sane and reasonable ideas that anyone might have had."

"You cwas ass—"

"Oh, dry up, Gustavus! You really think, Tom, that the Racke—and I suppose Crooke's in it, too—that they've been—"

"That's what we think," Tom said.

"And here's more evidence!" cried Digby.

He lifted up from a corner as he spoke an envelope addressed to Racke.

"Looks pretty clear against them!" growled Herries.

"And it will have to be stopped," Talbot said. "We can't have this sort of thing going on."

"Well, come to that, it may have stopped already," remarked Manners. "Crump's on the job, and I fancy rewards have been offered. Those sweeps will take alarm when they hear of that."

"Let's hope they won't hear of it, then," said Lowther.

"Well, Lowthah—"

"Why?" asked Tom.

"Because we want to catch them out, of course, duffer!"

Digby put the envelope into his pocket.

"I'll give this to Racke," he said. "Shan't say where I found it, of course."

"Is there a letch in it?" asked Gussy.

"No, it's not and don't care. No bizeny of mine, is it?"

"But you can tell by the feel of the thing, snally?"

"I dare say I could if I wanted to. But I don't want."

"Only to make Racke feel on thorns. This may be something that it wouldn't matter a bit if anyone's seeing. On the other hand, seeing that it's Racke's, it's just as likely to be something shady. Those cats never get on to the fact that a decent chap won't think of looking at other chaps' letters, and if it is anything that Racke—"

"You'll go giving the blessed game away, you chump!" exclaimed Lowther.

"How?"

"Racke may tumble to it that he dropped it here, or—"

"That's hardly likely I should think. Still, I'll look at it where I found it if you fellows think that would be the best thing to do."

"I'd leave it," Tom said.

"That's what I think," agreed Blake.

Digby dropped the letter.

"Come along, Manners! We've seen all there is to see here!"

## THE THIRD CHAPTER.

### More Blackmail.

"I SAY, Racke! You want to speak to you!" said Baggy. Trinkle a little time before the dinner-hour next day.

"Then you can go on waitin'!" answered Racke rudely. "I've no time to waste on a dashed fat fool like you!"

"It's imp'nt," said Baggy, with his face screwed up to look as mysterious as possible.

"I suppose you mean that you want to stick a knife or some more oof by pretendin' that you've found out somethin'!" sneered Racke.

"Not by pretendin'." Baggy replied, with an emphasis on the participle.

"What do you mean?"

"You don't happen to have dropped a letter lately?" asked Baggy slyly.

Racke's hand went to his breast-pocket, and his face grew as sickly hue.

"He, he, he!" giggled Baggy. "I thought that would fetch you!"

"You'd better come along to my study," Racke said.

"Oh, I don't mind talking here if you don't!" returned Baggy, tossing his head.

They had met in the quad, within twenty yards of the door of the School House.

But it did not suit Racke to talk there.

"Come along!" he snarled.

"Suppose you're on the make again. If that's so, it's





Arthur Augustus, in his bold dash for liberty, ran full into the arms of P.-o. Crump. "Come on, Badgett, you coward! I've got one of 'em!" yelled the constable. But he spoke too soon, as Gussy, twisting and ducking, wrenched himself free and darted away. (See page 16.)

as much to your interest to keep it dark as it is to mine."

Racke knew what that letter must be. It would have been better for him if Digby had been allowed to hand it over, even if he had worried himself as to whether Dig had taken a look at it.

Baggy had been along to the shed in the wood and had found it. Now, Racke might have been doubtful about Digby. He had no doubt whatever about Baggy. It was not in that fat rascal's line to return a lost letter to its owner unread.

Racke followed Baggy to Study No. 6 in the Shell passages. Crooke was there, and he looked up with a scowl as Baggy showed his fat and smirking physiognomy.

"Get out!" he said.  
"Racke's asked me in," said Baggy, smirking more than ever.

"More fool Racke!" snorted Crooke. "The fat swep's found out somethin' more," said Racke unsteadily.

"Look here, Racke, you'd better be civil, you know! I'm not standing that sort of talk!" said Baggy.

"Hoot him out!" growled Crooke.  
"Let him if he dares to!" retorted Baggy valiantly. "And you daren't, either! Do it if you dare!"

And Baggy turned in the open doorway, offering a temptation that Crooke could not resist.

Crooke rushed at him and lifted his foot. But when that foot had all but touched Baggy's trousers, Crooke found himself swung back by Aubrey Racke.

"Stop it, Crooke, you idiot!" fumed Racke. "He's got us on toast!"

Baggy turned.  
"Feathers!" he said, putting a fat and dirty finger to his poddy nose.

"What's he mean?" snarled Crooke.  
"Whose poultry have you been sending to town?" asked Baggy, leering.

"Oh, by gad, you are an utter fool, Racke, to let this fat freak into the thing!"

"Fat freak, an'!" squeaked Baggy.  
"Well see! I'll go to Tom Merry and—"

No, I won't. I'll go to Rallon! I'll go to the Head! I—I'll go to the police—there!"

"No, you won't," Racke said soothingly. "You're not going back on old pals like that."

"You'll have to make it worth my while to keep dark, then," said Baggy.  
"Look here, you'd better come into the game with us!" Crooke said, winking at Racke.

"Me! What, poultry-stealing! Tain't honest. And I wouldn't mind that so much, only a chap might get caught."

"Tell you what—there's a safe job for you, Baggy. See here, Racke, if we can get two chaps to fill our beds we'd better both go next time. It's too risky one 'gin' alone."

"All very well when it's your turn to go!" Racke growled.

They did not mind talking before Baggy now. That letter had told him so much that there was little more for him to learn. It was from the man to whom Racke and Crooke had been forwarding the proceeds of their roost-robberies. The fellow was not a poultry salesman. He was a man who had a term or two before been employed by Racke at Bycombe, and was now doing his dirty work in town. He received the stuff, and disposed of it on their behalf.

It did not appear from the letter that he was working on a sharing system. That would hardly have tempted him. The sums obtained in this way would not have tempted Racke and Crooke the term before. But they were very short of money for the time being, and twenty shillings meant more to them than twenty pounds usually did.

Neither believed that the shortage would last long, and certainly their accomplice in town did not think so. He would wait for his reward.

"There's dashed little in that," Crooke said. "I've taken my turn along afore now. But you know as well as I do how beastly difficult it is to handle the stuff alone. Mellish can slink in an' creep into my bed, an' Baggy can take your place."

"So that's why Mellish goes to your dorm, is it?" said Baggy cunningly. "Aid that's"

how he came to give away the news that our chaps were going to raid you the other night? I suppose it wasn't safe for either of you to go out with a raid on! He, he!"

The feelings of the eads of the shell towards Baggy were positively murderous. But they dissembled those feelings; they had to dissemble them. A word from the fat fellow and their game would be all up. And Baggy was at best a leaky vessel. The one way of safety seemed to be to bring him into the game.

"You'd do the same, wouldn't you, Baggy?" asked Crooke wheedlingly.

"Well, I wouldn't mind. I don't see how I could make much by telling Tom Merry or any of those beasts. But, of course, I shall expect to do pretty well out of it. Look here, you chaps grub heaps better than we can afford to. I'm coming to tea with you every night. We don't want Mellish; he's a greedy bouncer. But I'm coming."

"Right-ho!" replied Racke, though without enthusiasm.

"And I want the bob down, and another ten bob after you've been to the hen-roosts again," continued the fat rascal.

"I say, you know, there's goin' to be dashed little profit in it for us if this sort of thing goes on!" grumbled Crooke.

"That's not my bizney," said Baggy. "Of course, you can stop it if you like. But unless I'm paid not to, shall let on about it. You can count on that."

"Got any change, Gerry?" asked Racke.

"Yaas. Why?"

"Give me five bob, an' I'll hand over a ten-bob note to Baggy."

Crooke shelled out two half-crowns. Racke produced the note and pocketed the silver, and Baggy departed, smiling broadly.

The two he left behind were not smiling. "I'm not so sure that we hadn't better chuck it," said Racke. "After all, there isn't a heap of profit in it, an' this fat rotter will cut down what there is. We got Mellish cheap enough, but there's no limit where Tremble's concerned."

"I wish I could get the polky young beast into a dashed hen-roost, an' slide off an' leave him there to be caught!" returned Crooke viciously.

"Well, you can't. He'd never go. An' if you did manage it he'd give us away—an' prove that we were in it, too. He'd gone off now with that letter. Only once more, anyway, Crooke; it's getting too dashed hot!"

"Let's have the final flutter to-night, then," replied Crooke recklessly. "That bath bizness must have been an accident. If anyone had got on to us we should have heard of it before this."

"Oh, Mellish would have told us if anyone had twigged. He doesn't lie there with his ears shut, you bet! Yaas, I'm game for to-night, but it must be the last time. No one outside seems to have moved in the affair yet, or I wouldn't go to-night."

"There, of course, Rakce was wrong. That vigilant officer, P.-e. Crump, had been informed of the robbery."

"But he was not further wrong than Crooke; for the bath business had been no accident, and there were eight fellows at St. Jim's who knew of the thefts, and knew who the thieves were."

"Thus in planning one more expedition before giving up their nefarious game, Rakce and Crooke were running risks that the jaws of dangers of which they did not dream."

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### On the Right Track.

"I THINK they'll try it on again to-night," Arthur Augustus asked Tom.

"The eight in the secret had met in No. 10 study on the Shell passage to discuss preventive measures."

"You know, can't say," replied Tom. "On the whole—"

"I only asked what you thought, duffer! Stands to reason none of us can know."

"Well, what do you think?" asked Tom.

"I rather fancy they will. They seem to have had at least three goes at the game, and they haven't been caught out. That sort of luck makes the average silly as fat as a pig."

"And what they could make out of three goes wouldn't amount to a lot, according to their way of looking at money," remarked Manners.

"What will make most difference is whether they have got wind that the roost-robbers are being watched for, I fancy," said Talbot.

"You may be certain that they'll take alarm fast enough if they know of that."

"But how can we find out whether they know?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Better send you as a deputation of one to ask them," suggested Lowther.

"Weally, if all the silly idwads—"

"Crooke was trying to be funny, chump!" growled Herries. "I don't believe they know. And I believe there will be another expedition to-night. I saw Baggy Trimble come out of their study just before dinner, and after dinner the fat sweep and Mellish had their heads together in the quad."

"And what do you make of that, Herries?" Tom asked.

"My notion is that they're both going to-night, and that Baggy and Mellish will sink into your dorm to lie in their beds."

"Wonders will never cease!" exclaimed Lowther. "Not only has there been a silly of two quite sane ideas within a week, but now Herries has taken to noticing things and drawing deductions from them!"

"We're not all such asses as you are!" snapped Herries.

"Oh, no! Most of you are much bigger ones," replied Lowther blandly.

"I can tell you something else," said Manners. "Baggy's been to see Rakce and Crooke this evening. I saw him come out of their study with jam and crumbs about his ugly mouth, and grinning like one o'clock."

"And I can tell you something more still," Digby chipped in. "You know that letter I picked up yesterday in the shed in the wood? Well, it isn't there any more."

"An' Crooke haven't been out of gates, have they, Blake?"

"No," answered Blake. "As I couldn't play football this morning, being crooked, I'd thought I'd better go out to see whether they did. If they'd gone down to the village, they'd probably have heard that the hen-thieves were being watched for. But they didn't go, either morning or after-

"But Baggy went out after classes this morning," Herries said. "I saw him. Now, who will bet me evens that Baggy didn't go along and find that letter? He knew more than he told you three yesterday, and more pretty sure than one of the things he knew was that they were using that shed instead of bringing the murdered fowls—"

"Murder most foul, most foul and villainous!" snapped Manners. "It may be, dear boy; but that's the fault of William Shakespeare, not of Montague Lowther!"

"Instead of bringing them here, And I wish someone would muzzle Lowther!" finished Digby.

"Talking about muzzles reminds me of old Tower," said Herries. "Why shouldn't we use the old boy to track those sweeps? He's nuts on a trail, you know."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Manners. "If Tower's brought into it, Herries?" asked Talbot. "I don't think there will be much difficulty in following them up ourselves if it wouldn't be quite do to let Tower get among the poultry."

"Perhaps not," admitted Herries. "But you're a silly ass, anyway, Manners, and old Tower is less brainier than the sweeps."

"I suppose that if we follow up those wascals we should all wear black ewape masks," said Arthur Augustus, breaking silence after quite a long spell—for him.

"It's only Gussy's instinct for the melodramatic," said Lowther. "Why not long coats and black lanterns, old top?"

"But the ewape masks would be useful, wilehafs the long—"

"How would the masks be useful?" struck Blake, and never thought it necessary to let Herries finish a speech.

"Well, Crump is on the track, an' no doubt othafs as well; an' if we are goin' to follow, we mustn't up to the wun the risk of bein' taken for wood-wobhafs ourselves, which would be very unpleasant."

"We should run a blessed sight bigger risk of being taken for thieves if we were masked!"

"Yaas, possibly, if we were caught. But with masks nobody could identify us until they caught us. Without, someone might recognise one or more of us, as we've done. We wouldn't know us in masks."

"There's really something in Gussy's idea," said Talbot.

"From which it would seem to follow that there's something in Gussy's idea," remarked Lowther solemnly. "We live and learn!"

Arthur Augustus gave that remark no more notice than a sniff of contempt.

"We have the ewape masks Leah," he said.

"So that's what you were after when we accused you of slacking this morning?" said Digby.

"Yaas! It was wide of you to suppose for a moment that I should slack, Dig. But the honah of St. Jim's comes before even football!"

"And the honour of St. Jim's needs ewape masks to uphold it!" Lowther murmured.

"But no one minded Lowther. The ewape masks had been practically accepted from the moment Talbot's word of approval was given to them. Gussy produced them now, and Lowther was as ready as anyone to try on his.

It was drawing near time for prep; but before the eight separated an arrangement was made that the departure of Mellish and Talbot should be signalled by the Fourth dormitory should be the signal for Blake & Co. to get on their clothes and prepare for the expedition, and that Tom Merry & Co. should follow Rakce and Crooke—or either—at once.

"We're taking rather a lot for granted," said Talbot. "But, after all, it only means being a bit of a guy. We shan't follow if they don't go."

All four of the Shell fellows were still awake when, about half-past ten that night, the door of their dormitory was pushed softly open. They heard the heavy breathing of Baggy, who was in a funk now that the time for his share of the game, slight as that share seemed, had come. They heard Mellish whisper to him not to blow like a grasshopper. They caught some words which told that Rakce and Crooke had got out of bed and were dressing. And then they heard the door softly opened and closed once more.

Rakce and Crooke had departed on their nefarious errand.

Now, a good deal depended upon Blake &

Co. For the Shell fellows had still to dress, and, make what speed they might, the precious pair must be well clear of the school before the Fourth Formers ought to be already on the look-out.

Before he left the dormitory Talbot awoke Gore and said something to him.

"Who was that?" asked Tom, in a whisper, as they went out.

"Gore. I told him that Mellish and Trimble were keeping beds warm for Rakce and Crooke, and asked him to make sure that they didn't leave before we got back."

Tom grinned in the darkness.

"Good egg!" he said. "But, as a matter of fact, it wasn't really necessary, because I explained something of the affair to Kangaroo before we came up to bed, and asked him to do ditto. I woke him just now."

"I might have known you would have thought of that, Tom."

"Don't see how you could, and it doesn't matter that both of us should have had the same notion. Gore will enjoy the job, and Baccy and Gussy will get no more sleep if they can't sleep, but Baccy wanted to come with us; and that would have meant Dane and Glyn, too, and it would have made too much of a crowd."

"Hallo, there!"

It was the voice of Digby coming out of the gloom.

"Hallo, Dig!" said Tom. "Blake and Gussy have all followed the robbers. Blake will go right on after them; but Gussy and Herries will stay behind for us. I know which way they've gone. Come along!"

They passed through the box-room, and out of the window on to the leads. Thence they dropped one by one into the dark and silent quad, and made their way to where the old tree made a convenient rough ladder to the top of the wall.

They dropped from the wall to the grass below, and found Gussy awaiting them there.

"To the right!" he said. "Tom Merry, don't you think we had better put on our ewape masks?"

"Right-ho!" answered Tom; and the masks were donned. None of the juniors were in the school caps, of course.

"This may be either Baggett's place or Black Barn," said Manners. "The other show is to the left."

"Howies will wait to tell us which," Gussy said. "Anyway, we are on the right track so far!"

#### THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

##### Caught in the Act!

"WHO goes there?" It was the voice of Herries out of the darkness.

"Seen anything of Crump?" inquired Tom ungrammatically, but quite intelligibly.

"I thought so. It's all right. The rotters have gone on to Baggett's, and Blake's on their track. I waited here for you chaps."

"Have you your ewape mask on, Hewies?" asked Arthur Augustus impressively.

"No. Forgot all about it. But I'll put the thing on now."

"Seen anything of Crump?" inquired Tom. "No, is he about?"

"We don't know that he is, but it's likely enough."

"Well, he's an old duffer, anyway," said Herries. "We needn't be afraid of him."

"There is no reason whatever why we should be afraid of Hewies! Our consciences are clearah, an' we're all with clear consciences, Gussy!" put in Lowther.

"Dry up, all of you!" commanded Tom Merry.

Some of them were disposed to take the expedition too lightly, Tom thought. They wanted to catch Rakce and Crooke red-handed, but they did not want to be caught with Rakce and Crooke. And there was a distinct danger of that if they were not more careful.

Tom led the way behind a hedge, and they approached the poultry-farm thus in single file.

"There's a light!" whispered Talbot, in Tom's ear.

"I see it. Well, they couldn't do their dirty work without a light, I suppose; but it seems pretty risky to show it like that."

"There are no windows on this side, if I remember right."

"There's only a glimmer from under a door. They've gone into one of the hen-houses, I'm sure. Shall we move on them? No good letting them too near the door."

"Haven't heard from Blake yet," Tom

replied. "He'd have been close on their heels, I fancy."

"Here I am!" spoke the voice of Jack Blake.

All they crowded round him. Gussy put up a hand to feel his face.

"But Jove, Blake, you have forgotten your mask!" he said.

"So I have. No harm done—I'll put it on now. They're Mr. Tom's! The master-locks or something of that kind for the backs; anyway, they had no difficulty about them. I peeped in and saw the sweeps collar a fowl each and wring their necks. They did it as if they'd had some practice, too."

"Any sign of watchers, Blake?"

"Didn't see any, and I think I must have done if there had been any close by. The house looked all dark. Quiser thing there isn't a dog."

"Badgett don't like them—afraid of them," said Herries. "He was in an awful funk the other day when I sawer just sniffed at his legs in a friendly way."

"I do not consider that the manna in which Tow-shaw sniffs at anybody's legs is at all friendly, Hewigss," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Is this an expedition, or is it a debating society?" asked Lowther.

"Besides, Crump can be warranted to catch nothing but the German measles," said Lowther.

But both Blake and Lowther were wrong. P.-C. Crump was not sneezing. On the contrary, he was much wider awake than usual, and at that moment was not a hundred yards from the adventurers.

As Blake had never caught anything but the German measles before—a statement for which Lowther really had not sufficient authority—he was to break his record that night.

P.-C. Crump had visited Moses and Black Barn, and was now on his way to the newly formed farm.

Badgett's place was really the most likely of the three to be raided. He had more poultry, and his birds were in better condition than was the case at either of the other places.

But Crump did not like Badgett, and he considered the reward offered by the poultry farmer mean, so he had left his place till night.

Now he was nearing it, the big feet in his heavy police-boots clumping along the road.

If the light had waited where they were another minute or so they could hardly have failed to hear him.

But, led now by Blake, who had already been over the ground, they were drawing nearer to the hen-houses.

Racke and Crooke were hard at work. As this was to be their last raid, and as there were two of them to carry away the plunder, they were not going to be content with less than eight or ten fowls.

Winning a fowl's neck is not a particularly pleasant operation, and it is not too easy for anyone unused to it. But these two had had some practice, and on the whole they rather liked the killing, for there was a strain of cruelty in both of them.

Five fowls lay dead or dying on the ground now, and Crooke was just finishing off a sixth. The rest had taken alarm, and had come out of their sleep, to set up a horrible squawking.

"I say, hurry up, Crooket! Badgett will hear for a deal cert, and we shall be nabbed!" exclaimed Racke.

"Right ho! That does it! I say, what a pity we shall only get half a dozen! Tell you what—let's cut along to one of the other shows!"

Crooke had been keener than Racke from the outset of this business. It was not that Racke was more honest or less cruel, and the notion had originated with him. It was that Crooke was bolder in an ordinary way his courage was smaller than Racke's. But he liked this kind of thing better than Racke did.

Basically Crooke would have made a better burglar than Racke, just as Racke would certainly have made a more effective promoter of dud companies than Crooke.

"Not dashed, well, He!" replied Racke now. "I've had enough of it!"

He collared three of the fowls, and was about to make his way out when he heard the sound of footsteps close at hand.

His face went yellow with fear.

"Put that light out!" he hissed. "Here's Badgett on the loose!"

He pulled the door to, and Crooke hastily put out the acetylene lamp, by the light of which they had been working.

They waited, quivering with fear. All Crooke's business had melted away at the approach of danger, and he was in every bit as big a funk as Racke.

But, though they listened intently, no further sound of footsteps came to their ears.

It was not Badgett or anyone from the house that Racke had heard. It was Tom Merril, awakened by the noise from the hen-house, had come downstairs and lit a lantern.

And they had halted a few yards away, for a light had appeared near the house, and they thought it prudent to take cover.

Meanwhile, Crump was drawing nearer, and Mr. Badgett, awakened by the noise from the hen-house, had come downstairs and lit a lantern.

But Badgett was a timid man. He valued his poultry; but he valued his own life and limbs more. And he did not feel at all sure what might happen if he attempted to tackle the roost-robbers singly.

"Now where's Crump? Where's the silly, sleepy old rascal?" he fumed. "Anywhere but where we could be, or, contrari!"

"The light's gone!" said Tom.

"And the light in the hen-house has gone, too," Talbot said.

"Lowther, we must have those rotters out of it! It will be no end of a disgrace to the school if they're caught!"

Lead on, Madcut!" spoke Lowther.

And Tom led on.

The eight made a rush in the direction of the building in which the robbers had been at work. In the gloom they missed it completely, and had to come back on their tracks.

And Crump was drawing nearer still, and Badgett had plucked up courage enough to come out again with his lantern.

"I never could hear the brutes about the place!"

"Aren't you going to see about it?" called Mrs. Badgett from the staircase.

"In a manner, my dear—in a minute! You wouldn't have me rush on danger unprepared, would you? Where's that gun?"

Fiddlesticks! about danger! There's nothing at all to be afraid of, I tell you! As for the gun, it isn't loaded, and you don't use it if it was!"

But it might frighten them, my dear—it might frighten them!"

"Not in your hands, it wouldn't! Here, I'll take the gun, and you lead on with the lantern!"

And Mrs. Badgett appeared, hastily arrayed, with hair in curl-papers, a lady with a large red nose and a very determined expression.

She snatched up the gun, and joined her trembling spouse outside the kitchen door.

Then the lantern began to move, just as Blake found the right door, and he and his comrade broke it open, in spite of the weight of Racke and Crooke resisting them from inside.

Manners flashed an electric torch. Its light revealed two figures, which the eight knew must be those of Racke and Crooke, and half a dozen more for fowls.

But the cads of the Shell had taken the same precaution which Gussy had suggested to those who were tracking them. Both wore crumpled masks.

"Caught in the act!" cried Tom. "Oh, we'll make you smart for this, you swamps! But clear out now, and sharp about it, or you'll be nabbed! They've taken the alarm at the house!"

"Hallo, Mr. Badgett! I do believe as they're at it! There's a light in one of your 'cu'-ouses!" cried P.-C. Crump.

That thing happened to be loaded you might do me a fatal injury! Please stop!"

"If I stop you've got to go on!" shrieked his muck-brother behind him.

"I—I— Why there's a whole crowd of them! Arrest them, Crump! Do your duty, my man! I—I don't feel at all well, and I think I'd better get back to bed at once!"

But do your duty, my man! It's your duty, you know. I'm a poultry-farmer, not a policeman, and it certainly isn't mine!"

"Come on, you fellows!" roared Crump, as if he had spoken the gate; and the sky had grown lighter, so that more could be seen.

Figures were visible, but only dimly visible, and Tom and his comrades could not tell how many he beheld.

"They're masked!" bubbled Badgett. "My dear, I fear for your safety! Let us get into the house at once, and leave Crump to his duty!"

"Come on, you fellows!" roared Crump, keeping up the notion of aid behind, but by no means weakening in his determination to do his duty, and behind him he must.

Racke grabbed Crooke's arm. The two had contrived to keep in touch as they ran.

"This way," he hissed in the ear of his partner in guilt. "We can get over the fence at a pinch, an' once we're clear of the place, some of those inter-jan' bouders may be saddled with the job—an' serve them dashed well right!"

Crooke did not expostulate. It may have crossed his mind that this was hardly a decent return for the chance to escape that the enemy had given them. But he cared as little as Racke about doing the decent thing.

They melted away into the gloom, unnoticed by any of the rest.

All that passed was a matter of seconds, and Tom Merry and his comrades, running hard, had reached the gate just before Crump got there, and while Badgett, still urged on by his wife, was twenty yards away.

Not all of them had reached the gate.

Arthur Augustus had stumbled and fallen by the way. He would not about for help, and before he could struggle up his limbs were lost to him in the gloom.

He saw the lantern, and made a dash for it.

But he found that the fence was between him and the lantern, and that he had missed the way to the gate.

The lantern was too near for him to risk trying to climb the fence there. He ran along it, seeking the gate.

But he reached the gate only to run right into the arms of Crump.

That vigilant officer of the law was too completely taken by surprise to grip him. He had been so busy that he had not had been able to collar any of them.

Now he yelled:

"Come on, Badgett, you coward! I've got one more for you!"

And even while he yelled he realised that he had not really made a capture. His arms had almost closed around Gussy, but not quite.

Gussy ducked and dodged, swung round, and made for the fence at another part.

After him pounded Crump. In front of him ran the other two.

One of them was on top of the fence, and was giving the other a hand up.

"Help!" gasped Gussy, as the second mounted.

"No dashed fear!" returned Racke violently.

Then he and Crooke dropped to comparative safety on the other side.

Gussy started to swarm up the fence. But Crump was too near to give him a chance.

The policeman's hands seized him. He dropped, he struggled himself free, he was dropping. Crump clutched again; but Gussy was beyond his reach now, making hard for the gate.

He could see where it was, for Badgett stood just outside it, holding the lantern.

"Oh, dear!" panted Gussy. "That dreadful female!"

Mrs. Badgett stood in the gateway, and she was leveling the gun at him.

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## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

### A Narrow Shave for Gussy.

UP of the hen-house rushed the robbers and their trackers, all alike masked.

Towards the hen-house, at the best speed of which he was capable, he snatched up his gun, and was at least pluckier than Badgett. That hero, with the lantern in his trembling right hand, would have stopped dead but for the fact that his wife was proceeding on with the gun.

"Don't, my dear—don't!" he pleaded. "If

"Come here at once, or I'll shoot!" she shouted.

Gussy did not know that the gun was unloaded, but he took the risk.

He turned again, dodged Crump by a couple of yards or so, and put on speed, seeking another chance to get over the fence, if he could not leave Crump far enough in the rear.

Once more he tried, and once more he failed. He fell when almost at the top, and landed right upon Crump.

Gussy picked himself out of the confused heap they made before the constable had quite realised what had happened to him. And again Gussy fled.

He was getting desperate. At the gate stood Mrs. Badgett with the gun. She had again pounced Crump, blowing harder even than Gussy blew, but holding on doggedly.

The perspiration poured down the face of the unlucky swell. His breath came in sobbing gasps. Confident in his innocence, he would have given himself up had only himself been concerned. But the honour of St. Jim's was at stake, and he held on, wondering what had become of his chums, and how it was they had not missed him.

But they missed him now. The seven had split up into three parties in their flight, but the three had become one again.

"I say, we're not all here!" said Tom Merry, in dismay.

"Who's missing? Are Racker and Crooke here?" asked Blake.

"That's you, I know, Blake. Who else?"

"Talbot!" spoke the owner of that name.

"Manners" — "Digby" — "Lowther" —

"Herries" spoke four more.

"My hat! That ass Gussy's been left behind!" gasped Blake.

"He's dead sure to be caught!" said Manners.

"We must go back," Tom said at once.

"He simply mustn't be caught. It will be had enough if Racker and Crooke have been, but Gussy—"

"They hurried back—just in time to see Gussy led out of the enclosure by the constable.

He had tumbled over a coop, and had fallen. This time Crump, hard on his heels, had fallen on top of him, and when they struggled up, the constable had got a firm grip on poor Gussy.

But the mask was still on, and Crump did not know who it was he had captured.

Everything had to be risks now—even the gun in the hands of Mrs. Badgett.

"Rescue!" breathed Tom, and they swooped upon Crump and his prisoner.

The sudden run-out of the gleam frightened even the stern soul of Mrs. Badgett.

Her valiant husband fairly took to his heels and ran for cover. She dropped the gun, and followed him, storming at him as he ran.

Crump had no chance. Half a dozen hands seized him. He was swung off his feet, and deposited on the ground. His tunic was hastily unbuttoned, pulled over his head, and partially buttoned again.

While this was being done by the rest, Blake and Digby collared each an arm of Arthur Augustus, and rushed him away.

"You silly ass!" roared Blake.

"I really could not help it, dear boy!" panted Gussy. "I fell, you know. An' Wacker an' Cwooke couldn't give me a hand to get oah the top of the fence."

"Oh, wouldn't they, the swamps! I shan't forget that!" Blake snapped.

Behind them sounded hurrying feet. The rest were following.

"Scout for all you're worth!" came the voice of Tom Merry. "Crump mustn't get near enough to see where we go."

"The dear old Crump!" cried Lowther. "His more in him than I ever dreamed. Still, Gussy was an easy capture. If it had been anyone else—"

"Wats, Lowther!"

They made the best speed for the school. Behind them P.-c. Crump struggled out of his tunic and rose to his feet.

The Badgetts had come back now.

"They were boys!" spluttered Crump. "An' I 'd' bodied as 'ow they were some of them young rips from the school!"

"Boys? Absurd!" said Badgett, his voice still quavery. "Why, they were burly ruffians six feet high or more, every one of them!"

"You say that, do you, Mr. Badgett? Well, then, all I've got to say is that you deserve to lose your blessing, an' you've got it on the place. For you're the biggest coward I ever see in all my puff!"

And Crump marched off. He knew that he had failed, though he had done his best. There was no more to be done, for he had recognised none of the marauders, and Badgett said they were all men six feet high, so that plainly an attempt to bring the night's escapade home to the St. Jim's juniors was hopeless.

But Crump had his suspicions. The worst of it all, from his point of view, was that his suspicions did not matter to anyone.

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

### Rough Justice!

"KANGAROO!"

"I'm here, Thomas!" answered Harry Noble from his bed in the Shell dormitory.

"The question is whether Mellish and Baggy are there," said Tom.

"Not 'ere," he answered. "I'm sorry!"

"They're here, all serene," spoke Gore.

"I've all right. I didn't know Kangaroo was looking after them."

"Have Racker and Crooke come back?" asked Manners.

"I've all right, Gore."

"Got you," snapped Blake.

Mellish had tried a dash for escape. But the Fourth-Formers had stayed near the door and he had run into Blake's arms.

"Those two rotters are hiding," said Manners. "But we'll find them all right. They're about the place somewhere, for it's certain they got to what had happened."

Someone had lighted a candle now, and the Shell fellows were all sitting up in bed, blinking and wondering. Only Kangaroo and Gore had stayed to what had happened.

But the rest were soon enlightened.

"Racker and Crooke have turned rotters!" said Tom. "The game's been going on since the time they were fairly caught them out to-night. They can't be given up—it would be such a rotten thing for the school—but we'll settle accounts with them."

"But what were Mellish and Trimble doing in it?" asked Glyn.

"Come to occupy the beds of those two swamps, to blind any of us who might suspect anything," Tom answered.

"I—I—Racker asked me to come and keep his bed warm while he went out!" Baggy whined.

"I didn't know what they were up to. I didn't know, of course, but I didn't. I didn't know a word about their stealing poultry, and sending it to that man of Racker's in London to be sold, or that they had sent me to you, or quite a lot!" Blake interrupted him. "You're telling us more than we knew, anyway."

"Let him go on," said Lowther. "By the time he's told us all he doesn't know there won't be much left for us to learn."

"It was an accident that I knew anything at all about it—really, it was!" spluttered Blake. "I happened to see a letter of Racker's; and, of course, I couldn't help knowing what it was about. I had a squint at it, just the same as any of you fellows would have done. You know, you know!"

"Where did you find that letter, Baggy?" asked Digby.

"In the shed in the wood. That's where they used to take the fowls, you know. But I don't dare do anything about it. I didn't know they were stealing them, and I only came here to keep Racker's bed— Yoop!"

Wharrer doing, Gore?"

Gore had yanked Baggy out of bed.

"I know a cure for your complaint!" he said. "Hold him a moment, you fellows. Mellish, too! Here's the dose for them!"

He produced from under his bed a big bottle, full of some very objectionable fluid. It was "Hot Horse," that it was objectionable, anyway, for certainly Gore had no intention of being kind to the black sheep of the Fourth.

"I'll give it for Skimmey," he said, "but he won't grudge it."

"Really, Gore, my dear fellow—"

"Dry up! I'll mix some more for you, if you want it. Here goes!"

"Yarooohh! Yow-ow!" howled Baggy, as a full fall of the mixture descended upon his devoted head.

"Keep him off!" pleaded Mellish. "Tom Merry—Talbot—Blake, won't let him!"

But no one stood between Gore and his second victim. The partial punishment might not exactly be what they would have thought of themselves, but they let Gore have his way.

Then they kicked Baggy and Mellish out, and the minor sinners slunk off at once to the bath-room.

"What about looking up the other two?" asked Manners.

"It's worth while!" asked Tom. "We can get them any time to-morrow, and my notion is that they ought to be tried by the two Forms sitting in judgment together."

"I don't see why they care to enjoy themselves in some box-room, they are very welcome indeed to do so," said Lowther. "Personally, I should not think it an absolute ideal thing spending a cold night like this, but that tastes different."

"Then there's nothing more doing to-night, Tommy!" said Blake.

"I think not, old chap. Thanks for your help."

"Thanks for our help? My hat, you'd have got it in the neck if we had been left out of the trial, more of a rotten decision and Clive and Korymband and Julian, and that lot—will be pretty sick at not being in it, I can tell you!"

"Oh dear, goodness, we couldn't take the whole blessed Fourth Form roost-raiding!" replied Tom.

Blake & Co. departed, Gussy very tired and unusually silent.

But he bucked up amazingly when Blake said:

"Quite a hefty idea of yours those craps masks, Gustavus! But for them we'd probably all have been locked up by now."

Racker and Crooke did not spend the whole night in their hiding-place, whatever it may have been. But it was past two o'clock before, chilly and weary and evil of temper, they dared to creep to their beds.

The reckoning came next day, and it was a stern one.

In the junior Common-room, with locked door, were assembled all the School House members of the two Forms. Kangaroo, who was chosen as not having been of the party of the night before, acted as judge, and the proceedings were taken in deadly earnest.

Racker and Crooke were forced, in the event, to disclose the extent of their depredations, and had to be fined in crowns out of the money had suffered by them. The money would be sent anonymously, of course.

But that was not all. The fags, who had got wind of the fact that something was up, and had assembled in crowds outside the Common-room, heard sounds as of souls in torment proceeding from that apartment, and knew "Racker and Crooke were catching it hot."

It should have been excepted that Racker and Crooke. But they had had so many lessons, and had profited by them so little, that there was not much hope that it would be.

THE END.

There is another long, complete story of TOM MERRY & CO. at St. Jim's in next Wednesday's issue of the "PENNY POPULAR," entitled,

## "ROUGH ON DIGBY!"

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