

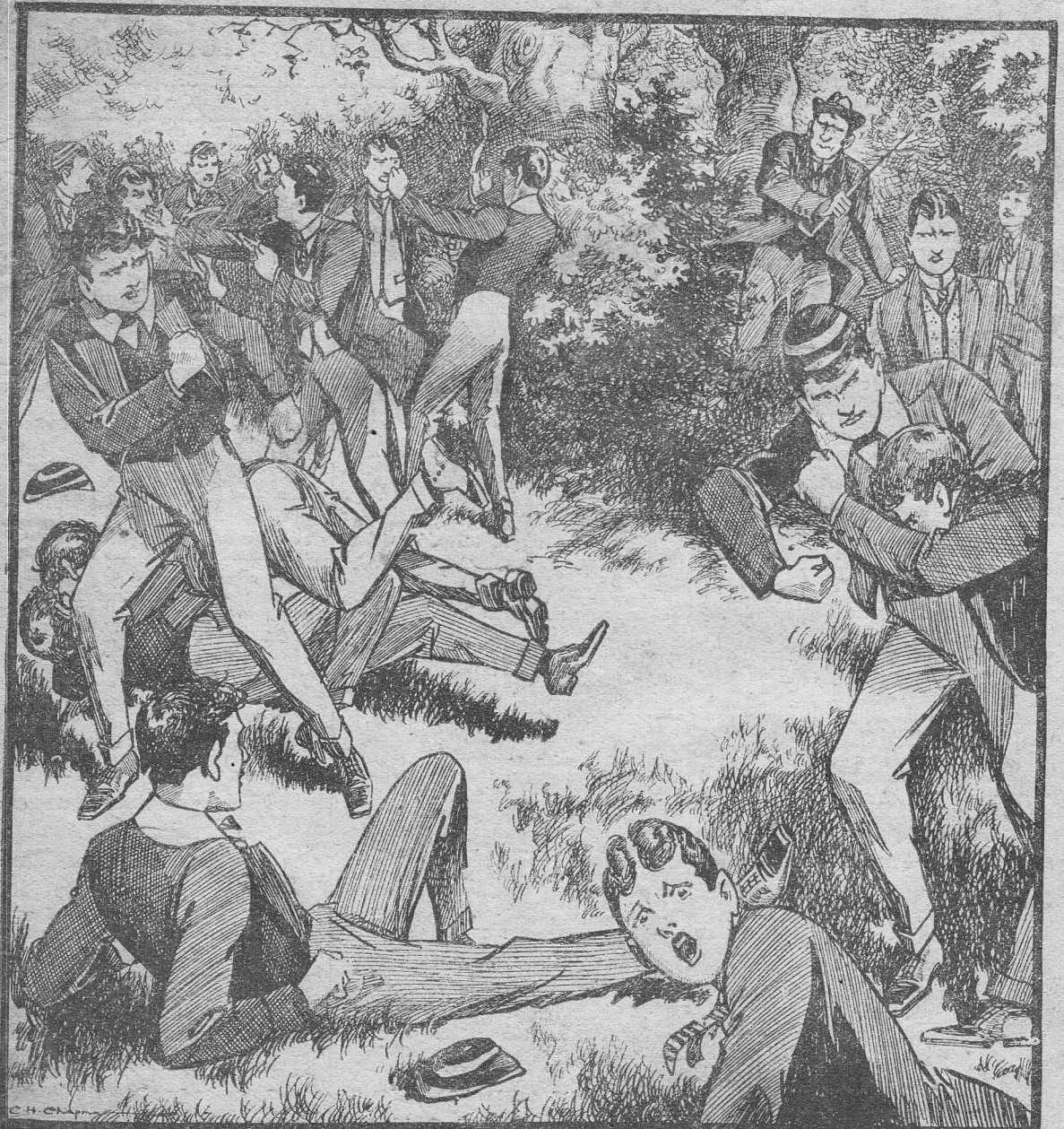
20-PAGE NUMBER! ——— 3 LONG STORIES

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**Popular**

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No. 43  
New Series.

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



**GREYFRIARS AND HIGHCLIFFE AT WAR.**  
(A Thrilling Scene in the Magnificent Long Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)



# HIGHCLIFFE'S DEFEAT!

A Magnificent Long Complete Story of HARRY WHARTON & Co. of Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER. A Shock for Mr. Quelch.

"WE live in stirring times!" It was Ogilvy of the Remove who made that observation. Ogilvy and his chum, Dick Russell, were at tea in their study, at the same time discussing the state of affairs in the Remove Form.

"Ever since Wharton was made to stand down from the captaincy," continued Ogilvy, "there's been ructions!"

Dick Russell nodded. "To my mind, it was a mistake to drop Wharton," he said. "Of course, Wharton made a blunder—and a good many, if it comes to that—but Form-captains aren't infallible. However, Quelchly thinks there ought to be another election, and we must bow to Quelchly's superior wisdom. The position is going begging, and I'm going to have a shot at bagging it. Pass the jam!"

Ogilvy pushed the four-pound pot across the table. "Dick," he said, looking at his chum, "this is the chance of a lifetime for you! The captaincy, as you say, is going begging. There are five candidates, and two of them—Smithy and Toddy—have already been given a trial—and a jolly fine mess they've made of it! If you can't put up a better record than either of those two you deserve to be publicly pulverised!"

Russell laughed. "I'll do my best, Don!" he said. "If you do your worst, you'll bag more votes than Smithy or Toddy," said Ogilvy. "The fellows are fed-up with the pair of them. Smithy allowed the Highcliffe rotters to send a spoof Form-master to Greyfriars; and Toddy sent Wibley over to Highcliffe in the disguise of a drill-sergeant—and Wib came a fearful cropper! I don't think the Remove will forgive either of these things. So it's up to you, Dick, to go in and win!"

Dick Russell burrowed in the jam-pot with his spoon, and triumphantly fished up a huge strawberry. "I wonder whose trial week it will be next?" he remarked. "Yours, for a cert!" said Ogilvy. "What makes you think so?" "I've got a sort of premonition—"

"That's a good word. I'll back it both ways!" Ogilvy gave a snort. "Don't be an ass, Dick—"

"No need to try, while you're here!" chuckled Dick Russell.

"Look here—"

The conversation was cut short at this stage by the arrival in the study of Billy Bunter.

The fat junior rolled in without knocking, and pointed a fat and jummy forefinger at Dick Russell.

"You're wanted!" he said.

"Where?"

In Quelchly's study. It's about the captaincy, you know," said Bunter. "Before you

go, I want to have a word with you in private. If Ogilvy wouldn't mind stepping outside for a minute—"

"Well, of all the cheek!" gasped Ogilvy. "You see, this is confidential between Dick and me," explained Billy Bunter.

"My hat!" gasped Ogilvy. But he made no attempt to budge.

"Oh, all right!" growled the fat junior. "If you choose to be an ill-mannered beast, I suppose I must say what I've got to say in your presence! Now, look here, Dick—"

"I'm Russell to you, please!" "Look here, Russell, you know jolly well you haven't an earthly chance of becoming captain of the Remove—"

"What!" "Of course, you're all right, in a crude sort of way. You can use your fists, and all that, but a true leader should have brains as well as brawn. I read that in a book."

"You—you—" stuttered Dick Russell. "I'm one of the five candidates, as you know," Bunter went on, "and the captaincy's a walk-over for me. Smithy's failed, and Toddy's failed, and there's no need for you to make a fool of yourself in the same way."

"What do you suggest that I should do, then?"

Billy Bunter failed to notice the storm-signals in Dick Russell's voice. "Withdraw!" he said promptly. "Tell Quelchly you'll retire from the contest. It's not a bit of use being obstinate and pig-headed. Look who you're up against!"

And Billy Bunter drew himself up to his full height, which was not very considerable.

Dick Russell glared at the Owl of the Remove.

"So you want me to retire?" he said, at length. "That's it!"

"Well, I'm going to show you that the boot's on the other foot!" said Russell grimly. "You're the merchant who's going to retire. Lend a hand, Don!"

"With pleasure!" grinned Ogilvy. Billy Bunter backed away in alarm.

"Keep off!" he exclaimed wildly. "I was advising you for your own good—"

The next moment Billy Bunter floundered through the open doorway, and sat down with a bump in the passage.

"Yaroooooh!" he roared. "You wait till I'm captain of the Remove! I'll pay you out for this!"

"Let's dribble him along the passage, Dick!" said Ogilvy.

But Billy Bunter did not wait to be converted into a human football. He picked himself up, and scuttled away as fast as his fat little legs would carry him.

"You'd better huck up and see Quelchly!" said Ogilvy. "He doesn't like to be kept waiting!"

Russell nodded, and hurried round to the Form-master's study.

"I'm to have a week's trial as Form-captain, sir?"

Mr. Quelch nodded. "You will act in the capacity of Form-captain for a week from now," he said.

"When each of the candidates has been given a week's trial, the whole Form will vote, and the boy whose week has proved most successful will be elected to the captaincy."

Dick Russell's brain worked swiftly. His trial week had started, and it was "up to" him to make it a huge success.

The first thing to be done was to tackle Highcliffe.

The feud between Greyfriars and Highcliffe had never been stronger than now.

During the past few weeks the Remove had been at war with Ponsoby & Co., and the latter had proved themselves to be "top-dogs." They had hired a broken-down actor to come to Greyfriars and impersonate a Form-master, and the scheme had proved successful. Wibley of the Remove had tried to play a similar jape on Highcliffe, by appearing at that school in the guise of a drill-sergeant. But the Highcliffians had tumbled to Wibley's little game, and he had been sent back to Greyfriars in a sack—"Returned herewith!" as the Caterpillar had put it.

Dick Russell reflected that this sort of thing must stop. Highcliffe must be made to realise that they could not pull the legs of the Greyfriars fellows with impunity.

Russell was a direct, go-ahead sort of fellow, who did not let the grass grow under his feet. He meant to get off the mark in style, and he had already thought out a plan for trouncing Highcliffe. The plan was neither deep nor cunning. Instead of japing the rival school, Russell preferred to meet some of the representatives in a stand-up fight.

"Excuse me, sir!" he said to Mr. Quelch. "May I use your telephone?"

The Remove-master stared at the suddenness of the request.

"Is it urgent, Russell?" "Very, sir!"

"In that case, you may certainly make use of the instrument."

"Thank you, sir!"

An awkward pause followed. Dick Russell stood looking at Mr. Quelch, and Mr. Quelch's gimlet eyes were fastened upon Dick Russell.

"Well?" said the Form-master at length. "What are you waiting for, Russell?"

"For you to go out of the room, sir!"

"What?"

Mr. Quelch nearly fell down.

"How dare you make such an insolent suggestion?" he thundered.

"I'm going to have a private conversation, sir."

"And you expect me," rumbled Mr. Quelch, "to vacate my own study while you use my telephone? I have never heard of such impudence!"

The junior flushed.

"I—I didn't mean to be impudent, sir. But I'd much rather you didn't hear what I was going to say."

Mr. Quelch frowned. "Whom did you intend to ring up?" he asked.

"Frank Courtenay of Highcliffe, sir."

"With what object?"

"I—I'd rather not say, sir!"

"But I insist upon knowing!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Oh crumbs!"

Dick Russell was in a tight corner. It was useless to attempt to evade the Form-master, so the junior decided to state the facts.

"I was going to send Courtenay a challenge over the 'phone, sir," he explained.

"A football challenge?"

"N-n-not exactly, sir."

"What then?"

"A—a challenge to fight, sir—a six-a-side contest between Highcliffe and Greyfriars."

"For a moment Mr. Quelch stood petrified, unable to move or speak. When he did speak his voice was like a thunderclap.

"Russell! Boy! Your impertinence is astounding! I can scarcely believe my ears! You have the audacity to ask me to leave my study whilst you telephone to another school to make arrangements for a bestial exhibition of fisticuffs!"

"That—that's putting it rather strongly, sir."

"Not at all. That is the only construction one can put upon your conduct. I shall come down severely for your effrontery!"

"My hat!"

"Hold out your hand, Russell!"

The junior reluctantly obeyed. He received three stinging cuts on each hand, and it was as much as he could do to repress a yelp of pain.

"There!" said Mr. Quelch grimly. "I trust that will be a lesson to you! I forbid you to use my telephone, and I also forbid you to issue such an unseemly challenge to the boys of Highcliffe!"

Dick Russell looked the picture of dismay. "But—but we've got to get our own back on Highcliffe, sir—" he began.

"Then you may 'get your own back,' as you call it, in a less-revolting way!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"It's like this, sir—"

"Not another word, Russell! Leave this study at once!"

And the temporary captain of the Remove went out, squeezing his hands.

Donald Ogilvy met his chum in the passage. "Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean to say you've been licked?"

"Three on each hand," said Russell lugubriously.

"But—but what for?"

Dick Russell described the little drama which had been enacted in the Form-master's study.

"My hat!" gasped Ogilvy. "You've got a nerve! Fancy asking Quelch to clear out of his own study! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cheese it!" growled Russell irritably.

"Of course, it's a good wheeze to challenge half a dozen Highcliffe fellows to a fight," said Ogilvy. "But now that Quelch's put his foot down there will be nothing doing."

"Won't there, by Jove?" said Russell. "Just you wait!"

Ogilvy caught his chum by the arm.

"I say, old man, you're not thinking of defying Quelch, are you?"

Russell nodded.

"But—but think of the risk—"

"We've got to get quits with Highcliffe. Nothing else matters. I mean to fix up that fight, and Quelch can go to Jericho!"

Ogilvy did not reply to this outburst, for the simple reason that it left him speechless.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Challenge.

"COME in, fathead!" Bob Cherry sang out the invitation.

The Famous Five of the Remove were at tea in Study No. 1 when a knock sounded on the door. It opened in response to Bob Cherry's shout, and Dick Russell came in.

"Welcome, little stranger!" said Bob. "It isn't often we're honoured by your presence these days. Make yourself at home! Will you have a rock-cake?"

"No, thanks!" said Russell. "I haven't brought my poker with me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To what do we owe the honour of this

sudden visitation?" inquired Hurree Singh in his quaint English.

"I looked in to tell you fellows that my trial week has begun."

"Oh!"

"It's no easy job to skipper the Remove, even for a week," said Russell. "Can I count on you fellows to back me up?"

"Of course!" said Harry Wharton.

"Our brains and bodies are at your entire disposal!" said Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five were quite prepared to give Russell a helping hand. He was one of the straightest and best fellows in the Form, and they liked him.

"Got any brilliant wheezes?" asked Johnny Bull.

"I think it's high time we got our own back on Highcliffe!" said Dick Russell.

"Hear, hear!"

"I'm not suggesting that we try another jape on them. Every time we've tried to jape them lately something's gone wrong with the works."

"What do you propose to do, then?" asked Wharton.

"Fix up a big scrap—half a dozen of our fellows against half a dozen of theirs."

"My hat!"

"To my mind, that's the best way of wiping off the arrears," said Russell. "We could put up six men who would be more than a match for them."

"Yes, rather!"

Harry Wharton & Co. jumped at the scheme. As a matter of fact, they preferred a hand-to-hand encounter to a stealthy jape.

"When and where is this scrap coming off?" asked Nugent.

"The clearing in Friardale Wood strikes me as being the best place," said Russell.

"As to the time, I'll fix that with Frank Courtenay."

"You're going over to see him?" asked Wharton.

"No; I shall ring him up. I tried to 'phone him just now, but Quelch found out what was in the wind, and gave me a licking. He also forbade me to fix up the contest."

"And yet you're going ahead?" exclaimed Bob Cherry in astonishment.

"Of course! I'm not going to be put off my stroke by Quelch? Who's Quelch, anyway?"

The Famous Five gasped.

"I believe Russell's been studying the principles of Bolshevism!" said Johnny Bull.

"Rats!" said Russell. "Now, what about selecting our half-dozen to meet Highcliffe? I don't think we can improve on the six who are in this study now."

"There's Smithy," said Frank Nugent thoughtfully. "Smithy's a bit above my weight in the boxing line. I think I'll stand down in his favour."

"All serene!" said Russell. "That will be Wharton, Cherry, Bull, Inky, Smithy, and myself. And if we can't pulverise Highcliffe I'll eat my Sunday topper!"

"Whose telephone are you going to use?" asked Wharton. "You can't very well borrow Quelch's after what's happened."

"There's a 'phone in the prefects' room," said Dick Russell. "I'll use that."

"Let's know the result," said Bob Cherry.

Russell nodded and quitted the study.

A senior match was in progress on Big Side, and the prefects' room would be deserted. Dick Russell could say all that he wanted to say in three minutes or so, and no one would be any the wiser.

Just as he approached the prefects' room, however, he became conscious of the fact that he was being stealthily followed. Turning suddenly, he caught sight of Billy Bunter.

"You spring worm!" shouted Russell indignantly.

"Oh, really, Russell—"

"You were following me, you fat toad!"

"Yow! I wasn't! I didn't—"

Dick Russell sprang at the Owl of the Remove, took him by the scruff of the neck, and marched him away towards the Close.

"Leggo!" screamed Bunter. "I'll tell Wingate! I'll tell Quelch!—Where are you taking me, you beast?"

"I'm going to 'chain you up to keep you from spying!" said Russell grimly.

"Ch-chain me up?" faltered the fat junior.

"Yes. There's an old dog-kennel in the Close, and a hefty chain. You're going to be the dog!"

"Lemme go, you rotter!"

But Dick Russell marched on with his fat prisoner, and halted him in the Close.

Mark Linley stood near the disused dog-kennel chatting with Monty Newland.

"Hallo!" ejaculated the Lancashire lad. "What's the little game, Russell?"

"I want to keep Bunter in a safe place while I have a little chat on the telephone," explained Russell. "If you fellows wouldn't mind holding him a minute, I'll just fasten this chain round one of his ankles, and convert him into a tripe-hound."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mark Linley and Monty Newland readily obliged. They clasped the fat junior in a tight embrace.

"He won't be able to do any card-dropping now!" said Dick Russell, with satisfaction.

And, heedless of the wild wails of the captive, he hurried away to the prefects' room.

Linley and Newland strolled away, also chuckling as they went.

"Beasts!" shouted Billy Bunter, plunging forward, and bringing the kennel with him. "Come and take this chain off!"

But the "beasts" had vanished.

Dick Russell found the prefects' room empty, as he had anticipated, and he went to the telephone and took the receiver off its hooks.

"Number, please!" said the operator.

"I want Highcliffe School, miss."

"One moment!"

Dick Russell waited not one moment, but many. He was conscious of the fact that he was a trespasser—using the prefects' telephone without permission—and he fervently hoped that no one would come in.

After a time a sharp, metallic voice addressed him over the wires.

"Who is that?" said the voice.

"This is Russell, of Greyfriars. I want to speak to Frank Courtenay—"

"Indeed!"

"Yes," said Russell, anxious to get the affair over quickly. "Buck up, fathead, and get Courtenay to the 'phone!"

There was a spluttering noise at the other end.

"Are you aware—"

"I'm aware that you're a silly ass, if that's what you mean! Don't keep me hanging about all day! Tell Frank Courtenay I want to speak to him!"

"Boy! Are you aware of the fact that you are addressing a master—Mr. Mobbs, to be precise?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Dick Russell nearly dropped the receiver in his dismay.

"I—I'm awfully sorry, sir!" he stammered.

"I—I thought—"

"Evidently you did not think, or you would not have addressed me in that impertinent manner!" said Mr. Mobbs drily.

"Would you be good enough to ask Courtenay to come to the 'phone, sir?"

There was a snort from Mr. Mobbs. The Greyfriars junior could not tell whether he said "Yes," or "No."

Russell took a fresh grip on the receiver and waited. Every now and then he shouted "Are you there?" into the transmitter, and after a time a voice replied:

"Yes. What do you want?"

"Is that you, Courtenay?"

"Yes!"

"It doesn't sound like your voice."

"I've got a cold!" was the reply. Frank Courtenay's manner seemed unusually gruff.

"Why have you rung me up, Russell?"

"To issue a challenge!"

"My hat!"

"We've made up our minds to put you fellows in your places," said Dick Russell. "Will you select six fellows—including yourself—to meet six of ours in a hand-to-hand fight?"

"This is very sudden!"

"I'm captain of the Remove for a week, and I mean to hustle," was the reply.

"I see. Quite a neat little limber-ick could be made out of that! How does this go:

"There was a young swanker named Russell, Who made up his mind he would hustle; So he challenged our chaps To the sternest of scraps Just to show off his elegant muscle!"

"Don't be funny!" snapped Russell.

"I won't! I can safely leave the comic business to you!" was the retort.

"You've heard my challenge. Is it accepted, or declined?"

"Accepted, of course!"

"Good! To-morrow's a half-holiday. Suppose we fix it for three o'clock in the clearing in Friardale Wood?"

"That will do nicely."

"You'll select six fellows?"

"With pleasure!"

"Who will they be?"

"I can't decide all at once. But I shall be there, and the Caterpillar and Flip Derwent and Smithson. Who's coming on your side?"

Russell gave the names.

"Good!" said Frank Courtenay. "I suppose the losing side provides its own ambulance—what?"

"In that case, you'd better do so in advance!" chuckled the Greyfriars junior.

"Rats!"

"You've got the time all right—three o'clock to-morrow afternoon? There's no need for me to write you a letter confirming this arrangement, is there?"

"No need whatever. That will be quite O. K."

"Au revoir, then!" said Russell. And he rang off.

Fortunately, the senior match was not yet over, and the junior got clear of the prefects' room without being challenged.

Russell went along to Study No. 1 to acquaint the Famous Five with the result of his conversation with Courtenay; and he quite forgot the existence of Billy Bunter, whom he had chained up a short time previously.

Meanwhile, the fat junior had managed to drag himself, kennel and all, into the building. He staggered along the passage, with the kennel bumping behind him.

"What the merry dickens!" exclaimed Skinner, coming out of his study to ascertain the cause of the noise.

Billy Bunter threw out his fat arms appealingly.

"I say, Skiney, you might unfasten this beastly chain!" he panted.

Skinner chuckled.

"I might, and I might not!" he said. "Matter of fact, I don't think I will. It would spoil the general effect!"

"You rotter!" howled Bunter. "How would you like to be chained up to a kennel?"

"Wait a jiffy," said Skinner. "I'll see if I can find you a bone—a nice, juicy one, you know!"

But Billy Bunter didn't wait. He clumped away along the passage, a ridiculous figure with the chain round his ankle and the kennel trailing along in the rear.

The next person Bunter encountered was Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth.

Mr. Prout's eyes fairly bulged out of his head when he caught sight of the fat junior.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "Bunter, you utterly absurd boy, detach yourself from that chain and kennel immediately!"

"Yow! That's what I've been trying to do for the last ten minutes!" groaned Bunter. "I can't unfasten the beastly chain!"

"How did you come to be in that extraordinary position, Bunter?"

"It's a practical joke, of course!" said the fat junior. "Any fool can see that!"

"Boy! Do you dare to insinuate that I am a fool?"

"Nunno, sir!" said Bunter hastily. "I shouldn't dream of suggesting it, sir. I should keep my thoughts to myself!"

At that moment Mr. Prout caught sight of three of his pupils—Coker, Potter, and Greene.

"Coker!" he rapped out. "Pray liberate Bunter from his present unfortunate plight!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Coker. "Certainly, sir! I'll set the dog loose at once! Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is no laughing matter, Coker!"

"Sorry, sir, but Bunter's too funny for words! Ha, ha, ha!"

It was some time before Coker recovered from his laughing fit. Then he stooped down, and eventually succeeded in setting the fat junior free.

"Take that kennel back to its habitual resting-place, Bunter!" snapped Mr. Prout.

"Yes, sir. It was Russell who chained me up, sir. Aren't you going to wallop him?"

"Silence, Bunter! You have been the victim of a foolish practical joke, but you doubtless deserved any inconvenience you have suffered!"

With which unsympathetic remark Mr. Prout rustled away; and Billy Bunter limped slowly and painfully along the passage, dragging a chain and a dog-kennel after him.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### The Fight in the Wood.

THE six Greyfriars fellows who had been selected for the fray against Highcliffe took the affair very seriously.

Before bed-time that evening they assembled in the gym, and indulged in THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 43.

friendly sparring in order to fit themselves for the forthcoming contest.

"I think we shall pull it off," said Bob Cherry, as the juniors trooped up to their dormitory; "but it doesn't pay to be overconfident. Those Highcliffe bounders have sprung so many surprises on us lately that you never know what they're going to do next."

"True, O King! But we ought to be a match for any six they can put out," said Johnny Bull.

"Hear, hear!" said Vernon-Smith, who was very bucked at the prospect of taking a hand. "Courtenay's their star man," said Harry Wharton, "and the Caterpillar's not to be despised. Flip Derwent and Smithson are useful, but they're not quite up to our weight. By the way, how are we going to fight—altogether, or in pairs?"

"In pairs, of course," replied Dick Russell. "I'll tackle Courtenay, and you, Wharton, can settle the Caterpillar's hash. Smithy can smash Smithson, and Bob Cherry can make mince-meat of Flip Derwent. I don't know who the other two Highcliffe fellows are going to be; but, whoever they are, Johnny Bull and Inky ought to be able to account for them."

"With my esteemed rightful arm I will blackfully discolour the eyes of my ludicrous opponent!" declared Hurree Singh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I'll give my man no quarter!" vowed Johnny Bull.

"Good!" said Dick Russell. "We're all in fighting trim, and I've no doubt we shall make Highcliffe sing small."

"It's about time!" growled Bob Cherry. "Those Highcliffe johnnies have grown too big for their boots!"

There was great excitement in the Remove dormitory that evening when the affair became common knowledge.

"We'll come along and cheer you on to victory, you fellows!" said Squiff.

But Dick Russell shook his head.

"I don't think anyone had better turn up, barring the selected six," he said. "We don't want any spectators. They might jolly soon become combatants!"

"All the better!" said Peter Todd.

"It wouldn't be fair to Highcliffe," said Russell. "I don't suppose they'll bring more than six."

So it was decided that only the chosen six should go.

The hours seemed to drag on leaden wings next morning. In the Remove Form-room Mr. Quelch found his pupils very trying.

Bob Cherry informed him that the Magna Charta was signed at Friar-dale Wood; and Johnny Bull created a sensation when he started talking about the Wars of the Roses. But Mr. Quelch, although he handed out impositions freely, did not smell a rat.

At last the welcome word of dismissal came.

Harry Wharton & Co. hurried through their dinner, after which they retired to the gym, and spent an hour at the punching-ball. Then, accompanied by the good wishes of their Form-fellows, they set out on their enterprise.

As he led the way through the wood, Dick Russell little suspected anything in the nature of foul play on the part of the Highcliffians. He knew that Frank Courtenay was thoroughly true blue, and not for one moment did he dream that he and his companions were walking into a trap.

Yet such was the case.

When the Greyfriars juniors reached the clearing, they found it deserted.

"What on earth—" began Bob Cherry, in astonishment.

"They're late in turning up, I suppose," said Harry Wharton.

"Not a bit of it, begad!" exclaimed a familiar voice.

And Cecil Ponsonby, the leader of the Highcliffe "nuts," stepped into view from behind a tree.

Behind him, to the consternation of the Greyfriars fellows, came Gadsby and Monson, Merton and Vavasour, Drury and Tunstall, and five others, making a dozen in all.

There was no sign of Frank Courtenay or the Caterpillar; neither were Flip Derwent nor Smithson among the party.

Slowly recovering from his amazement, Dick Russell advanced towards Ponsonby.

"What does this mean?" he demanded hotly.

"It means," said Ponsonby, "that I've kept the compact."

"I don't understand you. I arranged that half a dozen of your fellows—"

"Half a dozen, was it? Thought you said a dozen. The telephone was very indistinct, don't you know?"

"The—the telephone!" gasped Russell. "But—but it was Frank Courtenay I was speaking to."

"Not a bit of it, my son. It was little me!"

"You!"

Ponsonby nodded.

"You woke up the wrong passenger!" he said. "You thought you were speakin' to Courtenay, an' it was me all the time! I accepted your challenge—an' here we are!"

There was a chuckle from the rest of the Highcliffians, and a buzz of indignation from the Greyfriars fellows.

Dick Russell glared at the leader of the "nuts."

"You cad!" he exclaimed passionately.

Ponsonby shrugged his shoulders.

"All's fair in love an' war," he said. "An' this is war, isn't it?"

"It's going to be!" chuckled Gadsby.

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

Harry Wharton & Co. were taken aback, but they stood their ground. The odds against them were two to one, and they were almost certain to get the worst of the encounter. But before they were overpowered they meant to leave their mark on the leering faces of Ponsonby & Co.

"Come on, you cads!" shouted Bob Cherry. "You've taken us at a disadvantage, but you needn't think we're funky! We'll fight you till we can't stand!"

"Yes, rather!" said Vernon-Smith. "Pile in, you fellows!"

The Highcliffe fellows looked a little less cheerful. Many of them were not fond of fighting. They set too great a value on their own skins. They had hoped that the Greyfriars fellows, on finding they were outnumbered, would tamely give in.

But Harry Wharton & Co. had no intention of doing that.

At a signal from Dick Russell, they rushed at their opponents, hitting out right and left.

Russell himself tackled Ponsonby and Gadsby, and he gave them a rare grueling.

He was one of the best fighting-men in the Remove, if not the best, and on this occasion indignation lent zest to his blows.

"Yaroooooh!" roared Ponsonby, as Russell's fist came into violent contact with his jaw.

Dick Russell continued to hit with vigour, and he did not desist until Ponsonby lay in a sprawling heap, and Gadsby rolled on top of him.

Meanwhile, the combat was raging fast and furious in other quarters.

Bob Cherry soon accounted for the weedy Vavasour, but he found Tunstall a hot handful.

Harry Wharton was at grips with Merton and Drury, and he managed to hold his own; and Vernon-Smith and Monson were mixed up in a desperate melee.

As for Hurree Singh and Johnny Bull, they were having rather a rough time of it. No sooner did they floor one opponent than another seemed to take his place.

"Stick it out, you fellows!" came Dick Russell's voice amid the uproar.

Russell was seated on Gadsby's chest, and Ponsonby was underneath Gadsby. The leader of the Highcliffe "nuts" was in a state approaching suffocation.

At first it seemed as if the Greyfriars fellows would carry everything before them, despite the odds with which they had to contend.

But numbers began to tell, and dismay was written on the faces of the Friars when Harry Wharton went down before the combined rush of Merton and Drury. These two had fought better than any of the Highcliffians, excepting Tunstall, who was standing up to Bob Cherry with a determination of which few had thought him capable.

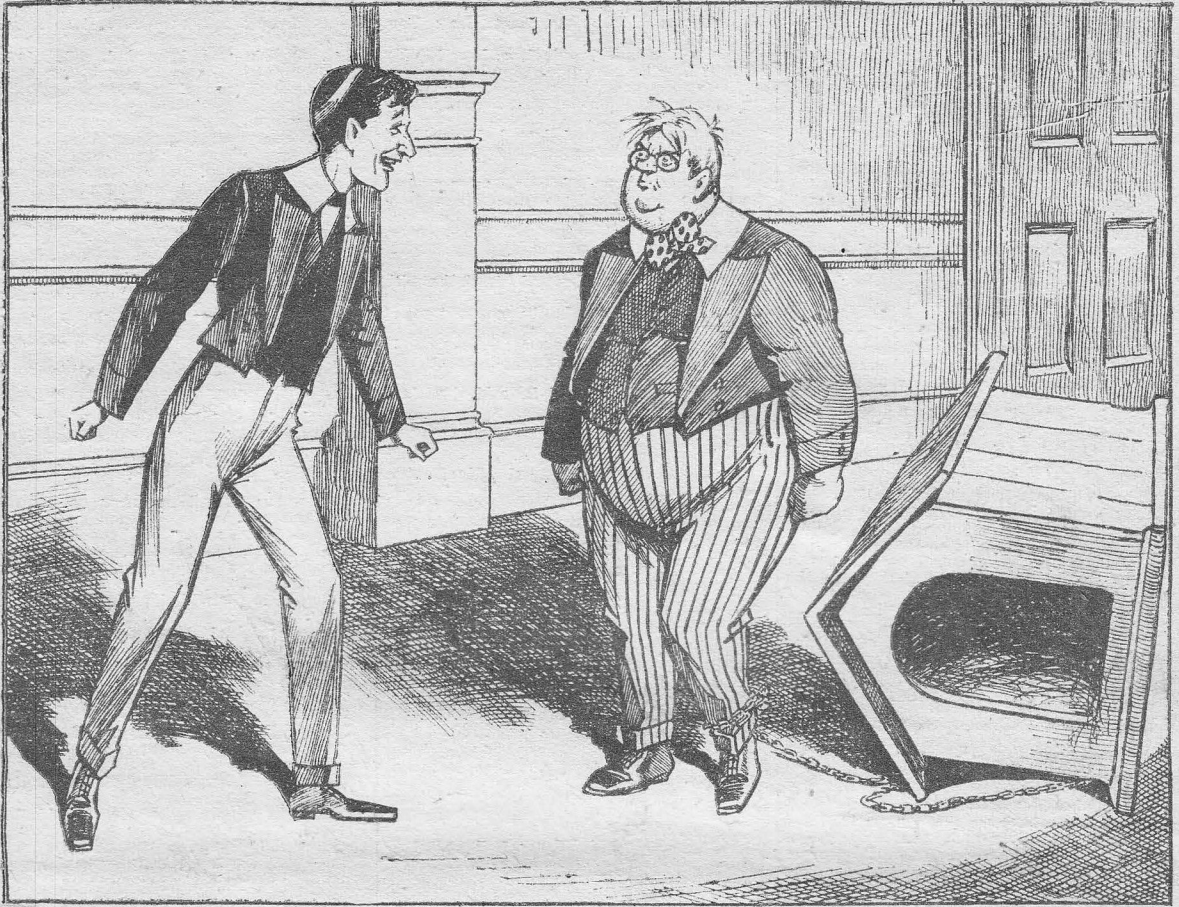
Hurree Singh was the next to go down; and the burly Johnny Bull followed. Sheer force of numbers had compelled them to throw up the sponge.

Dick Russell's hands were itching to plunge into the fray, but he knew what would happen if he relinquished his position on Gadsby's chest. Gadsby and Ponsonby would be free to use their fists again, and that must not happen.

"Rescue, Highcliffe!" spluttered Ponsonby. "Drag this rotter off!"

There was a rush of feet towards Dick Russell, who found himself assailed by four opponents.

Leaping to his feet, Russell hit out with all his strength. He knew that he must



"You rotter!" howled Bunter. "How would you like to be chained up to a kennel?" "Wait a jiffy," said Skinner. "I'll see if I can find you a bone—a nice, juicy one, you know!"

inevitably be beaten, but he wanted to render a good account of himself before he went down.

For the second time Cecil Ponsooby rolled over in the grass. And on this occasion Pon was far too dazed to take any further part in the hostilities.

Gadsby went down, too; but that was Russell's last achievement. The others were buzzing round him like bees, hitting out savagely, and with scant regard for the laws of fair-play.

Russell set his teeth, and fought on, but his blows had lost their sting. A curious feeling of weakness came over him. He felt that he had shot his bolt.

And then a familiar voice came to his ears.

"Russell! How dare you! You have defied my express orders!"

Dick Russell gasped, and so did his school-fellows.

For the voice belonged to Mr. Quelch!

It was a rude shock for Harry Wharton & Co. If they had thought of Mr. Quelch at all, they had supposed that he was in his study at Greyfriars, hammering out his literary work on the typewriter.

Of all the juniors present Ponsooby was the first to regain his presence of mind.

"Bunk!" he rapped out.

And the twelve Highcliffians promptly bolted into the bracken.

The Greyfriars juniors stood blinking at their Form-master.

They were looking very sheepish, and some of them seemed to be a good deal the worse for wear.

Harry Wharton's nose was swelling visibly, and Bob Cherry squinted uncertainly at Mr. Quelch with one eye. Johnny Bull was crossing his jaw, and Vernon-Smith's collar had slipped its moorings. On the whole, the Removites looked very complete wrecks.

Mr. Quelch's anger was, as Harree Singh remarked afterwards, terrific. His eyes were glittering, and he gripped his walking-stick

as if he were about to do someone an injury.

"This is disgraceful," he thundered—"positively disgraceful! I come out for an afternoon stroll in the wood, and what do I find? Six boys belonging to my own Form indulging in an exhibition which would disgrace a gang of hooligans!"

"We're in for it now!" muttered Bob Cherry, under his breath.

"You, Russell, are the prime mover in this affair!" continued Mr. Quelch. "I expressly forbade you to meet the Highcliffe boys in fistie encounter, and you have deliberately defied me!"

"I—I'm sorry, sir," faltered Dick Russell; "but we simply had to tackle those bounders!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Johnny Bull.

"Silence, Bull! You will all return with me at once to the school!"

Mr. Quelch turned angrily on his heel and strode away, and the juniors followed, looking very crestfallen.

"This is where the chopper comes down," muttered Vernon-Smith.

Harry Wharton nodded gloomily.

"Who would have thought old Quelch would come butting in like that?" he murmured.

"We should have been licked if he hadn't turned up," said Johnny Bull.

Bob Cherry grunted.

"We shall be licked in any case," he said. "Quelch's bound to lay it on thick."

The Form-master glared at the juniors over his shoulder.

"Cease that ridiculous mumbling!" he rapped out.

And the journey back to Greyfriars was concluded in silence.

There was great excitement, coupled with consternation, among the rest of the Removites when they saw their heroes return under escort.

"Bowled out, by Jove!" muttered Squiff.

"What rotten luck!" said Botsover major. The procession passed through the Close,

and trooped along the passage to Mr. Quelch's study.

For the space of ten minutes or so the Form-master made merry with his cane.

Dick Russell received a double dose, and he bore it without flinching, though it cost him a big effort.

"After your flagrant defiance of my orders, Russell," said Mr. Quelch, "I have no alternative but to request you to resign from the contest for the captaincy of the Form."

"Oh crumbs!"

This was a blow which Dick Russell had not bargained for. He had set his heart on becoming captain of the Remove, and now all his dreams were shattered. He could not refrain from making an appeal against the sentence.

"Don't you think that's a bit stiff, sir? We simply had to meet those Highcliffe fellows—"

"Silence, Russell!"

"I don't mind being lined, sir, or gated, or—"

"Silence, I repeat! You have proved your self to be totally unfitted to fill any position of trust. You were the ringleader in this escapade, and I consider that your punishment is perfectly just. Leave my study at once, all of you!"

And the six juniors, rubbing their tingling pains, trooped out into the passage.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.  
The Deputation.

"H E, he, he!" Billy Bunter's gloating cackles could be heard as Harry Wharton & Co. emerged from their Form-master's study.

"You've been licked!" sniggered the Owl of the Remove. "I heard all the swishes and the yells—"

"We didn't yell, you fat worm!" snorted Johnny Bull indignantly.

"Rot! It sounded as if pig-killing was going on!"

"You—you—"

"Quelch's shown jolly good sense for once," said Billy Bunter. "He's barred you from the captaincy contest, Russell—and it serves you right! Precious fine skipper you would have made—I don't think!"

"Stand aside!" growled Russell.

"Now that you've been chucked out, I suppose I shall be captain of the Remove for a week!" said Bunter. "You fellows can look out for squalls."

"The squalls will commence right now!" said Bob Cherry grimly. "Bump the fat rotter!"

The six juniors were in a very bad temper, as Billy Bunter speedily discovered.

Three times in succession the fat junior was bumped on the floor, and his yells awakened the echoes.

Realising that Mr. Quelch might come out of his study to see what all the noise was about, Harry Wharton & Co. beat a hasty retreat, leaving Billy Bunter to sort himself out.

"Yah! Beasts!" howled Bunter. "I'll make you sit up for this! Now that I'm captain of the Remove, I'm going to rule you with a rod of iron! Yah! Put that in your pipes and smoke it!"

But the juniors were out of hearing.

Billy Bunter slowly picked himself up, and rolled away to the study which he shared with the two Todds and Tom Dutton.

"Hallo, fatty!" sang out Peter Todd.

Billy Bunter blinked majestically at the leader of Study No. 7.

"You be careful, young Todd!" he said.

"Wha-a-at!" gasped Peter.

"You can reserve your fancy names for somebody else. I'm captain of the Remove, and I'm going to command respect!"

Peter stared.

"Say that again!" he said.

Billy Bunter obliged. And Peter Todd stared harder than ever.

"You're kik-kik-captain of the Remove?" he stuttered.

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"Since a few minutes ago. Russell's been chucked out, and my trial week has started. I'm going to bring about drastic reforms in the Remove."

"My hat!"

"At present," Bunter went on, "there's far too much slacking going on. The fellows seem to think of nothing but eating and drinking. All that sort of thing's got to stop. I'm going to put my foot down!"

Peter Todd was too much overcome to hurl himself at Bunter. He looked at the fat junior in a dazed sort of way.

As for Alonzo, he turned towards the Owl of the Remove, and extended a skinny hand.

"I tender you my warmest congratulations, my dear Bunter, on your appointment to the exalted station of captain of the Remove," he said solemnly.

"Thank you, Lonzy!" said Bunter, taking the proffered hand. "You're going to toe the line, of course?"

"I—I fail to understand that somewhat vulgar expression!" faltered the gentle Alonzo. "You're going to do as you're told, and all that?"

"Yes," said Alonzo. "I am very reluctant to take orders from a person who is enveloped in rolls of fat, but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Peter Todd.

Billy Bunter frowned.

"Don't be an ass, Lonzy!" he said severely.

"Certainly not, my dear fellow! I have no wish to queer your pitch, as the saying goes."

And there was a fresh outburst of laughter from Peter.

Billy Bunter walked across to Tom Dutton, the deaf junior, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Did you hear what I said to Alonzo?" he asked.

"I'm not!" growled Dutton.

"What!"

"What do you mean by asking me why I'm carrying on so?"

"Alonzo, you ass—Alonzo!" roared Bunter.

"Did you hear what I said?"

"In the middle of the afternoon?" said Tom Dutton incredulously. "Of course not! Only a burbling chump would want to go to bed at this time!"

Billy Bunter fairly exploded.

"I didn't say 'bed'! I heeoted. "I said

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Eh! Who's dead?"

"Hark at him!" said Bunter. "Deaf as a

carpost! Must be a pretty awful affliction,

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you know. Personally, I wouldn't be deaf for a fortune, in case—"

There was a sudden shout from Tom Dutton.

"I've got an unfortunate face, have I? My hat! If I had a face like yours I'd pawn it, and scrap the pawnticket! I'll teach you to say rude things about my face! Take that—and that—and that!"

And Tom Dutton delivered three blows which are known in the boxing profession as "pile-drivers."

The first blow knocked Billy Bunter against the table; the second transferred him from the table to the bookcase; and the third caused him to sit down violently on the floor.

"Yow! Beast! You've fractured my thigh!" moaned Bunter.

Tom Dutton pranced round his victim with brandished fists.

"You'll give me one in the eye, will you?" he roared. "Come on, then! I'm ready!"

Convulsed with merriment, Peter Todd seized the warlike Dutton and swung him back.

"Steady on, old chap!" he said. "It's a mistake!"

"Yes, he'll need a steak by the time I've finished with him!" said Dutton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold him, Toddy!" gasped Billy Bunter.

"Keep him off! He's dangerous!"

And the fat junior scrambled to his feet and fled from the study. He ran quite well for a person whose thigh was supposed to be fractured.

Meanwhile, Harry Wharton & Co. had retired to Study No. 1 to recover from the effects of Mr. Quelch's cane.

Dick Russell, feeling very sore mentally and physically, had been taken in tow by his chum Ogilvy, who did his best to soothe Russell's feelings. But Dick, like Rachel of old, mourned, and would not be comforted.

The luckiest fellow of all was Frank Nugent, who had stood aside so that Vernon-Smith might take a hand against Highcliffe.

Nugent was sympathetic when his chums told him their tale of woe, but he could not help chuckling at his lucky escape.

"It's rough luck on Russell," said Harry Wharton. "I think Quelch might have given him another chance."

"Hear, hear!" said Johnny Bull. "Russell ought to be allowed to finish his trial week."

That was the general opinion.

"Suppose we go before Quelch as a deputation?" suggested Bob Cherry.

"A what?" said Wharton.

"A deputation," repeated Bob firmly. "A hand of fellows representing the Remove. Of course, we shall have to be very tactful, and diplomatic, and all the rest of it."

"Very!" said Nugent.

"But if we talk to Quelch like a set of Dutch uncles, he may see his way to give Russell another chance. It's worth trying, anyway."

"Wait till Quelch's had time to simmer down," said Vernon-Smith. "Then we'll beard the lion in his den."

Later on in the evening the juniors went along to their Form-master's study to plead the cause of Dick Russell.

Mr. Quelch was at work on his "History of Greyfriars" when the delegates arrived.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed, as six juniors trooped into his study, one after the other. "What does this mean?"

"We're a deputation, sir," explained Bob Cherry. Bob was very proud of his ability to use words containing ten letters.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Quelch, running his eyes over the party. "What do you wish to see me about?"

Harry Wharton gallantly took the plunge.

"It's about Russell, sir. We think he ought to be given another chance."

Hurree Singh came forward quickly.

"My esteemed friend puts it very bluntly, honoured sahib," he said. "What he meant to remarkably utter was, 'Will the teacher sahib, in the generosity of his noble and esteemed heart, reconsider the decision he made in the heat of the ludicrous moment?'"

Even Mr. Quelch could not repress a smile at Hurree Singh's weird and wonderful English.

"I am surprised that you boys should hold a brief for Russell," said the Remove-master. "He deliberately disobeyed my express orders, and a boy who does that is not a suitable candidate for the captaincy of the Form."

"There's a good deal to be said for Russell's point of view, sir," ventured Bob Cherry.

"He had the welfare of the Remove at heart, and he badly wanted to trounce Highcliffe. That little scrap simply had to

come off, sir. Ponsonby & Co. have been giving us beans lately, and for the sake of the Form we couldn't afford to take it lying down."

Mr. Quelch was impressed. What impressed him most was the fact that Harry Wharton and Vernon-Smith, both of whom were candidates for the captaincy, should exert their influence on behalf of a rival.

If Russell was given another chance, their own chances of securing the coveted position would be lessened. The Form-master was a fair-minded man, and he could not help admiring their sportsmanship.

"We don't wish to be disrespectful in any way, sir," said Wharton, "but if you would let Russell finish his trial week we should all be grateful."

"Immensely grateful, honoured sahib!" said Hurree Singh.

"Very well," said Mr. Quelch graciously. "You may tell Russell from me that he will be given another chance."

"Hurrah!" said Bob Cherry spontaneously.

The juniors thanked Mr. Quelch and withdrew.

"Quelch's a brick!" said Johnny Bull heartily. "This ought to cheer Russell up."

"Yes, rather!"

Dick Russell was just explaining to Ogilvy across the tea-table that life wasn't worth living, when Harry Wharton & Co. marched into the study.

"What the merry dickens—" began Russell, starting to his feet.

"You've got a free pardon, my son!" said Frank Nugent.

"Thanks to your kind uncles!" added Bob Cherry.

"A free pardon! What do you mean?"

"Quelch's relented," said Harry Wharton.

"He's going to give you another chance."

Russell's face lighted up.

"Honest Injun?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Hurrah!" chortled Ogilvy. "I told you it would be all right, Dick! You'll be captain of the Remove yet!"

"Not while Harry Wharton's in the land of the living," said Bob Cherry.

"That remains to be seen," said Dick Russell.

"I'm going to have a jolly good shot at bagging the captaincy, anyway. Thanks very much for tackling Quelch, you fellows!"

"Don't mench!" said Vernon-Smith.

And the members of the deputation retired, feeling that they had deserved well of their country.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Rivals in the Ring.

DICK RUSSELL'S next move was a very bold one, in view of what had happened recently.

The junior approached Mr. Quelch after lessons next morning, and asked the Form-master if he would sanction the six-to-six contest between Greyfriars and Highcliffe on the following conditions: (a) That the contest took place in the gym at Greyfriars; (b) that it would be a glove-fight, and not a bout with bare fists; and (c) that a prefect should be present to see fair play.

Somewhat to Dick Russell's surprise, Mr. Quelch raised no objection.

"I am all in favour of a manly, straightforward bout with the gloves," said the master of the Remove. "What I so strongly object to is a secret meeting in the wood and a brawl with bare fists. Such scenes are unworthy of hoodlums, let alone school-boys! The chief reason why I was angry with you, Russell, was because you disobeyed my explicit commands. However, you have been punished for that, and we will say no more about it."

"Thank you, sir," said Russell. "Then I take it I can go ahead with the arrangements?"

Mr. Quelch nodded.

"I shall speak to Wingate on the subject," he said. "He will see that the contest is a fair one, as distinct from the distasteful exhibition of prize-fighting."

Dick Russell joined Harry Wharton & Co. in the Close, and told them the news.

"The challenge to Highcliffe will be issued again," he said, "and this time I'll see that it goes to the right quarter. I'll bike over myself, and interview Courtenay."

"Sounds too good to be true!" said Bob Cherry. "Fancy old Quelch agreeing to a six-side scrap!"

"You've got more nerve than I ever imagined, Russell," said Harry Wharton. "I

don't think many fellows would have had the pluck to tackle Quelch after what happened yesterday."

Dick Russell laughed. "A little nerve goes a long way sometimes!" he said.

"Look here," said Johnny Bull. "We'd better bike over to Highcliffe with you. It's not safe for one fellow to venture into enemy country."

"All serene!" said Dick Russell. Accordingly, the Famous Five, accompanied by Russell and Vernon-Smith, cycled over to the rival school before dinner.

"Lucky you had a bodyguard, Russell," said Harry Wharton, as the juniors pushed their bicycles through the gateway of Highcliffe. "Here's Ponsonby and half a dozen of his hangers-on."

Ponsonby & Co. were strolling in the quadrangle. Limping would have been the more correct term. They showed numerous traces of the previous day's tussle.

"Greyfriars cads!" muttered Ponsonby. "Highcliffe cads!" retorted Bob Cherry cheerfully. "Why don't you put your nose on straight, Pon? It seems to have got round to your left ear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ponsonby & Co. were furious; but there were only seven of them, and they never fought unless they outnumbered the opposition.

The Greyfriars juniors passed on into the building. They were obliged to leave their machines in the quadrangle, and there was a chance that the Highcliffe cads might puncture the tyres.

"If they puncture our bikes," growled Johnny Bull, "we'll puncture Ponsonby & Co."

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors went along to Frank Courtenay's study. They found the captain of the Highcliffe Fourth engaged in pumping up a football.

The Caterpillar, with his hands in his pockets, was giving encouragement. "Stick it, Franky!" he was saying. "There's nothin' like energy, you know!"

"If you really thought that, you'd lend a fellow a hand!" panted Frank Courtenay. "Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry's voice boomed through the study.

Frank Courtenay desisted from his exertions, and spun round.

"My hat! This is quite an invasion!" he exclaimed.

"We've brought you a challenge, Courtenay," said Dick Russell. And he outlined his scheme for a six-a-side contest between the rival schools.

"I sent this challenge before," explained Russell, "but there was a mix-up on the telephone, and Ponsonby got hold of it."

"Trust our dear Pon to get hold of these things!" drawled the Caterpillar. "But wherefore this sudden desire to shed innocent blood?"

"We mean to get level with you," said Harry Wharton. "You've made us look small several times lately, and we want our revenge."

"Then you shall have it," said Frank Courtenay, with a grin. "I'm always willing to oblige."

"You'll turn up at Greyfriars after lessons this afternoon?" said Dick Russell.

"Yes."

The Caterpillar looked inquiringly at his study-mate.

"Am I takin' a hand in this?" he asked. "Of course!" said Frank Courtenay.

"But I've forgotten how to box, begad!"

"You'll soon pick it up again," said Courtenay cheerfully.

"But think how dreadfully exhaustin' it is, Franky!"

"Rats! You've got to turn out."

The Caterpillar sank into the armchair in a state of resignation.

"Five o'clock in the gym at Greyfriars," said Dick Russell. "Can we count on that?"

Frank Courtenay nodded.

"We'll do our best to wipe you off the face of the earth!" he said.

"Are we to be invited to tea after the scrap?" inquired the Caterpillar.

"All depends whether you've got any teeth left!" said Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Having completed all the arrangements for the forthcoming contest, the Greyfriars juniors recovered their bicycles—which, fortunately, had not been tampered with—and rode back to the school. They arrived just in time for dinner.

Afternoon lessons passed slowly, but they were over at last, and the Removites flocked in a body to the gym.

A great deal hinged on the result of the contest. If Greyfriars won, Dick Russell would be well on the running for the captaincy. If Highcliffe carried off the honours, the Remove would be compelled to admit that their rivals had scored over them all along the line.

Long before the appointed time the gym was packed. And when five o'clock began to chime the six Highcliffe juniors arrived.

Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar were there, of course; and the other four were Flip Derwent, Smithson, and the brothers Wilkinson, both of whom were renowned fighting-men.

"Behold us ready for the fray!" said the Caterpillar.

"We can't start yet," said Bob Cherry, who stood pawing the floor like a war-horse. "We're waiting for Wingate to turn up."

"Blow Wingate!" shouted Bolsover major impatiently. "Carry on without him!"

"I say, you fellows, Cherry's funking it!" said Billy Bunter. But Frank Nugent silenced the fat junior with a back-hander that made his teeth rattle.

"Quite a crowded house, begad!" observed the Caterpillar, beaming cheerfully at the audience.

"Hain't we better pair off while we're waiting?" suggested Frank Courtenay.

Accordingly the juniors split up in pairs. "I'm tackling Courtenay!" said Dick Russell, as Ogilvy fastened on his gloves.

"My victim," said Bob Cherry, "shall be the Caterpillar!"

"Wilkinson major for me!" said Vernon-Smith.

"I'll settle the minor!" said Harry Wharton. Flip Derwent gave a chuckle.

"Nobody seems particularly anxious to polish me off!" he said.

"I will manfully accomplish that!" said Hurree Singh.

"That leaves Johnny Bull to tackle Smithson," said Dick Russell. "And if Johnny doesn't knock him into the middle of next week I'll eat my hat!"

"Hope it chokes you!" said Smithson.

At this juncture Wingate of the Sixth came in.

There was a cheer from the crowd. "Come along, Wingate!"

"Set the ball rolling, old man!"

The captain of Greyfriars raised his hand for silence. Then he turned to the twelve principals, who had paired off, and stood facing each other.

"I want you kids to understand," he said, "that this isn't a prize-fight. You can hit each other as hard as you like, but I shall disqualify anyone who doesn't conform to the ordinary rules of boxing. There will be rounds of three minutes' duration, with a minute's rest in between. If there should be no knock-out before the end of the twelfth round, the verdict will be given on points. Do you all understand that?"

There was a general nodding of heads.

"Very well!" said Wingate, pulling out his watch. "Time!"

There was a buzz of excitement as the six pairs of juniors closed with each other.

This was indeed a battle royal. As Peter Todd remarked, the bout between Dick Russell and Frank Courtenay was alone worth the money.

The first round saw plenty of fierce fighting, and there was little to choose between the two sides at the finish.

"Buck up, Greyfriars!" roared the crowd, as the boxers lined up for round two.

In this round there were great developments.

Johnny Bull floored Smithson with a powerful drive straight from the shoulder, and the Highcliffe fellow was counted out.

"That's one to us!" said Bolsover major. "Go it, ye cripples!"

Shortly afterwards another fellow suffered defeat. It was the elegant Caterpillar this time.

The Caterpillar was a fine fellow, but he was no match for Bob Cherry with gloves. Bob floored him with a vigorous upper-cut, and the Caterpillar was whacked.

"Another man down!" chortled Squiff. "Hurrah!"

And a cheer rang through the crowded gym.

There were no more knock-outs for a considerable time.

It was not until the Sixth round that Harry Wharton accounted for Wilkinson minor, who had been putting up a game fight.

In the same round Vernon-Smith knocked

out Wilkinson major, thus leaving two pairs of combatants still in action—Dick Russell and Frank Courtenay, and Hurree Singh and Flip Derwent.

Greyfriars had scored four victories, but the crowd clamoured for more. They wanted to see Frank Courtenay taste the dregs of defeat, and they wanted to see Hurree Singh put Flip Derwent out of action.

"Come along, Russell!"

"Get a move on, Inky!"

Dick Russell was boxing at the top of his form, but in Frank Courtenay he met a foeman worthy of his steel. The Highcliffe junior had had by far the worst of the encounter, but he was one of those fellows who never know when they are beaten.

Hurree Singh was finding Flip Derwent a hot handful. It was not until the tenth round that he began to get the better of the Highcliffe. Then there was a period of hurricane hitting, and Flip Derwent was seen to throw up his hands and crash to the floor.

"Number five!" exclaimed Peter Todd gleefully. "Now then, Russell! It's up to you!"

"Put your beef into it!" urged Bolsover major.

Dick Russell knew that if he defeated his opponent he would stand an excellent chance of becoming captain of the Remove. He would have accomplished a greater triumph during his trial week than Vernon-Smith and Peter Todd had done.

During that round—the eleventh—Dick Russell fought like one possessed. But Frank Courtenay resolutely refused to take the knock-out.

The round ended, and for a brief moment the rivals rested.

"Last round!" rapped out Wingate.

And Dick Russell and Frank Courtenay faced each other for the last time.

The former looked fairly fresh, but Courtenay was only carrying on by sheer strength of will.

Dick Russell was seen to smile. Victory would be his in any case. If he failed to administer a knock-out he would win on points, for his boxing had been far superior throughout.

But a win on points was a miserable business, to Russell's way of thinking. There had already been five knock-outs for Greyfriars. Dick Russell intended that there should be six.

In this last round, spurred on by the cheers of his schoolfellows, Russell summoned all his strength, and fought as strongly as if the fight had just begun.

"Good old Dick!" exclaimed Ogilvy. "Put him out of action, old man!"

Frank Courtenay was game to the last. But in Dick Russell, winner of the Public Schools Light-weight Championship at Aldershot, he had met his master.

Biif!

Dick Russell planted a powerful blow between his opponent's eyes, and Frank Courtenay staggered.

Following up, the Greyfriars junior administered an upper-cut, which lifted his opponent off his feet and sent him in a huddled heap to the floor.

And then what a volley of cheers burst forth!

It was Donald Ogilvy who led the cheering, which echoed and re-echoed through the historic gym.

Six of Greyfriars had defeated six of Highcliffe, and the Remove had thus made amends for previous failures.

Dick Russell's heart was light, and his hopes of carrying off the captaincy were high. He had fared better during his trial week than Vernon-Smith and Peter Todd had done. And of the other two candidates—Harry Wharton and Billy Bunter—he naturally feared Wharton most. Bunter could in no sense be regarded a serious rival. His week's trial was likely to prove a trial to all concerned!

Russell's recollections were cut short by a sudden rush on the part of his schoolfellows, who swung him shoulder-high, and carried him in triumph from the scene of the Greyfriars victory.

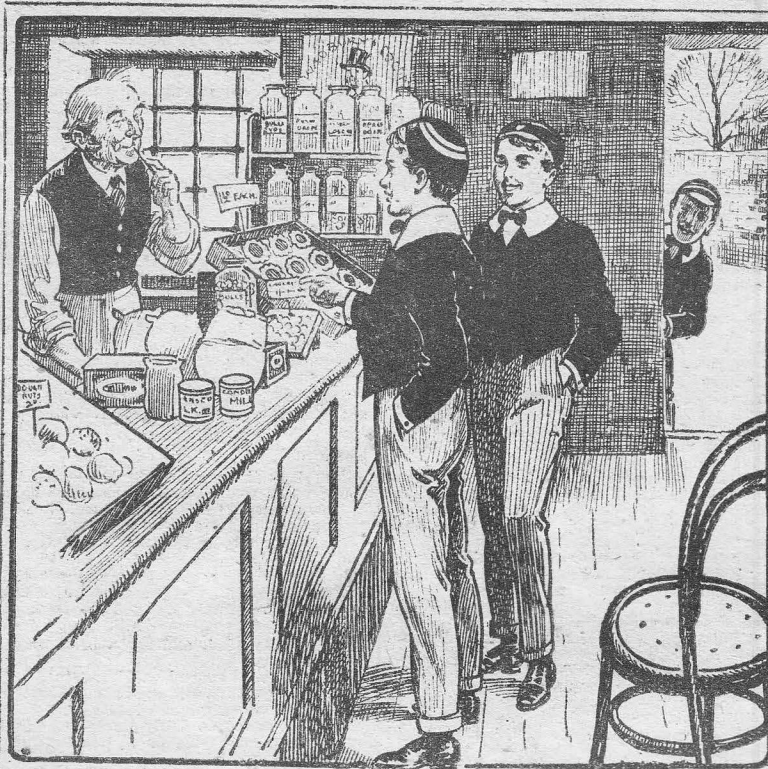
"Franky," murmured the Caterpillar, "this is no place for us. We'd better trot along to our own kennel an' hide our diminished heads."

And they trotted.

THE END.

(Another long complete story next week dealing with the adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. Order your copy in advance.)

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No 43.



### THE FIRST CHAPTER.

#### Jimmy Silver on the Track.

"SIX dozen jam-tarts."  
 "Yes, Master Pankley."  
 "Three dozen ginger pop."  
 "Yes."  
 "Four cakes—two seed and two currant."  
 "Yes."  
 "Two whole pineapples."  
 "Yes."

Jimmy Silver started as he heard the voice from the tuckshop. Pankley was evidently "going it."

Jimmy Silver had been in deep thought when the voice of Cecil Pankley of Bagshot fell upon his ears.

Jimmy Silver was leaning against the front of the little tuckshop in the corner of the quadrangle at Rookwood. His hands were driven deep into his pockets, and there was a wrinkle on his boyish brow.

The leader of the Classical juniors at Rookwood had plenty of room for thought. Matters were indeed in a serious state. Since a dozen juniors of Bagshot School had been quartered on Rookwood, owing to an outbreak of influenza in their own school, the star of Jimmy Silver & Co. had been on the wane.

Little as the Co. were inclined to admit it, there was no doubt that Pankley & Co. of Bagshot had, on more than one occasion, done them quite "brown." Which was all the more rough on the Classical Fourth, because their old rivals on the Modern side, instead of sympathising with them, simply looked on and smirked.

The Modern juniors declared that if the Bagshot crowd had been quartered on them, they would have put Pankley & Co. in their place so rapidly that it would have taken their breath away. Whether that statement was correct or not, it was certain that the Classics had not been able to do so.

And Jimmy Silver was thinking it out.

His chums, Lovell and Raby and Newcome, agreed that it was up to Jimmy Silver, and they cheerfully left it to him.

That knotty problem was exercising Jimmy Silver's brain when his deep reflections were interrupted as aforesaid.

He had hardly noticed Pankley going into the tuckshop, so deep was he in thought. But he could not fail to notice it when he heard Pankley's voice giving orders for so tremendous a supply of tuck.

Evidently Pankley was in funds, and equally evident he was making the money fly.

His voice went on:  
 "Three pounds of mixed biscuits, and three jars of jam."

"My only hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver in wonder. "Is he laying in provisions for a siege?"

"Two tins of condensed milk, and six jars of preserves—"

"I say, Panky," came Poole's voice, "you're going it, old man!"

"Well, it's going to be a topping picnic!" said Pankley. "There will be a dozen of us, you know. Nothing like having enough. We shall want some tea and sugar, too, and a few pounds of ham and tongue."

"We won't take that little lot to the study," chuckled Poole. "Those Rookwood fellows would raid it as likely as not."

"That's all right!" said Pankley. "They won't have the chance of raiding the tuck, or of raiding the picnic, either. They don't know that we're going to have a picnic this afternoon!"

Jimmy Silver grinned.

Pankley was apparently unaware that his voice was quite audible outside the tuckshop, and that Jimmy Silver was adorning the shop-front with his person.

"It's all going to be sent direct to Grubb's Farm," went on Pankley. "You've got my instructions about the stuff, sergeant, written down."

"Yes, Master Pankley," said Sergeant Kettle.

# UP AGAINST PANKLEY!

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

... BY ...

## OWEN CONQUEST.

The old sergeant who kept the school shop at Rookwood was quite impressed by the enormous orders Pankley was giving.

"Well, that's about the lot," said Pankley. "Do as I've told you with the stuff, sergeant. I don't want it sent to the study. Come on, Poole!"

Pankley and Poole came out of the tuckshop.

"Hallo!" said Pankley, as he looked at Jimmy Silver.

"Hallo!" said Jimmy Silver.

"The blessed worm has heard you giving your orders, Panky!" said Poole, with a shake of the head.

"So it's a picnic, is it?" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "A whacking picnic at Grubb's Farm? Rather chilly weather for a picnic, but thanks for the tip! We'll be there!"

"You jolly well won't be there!" said Pankley warmly.

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

"Depend on us!" he said. "We'll come along in force. I'll bring a giddy army! But don't be alarmed; we'll let you have some of the stuff."

"You'll let us have some of our own stuff!" howled Pankley.

Jimmy nodded.

"Yes, if you're nice and civil."

"Why, you Rookwood ass—"

"You Bagshot bouncer!"

"Bump him!" said Poole. "Bump him for being a Rookwood fathead, and bump him for his cheek!"

"Here, hold on! Rescue!" howled Jimmy Silver, as the two Bagshot fellows collared him.

Bump!

Jimmy Silver descended forcibly on the ground. But Lovell and Raby and Newcome came speeding to the rescue across the quad.

"Scoot!" said Pankley.

But there was no chance for the Bagshot chums to scoot. In catching Jimmy Silver, they had caught a Tartar. Jimmy held on to them, and though they let him go, he did not let them go. And



Lovell and Raby and Newcome arrived on the scene at top speed.

"Collar 'em!" roared Lovell.

"Give 'em socks!"

Pankley and Poole struggled in the grasp of the Fistical Four. But they struggled in vain. They were severally and collectively bumped on the hard, unsympathetic earth, and their yells were loud and wrathful.

"Yow-ow-ow! Leggo!"

"Chuck it! Yarooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

But for the fact that Bulkeley of the Sixth, the captain of Rookwood, hove in sight just then, the punishment of the Bagshot bounders would have been more severe. But as Bulkeley came along the Fistical Four dropped their victims as if they had become suddenly red-hot, and bolted round the old clock-tower.

"Hallo!" said Bulkeley, staring down at the two gasping and dusty juniors.

"What's the little game—eh?"

"Oh!" said Pankley. "Ah!"

"Groooh!" gasped Poole.

"What's the matter?" demanded Bulkeley.

"Nun-nun-nothing!" stammered Pankley. "N-n-nothing at all! It's all right Bulkeley."

"You'd better go and brush yourselves down, I think," said Bulkeley, and he passed on, smiling.

Pankley and Poole certainly needed brushing down. But, dusty and rumped as they were, and damaged, they grinned as they strolled away to the School House.

"The astute Jimmy is on to it," murmured Pankley. "He knows all about the picnic now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And he will be puzzling his little brain for a dodge to raid that picnic—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What a lot of trouble we're taking to make him happy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the two Bagshot juniors went in to brush themselves down, apparently in quite a contented frame of mind.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Watching the Enemy.

"A LL serene!" panted Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four had escaped round the clock-tower and through the archway into Little Quad. Then they slackened down, grinning. They had been very glad to escape a personal interview with Bulkeley. The captain of Rookwood was very down on the incessant rags and rows between the Classical Fourth and the Bagshot juniors, and he had given the Fistical Four solemn warning—just as if they were to blame, as Jimmy Silver had remarked.

"What was the row about?" asked Lovell.

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

"There's going to be a picnic," he remarked. "A Bagshot picnic—a whacking picnic—a regular break-the-record picnic. I heard Panky giving orders for stuff by the hundredweight—"

"Oh, draw it mild!" murmured Raby.

"By the ton!" said Jimmy Silver, firmly. "I tell you they're breaking the record this time. Panky must have had a whopping remittance from the motor-works. His pater's making tons of tin out of cars, you know. Jam-tarts, and cakes, and ginger-pop, and tongue, and preserves—blessed if I can remember all the list—and they're going to picnic on Grubb's Farm this afternoon."

"Oh!" said Lovell, rubbing his hands.

"This is where there's a raid," said Newcome. "No good leaving all that topping stuff to Bagshot bounders.

Panky can pay for it, and we'll scoff it, and that will be an equal division of labour."

"We're on in that scene!" said Raby emphatically.

"Exactly!" said Jimmy Silver. "You know old Grubb—grumpy old bouncer, who complains when hares and hounds go over his land. What was his land made for, I'd like to know? He walloped a kid in the Third with a big stick once, you remember. But he's got a nice meadow by the river where it's ripping to have a picnic, and I don't see why we shouldn't picnic there. It's a fine day, even if it is a bit chilly!"

"Where's the tuck?" asked Lovell, in a business-like tone.

"That's the trouble. Sergeant Kettle is going to send it there direct. They're too cute to take it into the study. They know we'd dish them if we could. In fact, I've told 'em so—hence the trouble—"

"Hinc illæ lacrimæ!" murmured Raby classically.

"Oh, bow-wow—keep that for Bootles!" said Jimmy Silver. "I told the rotters they could come to the picnic—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But after their check, we won't let 'em come!" said Jimmy. "After all, a picnic like that is too good for Bagshot bounders. What we've got to do is to spot that tuck doing its route-march to Grubb's Farm, and—"

"Nail it!"

"Exactly! We've got to scout, and keep an eye on the Bagshot bounders, and see when they start—also an eye on Sergeant Kettle's shop, in case he sends a kid with the goods. Those goods have got to be delivered to—"

"Us!" grinned the three.

"Precisely! By force or fraud, as Homer says—or, rather, doesn't say," said Jimmy Silver. "That's the campaign for this afternoon, my infants; we can cut footer practice for once. We don't need it so much as those Modern worms, anyway."

And Jimmy Silver & Co. proceeded to "stalk" Pankley and Poole of Bagshot. They were "on" to that picnic. All the laws of war justified them in commanding the supplies of the enemy.

They found the Bagshot chums in the end study just finishing brushing themselves down. Lovell strolled in and took up a book, and appeared to read. Pankley and Poole grinned, and strolled out.

Raby strolled along the passage after them.

They went downstairs, and sauntered into the hall, and Newcome sauntered quite close at hand.

Then they strolled into the quadrangle, and found Jimmy Silver strolling there, and his stroll kept pace with theirs.

Pankley turned upon him at last.

"Look here, Silver, what are you hanging about for?" he demanded.

"Information," said Silver calmly.

"If you're after our picnic—"

"Exactly!"

"Why, you cheeky rotter—"

"Peace, my infants," said Jimmy Silver. "I've offered once to let you come. I can't say fairer than that!"

Pankley and Poole walked off. But they could not escape the eagle eye of Jimmy Silver, even if they wished to. Pankley and Poole went into the tuckshop, and the Fistical Four, gathering together again, lined up outside the shop and adorned it with their graceful persons.

They heard a ginger-beer cork pop in the shop, and that was all. After about ten minutes, Jimmy Silver looked into the shop. It was empty.

"Hallo, sergeant! Where are those chaps?" he asked.

Sergeant Kettle grinned.

"They've gone through, Master Silver."

"Oh!"

Jimmy Silver rejoined his chums.

"The rotters have dodged us!" he growled. "They've gone through old Kettle's place. Scatter, and look for 'em. I'll keep an eye on the gates, and whistle if they try to get out."

"Right-ho!"

Pankley and Poole had vanished. Lovell and Raby and Newcome proceeded to hunt for them. Jimmy Silver sat down on one of the old oak benches, under the big beeches in the quad, where he had a full view of the gates. So long as Jimmy Silver was on the watch, the Bagshot juniors could not get out unseen. It was a question of prestige now with the Fistical Four—they were determined to bag that picnic.

But Pankley and Poole did not come down to the gates. Jimmy Silver began to get impatient. Suddenly he gave a start. A voice, proceeding from the other side of the big beech against which he was leaning, came to his ears, speaking in a cautious whisper.

"We've dodged the rotters now, Poole. It's all right. Now, lend me your giddy ears, old chap, and I'll tell you what we'll do!"

## THE THIRD CHAPTER.

### Spotted!

JIMMY SILVER grinned.

Pankley and Poole had "dodged" the juniors who were hunting for them, and had taken cover behind the thick old beeches. Jimmy Silver sat tight. If Pankley and Poole chose to discuss their plans in his hearing, that was their own look out. If they hadn't sense enough to look round the tree before they began to talk, they could take the consequences. That was how Jimmy Silver looked at it. He was a scout, and it was not up to him to give the enemy warning of his presence. He sat tight.

"The rotters are after the tuck, Panky. We shall never get it away. Better put it off till Saturday."

"I tell you I've got a dodge," said Pankley.

"It's no good," persisted Poole. "They'll drop on us while we're going, and collar the tuck."

"They can't do that; the sergeant's sending it."

"Well, if they're going to follow us to the meadow, and drop on us there, it's just the same. You can depend on it some of them have got an eye on the gates now."

Jimmy Silver grinned. He had his eye on the gates, and his ear on Pankley and Poole.

"That's where my dodge comes in," said Pankley. "I'm going to cut down to Grubb's on my bike—"

"What for?"

"To fix it with him. What about a password?"

"A—a what?"

"A password," said Pankley. "The rotters will never get on to that. We'll have the feed in old Grubb's garden, behind the farmhouse, instead of the meadow—"

"They can get there just the same."

"Not without coming through the farmhouse," said Pankley.

"Well, they can do that. Old Grubb wouldn't stop 'em. He doesn't know 'em by sight, nor us either, for that matter."

"That's where the password comes in," said Pankley. "I've thought it out, you see. All our fellows have got to go; but instead of going all at once, we can stroll out one or two at a time, and meet at Grubb's place at four o'clock."

"And those rotters will just stroll out, too, and meet there as well," said Poole. "I tell you, you'd better put it off till Saturday."

"You don't see the point, you ass! I'm going to arrange a password with old Grubb, and he will know which are the fellows, and which are not, and then he'll keep those wasters out."

"Oh, I see!"

"For instance, suppose I tell old Grubb that our fellows, when they come in, will say, 'Good-afternoon, have you used Snook's Soap?' Well, he'll let every chap go in who puts it like that, and every chap who doesn't will get kicked out."

"But that wouldn't do for a password—old Grubb wouldn't like it. He doesn't look as if he uses much soap, anyway!"

"Fathead! I'm only putting a case!" said Pankley. "We can make up a good password. Lemme see—any old thing will do."

"Who goes there?" suggested Poole.

"No, that wouldn't do. Lemme see—I'll arrange for the chaps to say, 'Hallo! What's your price for corn?' The rotters wouldn't guess that in a month of Sundays, even if they suspected at all."

"Good!"

"All we've got to do is to cut down there and give old Grubb the tip. I'll warn him that every chap who doesn't give the password is a rotter coming to kick up a row, and ask him to kick 'em out. I'll tell him he needn't stand on ceremony with 'em, because they're a set of young ruffians who want to bone our piece."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll get down there now. When we come back, we'll call a meeting of the fellows in the end study, and whisper it to 'em, and then they can stroll out one at a time. Then, if those bounders follow us there, they'll find old Grubb ready for 'em with a big stick!"

"Hurrah!"

"Come and get out the bikes. If those worms spot us, we shall have to run for it."

"Right-ho!"

"And, mind, not a word to any of the chaps. Giddy wails have ears, you know, and if Silver got on to it—"

"Mum's the word!" agreed Poole.

Jimmy Silver, sitting silent on the other side of the beech, indulged in a broad grin as the Bagshot juniors' footsteps died away.

He would have liked to utter a yell of laughter, but he restrained it with an effort.

Pankley's cunning device of a password was a "dodge" of which even Jimmy Silver would never have dreamed if the two plotters had not so kindly talked it over within range of his ears.

Jimmy Silver did not move till he judged that the two juniors had had time to get to the bike-shed. Then he rose, and scuttled away, looking for his chums, Lovell and Raby and Newcome bore down on him from three different quarters.

"I've spotted 'em!" exclaimed Lovell. "They're making for the bike-shed!"

"That's all right," said Jimmy Silver.

"Come indoors!"

Lovell stared.

"What!"

"They'll get off!" said Raby.

"That's what I want 'em to do," said Jimmy Silver coolly.

"But—but—"

"I've made a giddy discovery. Come on—come up to the study!"

The Co., wondering, followed Jimmy Silver to the end study. Jimmy looked out of the window. Pankley and Poole were hurriedly wheeling their bikes down to the gates.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 43.

"They're off!" growled Lovell.

"Only those two!" said Raby. "What about the others? They're all in it!"

"Lend me your ears, as we say in the play," said Jimmy Silver. "I will a tale unfold—"

"Oh, cut the cackle, old chap!" said Lovell. "What's the little game?"

Jimmy Silver explained.

"My only hat!" gasped Lovell. "What a dodge—a giddy password! And they didn't see you! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted the Classical Four.

"They're going to arrange the giddy password now!" grinned Silver. "And when they come back, there's going to be a meeting in this study—"

"And we—What are you up to?" asked Lovell, as Jimmy Silver took the key out of the study door.

Jimmy slipped the key into his pocket.

"When that meeting meets in this study, it's going to stay here," he remarked. "When they're all here, I'll look 'em in—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Then we'll walk down to Grubb's place—"

"And give the password—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And scoff the picnic!"

The Fistical Four yelled at the idea. Putter of Bagshot looked into the study. He glanced suspiciously at the Fistical Four, who were wiping away tears of merriment.

"Hallo! Where's Pankley?" he asked.

"Echo answers where," said Lovell.

"What's the little joke?" demanded Putter.

"Quite above your comprehension, my dear," said Jimmy Silver affably. "Don't you worry your poor little brain about it. You go and think about the picnic."

Putter stared, and walked away down the passage, looking puzzled. The Fistical Four chuckled gleefully.

When Putter was gone, they ensconced themselves in the next study, to wait and watch for the meeting in the end study. They had some time to wait, and the rest of the Rookwood fellows were enjoying themselves on the football-ground. The Fourth-Form passage was quite deserted. But, as Jimmy Silver remarked, Pankley's panic was worth waiting for.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### Preparing Mr. Grubb.

PANKLEY and Poole pedalled away down the road, grinning.

They, as well as the Fistical Four, seemed to see something very humorous in the situation.

Indeed, Pankley was laughing so heartily as he rode down to Coombe that he came very near to falling off his bicycle, and narrowly escaped a collision with his chum.

"Look out, fathead!" said Poole.

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Pankley.

"What do you think of it, Poole, old son? What do you think of the sweet and child-like innocence of Rookwood?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To think that Jimmy Silver—the cute Jimmy, the keen Jimmy—hadn't a single suspish that we knew he was outside the tuckshop, drinking in every word—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Poole.

"To think that he never dreamed that we spotted him on the seat under the tree—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To think that he swallowed it all whole, without a suspish—"

Poole gasped for breath.

"Such lamb-like innocence ought to be rewarded," said Pankley. "I should never have believed there was such dove-

like simplicity in the wide world, if I hadn't been to Rookwood."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The two hilarious juniors rode through the old village of Coombe, and dismounted at a stile beyond. From the stile there was a footpath leading to Mr. Grubb's farm.

Mr. Grubb was an exceedingly testy old gentleman. His wrath had been roused by Rookwood juniors crossing his land, and he had a "down" on these enterprising young gentlemen. Mr. Grubb, who disliked public footpaths and rights-of-way across his fields, had taken the liberty of closing a footpath with barbed wire. Some cheery young person from Rookwood had paid his barbed wire a visit with a pair of wire-cutters, and Mr. Grubb had had all his trouble for nothing—to say nothing of the expense of the wire.

Naturally, Mr. Grubb was not pleased. Mr. Grubb was not only unpopular at Rookwood, but in the neighbourhood generally. It was whispered that Mr. Grubb was making fabulous sums by holding back his corn for rises in price, which naturally did not make him popular at a time when bread was dear.

"You first," said Poole, as the two juniors dismounted at the stile.

Pankley nodded, and vaulted over the stile, and walked along to the farmhouse.

Mr. Grubb could be seen in the yard, engaged in ragging a farm-hand, who had apparently incurred his lordly displeasure. He looked round as Pankley came up, with a frown on his rugged face. Mr. Grubb did not like boys; indeed, his secret opinion was that they ought, as a rule, to be drowned at birth like puppies. Mr. Grubb had long forgotten the dim and distant time when he had been a boy himself.

"Hallo!" he said gruffly.

Pankley raised his cap politely.

"Good-afternoon!" he said.

"Arternoon!" growled Mr. Grubb.

"What do you want 'ere? You're one of them Rookwood pests, I s'pose?"

"Ahem! I've come about a rather important matter, Mr. Grubb. I want to ask you a question."

"Well?"

"What's your price for corn?" asked Pankley.

Mr. Grubb glared, and took a tighter grip on his whip. He knew, of course, that a schoolboy could not have come to buy corn, and he took the question as a reference to his hard-fisted dealings—as indeed it was.

"I've heard," went on Pankley cheerfully, "that you're selling your corn very dear, Mr. Grubb."

"You young raskil—"

"So I thought I ought to point out to you that it is very unpatriotic," said Pankley, with sublime coolness.

"Wot?"

"It's wrong to hold it back from market, to wait for a rise in price," said Pankley solemnly. "I thought, perhaps, that it hadn't occurred to you that it was wrong, Mr. Grubb, so I came along to tell you."

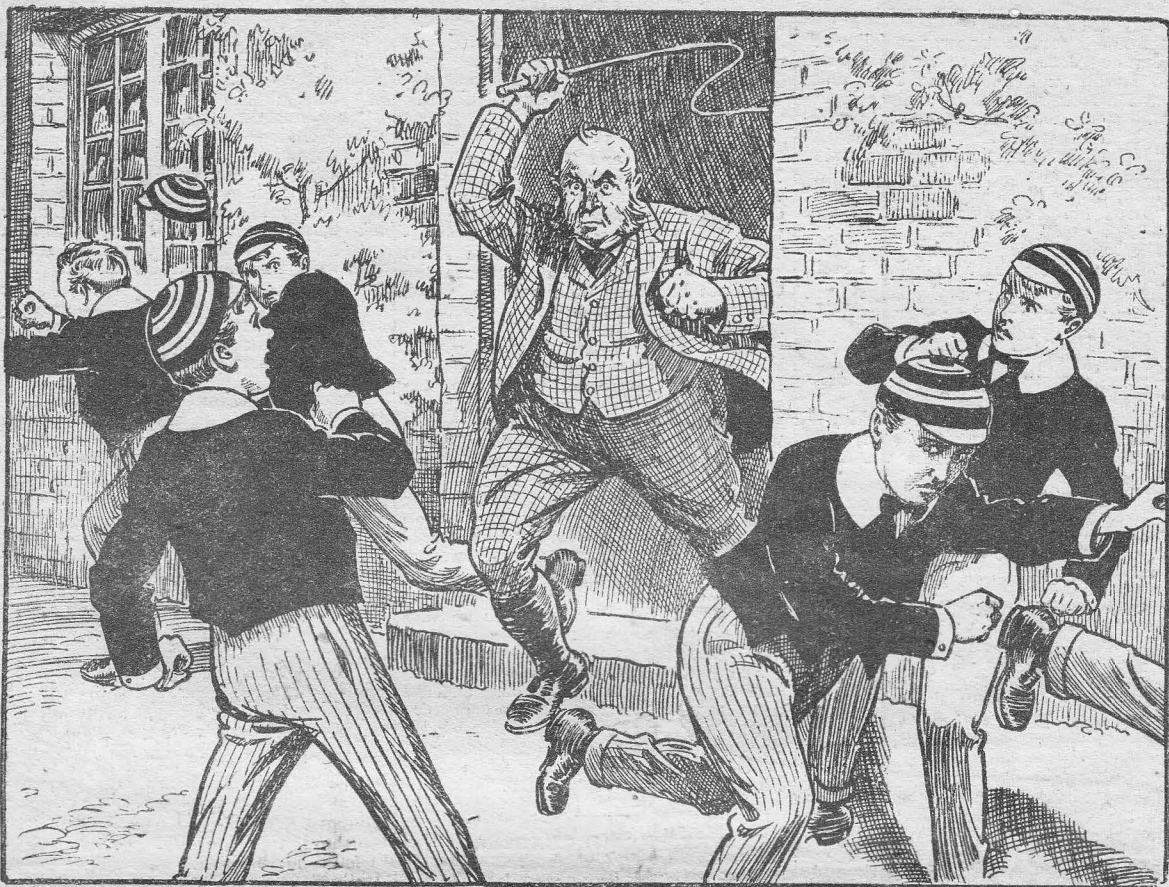
Mr. Grubb turned purple. He could hardly believe his ears. He had sometimes received "slang" from Rookwood juniors, but such astounding impertinence as this had never fallen upon his ears before.

He looked at Pankley as if he would eat him.

"Wot?" he gasped. "Wot? Why, you impudent young villain—"

"Don't be ratty, Mr. Grubb," said Pankley, and, keeping a wary eye on the whip. "Let me urge you, my young friend—I mean, my old friend—not to act like a skinflint—"

Pankley had no time to get further.



Mr. Grubb made a sudden bound out of the doorway, and lashed round him furiously with his big whip. "You young raskils!" he roared. "So that's it, is it? Wot's my price for corn—wot? I'll teach you wot's my price for corn!" (see page 13.)

Mr. Grubb made a jump at him like a kangaroo. Pankley had just time to dodge, and fled across the field, with Mr. Grubb racing in pursuit.

Pankley's young legs were swifter than Mr. Grubb's old ones, which was a very fortunate circumstance for Pankley. He cleared a hedge at a bound, and vanished.

Mr. Grubb was not equal to clearing hedges, and he had to stop, and he turned back towards the farmhouse breathless and growling.

He had just reached the farmhouse, when Poole came sauntering up. The farmer gave him a glare.

"Good-afternoon!" said Poole.

Mr. Grubb looked at him, and came a little closer, with a grip on his whip. He was quite prepared for another question about the price of corn, and if Poole uttered it he meant that Poole should not escape as Pankley had done.

Poole watched him rather nervously, and backed away as Mr. Grubb came closer.

He had to carry out his part of the programme, but it was not a safe business.

"I called to ask you a question," said Poole.

"Ho!" said Mr. Grubb, coming a little nearer.

"A lot of fellows are coming this afternoon to speak to you about it," said Poole, still backing away.

"Ho!" said Mr. Grubb. "Har they?"

"They har," said Poole humorously, and still backing, while the stout old gentleman followed him up with gleaming eyes. "What's your price for corn, Mr. Grubb— Oh, my hat!"

Poole bolted as the farmer rushed at him.

The whip snapped round his legs, and Poole gave a fiendish yell.

Then he was out of reach, and he fairly whizzed towards the stile, and cleared it without touching it.

Pankley was waiting for him there, and had the bikes ready.

"Jump on!" he yelled. "He's coming!"

Mr. Grubb came thumping up to the stile.

The two juniors jumped into their saddles and pedalled away for their lives as the infuriated Mr. Grubb reached the road.

The farmer stood in the road and brandished his whip after them. But they were safe out of reach, and they did not slacken down till they were through the village.

Then Pankley free-wheeled and caught his breath, and chuckled.

"Worked like a charm!" he grinned.

"Yow!" said Poole.

"What's the matter with you, Poole?"

"Wow! The awful beast gave me a cut round the legs!" groaned Poole.

"Yow! I can tell you it hurts!"

"Never mind—"

"Fathead! I do mind!"

"Pooh! That's nothing!" said Pankley, who had not felt the weight of Mr. Grubb's whip. "That's all right!"

"Silly ass! Wot!"

"Think of those Rookwood chaps dropping in this afternoon and giving him the password!" chuckled Pankley. "Think of old Grubb's face when they call on

him and say: 'What's your price for— ha, ha!—corn?'"

And Poole gurgled with mirth.

#### THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Jimmy Silver Takes a Party.

"HERE they come!" whispered Jimmy Silver.

All Rookwood was busy on the football-field, with the exception of the Fistical Four of the Fourth.

They were lying low in Jones minor's study, waiting.

Their patience was rewarded at last.

There was a sound of footsteps in the passage, and Jimmy Silver, peering out, the door being half an inch ajar, spotted three or four Bagshot fellows coming along to the end study.

Three or four more came along after them, then came Potter, and at last Pankley and Poole.

Evidently the meeting was coming off at last.

The Bagshot juniors passed into the end study, and the Fistical Four heard the door close.

Jimmy Silver stole out into the passage on tiptoe.

Cautiously—very cautiously—he stole along to the end study. There was a murmur of voices within—many voices.

With really wonderful caution Jimmy Silver inserted the key into the outside of the lock and turned it.

Click!

There was an exclamation in the study. "Hallo! What's that?"

"Somebody's locked the door!"

"My hat!"

"You can come out now, you fellows!" called out Jimmy Silver to his chums, and Lovell and Raby and Newcombe joined him in the passage, chuckling.

The study door was shaken from within. It did not open.

"Hallo! Who's locked us in?" shouted Pankley.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, open the door! We've got to go out!"

The Fistical Four yelled.

"Going to a picnic?" howled Lovell.

"Well, yes."

"Got the password all right?" shouted Raby.

"Eh? How did you know there was a password?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you rotters—"

The Fistical Four roared. Pankley & Co. were entrapped in the study and locked safely in. The coast was clear for the picnic raiders.

"Good-bye!" said Newcombe.

"Let us out, you rotters!"

"Sorry! We can't," said Jimmy Silver. "We're going to a picnic. You'd be rather in the way, you know, if we let you out."

"Look here!" came Pankley's voice through the keyhole. "You can't go! Grubb won't let you into his garden!"

"Yes, he will, if we give him the password," chuckled Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, you rotter!"

"Sorry we haven't time to stay and listen to your sweet voice, Panky! Good-bye!"

"Look here—"

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not stay to look there. They walked down the passage, almost doubled up with mirth. Jimmy Silver had the key of the study in his pocket. The whole dozen Bagshot juniors were locked in the end study, and there was no help for them. They could not hammer on the door to attract attention, for that would have brought Mr. Bootles on the scene, and the Fistical Four knew that Pankley & Co. would play the game. In a similar situation Jimmy Silver & Co. would have depended on themselves, and would have been careful not to bring a master into the affair, and they expected as much of Pankley.

The Fistical Four sauntered, grinning, out of the School House. They were feeling exceedingly pleased with themselves. At last their prestige was to be restored, and the Bagshot bounders were to learn that they could not keep their end up against the Fistical Four.

"I say, this is too good to keep to ourselves," said Jimmy Silver. "Let's be hospitable. There's plenty for everybody, and we may, as well take those Modern worms along. It will show 'em, too, that we can down the Bagshot bounders. They've been smirking at us long enough."

"Good idea!" agreed the Co.

Tommy Dodd & Co., of the Modern side, had just come off the football-field. They greeted the Fistical Four with suspicious looks.

"Wherefore the cackle?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"Like to come to a picnic?" asked Jimmy Silver affably.

"Heaps of tuck!" said Lovell. "Six dozen jam-tarts—"

"Three dozen ginger-pop!" said Raby.

"Four cakes!" chuckled Newcome, "and jam and preserves!"

"Been robbing a bank?" asked Tommy Dodd, in astonishment.

"No; we've been robbing a bounder," chuckled Jimmy Silver. "It's a raid, my sons. We're doing the Bagshot

bounders in the eye, and we're willing to share the loot."

"We're on!" said Tommy Dodd at once. "Where is it?"

"At Grubb's Farm."

"And where are the Bagshot chaps?"

"Locked up in my study."

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle howled when Jimmy Silver explained. The idea of Pankley & Co. remaining locked up in the study while the Rookwooders scoffed the picnic was enough to make them howl. They even admitted that for once the Classics had kept their end up, which was a great admission for the Modern heroes to make.

Jimmy Silver collected more guests. He was generous and hospitable. Besides, as he remarked, the picnic was coming cheap. Jones minor and Hooker and Flynn of the Classical side joined the party, and Towle and Lacy and Webb of the Modern side. Topham and Towns-end, the dandies of the Fourth, condescended to join, and three or four Shell fellows came into the party. When Jimmy Silver & Co. started from Rookwood the whole party numbered twenty.

It was a numerous party for the picnic, but Jimmy Silver convinced them that there would be plenty for all in reciting the tremendous orders he had heard Pankley giving in the tuckshop.

The juniors started for Grubb's Farm in great spirits, and if anything cheered them more than the prospect of the picnic, it was the thought of a dozen Bagshot juniors crowded in the end study, cooling their heels while their whacking picnic was "scoffed."

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

### The Picnickers.

"HURRAH!"

Pankley and Poole watched, from the window of the end study the merry party that started out with Jimmy Silver.

They howled with laughter as the Rookwood crowd disappeared out of the gates.

"Where does the blessed joke come in?" demanded Putter, who, like the rest of the Bagshot juniors, was getting impatient. "I don't see anything funny in being locked up in a study, for one!"

"Same here!" said Wilson. "Where does the merry joke come in? What did you let that bounder lock us up here for, Panky?"

"And what about the picnic?"

"What are you cackling at, you chumps?"

"If there's a joke on, tell us what it is, or we'll jolly well bump you through the blessed floor, you images!" exclaimed Putter, exasperated.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Pankley and Poole.

"Oh, collar 'em!"

"How are we going to get out, you dummies?" howled Wilson. "I've a jolly good mind to hammer on the door and bring old Bootles here. I'm not going to be shut up here all the giddy afternoon!"

"Peace, my infants!" said Pankley, with a wave of the hand. "Listen while I breathe a whisper of enlightenment!"

"Well, buck up with it, or you'll get this ink down your neck!" growled Putter. "I don't see the fun myself in being locked up in a study without room to breathe. I may be dense."

"No 'may' about it, old chap," said Pankley. "You are dense!"

"Look here—"

"It's the jape of the season," said Pankley. "We've got a picnic on for the afternoon, and those bounders are on

the track. They've gone to Grubb's Farm for the picnic."

"Yes?"

"While we're locked up here!" shrieked Wilson.

"Exactly!"

"My hat! I'll bash that door down with a chair—"

"Peace, my child!" said Pankley soothingly. "Jimmy Silver has heard us lay our little plans, but those little plans were laid entirely and solely for his benefit, and those cheery youths won't find a picnic at Grubb's Farm—they will find old Grubb on the war-path!"

"Oh!"

Pankley, in an airy manner, proceeded to explain the deep-laid plot, and the Bagshot juniors simply gasped as they listened.

"Well, that takes the cake!" said Putter. "You mean to say they swallowed it all without a suspish—"

"Not the shadow of a suspish."

"Great Scott!"

"But where's the grub all the time?" demanded Wilson.

"The grub's in Sergeant Kettle's shop, my son," said Pankley. "I've given him strict instructions to keep it there till I come for it, and not to answer any questions those bounders may ask!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And while they're enjoying themselves at Grubb's Farm, we're going to enjoy our little selves with a picnic in the wood," said Pankley.

"But we're locked in!"

"Of course, we are! I expected Jimmy Silver would think of a dodge like that when he heard that we were going to hold a meeting in the study," chuckled Pankley. "I should have been disappointed in Jimmy if he hadn't thought of that!"

"And you let him do it?" gasped Putter.

"Certainly!"

"Well, you ass, we can't get out without making a row, and we can't do that without bringing Bootles into it."

"Shush!" said Wilson. "As soon as I came in, I noticed the key was gone, and I knew we were going to be locked in. It's all serene!"

"Going to crawl out through the keyhole?" asked a sarcastic voice.

"Or up the chimney?"

"Or jump out of the window?"

"We could get out of the window if we liked," said Pankley cheerfully. "I've got a coil of rope in my box. But it won't be necessary, as it happens, as we're only locked in."

"How can you unlock a door without a key?" demanded Wilson.

"With a screwdriver, my son!" said Pankley, taking that tool from his pocket. "I was only waiting for the Rookwood bounders to get clear."

"Oh, by gum!"

Pankley, with the admiring glances of the Bagshot juniors fixed upon him, proceeded calmly to unscrew the lock from the door. In five minutes the lock was removed, and the door, though still locked, came open.

Pankley laid the lock and the screwdriver on the table.

"Jimmy Silver can find those when he comes in," he remarked. "We'll tell him about the picnic afterwards."

"Oh, good!" chuckled Putter.

"And he can tell us how he got on with old Grubb—"

In a hilarious mood, the Bagshot crowd swarmed out of the study, and hurried down to Sergeant Kettle's shop in a body.

"Parcels ready, sergeant?" asked Pankley.

"Yessir!"

Sergeant Kettle lifted up three large bundles from the little counter, and passed them over to the Bagshot juniors. "Thanks! Come on, you chaps!"

Pankley and Poole and Putter carried the parcels, and the whole band, grinning with glee, walked out of the gates.

They did not take the direction of Grubb's Farm. That was a neighbourhood Pankley & Co. meant to keep away from very carefully.

They went down the road towards Coombe, and turned into the footpath through the wood, and came out on the bank of the shining river.

"Here we are!" said Pankley, plumping down his parcel.

"Hurrah!"

The gleeful Bagshot juniors set to work at once.

The big parcels were unfastened, and the good things unpacked, and a dozen pairs of eyes gleamed with satisfaction at the goodly array.

"My hat! This is something like!" said Putter. "And those bounders thought they were going to bag a feed like this, by gum!"

"They're not quite up to our weight," said Pankley loftily. "I wonder how they've got on with old Grubb?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Bagshot crowd chuckled merrily as they proceeded with the picnic.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

An Astounding Reception.

JIMMY SILVER & CO., without the faintest suspicion of the manner in which the astute Pankley had pulled their legs, sauntered cheerily along the road to Grubb's Farm.

It was getting towards tea-time, and they had good healthy appetites. The memory of the long list of good things that Pankley had ordered in the sergeant's little shop at Rookwood made their mouths water.

Not a suspicion crossed their minds of the dreadful truth.

They clambered over the stile, and came in a body towards the farmhouse, the residence of the testy Mr. Grubb. That Mr. Grubb was a very testy and unpleasant old gentleman they knew. But they knew that picnic parties often came to the farm, which was picturesquely situated on the Coombe nplands, with a view of the wide moor, and the Channel in the distance. There was nothing surprising in Pankley having selected that spot for his picnic.

"I suppose it'll be all right," said Topham, as if struck by a sudden doubt, as they came near the farmhouse.

"Why shouldn't it?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Well, old Grubb is a sour old beggar, and he ain't fond of Rookwood chaps," said Topham. "If he guessed that we didn't belong to the party at all—"

"How could he guess, fathead? He must know that Pankley & Co. are at Rookwood, and if he recognises some of us, he won't know they haven't asked us. The password will settle it."

"He may be surprised that Pankley isn't with us," remarked Flynn.

"We'll mention that Pankley was detained at the last moment."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, it'll be all right!" said Tommy Dodd. "What beats me is that the silly ass should arrange a password, and all that, and then let you chaps spot it all!"

"They're not up to our weight," explained Jimmy Silver. "We can down Bagshot bounders just as easily as we can down Moderns."

"Why, you Classical ass——" began Tommy Dodd warmly.

"Now, you Modern fathead——"

"Look here——"

"Peace, my children," said Lovell. "Let's get on to that picnic. We don't want to waste time; Pankley & Co. may get out."

"Yes, come on!" said Jimmy Silver. "You Modern chaps are such beggars for arguing. Here we are!"

The numerous party of expectant picnickers came up to the farmhouse.

Jimmy Silver knocked boldly at the door.

It was opened by Mr. Grubb himself. Mr. Grubb had spotted them from the window. There was a deep frown on his rugged face, but the juniors were not surprised at that; they never expected to see Mr. Grubb looking good-tempered.

Mr. Grubb was not looking, and not feeling, good-tempered. He remembered Poole's remark that more fellows were coming along that afternoon to ask him about the price of his corn. At the sight of the Rookwood crowd he had no doubt that they had come.

That was why he had opened the door himself. And that, too, was why he had taken the precaution to slip his big whip under his arm. Mr. Grubb was ready for business. If this crowd of young rascals had come to cheek him, Mr. Grubb was resolved that they should suffer for their sins and should certainly not get off so cheaply as the first two practical jokers had done.

"Well?" he rapped out.

Jimmy Silver raised his cap politely. He was always polite, though really politeness seemed wasted on Mr. Grubb.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Grubb!" said Jimmy.

"What do you want?"

"We've come to the picnic."

"What!"

"The picnic," said Lovell. "In your garden, you know."

"Eh?"

"It's all right, Mr. Grubb," said Jimmy Silver. "We understand about the password."

"Wot?"

"What's your price for corn?" said Jimmy Silver affably.

"Ho!"

"What's your price for corn?" chorused all the juniors together.

What happened next seemed like an earthquake to the astounded juniors.

Mr. Grubb made a sudden bound out of the doorway, which brought him into the middle of the crowd of them.

Then he lashed round him furiously with his big whip.

"You young raskils!" roared Mr. Grubb. "So that's it, is it? Wot's my price for corn—wot? I'll teach you wot's my price for corn!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"He's mad!"

"Great Scott!"

"Yarooooooh!"

"Help!"

"Oh! Ah! Oow! Wow!"

Lash, lash! Slash! Swish! Whack, whack, whack, whack!

The astounded juniors scattered in all directions. They were too astounded to run for the moment, and there was not much room for running in the farm garden. The long whip lashed and slashed round them and among them, doing great execution.

There were yells and shrieks of pain and wrath on all sides, and the juniors tumbled over one another in their efforts to escape the slashes of the infuriated Mr. Grubb.

"Wot's the price for corn—hey?" roared Mr. Grubb. "I'll show yer! Take that! I'll teach you manners, you young raskils! Take that, and that! The other young raskil told me you'd be coming—take that!—and I was ready for yer. Take that, and that, and that!"

"Yow! Ow! Ow!"

"Stop him, somebody!"

"Yarooooh!"

"Yow! Ow! Help! Murder!"

"Oh! Ow! Fire! Yah!"

Slash, slash, slash!

The juniors, convinced that Mr. Grubb had gone suddenly mad, scattered, and Mr. Grubb charged after them, still slashing away. Some of them escaped by the gate, with severe pains in their legs and backs. Jimmy Silver & Co. were cornered against a hedge, and they scrambled through the hedge with the whip lashing on them. They got through with torn clothes, and ran. Mr. Grubb charged Tommy Dodd & Co., who were desperately negotiating a fence.

"Here he comes!" shrieked Tommy Dodd. "Hop it!"

Lash, lash, lash!

"Yarooooh! Stoppit! Help!"

"Take that, and that, and that!" roared Mr. Grubb. "Wot's the price of my corn, you young raskils! I'll larn yer! I'll——"

"Yah! Oh! Yooooop!"

The three Tommies rolled over the fence, and fled, and Mr. Grubb glared round in search of new victims. But all the unhappy picnickers were out of reach now, and the farmer, breathing hard after his exertions, and somewhat satisfied with the punishment inflicted upon the supposed practical jokers, shook his whip after the fleeing juniors.

"Garge! Willyum! Tummas!" he roared. "Chase them young raskils off my land! You 'ear me? Garge! Willyum! Tummas!"

But the juniors did not need chasing. They were sprinting away as if on the oinder-path, heading for the river, and Garge and Willyum and Tummas had simply no chance of getting near them. Jimmy Silver & Co. were good runners—they had distinguished themselves on the footer-field, but it is safe to say that that afternoon they broke all records.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Picnic.

"O H dear!"

"Wow, wow!"

"Ow! My legs!"

"Yow! My back!"

"Yoooooop! My shoulders!"

"Oh crumbs!"

It was a chorus of lamentation. The celebrated lamentations of Job were a joke to it. The voices of the Rookwood juniors were as the voice of Rachel of old, who mourned and would not be comforted.

The unhappy victims of Pankley's little joke had run and run, till they could run no farther. They were a mile by that time from Mr. Grubb's property, and quite safe from pursuit. They flung themselves down in the grass of the river-bank and groaned in chorus.

Rough handling was not a new experience to the Rookwood juniors, but never in all their experience had they come upon such terrific handling as they had received that afternoon.

Every fellow had had at least two or three lashes of Mr. Grubb's big whip, some of them as many as a dozen, and they were scratched and torn and bumped through scrambling over fences and hedges and thorns.

It was a pitiable scene on the green bank of the river, and the sounds that rose from the dishevelled juniors would have touched the heart of a Prussian Hun.

For a quarter of an hour, at least, there were no sounds but the sounds of lamentation.

Jimmy Silver groaned in bitterness of spirit. He could see it all now, of course. Mr. Grubb's conduct showed that there was no picnic there, and his fury when he heard the password and his mention of another "young raskil" who had said they would be coming more than enlightened Jimmy Silver.

He could see it all now, and he simply blushed as he realised that that little talk under the beech in the quad at Rookwood must have been planned by Pankley and Poole for his especial benefit, and they must have known he was there all the time, and had deliberately taken them in. The whole thing was a gigantic jape. But it had been schemed so astutely and played up to the very end so cleverly that even the keen-witted Jimmy Silver hadn't had the faintest suspicion.

He had been so hopelessly "done" that he had no defence to make.

"It's no good moaning over it," said Tommy Dodd, taking pity on his old rival in his hour of defeat and humiliation. "But you have had your leg pulled, Silver, and no mistake. They've simply done you in the eye."

"Rub it in!"

"Duck the silly idiot in the river!" moaned Topham.

"Oh, shut up!" said Tommy Dodd. "Don't go for a chap when he's down. It's only natural for a Classical duffer to be taken in. Well, I vote we get off; no good sticking here and groaning. I want a wash and a brush-up!"

The unhappy victims picked themselves up wearily. Their injuries were not hurting them so much now; it was the defeat, the knowledge that they had been so thoroughly done by the Bagshot bounders that rankled.

"Still, those rotters are shut up in the study," said Newcome hopefully. "They've got to stay there, anyway, till we let them out."

Tommy Dodd laughed scoffingly.

"You ass! Pankley must have known you were shutting him up there! Bet you he had some dodge ready for getting out! Had it all fixed up, of course. Bet you they didn't stay there ten minutes after they saw us clear off!"

"Oh!"

"And they're having the picnic somewhere now!" moaned Lovell. "Oh, I shall never get over this! Jimmy, you'll turn my hair grey this time!"

"Go it!" said Jimmy Silver. "Rub it in!"

"No, I won't, old chap," said Lovell affectionately. "You couldn't help it. We ought to have smelt a mouse, too. It was all too jolly good to be true, you know—if we'd only thought of it!"

"If!" groaned Jimmy Silver.

The picnickers—they did not feel much like picnickers now—tramped down the path beside the river, to take the short cut through the wood home. They tramped on in glum silence, broken only by an occasional groan, for some time.

But all of a sudden Jimmy Silver halted.

"Great Scott!" he panted.

"Wharrer marrer with you?" mumbled Raby.

Jimmy caught his arm.

"Look!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Great pip!"

In an instant the Rookwood juniors forgot their pains and their aches, their scratches and their bumps. Their eyes fairly blazed at the scene before them.

It was a happy and peaceful scene—nothing less than a picnic-party of a dozen fellows, seated among piles of good things, on a grassy slope, beside the shining river.

"Pankley & Co.!"

"Oh, what luck!"

"Our luck's in, after all!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows, I brought you out this afternoon to a picnic. The programme has been a little—a little disarranged. But there's the picnic!"

A chuckle ran through the ranks of the Rookwooders.

There was the picnic!

Pankley & Co., enjoying themselves, had not observed the dusty band in the distance. They were laughing and chatting as they discussed the mountain of good things.

"Cover!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

The Rookwooders did not need telling twice. They glided into the cover of the wood. Even Topham and Townsend, the slackers, were keen for once. There was the picnic, and signal vengeance for their manifold wrongs. There were twenty of them, and the Bagshot bounders hadn't a ghostly.

They disappeared into the wood, and with infinite caution they picked their way among the trees and thickets, approaching the Bagshot camp with the stealth of Red Indians on the war-path.

Closer and closer, keeping in cover till they reached the edge of the glade, and this time it was Pankley & Co. who had suspicion. Pankley's voice could be heard as they approached.

"I wonder how those kids have got on with Grubb?"

"I wonder how they've got off!" said Poole.

And there was a howl of laughter from the Bagshot crowd.

"Poor little dears!" said Pankley.

"They can't keep their end up against us, you know. That ass Silver—quite an ass, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And that duffer, Tommy Dodd, too—quite a duffer!"

"Oh, quite!"

"If they could see us now!" grinned Poole.

"Ha, ha! Pass the jam!"

"If they could only see us!" chuckled Putter. "Why—hallo—what—who—which—My only hat!"

"Go for 'em!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

With a rush the Rookwood crowd came out into the glade.

Pankley & Co. leaped to their feet.

"Jimmy Silver!" gasped Pankley. "Oh, thunder! Line up—back up, Bagshot!"

"Give 'em socks!"

"Mop 'em up!"

"Hurrah!"

The Rookwood rush simply swept Pankley & Co. off their feet. They were hurled in all directions. They were rolled and bumped over, squashed in the grass, pitched into the thickets.

They simply hadn't a chance. Pankley and Poole and Putter put up a great fight, but they were rolled over, plastered with their own jam-tarts and condensed milk, and were glad to wriggle away and run for it. In three minutes the picnickers, dusty and dishevelled, jammy and milky and sticky, were in full flight, and the victorious Rookwooders remained in possession of the camp—and the picnic. "Hurrah for us!" chortled Lovell. "Now, you Modern bounders, what have you got to say? Haven't we brought you out to a ripping picnic?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tophole!" chuckled Tommy Dodd. "We let those bounders off lightly! I wish they'd come back!"

"Ha, ha! They won't come back!" said Jimmy Silver. "Gentlemen, here is the picnic! Pile in!"

"Hurrah!"

The Rookwooders piled in. All their woes were forgotten now; victory was theirs at last. And while the Bagshot fellows, in a very sticky and dishevelled state, were retreating disconsolately through the wood, Jimmy Silver & Co. settled down with great enjoyment to Pankley's picnic. In spite of all they had been through, he felt satisfied. At last they had scared a point "Up Against Pankley!"

THE END.

(Another long complete story of the chums of Rookwood next week, entitled "The Jape of the Season!" By Owen Conquest.)



## "Little Polly Flinders."

A THRILLING NEW  
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# HIS FATHER'S ENEMY.

BY  
MARTIN CLIFFORD

A MAGNIFICENT, NEW LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE OF TOM MERRY & CO., OF ST. JIM'S.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

### Mellish Hears Something.

"HERE you are!" said Digby. "And, mind you, that's the very last you'll get from me. So you may as well clear out, for it won't pay you to stay."

And as he spoke he thrust into the outstretched hand of the man who called himself Justin Carruthers a ten-pound note.

He had borrowed that note from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the one chum left to him; and it meant mortgaging his next term's pocket-money. Not that Gussy would insist upon payment in full next term, or would press for payment at all, as far as that went. But Dig was proud, and Gussy's own pride would make him understand what Dig felt in the matter.

And Digby would not have grudged even the prospect of stony-brokiness that stretched before him if only he could have been sure that the ten pounds would buy this man off.

But how could he trust him?

The man was a wrong 'un. About that there could be no doubt. Digby's belief in their kinship did not blind his eyes to that fact.

"That's a pleasant and friendly way to talk to your uncle!" said the fellow sneeringly.

"I don't feel pleasant, and I don't feel friendly," replied Dig. "You may as well have it straight. I'm not a bit surprised that my pater bars you—I can't stand you at any price! You've messed up everything for me at St. Jim's, and—"

"My dear Bob, you!"

"Don't call me Bob!"

"My dear boy, then! You are talking out of the back of your neck! How can I have queered your pitch for you at St. Jim's when I have not been within half a mile of the place? I fail to perceive that I should have done that even had I called upon you there, for I flatter myself that there is now nothing about me which would lead anyone to take me for anything but a gentleman."

And it was true that the fellow looked in better case than he had done when he first turned up at Rylcombe. Some of the money with which Dig had supplied him had evidently been spent upon his wardrobe; and, apart from the fact that his face was that of a man who had plainly lived years of dissipation, most people would have noticed nothing wrong with him.

"That's not the thing," said Dig bitterly. "You don't need to turn up there in order to give me away. Staying at a low pothouse like the Green Man and gambling with cads like Racke and Crooke is quite enough for that."

"Cads, eh? Now, I have been thinking of making the suggestion that when those two bright youths next came along for a friendly hand you should accompany them."

"Catch me at it!" snapped Dig.

"I gather that they are not in your circle? Possibly theirs is too exclusive for you? I must say that I consider my respected brother-in-law treats his son with that liberality which—"

"You shut up about the pater! You're not fit to black his boots!"

"Don't attempt that tone with me, my boy, for I won't stand it! If I choose to look you up at St. Jim's I shall do so. Your

friend Crooke expressed his opinion last night that it would be the correct card."

"Did he? I sha'n't forget that!" said Digby hotly. "I can see what the sweep wanted! But there's one thing—he couldn't, and you couldn't, make things much worse for me there than they are now."

"Ah! I understand that there is some feeling against you on account of the foul blow you struck young Crooke. But that is entirely your own fault, I consider."

"I didn't strike him a foul blow, and I don't believe you think I did. And, look here! You promised to clear out when you had that cash. You'd no right to be talking about more games with those two cads!"

"My dear, innocent youth, you can hardly expect me to go at once because my presence in the vicinity does not suit your book!"

"Nor yet because you've promised, I suppose?"

"Nor yet because of that. Have you never heard of the proverbial likeness between promises and pie-crusts?"

It was in the road between St. Jim's and Rylcombe village that the two stood talking, on a misty day which rendered objects a few yards distant invisible. The hedges on either side could be seen but dimly; and Mellish, the sneak of the Fourth, hidden behind that to the right of Digby, as he stood facing towards Rylcombe, was safely hidden.

Percy Mellish had followed Digby out of gates, and had crept behind him until he had seen him meet the fellow from the Green Man. Mellish owed Digby a grudge, and that and his insatiable curiosity had prompted him to follow and hide that he might overhear the talk between those two.

Far less rancorous than Racke or Crooke, Mellish could yet be spiteful enough while an injury was fresh in his mind; and it was only three or four days since Digby had knocked him down in front of the Green Man.

He chuckled quietly now. It was plain to him that Dig was in the toils, and to know that pleased him. Besides, he was, as usual, short of money, and he was hearing what might bring him a loan from Aubrey Racke. Mellish never repaid such loans; but that mattered little, as Racke never expected him to.

"You're as big a rotter as ever I ran up against!" Digby said hotly.

"My hat! If I were that chap I'd give him a good hiding!" murmured Mellish to himself. "Not but what it's about true, all the same."

Carruthers—as he called himself—did move forward as if to clutch Dig by the collar, rapping out an oath as he did so. But at that moment the clang of several bicycle bells sounded out of the mist, and Tom Merry just swerved aside in time to avoid running into Carruthers.

Behind Tom Merry rode Talbot, Manners, Lowler, Noble, and Dane.

Each of them glanced at Digby as they passed. Some nodded. No one spoke.

Dig felt furious and ashamed. They would know who this fellow was, of course. If they did not know yet they would soon, for Racke and Crooke would not keep his secret long. He hated being seen with the man, and he was inclined to exaggerate the importance of the incident. Even had his supposed uncle been more obviously a wrong 'un than he was, there was nothing much in

being seen speaking to him on the King's highway.

But Dig's nerves were all on edge, and he felt keenly the alienation of nearly all the fellows who had been his friends.

He turned without another word, and disappeared into the mist in the direction of St. Jim's.

The man to whom he had been talking stood staring into the gauzy veil of mist after him.

Then a figure loomed up—the figure of a man in an overcoat, muffled up to his ears.

The two men faced one another, and recognition was mutual and instant.

"Banship!" cried the fellow from the Green Man.

"If it isn't Crey, by gad!" said the other.

"Crey no longer—at least, not Crey for the present," said the pseudo-Carruthers, a trifle nervously. "I happen to be passing under another name in this neighbourhood."

"What's the little game?" demanded Banship.

Mellish listened more keenly than ever.

"Oh, nothing much in your line, Ban. Not enough pickings in it. But we have gone through too much together for me to want to keep it back. I am here as Justin Carruthers."

"Our old pal Justin, eh? Where is he, by the way?"

"Dead, I believe."

"You don't know?"

"I think it's tolerably certain. Didn't you hear that he joined up early in the war?"

"To wipe out the past, eh?" sneered Banship. "You and I were not such fools as that, Crey, were we? Where do they say Justin passed in his checks?"

"At Vinny Ridge. I believe it's true, too."

"But what are you doing under his name?"

"Young Digby is at school near here—the only son of Justin's sister and Robert Digby, you know."

"Oh, I know Sir Robert!"

And Banship coupled the name with a lurid oath.

Mellish guessed that Banship did not exactly love Dig's pater. It was easy guessing, indeed.

"That's more than I do, though I've pretended to. I heard enough from Justin when he talked in his cups to know all about his sister and Digby and this cub. I was hard up, and I thought that I might use my knowledge to screw something out of the cub."

"But I infer that there's not much in it."

"Not as much as there ought to be, Ban. Sir Robert does not appear to be liberal in his estimate of what a boy at school wants in the way of cash. Now, there are two of young Digby's schoolfellows I have met who are worth a heap more in that way, and I'm bringing them on quite nicely."

"Who are they?"

"One is young Racke, son of Racke, of Racke & Hacke, who made their pile during the war."

"I know the father, Crey. If his son's at all like him he won't be exactly easy money. Who's the other?"

"His name's Crooke. His people didn't begin to have money during the war, but he's much of the same type as the other."

"H'm! They're sportive youths, I assume?"

"Your assumption, Ban, is correct."

"Young Digby at all in that line—eh?"  
 "No."  
 "It's a pity—it's a great pity!"  
 "Why? You've something up your sleeve, Banship!"  
 "I don't let things out as the good Justin did, Crey; and probably you're not aware that Sir Robert Digby is the man I hate most in all the world!" hissed Banship.

"By the Lord Harry, you surprise me! Why, you never let on that you knew him when Justin used to talk about him!"

"No. I can keep a close mouth. But I have a score to settle with Sir Robert, Crey. Ten years ago he thrashed me within an inch of my life—left me for dead, practically, and sent a groom to make sure whether I had actually kicked the bucket! And I vowed to be even with him, however long I had to wait!"

"What have you done, dear boy?"  
 "Never mind that! Oh, I'll grant you that the pious would have said he did right! But it was no affair of his. A little matter of a fool and his money—that was all. I carried too many guns for the fool. But Digby carried too many for me—then. But I haven't done with him—my oath, I haven't done with him!"

"Where are you bound for now?" asked Crey, who called himself Carruthers.

"Anywhere in general—nowhere in particular. Where are you squatting?"

"At a snug little pub not far away. Better come along with me. We can work together, as we've done before. I fancy that you and I may be able to make something out of Racke and Crooke, even though young Digby won't flutter the pastebards."

"I wish he would! I should revel in getting him into the blackest sort of disgrace. There's nothing would hit his cursed father harder than that, I know!"

"There may be other ways of working it. Come along to the Green Man, Banship, and we'll drink to a renewal of our old partnership!"

They vanished together into the mist, and Percy Mellish came out into the road and made for St. Jim's and dinner, with so much to think about that of dinner he hardly thought at all.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Dig's Friend and His Enemies.

"**H**ALLO, dear boy!" said Arthur Augustus, as Digby reached the school-gates.

Gussy was standing there in the mist, waiting for his chum. He was shivering a bit, for the mist struck cold, and it seemed to him that Dig ought to be pleased to find him there.

He had not thought twice about the ten-pound note. No one was more generous than Gussy. But he had been thinking a good deal about Dig and Dig's trouble, and perhaps he had been priding himself somewhat on his loyalty in standing by Dig when Blake and Herries and all the rest seemed to have deserted him.

Digby did not seem at all pleased. As a matter of fact, he would have preferred not to see Gussy just then. He had a shrewd and uncomfortable notion that the money Gussy had lent him had been wasted.

"Hallo!" he growled.

"Was it all right, dear boy?"

"Was what all right?" snapped Dig.

"Oh, well, you know, Dig!"  
 Gussy would not refer to the tenner. He would have considered it indelicate to do so. But, of course, it was of that and the use to which it had been put that he was thinking. It had puzzled him a good deal what Dig could want with it.

"Look here, D'Arcy. I told you you'd have to take me on trust, you know, and—"

"But, Dig, dear boy, I am takin' you on trust, weally! I would not dream of askin' you questions about anythin' you wished to keep private."

"Don't ask me any questions at all!"

But Dig's manner had softened, and he slipped his arm through Gussy's as though he were glad still to have someone whose arm was at his service in that friendly way.

"Wight-ho, Dig!"

"Were you at the gates when Tom Merry and those fellows came in?" Dig asked.

"Yaas, dear boy."

"Did they say anything about me?"

"No. Why should they?"

"Oh, no reason in particular! But—but—"

Digby paused; and, with a great effort, Gussy kept silence still.

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Then Mellish slunk past them, with a scowl at Dig.

"That boundah has not forgiven you yet, dear boy," remarked Gussy.

"Do you suppose I want him to?" returned Dig crossly.

Mellish went on his way, which led him to Study No. 6 on the Shell corridor, tenanted by those two extremely nice youths, Aubrey Racke and George Gerald Crooke.

He slipped inside without knocking, and closed the door again hastily, for the room was full of tobacco-smoke.

"Don't trouble to knock!" said Racke nastily.

"Oh, don't put on any of that!" sniffed Mellish. "I've come to tell you fellows something important. But you needn't hear it if you'd rather not."

"What's it about?" asked Crooke.

"For once, Mellish went straight to the point. 'About the fellow who calls himself Carruthers—but that isn't his name, really,' he said.

Racke and Crooke looked at one another, and Crooke whistled softly.

"You see, I was right, Gerry," said Racke.

"Yaas, by gad!" But how have you found that out, Mellish?"

"I've listened to quite a lot this morning," replied Mellish, with a grin. "I know that Dig thinks that chap is his uncle. He handed him over a note this morning—five or tenner; I don't know which. Wonder where he got it? He doesn't love the chap, either; he gave him the rough side of his tongue, I can tell you."

"But Carruthers didn't tell him he wasn't Carruthers, I take it?" said Racke.

"Not likely! Dig flounced off as mad as a hatter, and next minute a fellow came up—must have passed Dig only a few yards away. He and the Carruthers bouncer knew each other, it seemed. Carruthers' name is really Crey, and the other chap is named Banship. As far as I can make out, the real Carruthers has pegged out, and Crey's taken his name to sponge on Dig."

"Go on!" said Racke. "I'm not surprised a bit. I twigged this some little time ago. You won't squeeze anything out of me for this news, Mellish, old gun!"

"But I've more to tell you," said Mellish eagerly. "These two sweeps got talking about you and Crooke. The Crey bouncer thinks he'll have you two on toast, sooner or later, and he invited Banship to go into the game with him."

"Is that straight?" snapped Crooke.

"I'll take my oath on it!"

"H'm! Now, that is worth a trifle," said Racke.

"I'll lend you a quid, Mellish—payment as per usual."

Mellish grinned as he took the pound-note. His pride would not have been offended had Racke said that it was a gift, as it really was.

"So Crey, or Carruthers, or whatever his name is, thinks he can do us down, does he, Mellish?" said Crooke.

"That's his notion."

"Wonder whether he's ever tumbled to the fact that that sort of thing cuts both ways?" Racke asked thoughtfully.

"I suppose you mean that you two can do those two down," Mellish said. "Well, if I was betting on it, I should put my money on them."

"Oh, get out!" snarled Crooke.

Mellish went. He had got what he came for, and saw no use in waiting longer.

"Hanged if I think it's worth while to go along to the Green Man again while that sweep's there!" Crooke said.

"Rats!"

"It's all very well to say 'Rats!' But I'm not so dashed keen on bein' rooked, let me tell you."

"Have you any objection to rookin'?"

"Eh?"

"Isn't that plain enough for you?"

"Oh, I know what you mean! I don't quite see how you're goin' to work it, though."

"Jolliffe will stand in with us. Banks, too, if he's there."

"You mean that we three—or we four—should play stiff against those two?"

"Just that, Gerry!"

"Case of 'Pull devil, pull baker,' eh?"

"That's it!"

"It will make a funny sort of game of it."

"But with the advantage on our side, dear boy—don't forget that!"

"Yaas, there's something in that!" said Crooke meditatively.

"There's everythin' in it!" replied Racke confidently.

## THE THIRD CHAPTER.

### A Deputation to Digby.

"**O**h, come in, you two!" said Tom Merry, as Blake and Herries showed themselves at the door of Study No. 10 on the Shell passage.

There were already seven fellows in that study—Tom himself, Lowther, Manners, Talbot, and the New House trio, Figgins, Kerr, and Patty Wynn.

"We didn't bring Gustavus," Blake said.

"You see, he hasn't broken with Dig. It wasn't our fault that we did. We didn't want to. But it's come about somehow. You chaps seem to fancy you can do something to put things square, and we shall be only too glad if you can; but if it's a failure, Dig will still have Gussy, and that's something."

"I've called this meeting," Tom said.

"Because we're all Dig's chums. He has other friends. Nearly everyone likes Dig. But, except for Gussy, I think the present company represent his—I hardly know how to put it—"

"Nearest and dearest!" suggested Lowther.

"Well, that will do. Look here, Blake, you don't seriously believe that Dig's going to the box-woods, do you?"

"No, I don't," replied Blake. "Appearances are against him. But Dig isn't that sort."

"What do you think it is, then? He's behaving very queerly," Figgins said. "He wouldn't stop when Kerr and I tried to have a yarn with him this morning. And we only wanted to show him that—that it was all right, you know."

"I'm afraid that that was just what got his back up," Kerr said.

"But what is a fellow to do?" asked Eggy plaintively. "If you pass him with merely a nod, he's sure to think you're cold-shouldering him. If you try to be friendly, that's all wrong, too!"

"Just what I tell Blake," said Herries.

"You don't know how to be right with him."

"Perhaps his private trouble—you fellows seem to think he has one—is of a sort that makes him prefer to be left alone," Talbot said quietly.

"But he isn't going to be left alone," replied Blake. "It isn't good for him. He's coping himself to death."

"Besides, there are other things beyond the private trouble," said Tom. "Some of the fellows are holding against him that which he gave Crooke. And then there was Mellish—I don't mind Mellish's being knocked down, but even with a chap of his sort there ought to be some reason for it, and he makes out that it was only because he saw Dig talking to that bad hat Jolliffe, of the Green Man."

"Mellish talks a lot, but he doesn't tell any more than suits him," Patty Wynn said. "I should like to know what he said to Dig about seeing him with Jolliffe."

"Look here," said Kerr, "if we're to believe Mellish's yarn at all, I think it explains itself. He jeered at Dig, and Dig punched him. That's all. Dig's ripe to punch anybody's head now for two pins, and Mellish's wants punching—always does. Put that aside! As for Crooke, I'm pretty sure how that happened. I've paid special note to the scar on his face, and I happen to know that Crooke and Racke were on their bikes when they met Dig. Crooke's bike has rat-trap pedals, and if his face came against one of them as he fell, it would get—just what it did get!"

"I believe you're right, Kerr!" Talbot said.

"Well, none of us ever did believe that Dig struck Crooke a foul blow, and none of us minds much about his tumbling Mellish over," said Tom Merry. "But that bizney with Jolliffe sticks in my throat a bit, and I don't like all the mystery."

"Thomas, it isn't like you to want to know more about another fellow's affairs than he chooses to tell you."

"Don't be a chump, Kerr! I don't want to know anything of the kind. I want Dig to set himself right, that's all. And I want him to know that, as far as we're concerned, we don't doubt him."

"In short, that if he makes a clean breast of everything, he's perfectly welcome to keep everything else as dark as he likes," put in Lowther.

"You're a bigger chump than Kerr!" snapped Tom.

"If the trouble's a family trouble—" began Talbot.

But Herries interrupted him.

"A family trouble couldn't account for the Green Man bizney," he said.

"How do you know it couldn't?" asked Kerr.

"Well, how could it?"





"Come in!" said Grey, and the three passed into the house. In a flash, Banship turned and locked the door behind them. Digby was a prisoner and he realised it on the moment. "Let me out!" he cried. "This is a rotten trick! The mater's not here!" (See page 20.)

"I can't explain. But I'm not dogmatic enough to say that it's impossible."

Herries snorted, and Blake looked quite unconvinced. But Lowther nodded his agreement with Kerr, and it was plain that Talbot thought there was something in the Scots junior's argument—as there was, of course.

"We might argue all night and not get any for'arder," Blake said. "What's your notion, Tommy? If it's anything that can be done, then I'm on. But I'm sick to death of talking about it all. We've had nothing else in our study for days past, and we've had to sit on Gussy hard now and then to make him see things our way."

"And then he wouldn't," added Herries. "Was it calculated to make him?" inquired Lowther blandly.

"Well, if Blake and I hadn't more sense than that dummy—"

"I'm not sure that Gussy hasn't shown up better than the rest of us, Herries, old chap," said Tom. "After all, is there a straighter fellow at St. Jim's than Dig? I don't know one. And my proposal is that we form a deputation to tell him that—that—Oh, that we know he's straight, and—and—"

"Not guilty, but don't do it again!" said Lowther solemnly.

"Oh, you're an idiot!" "I'm not idiot enough for your deputation, Tommy, anyway!"

"What do you say, Talbot?" "Sorry, Tom! I'm not on. I think Digby would rather be left alone at present. If there was anything I could do for him—"

"This is the only thing we can do for him, as far as I can see. I suppose you're to be counted out, Lowther? Manners, what do you say?"

Manners spoke for the first time since the meeting had begun.

"I'll go, Tom, if you like. But I'm not too keen. I feel that if I were in Dig's place I might not be very pleasant about it. But he's got a better temper than I have."

"Figgy?"

"I'm on. Can't do any harm, I should think."

"Kerr?" "Nothing doing, Tommy! I only butt in when there's detective work to be done."

"Fatty?" "I—I think Kerr knows best, Tom Merry."

"Well, five's enough. You two will come, of course?"

This was to Blake and Herries. They looked at one another doubtfully. But they could hardly refuse.

"Yes, we'll come, said Blake. "Let's go now," Figgins suggested. "Have you fellows any notion where he's to be found? I know he's moved out of your study."

"If he isn't out, he'll be moping in the Form-room," replied Blake.

They found Digby in the Form-room. It was the day after his interview with Caruthers—or, rather, Grey—and within the last half-hour Racke had kindly assured him that his uncle was at the Green Man still, and had even ventured to suggest that Digby should accompany him and Crooke thither that night. But Racke had not expected assent to that proposal, and if he had he would have been disappointed.

Dig looked up when the five entered. He was seated at his own desk, with a book before him. But he had not turned over a leaf, and he could not have told anyone what the book was about without looking at the title.

He looked up, then looked down again at once. The five drew near. "I say, Dig," said Tom, with some hesitation.

Dig's manner was not encouraging, to say the least of it.

"Well?" returned Dig dully. "We want to say that—oh, it's all right, you know, Dig, and we haven't any of us any doubt of you."

The words were halting. More eloquent fellows than Tom Merry had ever pretended

to be might have found it hard to speak just the right words in that juncture.

But it was not like Digby to take them as he did, halting though they were.

He got up, and stepped clear of the form on which he had been sitting. "Thank you for nothing!" he snapped.

His glance went past Tom and Manners and Figgins to Blake and Herries in the background.

"We oughtn't to have come," whispered Blake to Herries.

"Look here, Dig—"

"Don't you say anything, Figgins! I don't want to quarrel with you, and as we're in different Houses it ought to be easy enough for you to steer clear of me, I should think."

There was a moment of silence after that. It was evident to the deputation that their mission could hardly be reckoned a success.

"Haven't you anything to say, Manners?" he asked.

"Nothing, if you take it like that!" answered Manners.

"Then I'll go!" "I say, Dig!"

Tom Merry put out a hand to stop the angry Fourth-Former. Digby pushed him roughly aside.

Manners, Figgins, and Blake all saw that it was hopeless. But Herries could not, or would not, see that.

He caught Dig by the arm. "Oh, don't be such a silly ass, Dig!" he pleaded.

Herries was a good deal bigger and stronger than Digby, and he held on tightly when Dig struggled to get free.

"Let me go!" panted Dig. "Oh, don't be such an—"

"Take that, then!" Dig's right hand smote the face of Herries's hard.

Herries released his hold and staggered back. There was a look on his rugged countenance that it would take Digby a long time to forget.

But remorse came later. Dig felt nought at the moment.

"Aren't you going to hit me back?" he demanded, moving towards Herries.

"No, I'm not!"

"I know I'm not up to your weight," said Dig hotly, "but I've slapped your face. You've a right to give me a hiding, and I can take it!"

"I'm not going to touch you!" answered Herries.

Dig marched out. Tom and Manners and Figgins waited only a moment, and then followed.

Herries sat down, laid his arms on the desk, and buried his face upon them.

Blake hardly knew what to say, but he said the right thing when he did speak.

"Never mind, old man! You couldn't hit him back, of course. I wouldn't have. He'll be sorry when he thinks what he's done."

Herries' shoulders shook. But there were no tears on his face when he lifted it to Blake.

"I—I— And he thought I'd hit him back—that I'd give him a hiding, though he is so much below my weight! Dig thought that, Blake! That's what hurts!"

Arthur Augustus had so bad a time at tea, half an hour later, that he cleared out before the meal was half finished.

Perhaps it was too bad of Blake and Herries to take it out of Gussy, and certainly they might have explained what had gone wrong. But they did not feel like explaining, and they did feel like taking it out of somebody.

It was not until the next day that Gussy heard what had happened, and then it was Tom Merry who told him.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I considah that you were vewy foolish indeed to try anythin' of the kind without consultin' me," he said, surveying Tom severely through his monocle. "I should have advised against any such move. But I am sowsay about Hewies, an' I shall make it my bizney to ofiah him my sympathy, an' to wemonstwate with Dig."

"Gussy, old top, we were five fools yesterday. I see that now. But the whole five of us rolled into one wouldn't make such a whacking big fool as you'll be if you go for either sympathy with Herries or remonstrance with Dig!" answered Tom.

"I shall do pwecisely as I considah best, Tom Mewwy!"

"You always do. That's why you're continually putting your silly foot into it!" Tom answered, almost in a groan.

But for once Arthur Augustus took advice. After thinking the matter over, he decided to say nothing either to Dig or to Herries.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### In the Toils.

**S**MOKE hung like a veil in the snug private room of Mr. Joliffe at the Green Man, and the smell of spirits was strong.

It was so late at night that it might rather have been called early in the morning. The little game which Racke and Crooke had started out to play had developed into something they had never counted upon, and they had gone on and on till at last they dared go on no longer.

The man who called himself Carruthers had drunk deeply, but not so deeply as to make him incapable of bearing his part in the game of "Pull devil, pull baker," which the six around the table had been engaged upon. Racke got up from his seat. His face was drawn and haggard, and he looked like a man of double his age.

Crooke followed his lead. Crooke looked stupefied. The impossible had happened, and he could not understand it.

But Racke understood it very well indeed. He had not counted on this, though he might have known that Joliffe and Banks were not to be trusted.

They had gone back on what they had promised him and Crooke. They had "played stiff" indeed; but they had played stiff in collusion with Crey and Banship, not with Racke and Crooke.

Crooke was too stunned to make an outcry. Racke realised his position too clearly to say anything.

What could he say? To reproach his faithless confederates was out of the question. They would have laughed at him. The other two knew, of course; but to go for them was to convict himself and his ally.

All the ready money the two cads of the

Shell had brought with them—a considerable amount—had passed over to Crey and Banship. Joliffe and Banks had had—or appeared to have had—the most wretched luck imaginable. Even when they had held good cards, the other men had held better.

Racke and Crooke had been allowed to win at first, while the stakes were comparatively small. Then they had begun to lose after play became heavier. They had gone on losing. They had given I O U's after their supply of notes was exhausted. Crooke had no notion now what he owed. That fact frightened him. Racke, who knew within a little what he had lost, was hardly less frightened.

Banship looked up as the two got to their feet, and in the man's evil face there was something that made them shiver.

"I suppose you're not clearin' out of here in a desperate hurry?" said Racke, speaking as lightly as he could. "It will be two or three days before we can pony up on those bits of paper, y'know."

To Crooke's muddled mind that seemed a foolish speech. Crooke would have been only too glad if the two strangers would have cleared out without their money. But Racke knew that was unlikely.

Banship gave Joliffe a swift look, and the burly landlord got up, yawning and stretching.

"Come along, Banks, old pal," he said. "We'd best go to bye-bye. Mr. Carruthers here knows enough about the ways of the place to let these young gents out. Better luck next time, young sirs!"

Racke scowled at the two rascals, and answered not a word. Crooke was too utterly miserable even to scowl.

Banks and Joliffe went, leering. They were on velvet. All that they had apparently lost would come back to them, with a share of what the other two had won. Unless, that is, there was more trickery, which, seeing what type of men Banship and Crey were, seemed possible. But probably Messrs. Banks and Joliffe had taken measures to make themselves safe against anything of that kind.

"We'd better cut, Crooke," said Racke uneasily.

"Oh, not just yet!" Banship said. "I want a little talk with you."

The two miserable juniors sat down again. They were hardened gamblers. At an age when they should have known nothing of such things save by hearsay they were capable of trying the tricks of cardsharps; but they were not capable of holding their own against the wiles of such men as these. And they had begun to realise that fact now.

"It's not much use talkin', y' know," said Racke, still with a notion that to get away and think out some dodge for avoiding payment was the best chance for him and Crooke. "You hold our notes for the cash, an', of course, we know that they will have to be met. So that's all about it."

"Not quite all, eh, Crey?" said Banship, with an ugly smile.

"Not nearly all!" replied Crey, pouring himself out more brandy.

Racke's sullen eyes gleamed.

"I don't know what more you expect of us," he said. "But Mr. Crey—who doesn't seem to be Mr. Carruthers any longer—had better be careful how he tries to put the screw on. We happen to know a bit about him!"

A sudden notion had flashed into Racke's mind. Could not the game which Crey had been playing be turned against him? Banship's use of the fellow's real name had given him the hint.

But Racke was up against cunning far greater than his own.

"So you know something, do you?" purred Banship. "Be quiet, Crey! I can handle this extremely fly young gentleman better than you can, I think. And just what is it that you know, Mr. Racke?"

"I know that Crey is not really Digby's uncle," replied Racke sulkily.

"And what of it?" asked Banship.

"I can have him arrested for a swindle, by gad!"

"A swindle! How's that?"

"Gettin' money out of Digby by false pretences!"

Crooke's face worked nervously. He was already alarmed at his comrade's boldness, but he thought it best to back him up.

"That's it!" he said. "We know a bit too much about your two. You'd better let us have those I O U's back. The cash you've ricked us of ought to satisfy you!"

"Oh, we've ricked you, have we?" purred Banship.

"You know you have—an' Joliffe an' Banks stood in with you!" fumed Racke.

"Instead of standing in with you to rick us?" Banship started, with a knowing grin. "Wicked of them, wasn't it? But you two forget that we were hardly worth plucking, and that you were quite eligible victims of the operation. Never mind that, however. You can hardly make such a tale out of it as will help your ease with parents, headmaster, or magistrates, I fancy. And as to your charge against Crey—how are you going to prove it?"

"When Digby knows—"

"He will do nothing—nothing at all, my bright boy! Digby has pride. I happen to hate his father more than I hate any other man in the world; but I give him credit for that quality, and this boy is evidently a chip of the old block. You will never get young Digby to help you against Crey. But that does not matter, because you will not lift a finger against Crey—you dare not!"

"Why daren't we?" faltered Crooke.

But he saw, and Racke saw, and already they were well on the way to coming to heel.

Because of these I O U's, which would settle you once for all at your school, and make heap big trouble for you at your homes! That's why! Moreover, your silence concerning what you knew until you had got yourselves into a tight corner would spoil your chance, anyway."

"You'd get yourselves into trouble if you tried to use those I O U's against us," Crooke said sullenly.

"What is trouble to us? Our lives are one long round of trouble, my ingenious youth! Here's a tip for you. As long as you have any reputation to lose—which is hardly likely to be very long in the case of either of you, I fancy—don't pit your wits against those of men whose reputations are already fairly up the spout. If Crey and I found ourselves in the stone jug—but your best efforts won't send us there—we should come out precisely as we went in. See?"

They saw—too late!

Crey showed his teeth in a grin.

"Don't frighten them to death, Ban!" he said. "Tell them what we want with them, we're ripe for it now!"

"Haven't you had enough out of us already?" asked Racke bitterly.

Banship touched the scraps of paper before him.

"These are merely counters in a game we are playing," he said.

"An' we're counters in it, too? Is that it?" returned Racke.

Crooke saw that his face had changed. Crooke did not yet understand in the least, but he felt vaguely hopeful.

"Correct! Now, if you will only do a very simple and easy thing for us, you can have these incriminating documents back, my son!"

"What do you want us to do?" asked Racke.

"Young Digby is no friend of yours, I take it?" Banship said.

"He is not," replied Racke.

"I hate him! He did this for me," Crooke said, touching the cicatrice of the wound his own pedal had given him when Dig had knocked him down.

"He is no friend of my pal Crey's, and his father is my worst enemy," went on Banship.

"We've not done with young Digby yet. But we need something to help us in dealing with him."

"What is it?" Racke asked eagerly.

"A letter from his mother."

The two stared. They could not see through this.

"Any letter, do you mean, or some particular letter?" inquired Racke.

Crooke licked his dry lips nervously. He was in a funk. But it was a double funk now. Fear of what those two scoundrels wanted to do on the one side, fear of what they might do to him on the other.

Now, as always when they were in a hole, the precious pair of pals thought each of himself. Either would quite cheerfully have sacrificed the other had a way out offered itself by that treachery.

When fellows of their sort are faced by two unpleasant alternatives, it is ten to one that they will take that which seems to promise less immediate trouble.

Both saw that what they were asked to do was risky. But it was merely risky. To refuse seemed to them to mean certain smash.

"Any letter will do," Banship answered.

"An' you'll hand us over those I O U's?" asked Racke.

"An' give us back the cash we've dropped to-night?" added Crooke.

"You shall have the I O U's," answered Banship. "Not the cash. Jolliffe and Banks would not agree to that. It represents their share of to-night's plunder."

Crooke groaned. Another period of shortage loomed before him; and Crooke hated being short, going without luxuries, having nothing in hand for a little flutter. It might have been thought that the little flutter of that night would have been enough to last Crooke for some time to come; but the gambling craze was too strong in him for that.

"We'll do it!" said Racker. "Eh, Crooke?" Crooke muttered assent.

"Don't waste time!" said Banship sharply. "Bring the letter here to-morrow, and you shall have these scraps of paper back. Fail us, and you know what to expect!"

"And now we'll see you out," said Croy. "If you stay any longer you might be missed at St. Jim's, you know."

He had let Banship do nearly all the talking. Banship, the more masterful scoundrel, always took charge when these two worked together. And this scheme was more Banship's than Croy's. But there was little enough to choose between them in villainy.

Racker and Crooke went. They were relieved of their worst apprehensions, and their consciences were not greatly troubled by the promise they had made. They told each other that it could only be some fresh dodge for getting money out of Digby, and Digby's worries were nothing to them.

But they still had their dirty work to do, and about that they did not feel at all easy in mind.

#### THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Lured into Captivity.

"HERE'S a bit of luck, by gad!" said Racker.

Both he and Crooke looked seedy and washed out that morning as they stood before the letter-rack in the hall. But that was nothing out of the ordinary way for them, and in spite of feeling at least as bad as they looked they had contrived to get up earlier than usual.

"How can we be sure?" asked Crooke.

There was a letter for Digby. The address was in a lady's handwriting, and the Digby crest was on the flap.

"Take it along an' have a look inside," replied Racker. "I'm pretty certain, anyway. But it's no odds. Whether it's what we want or not he won't get it."

No one else was about. Racker thrust the letter into his pocket, and he and Crooke went up to their study.

The flap had not been very securely fastened, and the blade of a penknife lifted it without tearing. A glance sufficed to show the two young scoundrels that they held the price of their I O U's.

"Notin' much in it," Racker said. "Says she's a little better, but still not very well, an' he's her dearest boy an' all that sort of guff. He won't miss anythin' by not gettin' this."

"I hope no one spotted it in the rack," said Crooke nervously.

"Not likely! Besides, if anyone did, who's goin' to tell Digby? Hardly anyone's on speakin' terms with him. An' I'll take care that it isn't spotted on the 'Racker,' which would be really troublesome. Ha, ha!"

It was seldom Racker made a joke, and he thought that rather a good one. But Crooke only grinned feebly. He did not feel that this was a joking matter.

"I sha'n't feel easy until it's out of your hands," he said.

Racker's private opinion was that Crooke would not feel easy then. He had begun to wonder whether his pat had suddenly developed—or discovered—a conscience.

But he said nothing. And it was not conscience that was worrying Crooke; it was sheer funk.

After class the precious pair rode into Rylcombe together. They looked round them very carefully before they slunk into the Green Man. It was more than ever dangerous to be spotted there, they realised.

Jolliffe gave them a nod as they passed through the bar-parlour. The nod was not returned. Racker and Crooke felt that Jolliffe was no longer a real friend. Banks was not in evidence, and they did not want to see Banks. But Banship and Croy were together in the adjoining room, and there was a brandy bottle on the table.

The two adult scoundrels made a very careful examination of the letter. But it was too obviously genuine for any real doubt.

"Is there an afternoon post at your place?" asked Banship sharply.

Racker answered that there was.

Then Banship took a sheet of fashionable notepaper from a wallet, and started to write. Lady Digby's letter bore the family crest; but that was a small detail, and it was hardly likely that she never chanced to use paper without it.

Under the fascinated eyes of Racker and Crooke a forgery that might have deceived almost anyone was committed. Banship wrote slowly for the first two or three lines, but then his pace quickened. The writing was not difficult of imitation by a skilled forger; it had certain curves and lines easy to copy from their very individuality.

"Compare the two!" said Banship, handing over the original letter and the forged one to Racker when he had finished. "One of my little accomplishments, this, and not the least useful of them."

Crooke looked over Racker's shoulder. Neither of them could have told that the two letters had been written by different hands.

Banship took them back, and tore the original into tiny fragments. Then he placed the other in the envelope, and carefully stuck it down.

He was about to hand it to Racker when a thought struck him.

"I suppose a letter posted here within the next few minutes would get into the afternoon delivery at your school?" he said.

Racker nodded. He really did not know and did not care. It seemed likely. He was indifferent to anything but the price of his treachery.

But Crooke surprised him. "I say, I'll take that and put it in the rack at St. Jim's," Crooke volunteered. "It's been through the post once, you know, an' that might be noticed."

Banship gave him a searching look. "Thanks, but I won't trouble you," he said drily. "I observe that the envelope does not bear the Rylcombe postmark as yet. It can't well get any other here, if the letters are sorted for the locality, as is likely. And I shall feel safer about it if I see to it myself."

"When we want any more dirty work done at St. Jim's we shall know where to apply," added Croy, who had already taken more than enough to drink.

Racker dared not even scowl at that. They had not yet got back their I O U's.

But they had them. Banship and Croy were after bigger game than those two. The scraps of paper were handed over, and Racker and Crooke departed. There were no handshakes or professions of mutual esteem, and the eads of the shell hoped devoutly that they would never see or hear of Messrs. Croy and Banship again.

In that hope they were destined to suffer disappointment, however.

"Why in the world did you want to offer to take that letter, you idiot?" snarled Racker, when they had started on their way back.

"I meant to destroy it," admitted Crooke. "I thought you hated Digby? That thing means no good to him, you bet!"

"So I do hate him. But I don't like this bizny. That brute Banship gives me shivers all down my backbone!"

"He can't do that," gibed Racker. "You haven't such a thing."

"Oh, I'm not such a hard beast as you are, perhaps; but I don't stick at much, all the same. I wouldn't follow Banship all the way, though; he wouldn't stop short of murder, I fancy."

"Don't get in a blue funk," Racker returned contemptuously. "We're well out of that trouble, an' nothin' worse than more blackmail is goin' to happen to Digby."

But Racker's hardihood was not shared by Crooke. Even now he felt half inclined to make an attempt to destroy that letter.

He might possibly have done so if he had had the chance. But he did not get the chance.

Dig was waiting about when the letters were brought along after classes were over for the day. He seized the one for himself, and bore it off to the Form-room.

He read it, and sat in distress and perplexity.

How could his mother have written like that?

It was her handwriting; he never doubted that. It began "My dearest boy," as her letters always began. It was signed "Mums"—the old childish pet name that had never passed into disuse between them.

It asked him—begged him—to see his uncle once more. That was not so bad; Dig could understand that, however unworthy he might be, Justin Carruthers still had some place in the affections of his sister.

But the thing that surprised and hurt Dig was that his mother should so insist upon the necessity of his keeping the whole affair a secret from his father.

To Dig his mother and father had always seemed the very ideal of a married pair. Sir Robert could be stern enough with others, but he never spoke otherwise than gently to his wife. They had always appeared to have no secrets from one another, to live their joint life in the completest harmony.

Dig's home had done much to make him what he was—frank and straight and honourable, with no taste for concealments. He had had to keep this secret for his mother's sake, as he had thought. Now it seemed that his mother shared it, but that it was kept from his father.

"It's all wrong!" murmured Dig. "I oughtn't to have kept it from him, perhaps; but it's certain she oughtn't. It's the limit! He could be angry enough with me—never with her. It's wrong—it's all wrong! Oh, mater—mums—how could you?"

His head dropped on the desk. He was already overstrained, and this seemed to him almost beyond endurance. It would have been but a small trouble to the sons of some parents, members of households divided against themselves. To Robert Arthur Digby, with all the memories of a sweet and gracious home life, it was a big one.

And he knew that he must do as his mother asked. He had gone too far to kick now. Anyway, it would have been hard for him to support his father against her. As things were, it was impossible.

He must do it—must see that man again. The mater surely could not guess what her brother had become, or she would not want her son to have further dealings with him. But, of course, she did not know.

Dig looked up as the door opened, and drew his hand across his eyes, for he knew that they were wet.

It was Arthur Augustus who came, unable to keep away from his chum any longer.

Gussy had seen Dig take his letter and retreat to the Form-room. He felt that he could not follow at once; that would not have been the thing to do, and Gussy prided himself upon doing the right thing always.

But something seemed to tell him that that letter would only add to Dig's trouble. He hung about the corridors until he could bear it no longer. For two or three minutes he hesitated at the Form-room door. Then he heard—or imagined—the sound of a sob within, and he went straight to Dig's side.

"What is it, dear boy?" he asked. "Bad news? I twust your matah is not worse?"

"No, it's not that," answered Dig dully.

He did not resent Gussy's appearance. That was something, though it was merely due in reality to the fact that he was too hard hit to resent it. But he did not want to talk to his chum.

Arthur Augustus knew and vastly admired Dig's mother. It might have been easier to tell someone who did not know her, if it had been possible to tell anyone. But Gussy was quite out of the question, anyway.

"Are you wowwiny' about Hewwies, Dig?" "No—yes. No, I'm not now, though it has worried me, and I've felt no end ashamed of it."

"Don't wowwy, old chap! Hewwies is not anyway, he is onlay showway. Hewwies is very fond of you, Dig."

"That makes it all the worse! Can't you see that? He ought to have given me the hiding I fairly asked for. I feel sick about it. But it's not exactly that just now."

"I suppose you weally feel that you cannot tell me, Dig, dear boy?" said the swell of the Fourth wistfully.

"No, I can't. It's nothing to do with St. Jim's, you know. It's—it's just family trouble."

"Would you wathah I went away, Dig?"

"Yes, please, old fellow! But—but don't think I'm ungrateful. I don't want everybody to think me an utter outsider."

"Noboday could possibly think you that, Dig," said Arthur Augustus, as he turned sadly away.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.  
Dig's Letter.

HERRIES and Blake were coming out of the School House together next morning after classes, when Dig hurried past them.

He gave them a glance sideways, and his step faltered. But then he pressed on.

"I believe he was going to speak to me," said Herries.

"I fancy so. To say he was sorry," returned Blake. "It would only be like Dig to do that, though he hasn't been much like himself the last few days. Let's give him a yell," he suggested.

"No," snapped Herries. "Let him take his own time about it."

It was not often that Blake thought Herries knew better than he did, but he saw that his chum was right then. He had come to see Herries in a new light during the last day or two, and to think more of him than ever. For Herries had an awkward temper at times, and it could not have been easy for him to take that snip of the face as he had taken it.

Dig pushed out his bike, and made his way towards the gates. Figgins, Kerr, and Patty Wynne came in just as he reached them. All three nodded, and Patty said "Ciao, Dig." Digby did not speak, but he nodded to them and tried to smile.

Perhaps he was just a little comforted by these signs that he had not yet been given up by his friends. But the trouble in him was too deep for such comfort to go far.

A time and place had been appointed for his meeting with the man who called himself his uncle. He was not to go to the Green Man; he was to meet the fellow along a lonely road near Rylcombe Wood, a road which led out on to Wayland Moor.

It did not take him many minutes to reach the rendezvous, and he passed no St. Jim's fellow after leaving the gates.

The man whom he knew as Justin Caruthers was waiting for him. He stood by the side of the road, and in the middle of it, turned towards the moor, was a motor-car, with a goggled chauffeur.

"Welcome, my boy!" said Crey.

"There is a surprise in store for you, my boy! You are to see your mother to-day!"

"My mother?" panted Dig, gazing round him in amazement.

For the moment, he really thought she must be near.

"Yes, Robert, your mother, who is not so deaf to the call of kinship as you are!"

Dig felt that he hated the fellow worse in this oily, friendly mood than when he was blustering and overbearing.

"Where is she?" he asked bluntly.

"Not here, Robert—some miles away. She is at the house of a friend of mine, whither I am to take you."

"But she wasn't well enough to travel," said Dig.

"It will rejoice you to hear that she is very much better. I don't wish to flatter myself, but I really think that seeing me again after all these years has done her a world of good."

Well, it might be so; but if it were Dig could not understand it a bit. In no conceivable circumstances could seeing his Uncle Justin do him any good, he felt. But, of course, it might be different with the mater; it must be different, for she could not forget the days of her childhood, when this only brother had played so big a part in her life.

Dig had no suspicions—as yet. It seemed a trifle queer that his mother had said nothing about this journey in her letter. But he fancied he could account for that. Probably the mater had been called away somewhere, and she had snatched at the chance of seeing her brother in his absence.

More deception! Dig had a vague feeling that his mother had come down once for all from the pedestal on which she had always stood in his thoughts of her. She had been the one perfect person in all the world. Dig had recognised imperfections in his father, his sisters, his chums, in the Head, in Mr. Railton—in everyone he cared most for and held highest, except the mater. She had always been just perfect in his estimation.

But he must do as she wished. And he made up his mind that she should not see that he thought her wrong.

He got into the car with his supposed uncle, and in a minute or two they were speeding along the moorland road.

Through Wayland they glided, took the London road, turned off it, turned again, and slowed down as they reached another stretch of wide moor.

It was a very lonely place. Smoke rose from the chimneys of a house almost concealed from view in a hollow of the moor; but that was the only sign of human life Dig could see.

Even now he did not think much about that. If he had had the least doubt that Crey was the man he pretended to be, he would have felt ill at ease. As it was he had no more than a vague feeling of dislike of this place in its loneliness and dreariness.

The car jolted over the rough moor, slid hazardingly down a slope which possibly no car had ever negotiated before, and pulled up before the almost hidden house.

It was a shabby place, little more than a cottage, but badly-out of repair, and looking uninhabited.

The chauffeur took off his goggles, and Dig recognised his face at once.

But where had he seen it? Somewhere quite lately, he was sure. But where?

Then he remembered. He had met this man in the mist on the Rylcombe road just after parting from his uncle last.

"Come in!" said Crey, and the three passed into the house.

Banship turned and locked the door behind them at once. He thrust the key into a pocket.

Then, all in a flash, there came upon Dig the certainty that his mother was not here, the dread that he was trapped.

"Let me out!" he cried. "This is some rotten trick! The mater's not here!"

"She is not," said Banship grimly. "She knows nothing about this. I wrote the letter which you thought was from her!"

"Who are you? What's it all mean?" asked Dig wonderingly.

"I'm an enemy of your father, and I have taken this way to get revenge on him," answered Banship.

"And you, your swindling sweep, you're not—"

"No, dear boy, I'm not your uncle!" said Crey, with a leer.

"I'm glad of that, anyway!" flashed Dig.

"I know my mother's brother wasn't all he should be, but he couldn't have been so low a brute as you!"

"You had better pitch your note a trifle lower, you cub!" snarled Banship.

"Do you think I'm afraid of you, or of that patry scoundrel?" retorted Dig. "You can't keep me here!"

"Wrong there, my little pet!" sneered Crey.

"We are going to keep you here until your father shells out a thousand pounds to ransom you," Banship said.

"He'll never do that! You don't know the mater. He'd let himself be tortured to death before he would give into you!" flashed Dig.

"I know him very well indeed—to my cost,"

replied Banship. "Some years ago he meddled in my affairs, and presumed upon his superior strength to thrash me mercilessly. Now he must pay for it—in part, at least. It is possible that he may endure torture rather than give in. But the question will not be one of what he will have to endure, except mentally, but of what you will have to endure."

"And you can take that as a beginning, and as some return for the insolence with which you have treated me!" Crey snarled.

As he spoke he struck Dig heavily in the face.

Dig went for him like a wild cat. Crey was so taken aback by the fierceness of his attack that he retreated. But he hit back, punching as though his opponent were a man, and Dig reeled under his cowardly blows.

Banship threw himself into a chair, and watched with evident enjoyment.

Blood streamed down Dig's face, and his head was sinking under the blows he took; but he hit back as hard as he knew how. Into his mind flashed the thought of his chums at St. Jim's. What would he not have given to have had two or three of them there—Blake and burly Herries, or Tom Merry and Talbot, or hard-hitting George Figgins, or even Gussy!

Then he went down and lay still on the floor, momentarily deprived of consciousness. "I was not aware that you were such a hero, Crey!" giped Banship.

Crey looked down at the prostrate figure of his victim, and scowled blackly. There was no shame in him, as there was none in Banship; and they were as void of pity as of shame.

"Our nice young friend, Creeke, who appeared to have his knife into the cub there, would like to see him now," Banship said.

"Don't talk so much!" snapped Crey. "Let's get him up to the attic before he comes round."

He seized Digby by the head, Banship took the boy's legs, and they carried him up a winding stair to a small room at the top of the house.

There they laid him on the bed. He came to himself just as they were leaving the room.

"The mater won't give in!" he cried.

"That," said Banship, "remains to be seen. It will be the worse for you if he does not!"

Then they vanished, and the key rattled in the lock, and Dig knew himself a prisoner.

But his spirit was not broken.

"That brute isn't Uncle Justin, and the mater knew nothing about it!" he said to himself, almost exultantly. "I've got a rough time coming, I guess; but I can stand it now I know that!"

Meanwhile, at St. Jim's his place at the dinner-table was empty. But that in itself was not a matter to which much importance would be attached. Not until call-over would he really be missed, for it was Wednesday and a half-holiday.

How he was missed, and what was done when he was missed, the next story must tell.

THE END.

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