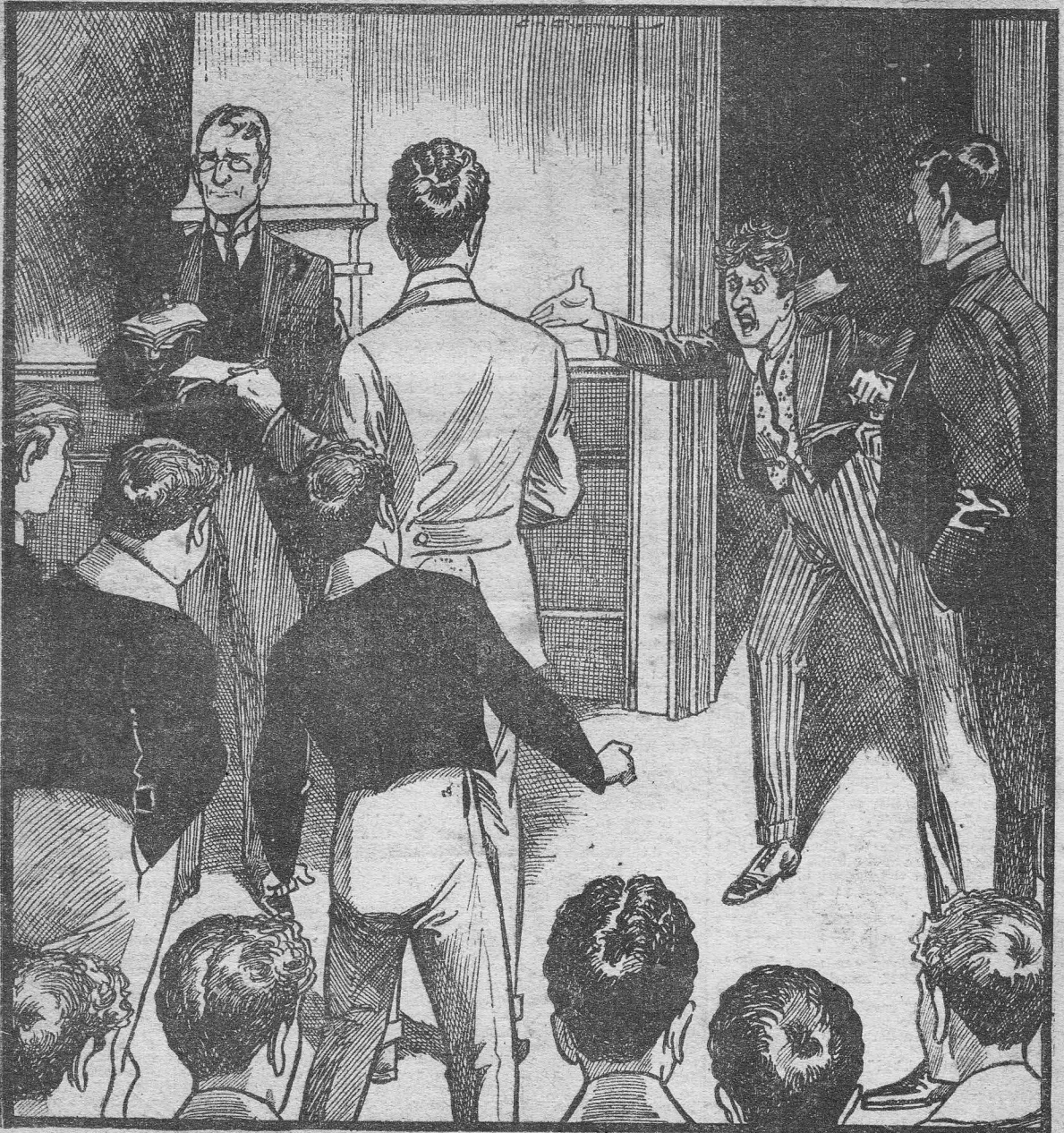


A SPLENDID BUDGET OF SCHOOL STORIES!

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JUST IN TIME TO VOTE!

(A Remarkable Scene in the Magnificent Long Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)



The Greyfriars Election!

A Splendid Long Complete
Story of HARRY WHAR-
TON & Co., the Chums of
Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Backing Up Bunter!

"IT'S going to be a jolly close fight!" That was Harold Skinner's opinion; and, for once in a way, the opinion of Skinner was shared by the whole of the Remove Form at Greyfriars.

Skinner was dispensing afternoon tea in his study on the day before the election, and there was quite a crowd of guests.

Vernon-Smith, who shared the study with Skinner, was not at home. This was fortunate, so far as Skinner was concerned, for Vernon-Smith would not have approved of the study being overrun with juniors.

Scoop and Stott and Bolsover major were present; also Trevor, Treluce, and Hazeldene. Refreshments—both light and otherwise—were piled on the table; and in return for a free feed, Skinner's guests were quite willing to listen to any opinions he cared to express.

"It's impossible to say with any degree of certainty who will bag the captaincy," Skinner went on.

"I think Wharton will," said Hazeldene.

"Rats!" growled Bolsover major. "The fellows have had one dose of Wharton, and they don't want another!"

"Hear, hear!" said Trevor. "The Form went to pieces before, when Wharton was skipper, and he's not likely to be re-elected."

"He's certain of four votes, at least," said Stott. "Bob Cherry, Nugent, Johnny Bull, and that nigger Hurree Singh will do their best to get him returned at the top of the poll. All the same, I don't give a fig for Wharton's chances. That fellow Dennis Carr seems likely to cut him out."

"I agree," said Scoop. "Carr's going all out for the captaincy, and heaps of fellows have promised to vote for him. It's jolly queer, when you come to think of it! At one time Carr was the rankest of rank outsiders, and nobody had a good word to say for him."

"He's a reformed character," said Bolsover major, with a sniff, "and I don't like reformed characters!"

"Is that because you can never hope to become one yourself?" asked Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't be funny!" growled Bolsover. "This election is a serious matter. There are six candidates, and I'm dashed if I know which to vote for!"

"What about Smithy?" said Hazeldene.

Bolsover scowled.

"Smithy let us down badly last week," he said. "He called a meeting in the Rag, and promised to provide refreshments, but he didn't keep his promise. And what's the use

of having a Form-captain who doesn't keep his word?"

"I'm with you there," said Skinner. "Smithy's not a bad fellow, but he let us down, and he's not going to get our votes. He's not going to get mine, anyway!"

"Nor mine!" echoed half a dozen voices.

"The list of candidates," Skinner went on, "isn't a very inspiring one. I'm beginning to wish I'd put up for the captaincy myself!"

"You wouldn't have stood a dog's chance, old man," said Stott.

"I should have got more votes than Smithy or Toddy are likely to get. I don't know a single fellow who intends voting for Smithy. And as for Peter Tedd, the only two voters he can count on are Alonzo and Tom Dutton."

"Dick Russell's got a decent following," observed Hazeldene.

"Yes; but I wouldn't vote for Russell to save my life! He's to goody-goody! Used to be quite a sportsman, and said nothing against a fellow who enjoyed a quiet smoke or played nap for penny points. But he's changed for the worse. He belongs to the Wharton school now."

"The Wharton Select Set!" sneered Bolsover.

"Exactly!"

"You're not going to vote for Wharton, are you, Skinny?" inquired Scoop.

Skinner laughed uproariously at this suggestion.

"What do you take me for," he asked, "a tame lunatic? I should have to be drunk or mad, or both, before I voted for Wharton!"

"You're backing up Toddy, perhaps?" suggested Treluce.

Skinner shook his head.

"I shouldn't relish the idea of Toddy being skipper of the Remove," he said. "He'd throw his weight about too much."

"Then, the only conclusion we can come to," said Trevor, "is that you're going to vote for Carr?"

"Carr! No jolly fear! If Carr were captain of the Remove our lives wouldn't be worth living. Every time we had a little flutter he'd put his foot down. There would be no more card-parties, no more merry revels. Carr would insist on compulsory football, and things like that. Groo!"

Skinner's audience desisted from their attack on one of Mrs. Mumble's plum-cakes, and stared at their host.

"What's the game, Skinny?" demanded Bolsover major. "You say you're not going to vote for Wharton or Carr, or Smithy or Toddy, or Russell. If you're not going to vote for any of these, who the blump is going to claim your vote?"

At this point Skinner exploded a bomb-shell.

"Bunter!" he said.

"What!"

There was a positive howl from the juniors. Many of them jumped to their feet.

"You—you—" gasped Scoop faintly. "Did you say Bunter?"

Skinner nodded calmly.

"William George Bunter, alias the Owl, the porpoise, and the Peeping Tom!" he said.

Hazeldene tapped his forehead significantly.

"Poor old Skinner!" he said. "He's off his rocker! I've suspected for a long time that he hasn't been quite right in the head!"

"My dear chap," comforted Skinner, "I'm the sanest fellow present!"

"No one would believe it to hear you talk," said Stott. "They'd imagine you'd just broken loose from Colney Hatch!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Of course, this is a leg-pulling stunt," said Trevor. "Skinner hasn't the slightest intention of voting for Bunter."

But the cad of the Remove stuck to his guns.

"I'm in sober earnest!" he declared. "Bunter gets my vote, and if you fellows have got a spark of wisdom in you, he'll get yours, too!"

"I wouldn't vote for Bunter," said Bolsover major, "if he offered me a whole term's pocket-money! You're potty, Skinny—absolutely up the pole!"

But Skinner's next words showed that there was method in his madness.

"It's like this," he explained. "If Wharton's elected, or Carr, it means good-bye to our freedom—a fond farewell to all our little flutters. We shall be kept in order, and bumped every time we stray from the path of virtue."

"That's so," agreed Scoop.

"Now look at the other side of the picture a moment. If Bunter is elected Form-captain, it means that we shall be able to do exactly as we like. There will be no one to order our goings-out and our comings-in. If we want to break bounds, we can do so without danger of interference from the captain of the Remove. We shall be free agents—free to do just what we choose. It amounts to this, in a nutshell. To vote for Wharton or Carr is to vote for slavery and loss of all our pleasures. To vote for Billy Bunter is to vote for freedom and a jolly good time!"

This lengthy oration quite exhausted Skinner, who leaned back in his chair, gasping.

The audience gasped, too.

It took some time for Skinner's words to sink in, but eventually they had the effect which Skinner hoped they would have.

"Dashed it that isn't sound reasoning!" said Stott. "I'd never looked at things in that light before."

"Neither had I," said Hazeldene.

"Of course, Bunter's an awful ass, and he'd be neither use nor ornament as a Form-captain," said Trevor. "But that doesn't matter a straw. What does matter is that we shall be free agents, as Skinner says."

Skinner beamed at his audience.

Five minutes before not one of them would have entertained the idea of voting for Bunter. And now Skinner had succeeded in converting the lot! They shared his opinion; they were with him to a man.

"I've been puzzled all along whom to vote for," said Bolsover major. "But the puzzle's solved now. Bunter bags my vote!"

"And mine!"

"Same here!"

There was quite a wave of enthusiasm all of a sudden for Billy Bunter.

The seven juniors in Skinner's study had all decided to vote for the fat junior, not because they had any love for him, but because they would be serving their own ends.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Talk of angels!" said Skinner, as the fat form of Billy Bunter appeared in the doorway. "Walk right in, Billy!"

This cordial greeting surprised Bunter. He was unaccustomed to such invitations. As a rule, for every fellow who told him to walk in, there were a dozen who told him to walk out.

The fat junior advanced into the study, his little round eyes gleaming behind his spectacles as he surveyed the unfinished plum-cake.

The occupants of the study almost fell over each other in their efforts to be accommodating to the Owl of the Remove.

"Here's a chair, Bunter, old fellow!" said Hazeldene genially.

"Sit down and make yourself at home!" said Bolsover major.

"You can eat with a knife if you like, and we shan't say a word!" said Trevor.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter grew quite dizzy. He could scarcely credit his good fortune.

Skinner beamed at the fat junior from the head of the table.

"Pile in, Billy!" he said.

The Owl of the Remove needed no second bidding. He sat down in the chair which Hazeldene had jerked back for him, and then started to commit assault and battery on the plum-cake. In the course of a few moments the cake was reduced to a handful of crumbs.

Like Alexander of old, Billy Bunter looked round for fresh worlds to conquer.

Skinner groped in his pocket, and brought to light a half-crown.

"Snoopy," he said, "just run along to the tuckshop and get half-a-crown's worth of jam-tarts—tuppenny ones!"

"Certainly!" said Snoop.

And he departed on his errand.

Billy Bunter sat blinking at his school-fellows.

Not for the life of him could the fat junior account for his sudden popularity. He had always imagined himself to be popular, but it had stopped short at that. Now there was no need for imagination. He was popular, in fact.

"Another cup of tea, old chap?" asked Skinner.

Billy Bunter nodded.

"You might pour out a couple, and put one on each side of me," he said. "I find it more convenient."

"All serene!" said Skinner cheerfully.

Bolsover major turned a flushed face from the fireplace, where he had been making toast.

"Here you are, Bunt!" he said. "Here's a couple of slices to go on with, while you're waiting for the jam-tarts."

"Good!" said Bunter.

And the two slices of toast, although of considerable thickness, were bolted in record time.

Then Snoop came in with the jam-tarts. There were fifteen of them, and they looked decidedly stodge. Stott was about to take one for his own consumption, but Skinner warned him to keep off the grass.

"This is Bunter's benefit," he said.

Billy Bunter tucked into the jam-tarts with a rapidity which made his schoolfellows gasp, accustomed though they were to his accomplishments in that line. Gradually, however, the fat junior slowed down, and by the time he reached his tenth tart he looked—and felt—comfortably full.

"These tarts are prime!" he murmured. "I should like to finish them, but I—I can't!"

"Oh, come!" said Skinner. "You don't mean to say you're going to be beaten by a few small tarts?"

But Billy Bunter had reached the end of his performance. Had he sampled another tart he would have been in grave danger of bursting.

With a face like a full moon, and with his hands crossed in the waistcoat region, the fat junior leaned back in his chair.

"Thanks very much for your hospitality, Skinny," he said. "I'll return it when—when my postal-order comes."

"That's all right," said Skinner.

"I hope you fellows don't think I came here expressly for a feed," said Bunter. "I came to see if I could collect any votes—"

"Set your mind at rest," said Bolsover major. "We're voting for you to a man!"

"Oh, ripping!"

Billy Bunter felt as if he had been transported into a sort of Fairyland. He had often pictured to himself in his dreams a scene like this—his schoolfellows paying homage to him, and looking up to him as their leader and hero.

There was a tap on the door of the study, and Bob Cherry looked in.

Bob was obviously surprised to see Billy Bunter seated in state, as it were, with Skinner & Co. fawning on him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the little game?" asked Bob.

"Bunter's nursing his constituency," explained Skinner, with a chuckle.

"What!"

"He's passing a pleasant afternoon with his electors."

Bob Cherry jumped.

"You—you mean to say you fellows are going to vote for Bunter?" he gasped.

"Right on the wicket!" said Stott.

"Oh, carry me home to die!" said Bob Cherry faintly. "This must be a dream!"

"It's real enough," said Skinner. "We're going to see that Bunter gets in by a thumping majority!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, I—I'm beat!" gasped Bob Cherry.

And he left Bunter to nurse his constituency, and felt, as he retreated along the Remove passage, that the world must be coming to an end!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Out of the Running!

BOB CHERRY lurched into Study No. 1, and called feebly for water.

The other members of the Famous Five were finishing tea, and they regarded their chum in startled surprise.

"What's happened?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

Bob Cherry sank into the armchair.

"Don't talk to me for a few minutes," he pleaded. "I feel quite giddy!"

Notwithstanding Bob's request, questions were simply fired at him by the other occupants of the study. But he ignored them all until he had recovered from the shock of what he had seen and heard in Skinner's study.

"Look here, Bob," said Wharton at length. "You said you were going on a tour of the Remove, to find out who every fellow intended to vote for."

Bob Cherry nodded.

"The good work is complete," he said. "I've come back full of facts and figures and startling information."

"My hat!"

"Don't tell us that Dennis Carr's going to resign from the contest!" said Nugent.

"Great Scott, no! Carr's going as strongly as ever."

"Come to the point," said Johnny Bull, "and tell us the result of your investigations."

"We are all ears!" said Nugent.

"Well, to begin with," said Bob Cherry, "there are seven fellows who have made up their minds to vote for Harry."

Wharton's face fell.

"Only seven?" he ejaculated. "You mean to say that there are only two fellows outside this study who are backing me for the captaincy?"

"That's all—so far, at any rate," said Bob.

"Pshaw! Then I might as well chuck in my mit. Who are the two?"

"Dick Penfold and Wun Lung. Pen's awfully keen that you should win back the captaincy, but Wun Lung needed no end

of persuasion before he'd promise to give you his vote." kept saying "No savvy in that parrot-way of his. But I talked him round, and you can count on him to turn up trumps at the election."

Wharton nodded.

"But if I've only got seven supporters, how many have the others got, for goodness sake?" he exclaimed.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"There's Smithy," he said. "He's got one—himself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You mean to say nobody intends to vote for Smithy?" gasped Johnny Bull.

"Not a soul, as far as I can make out. The fellows haven't forgotten how he let the Remove down during his trial week, and he has quite fallen from favour. Tom Redwing was undecided at first whether to vote for Smithy or Dick Russell, and when he saw that Smithy hadn't an earthly chance of being elected, he definitely decided to back Russell."

"How many supporters has Russell got?" asked Wharton.

"Six—one less than you!"

"That's cheering news, anyway! Who are the six?"

"Ogilvy, Morgan, Wibley, Micky Desmond, Kipps, and Tom Redwing."

Wharton nodded thoughtfully.

"I suppose that means that my most dangerous rival is Peter Todd?" he said.

"Not a bit of it!" replied Bob Cherry. "Todd's gone nearly as badly off as Smithy. He's got two supporters—Tom Dutton and Alonzo—and they're only backing him up because they know what they'd get if they didn't."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton jotted down some figures on a sheet of paper.

"Seven to me, six to Russell, two to Todd," he murmured. "That means that half the Remove must be going to vote for Carr?"

"Wrong again!" said Bob Cherry. "Carr and you are dead level. He's got seven supporters. There's Manly and Jimmy Vivian, Sulist and Tom Brown, Monty Newland and Bulstrode, and Dick Rake. We are seven, as the poet sings. From what I can see of things, it's going to be a close tussle between you and Carr and Bunter."

The last name had a magical effect upon Bob's chums. With one accord, they sprang to their feet, and stared in amazement at their informant.

"Bunter!" gasped Wharton.

"Did you really say Bunter, or are we getting deaf in our old age?" said Johnny Bull.

"Surely the humorous Bob is tugingly pulling our esteemed leg?" exclaimed Hurree Singh.

"I'm not," said Bob Cherry. "I've never been more serious in my life. Instead of being an 'also rat,' and right out of the running for the captaincy, Bunter has as many followers as Wharton and Carr."

"What!"

"You mean to say there are seven fellows—or, rather, imbeciles—backing up Bunter?" roared Frank Nugent.

Bob Cherry nodded.

"Seven," he said solemnly.

"Oh, my hat!"

Harry Wharton and the others sank down again into their chairs. They were overcome.

Frank Nugent fanned himself with an old copy of the "Greyfriars Herald," and the others remained gasping, and blinking at Bob Cherry.

"Thought it would stagger you," said Bob. "It had the same effect on me. That's why I was dumb just now. You could have knocked me down with a feather!"

Harry Wharton seemed to be knocked all of a heap.

To think that Bunter—the Rabby and brainless Bunter—had as many supporters as he and Dennis Carr!

When Billy Bunter had handed in his name as a candidate for the captaincy the Famous Five had regarded it as a huge joke. Not for one moment had they imagined that the fat junior had even a remote chance of being elected captain of the Remove.

Bunter was not an athlete; he had no qualities of leadership; he was everything that a Form-captain should not be. There was not a fellow in the Remove who was less suited for such an onerous post.

And yet seven fellows were rallying round him!

"Oh, dear!" gasped Wharton at length. "It's lucky I haven't got a weak heart, or I should have expired of shock!"

"The world seems to be upside-down!" said Nugent. "Who are the seven tame lunatics who intend to vote for Bunter?"

Bob Cherry stated the names—Skinner, Snop, Stott, Trevor, Trelice, Hazeldene, and Bolsaver major.

"Well, this is the limit and the last straw rolled into one!" declared Johnny Bull. "What are you going to do about it, Harry?" "Something must be done!" said Wharton desperately.

The possibility of being defeated at the poll by Billy Bunter was altogether too appalling. "Can't we make Bunter resign?" suggested Bob Cherry.

Wharton shook his head. "Nothing would shift Bunter now that he knows he's in the limelight," he said. "He'd be proof against bumpings and threats and honeyed words. Now that he's got seven delectors at his back, he'll hang on like grim death!"

"Surely we can find a way out somehow!" said Nugent. "Did you discover any fellows, Bob, who haven't yet made up their minds which way they're going to vote?"

"Two," said Bob Cherry. "Name'ly?"

"Fishy and Dupont." "Fishy's vote," said Wharton.

But Bob Cherry was not so optimistic. "I argued with him till I was husky," he said, "but he wouldn't give me any satisfaction. He said he was going to wait till to-morrow night—election night—before definitely making up his mind."

"And what about Dupont?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Bolsover's trying to bully him into voting for Bunter," said Bob Cherry. "Shame!"

"Bolsover's a beastly cad!" "He's got Dupont under his thumb, more or less," said Bob. "You see, they share the same study. Bolsover's threatened the kid with all sorts of pains and penalties if he doesn't vote for Bunter."

Harry Wharton looked grim. "If we catch Bolsover at his bullying tricks," he said, "we'll give him the bumping of his life!"

"Hear, hear!" "Apart from Dupont and Fishy," said Bob Cherry, "there are three or four fellows who are going to remain neutral. Nothing on earth will induce them to vote. They say that all the candidates are hopeless duffers, and that they prefer to be without a Form-captain."

"Everything seems to depend on Fishy and Dupont," said Wharton. "Let's go and canvass them!" said Nugent. "All serene!"

The Famous Five went first of all to the study which Dupont, the French junior, shared with Bolsover major.

Bolsover was in the act of thumping the table with his fist as Harry Wharton & Co. entered.

"Either you vote for Bunter," he was saying, "or your life won't be worth living!"

The Famous Five paused on the threshold. "Drop that, Bolsover!" said Harry Wharton sharply.

The bully of the Remove spun round with a scowl. "Mind your own business!" he growled. "You're not captain of the Remove now—and you're never likely to be again!"

"That's neither here nor there. It's up to every fellow to put down bullying, and if you so much as lay a finger on young Dupont you'll get it in the neck!"

"I can see what your little game is, Wharton," said Bolsover major. "You've come here to pose as a giddy champion of the oppressed in order to get this kid's vote!"

"Nothing of the sort!" said Wharton angrily. "If you open that rat-trap of yours again, Bolsover," said Bob Cherry, "I'll plant my fist in it!"

Bolsover subsided, and the Famous Five turned to Dupont, and asked him if he had yet come to a decision.

The French junior explained, with many gesticulations, that he had decided to vote for Dick Russell, that worthy having befriended him a good deal in the past.

Harry Wharton & Co. saw that Dupont's mind was made up, and they did not press him further.

"That makes seven for Russell," said Bob Cherry, as they emerged into the passage.

"Four candidates, with seven supporters each!" said Nugent. "My hat! It's going to be an exciting election, and no mistake!"

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"Fishy's vote will decide the issue," said Wharton. "Let's tackle him right away!"

Fisher T. Fish, the Vankee junior, was run to earth in the Rag.

"Made up your mind yet, Fishy?" asked Bob Cherry. "Nopel!"

"Are you going to rally round, like a good sort, and give me your vote?" inquired Wharton.

"I guess I can't say. Perhaps I shan't vote at all."

"You mean you'll be neutral?" said Nugent. "Most likely." The Famous Five could get no satisfaction from Fishy. They coaxed him, they told him it was his bounden duty to support the old firm, and they paid him compliments which, in the ordinary way, they would never have dreamed of paying.

But Fisher T. Fish remained adamant. Perhaps he was enjoying the novel position of being the deciding factor in the election, and he wanted to keep the various candidates in a state of suspense until the last moment. That evening there was a dramatic development.

An announcement appeared on the notice-board in the handwriting of Vernon-Smith calling a meeting in the Rag.

"At this meeting," ran the notice, "an important statement will be made."

Prompted by curiosity, quite a crowd of fellows, including the Famous Five, turned up at the appointed time; and Vernon-Smith, with a rather cynical smile on his face, mounted a form and proceeded to address them.

"Gentlemen," he began, "I am no fool—"

"Oh, come!" said Skinner. "Don't start by telling whoppers, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "I am no fool," repeated Vernon-Smith, with heightened colour, "and I can clearly see that I haven't an earthly chance of bagging the captaincy. Just because I made one or two blunders during my trial-week—blunders which any other fellow would have made in similar circumstances—you've all turned your backs on me, and refused to give me your support. I'm not going to whine. I know what a fleckle thing popularity is. One minute a fellow's lauded to the skies; the next he's dubbed a wash-out, and nobody has any use for him. Such is my sorry plight at the moment, gentlemen, and although I'm not in the habit of tamely throwing up the sponge, I have decided that there is nothing left for me to do but to resign."

There was a buzz of amazement from Vernon-Smith's audience. They had not bargained for the resignation of one of the candidates; and yet, in the circumstances, the Boulder could do little else. It was not much use standing for election without a single supporter.

"That's all, gentlemen," said Vernon-Smith. And he stepped down from the form. Instantly, the Boulder was surrounded by his schoolfellows. They realised that in ceasing to be a candidate Vernon Smith had become a voter. And the burning question of the moment was—to whom would his vote be given?

"Are you a Whartonite, Smythy?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Or a Russellite?" inquired Ogilvy.

"Or a Toddier?" asked Peter Todd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Vernon-Smith grinned at his eager questioners.

"I'm not going to make a parade of my intentions," he said.

"Of course," said Billy Bunter, with a knowing chuckle, "Smythy's going to vote for me!"

"Rats!" "Do tell us who you're going to vote for, Smythy!" urged Tom Brown.

But Vernon-Smith strolled out of the Rag without satisfying the curiosity of his schoolfellows.

For whom did he intend to vote? The answer to that all-important question was known only to Vernon-Smith himself!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Vanished Voter I

ELECTION DAY at last! The excitement in the Remove dormitory, as the rising-bell heralded the dawning of the eventful day, was terrific.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Ogilvy, springing out of bed. "In another twelve hours Dick Russell will be captain of the Remove!"

"Denis Carr, you mean!" said Squibb.

"Rats!" growled Bob Cherry. "He means Wharton!"

"Neither Russell, Carr, nor Wharton will have a look-in!" said Skinner. "Bunter's the hot favourite, and Bunter's going to win!"

"Of course I am!" said the fat junior. "It's easy to see what will happen at the election. Smythy will remain neutral, and therefore four candidates will make a dead-heat of it for top place. Quelch will give a casting vote, and, recognising my superior qualities of leadership, he'll give it to me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" The idea of Mr. Quelch preferring Billy Bunter to Wharton or Carr or Russell was too much for most of the Removeites. They simply shrieked.

Whilst the juniors were dressing Bob Cherry beckoned to Peter Todd.

"Look here, Toddy," he said, "why don't you resign?"

"Resign!" echoed Peter. "Why?"

"Well, you've only got two supporters—Alouzo and Dutton—and two mouldy votes will land you nowhere!"

"That so," said Nugent. "You've no more chance of becoming captain of the Remove, Toddy, than that fly on the wall yonder! Why not resign, and give Wharton your vote? Lonzy and Dutton would vote for him as well, and he'd be elected by a majority of three."

"Artful dodgers, aren't they?" chuckled Dennis Carr. "Don't you do anything of the sort, Toddy!"

"Set your mind at rest," said the leader of Study No. 7. "I haven't the slightest intention of resigning. Elections are funny things. Something may happen at the last moment whereby I shall rope in quite a lot of votes."

"Ass!" growled Johnny Bull. "This isn't the age of miracles!"

"I'm not going to give up like Smythy did, anyway!" said Peter Todd doggedly. "That sort of thing's awfully feeble!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith. "He calls me feeble! I've put a man to sleep for less!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Had Peter Todd retired from the contest the election would have been greatly simplified. Peter and Alouzo and Tom Dutton would undoubtedly have voted for Wharton, who would have headed the poll with a majority of three.

But, unlike Vernon-Smith, Peter Todd was sticking to his guns. The result was that Wharton, Carr, Russell, and Bunter each had seven supporters, and the election would resolve itself into a very close thing indeed. Even the cleverest prophet could not have foretold the result with any degree of accuracy.

After a spirited debate on the subject the Removeites clattered down the stairs, and went into Hall for breakfast.

Mr. Quelch noted their flushed and excited faces, and he understood the cause.

This was indeed a day of days, so far as the Remove was concerned. The fate of the Form seemed to hang in the balance.

This was probably the only occasion in history on which Billy Bunter was too excited to eat his breakfast.

The fat junior could not eat, and he could not sit still. He wriggled and squirmed in his seat, his little round eyes glistening with excitement. His dreams of becoming Form-captain, he told himself, were on the verge of coming true.

Mr. Quelch glanced at the Owl of the Remove.

"Bunter!" he exclaimed. "What is the matter with you? Are you ill?"

"Nunno, sir!"

"Then why are you neglecting your breakfast?"

"I—I can't be bothered with such trivial things just now, sir!" said Bunter. "I'm shortly going to be elected Form-captain!"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Quelch sharply. "I regard your candidature as a foolish joke, Bunter. Do you imagine for one moment that your Form-fellows would elect a boy who has neither brains nor ability?"

"Wait and see!" muttered Skinner.

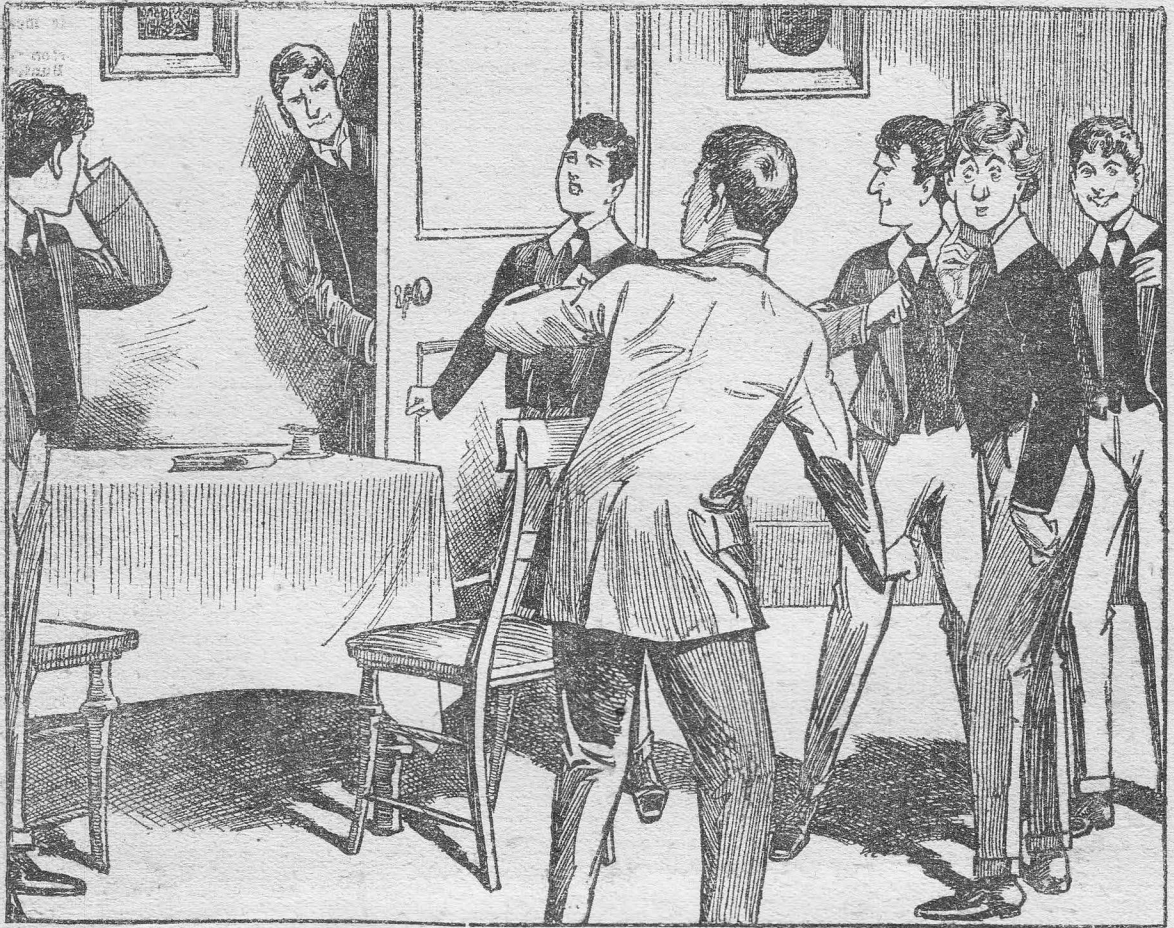
Mr. Quelch frowned.

"Take a hundred lines for impertinence, Skinner!" he rapped out. "Bunter! Pray make an effort to consume your breakfast!"

Billy Bunter toyed with his eggs-and-bacon for a moment, then he laid down his knife and fork.

"It—it's no use, sir!" he said. "I'm afraid I shan't recover my normal appetite till the election's over."

"Ha, ha, ha!"



"Pringle's as much entitled to a vote as anybody," said Bolsover major. "If you were to ask old Quelch —"
 "'Old Quelch' is here!" said a familiar voice. Bolsover spun round with a start. He nearly fell down as he caught sight of Mr. Quelch standing in the doorway. (See page 6.)

"Silence!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "You are an utterly ridiculous boy, Bunter. There is no cause whatever for your excitement, since you are not likely to obtain a single vote!"

Billy Bunter's supporters chuckled. Mr. Quelch did not know what they knew—namely, that Bunter had a first-rate chance of securing the captaincy. The Form-master would have a shock when he counted up the votes that evening.

After breakfast Peter Todd buttonholed Fisher T. Fish in the Close.

"What's wanted?" asked Fish.

"Your vote!"

Fish chuckled.

"I guess there's nothing doing!" he said.

"Now, look here," said Peter Todd persuasively, "you've got to make up your mind one way or the other, and you might as well decide to do the decent thing, and vote for me!"

Fish looked thoughtful.

"If you were Form-captain," he said, "would you make any alterations and improvements in this steeple old show?"

"Yes, rather!" said Peter Todd. "In the first place I should back up all smart business stunts—"

"Oh, good!"

"And I should insist upon the freedom of American citizens. I should encourage American trade, and float the Stars and Stripes from my study window."

Fish's eyes gleamed. He gripped the speaker by the arm.

"Are you giving me the straight goods?" he asked excitedly.

"Of course!"

"Then I guess my mind's made up. You shall have my vote!"

"Honest Injun!" asked Peter Todd.

"Yep!"

Peter rubbed his hands with great satisfaction, and strolled away. He had secured another recruit, bringing his total up to three. It was not a great total, but Peter

hoped that Vernon-Smith would vote for him, and that some of the neutrals would rally round at the last moment and give him their support.

The morning passed slowly—all too slowly for the excited Removites, who were longing for the hour of the election to arrive.

Mr. Quelch found his pupils extremely trying.

Billy Bunter, on being asked where Julius Caesar landed, replied, "At the top of the poll, sir!" and was given a hundred lines for his pains.

Shortly afterwards Bob Cherry, questioned as to who won the Battle of Hastings, replied that it was a dead heat between Harry Wharton, Dennis Carr, Dick Russell, and Billy Bunter.

Mr. Quelch was furious, and, although Bob Cherry put in a plea of absent-mindedness, he was rewarded with two hundred lines.

"Thank goodness it's a half-holiday this afternoon!" murmured Bob. "It's quite impos- sible to think of lessons!"

After what seemed an age the welcome word of dismissal came.

The juniors streamed out into the winter sunshine, and strolled round the Close in batches.

Harry Wharton walked with his loyal band of electors, and the other candidates walked with theirs.

"Wish all this suspense was over!" said Wharton.

"Wish we could collar another voter from somewhere, too!" sighed Nugent.

"Don't worry!" said Bob Cherry, with his sunny smile. "Harry's coming out on top, you mark my words!"

"But how can he?" asked Johnny Bull helplessly. "We're only seven, and Smithy's not likely to be on Wharton's side."

"My opinion is this," said Bob—"that there will be treachery in the ranks of Bunter."

"My hat!"

"I believe Skinner & Co. are pulling Bunter's leg all the time. They pretend they're going to vote for him, but they'll do nothing of the sort. The other candidates will get their votes."

"Skinner's not likely to vote for me," said Wharton ruefully. "We're at daggers drawn."

"But there's Hazeldene and Trevor and Truluce, and the others!" said Bob Cherry. "I fancy they'll rally round, not because they're keen on you, but because they regard you as the lesser of several evils. They'd sooner have you for skipper than Carr, Trinstance. Carr will be down on them too much. He can't stand slackers."

Bob Cherry's words put fresh hope into Wharton, who was anxious—desperately anxious—to win back his former position. It was not all honey being captain of the Remove, but it was infinitely better than playing second-fiddle to another fellow.

Shortly before dinner the following announcement appeared on the notice-board:

"NOTICE!

"The election of a Form-captain will take place in the junior Common-room at eight o'clock this evening.

"Should any candidates or voters fail to appear at the appointed time, the election will proceed without them.

"(Signed) H. H. QUELCH,
 "Remove-master."

The juniors laughed heartily when they read the last clause.

"As if anybody would fail to turn up!" said Bob Cherry. "Why, nobody would dream of staying away—not even the neutrals!"

As the day advanced the election fever grew. Free fights between the rival supporters were of common occurrence; and a good many of the electors would take black eyes and swollen noses into the junior Common-room with them.

There was no football that afternoon. In the first place, there had been a heavy fall of snow; and, secondly, there was far more important business on hand.

The snow, of course, was not allowed to be unheeded in the Close. It was heaped together in forts by the rival electors, who pelted each other until tea-time. Sometimes they came to close quarters, and on these occasions fists took the place of snowballs.

After tea, just as dusk was beginning to fall, Vernon-Smith, with his cap and coat on, was seen heading towards the school gates.

"Going out, Smithy?" inquired Dennis Carr.

"Yes."

"Anything important?"

"I've got to fetch my bike from the repair shop in Courtfield."

"You won't get lost in the snow, will you?"

Dennis Carr's tone was anxious. He had a lurking idea that Vernon-Smith intended to vote for him, in which case, it was extremely desirable that the Bounder should not be absent when the election took place.

Vernon-Smith grinned.

"Trust me not to get lost!" he said. "Dash it all, I've got eyes, and a sense of direction!"

"You'll be back by eight?"

"Of course!"

There was something in Vernon-Smith's tone which convinced Dennis Carr that his supposition was correct—that the Bounder intended to vote for him.

And Dennis rejoiced, for that extra vote was likely to give him the victory.

An hour passed, and Vernon-Smith did not return.

Dennis Carr began to look anxious.

Even making allowances for the snow and the dusk, the Bounder ought to be back from Courtfield by this time. But there was no sign of him.

What had happened?

Had Vernon-Smith, in attempting to cycle home, met with an accident? Or had he paid a visit to the cinema at Courtfield, and forgotten the flight of time?

Dennis Carr grew seriously alarmed. He communicated his fears to Lord Maulverer and Sir Jimmy Vivian, and the trio patrolled the Close together, waiting for Vernon-Smith to come in.

Boom!

It was the first stroke of seven, sounding from the old clock-tower.

"The silly ass!" muttered Dennis impatiently. "I feel sure he intended to vote for me—and he hasn't come in!"

"There's only another hour, begad!" remarked Lord Maulverer. "Shall we go and look for him?"

"We'll scan the road for a mile or so, and see if there's anything doing," said Dennis.

The three juniors proceeded out of gates, and along the dusky road. They scanned the banks on either side, thinking that Vernon-Smith might have come a cropper; but they drew blank.

"No luck!" said Jimmy Vivian. "We shall have to turn back now. No time to tramp all the way to Courtfield!"

"Confound the fellow!" snapped Dennis Carr. "This might make all the difference to the result of the election."

The trio trudged back to Greyfriars through the snow.

The half-hour after seven chimed as they entered the Close.

Dark and bitterly cold though it was, a number of juniors were still pacing to and fro. The time of the election was very near now, and they could not endure being penned up in their studies.

"Hallo, Carr!" sang out Bob Cherry. "You're looking jolly down in the mouth! What's happened?"

"That ass Smithy has gone out, and it doesn't look as if he'll be back in time for the election," growled Dennis.

"My hat!"

"I didn't see why Smithy's absence should worry you," said Wharton.

"But he was going to vote for me!" said Dennis Carr.

"Did he tell you so?"

"No; but it stands to reason that a fellow of common-sense couldn't possibly vote for anybody else."

"Rats!"

"Here he comes!" said Frank Nugent, as a shadowy form loomed up in the old gateway.

"Thank goodness!" said Dennis Carr, in great relief. "Smithy! Back up, old man! We were beginning to think you were never coming!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Election.

HERE was no reply from the junior who had just entered the school gateway.

"Smithy!" shouted Dennis Carr. Then a still, small voice replied: "My name's not Smithy, if you please!"

"Great pip!" gasped Bob Cherry, peering through the gloom at the new-comer. "Who are you, kid?"

"Pringle—I'm Pringle!"

"Pringle!" echoed the juniors, in wonder.

"Yes," said the youth, coming to a halt. "I'm the new boy, if you don't mind!"

"Blessed if I knew there was a new kid coming!" said Harry Wharton, in amazement. "Where's your luggage, Pringle?"

"Please, it's coming up on the station hack, thank you!"

"By Jove!" gasped Johnny Bull. "This is something new in new kids! Let's have a look at you, Pringle!"

And Johnny flashed on his electric torch, the rays of which illuminated the new boy's face.

Pringle was a weedy, mild-looking youth, with long hair and an expression of humble apology. He blinked in the rays of Johnny Bull's torch, and said meekly:

"Please, I should be awfully obliged if you would display the coils!"

"Display what?" gasped Bob Cherry, pinching himself to make sure he was awake.

"The coils! My uncle said that you would be pleased to show me the ropes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors understood now, and they roared with laughter. The innocence of Master Pringle was amazing. His uncle had informed him that the juniors would show him the ropes on his arrival at Greyfriars, and he had taken his uncle's words literally. He evidently expected Harry Wharton & Co. to produce several coils of rope.

Skinner and Bolsover major had been listening intently to the conversation, and whilst the other juniors were doubted up with merriment, the cads of the Remove pounced upon Pringle and whisked him away into the building.

It did not occur to Harry Wharton and Dennis Carr that Skinner and Bolsover had an axe to grind—that they were after the new boy's vote. Yet such was the case.

Pringle, who made no resistance, was marched away to Skinner's study.

Bolsover closed the door, and locked it on the inside.

"Look here, kid," said Skinner, "there's an election coming off in a few minutes. A new Form-captain's going to be elected, and you'll be one of the voters, see?"

"I'm sorry," said Pringle meekly.

"There's nothing to be sorry about, you duffer—unless you refuse to come up to the scratch and vote for the right man!"

"Dear me!" murmured Pringle. "Who is the right man, pray?"

This question gave Skinner the chance he wanted.

"A fellow called Bunter—W. G. Bunter!" he said. "If you vote for Bunter you'll never have cause to regret it! Bunter's one of the best. He believes in freedom for all. There isn't another candidate with half his physical and mental ability!"

"That's so," said Bolsover major, turning to Pringle. Then, clenching his massive fists, he added: "Now, kid, are you going to vote for Bunter?"

"Oh, yes!" gasped Pringle. "Certainly! With pleasure! By all means!"

Bolsover, who had thrown himself into a fighting attitude, lowered his hands.

"Good!" he said. "You know which side your bread's buttered. Swear that you will vote for Bunter, and nobody else!"

"I—I swear!" faltered Pringle.

"Shush!" said Skinner. "You mustn't swear in this study, you know! This is the most select study in all Greyfriars!"

"I—I didn't mean—" stammered Pringle.

"Of course he didn't!" said Bolsover. "Stop chipping the kid, Skinny. We've got his vote, and that's all that matters!"

Bolsover stepped to the door and unlocked it. No sooner had he done so than a crowd of Removites swarmed into the study. They had at last tumbled to Messrs. Skinner and Bolsover's little game.

"What have you been saying to this new kid, Skinner?" demanded Dennis Carr.

Skinner chuckled.

"I gave him the finest piece of advice he's ever likely to receive in his lifetime!" he said.

"You told him to vote for Bunter?" roared Bob Cherry.

"Exactly!"

"And he's going to do it?"

"Of course!"

"You rotter! You've been painting Bunter in glowing colours, and stuffing this new kid up with a lot of nonsense!"

Bob Cherry's tone was heated and indignant.

"All's fair in love and war—and elections!" retorted Skinner.

Bob Cherry advanced towards the cad of the Remove, who would have received a rough handling had not Harry Wharton intervened.

"It's all right, Bob!" said Harry.

"All right!" shouted Bob. "Don't you realise what this means? Pringle's vote will put Bunter on top. It will give him eight votes, and you and Russell and Carr will only get seven. Just think of it—Bunter captain of the Remove!"

Wharton laughed.

"Don't worry," he said. "Pringle won't be allowed to vote. He hasn't been in the school five minutes!"

"Rats!" said Bolsover major. "He's as much entitled to a vote as anybody. If you were to ask old Quelch—"

"Old Quelch is here!" said a familiar voice.

Bolsover spun round with a start. He nearly fell down as he caught sight of Mr. Quelch standing in the doorway.

"Oh, crumbs!" he gasped. "I—I didn't know you were there, sir!"

"Apparently not," said Mr. Quelch drily, "or you would have been more careful in your choice of expressions! What does this disturbance mean?"

Dennis Carr explained the situation.

"This new fellow—Pringle—has just arrived, sir. As he to be allowed to vote at the election?"

Mr. Quelch fixed his gimlet eyes on Pringle, who seemed to be apologising for his existence.

"You have just arrived, Pringle?"

"Yes, sir, if you please, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence, boys!" said Mr. Quelch, with a frown. "Do you wish to take part in the election of a new Form-captain, Pringle?"

"Say yes, fathead!" hissed Skinner, in the new boy's ear.

Pringle turned to Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, fathead!" he said.

The Remove-master gave a jump, and the juniors chuckled.

"Boy! You are impertinent!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, no, sir! Not at all, sir! I couldn't be impertinent if I tried—not even to my own grandmother, sir!"

Mr. Quelch glared at the new boy.

"Do you wish to participate in the election proceedings, or not?" he demanded.

"Yes, please, sir—thank you very much!" said Pringle meekly.

"Very well," said Mr. Quelch. "You cannot possibly have summed up the respective merits of the candidates in the short time you have been here; but since you are a member of the Form, I fail to see how you can be deprived of the privilege of voting."

Harry Wharton & Co. groaned. So did Dennis Carr and Co. So did Dick Russell & Co.

The new boy's vote—which would probably determine the issue—was to be given to Bunter!

"That's fairly done it!" groaned Dennis Carr.

Had Vernon-Smith been back in time for election, Dennis would at least have been able to tie with Bunter. But the Bounder was still absent, and the Owl of the Remove—unless a miracle happened—would secure the spoils.

"You will assemble in the Common-room at once, my boys!" said Mr. Quelch. "It is nearly eight o'clock."

Chattering excitedly, the Removites trooped along to the Rag.

The faces of Billy Bunter and his electors were jubilant. The faces of the remaining candidates and electors were as long as fiddles.

The opinion that Billy Bunter would win the election was almost universal.

The electors seated themselves at the desks, and the five candidates ranged themselves in a row by the mantelpiece.

There was a constant buzz of voices, which died away when Mr. Quelch swept in with rustling gown.

Boom!

Eight o'clock was striking—and Vernon-Smith was absent!

Dennis Carr clenched his hands with rage and exasperation.

"The election will now commence," said Mr. Quelch. "I should like to say a few words before the voting-papers are passed round. You are here this evening, my boys, to make an important decision affecting the future welfare of the Remove-Form. You are about to choose a leader. See to it, therefore, that the leader you appoint is a boy who has your complete trust and confidence. Do not vote rashly or hastily. Better not to vote at all, if you fail to see in these candidates the necessary qualities of leadership and command. A rash decision may be regretted later on; so I advise each of you to exercise his best judgment."

This speech was totally wasted, so far as the electors were concerned. They had come into the Common-room well knowing whom they were going to vote for; and the appeals of fifty Form-masters would not have reversed their decisions.

Mr. Quelch personally handed round the ballot-papers.

"Each boy will put a cross against the name of the candidate for whom he wishes to vote," said the Form-master. "I will allow a quarter of an hour for due reflection and deliberation."

Many of the fellows promptly put a cross against the name of their chosen candidate. Then they folded up their ballot-papers, and took them to Mr. Quelch.

"Skinner!" rapped out the Remove-master sharply. "You are looking over Pringle's shoulder!"

"I—I just wanted to see that he didn't make a mistake, sir!" stammered Skinner.

The cad of the Remove had been afraid lest Pringle, who seemed a hopeless idiot, mistakenly put a cross against the name of Wharton or Carr. Such a proceeding would have been fatal to Bunter's chances.

"You will keep your eyes in front of you, Skinner!" said Mr. Quelch. "Pringle does not require your assistance!"

Skinner looked relieved at having escaped so easily. His relief was all the greater because he had seen what he wanted to see. Pringle had duly inscribed a cross against the name of W. G. Bunter.

When the time-limit was up, and all the ballot-papers reposed on the Form-master's desk, Mr. Quelch signed to Harry Wharton.

"Kindly ask Wingate and Gwynne if they will be good enough to come and act as scrutineers, Wharton."

"Very good, sir!"

Harry Wharton quitted the Common-room, returning in a few moments with Wingate and Gwynne of the Sixth.

"You want our help, sir?" inquired Wingate.

"Yes, Wingate. I shall be obliged if you and Gwynne will assist me in recording the number of votes obtained by each candidate."

Billy Bunter, who was standing between Dick Russell and Dennis Carr, nudged each of them with a fat elbow.

"This is where you get left!" chortled the fat junior. "Pringle's voted for me! That gives me a total of eight votes, and Wharton and you have only got seven! He, he, he!"

"Bunter!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Cease that ridiculous sniggering at once!"

"Yessir. Certainly, sir! But I can't help feeling a bit bucked. You see, I've won the election, and—"

"You are an utterly absurd boy, Bunter! I shall be astonished if you have received a single vote!"

Just as the ballot-papers were being unfolded the Head looked into the Common-room.

"Good-evening, sir!" said Mr. Quelch.

Dr. Locke returned the salutation.

"I am looking for a new boy, Mr. Quelch," he said. "A boy named Pringle."

"Pringle!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Why, he is here!"

"Yes, sir, I am here, sir—if you please, sir," said a shrill voice.

"Bless my soul!" murmured the Head. "A mistake appears to have been made—"

"A mistake!" echoed Mr. Quelch. "Do you mean, sir, that Pringle does not belong to the Remove Form?"

"Most assuredly he does not!" said Dr. Locke. "He is to go into the Shell."

There was a buzz of amazement from candidates and electors alike.

The Removites—particularly Skinner and Bolsover major—realised that they had jumped to a hasty conclusion. They had taken it for granted that the meek-and-mild Pringle was coming into the Remove, when in reality he was destined for the Shell.

Billy Bunter groaned, and so did his supporters. This unexpected development had quite taken the wind out of their sails. The

discovery of their mistake in regard to Pringle meant the loss of a valuable vote.

"This is extraordinary!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "I was quite under the impression that Pringle was a member of the Remove, and I permitted him to take part in the election of a Form-captain."

"In that case," said the Head, "his vote cannot be taken into consideration."

"For whom did you vote, Pringle?" inquired Mr. Quelch.

"For Bunter, please, sir."

"The Remove-master jumped.

"Then I am well rid of such an indiscriminate and foolish boy!" he said. "Wingate! Kindly destroy one of the ballot-papers which has a cross against Bunter's name."

The captain of Greyfriars obeyed, to the accompaniment of deep groans from the Bunterites.

"You, Pringle," said the Head, "will come with me."

"Yes, thank you, sir!" said the new boy.

And he left the Common-room under escort, to take his place in the Shell, where he would doubtless soon fade into obscurity.

But the passing of Pringle left an aching void in Billy Bunter's heart, and in his batch of ballot-papers!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Winner!

MR. QUELCH, with the ready aid of Wingate and Gwynne, resumed his task.

A pin might have been heard to drop in the junior Common-room.

Everyone was, as Hurree Singh afterwards expressed it, on the "tender-hooks."

Mr. Quelch had intended not to betray a sign of emotion, but as he scanned the ballot-papers he found it difficult to conceal his astonishment.

He had supposed that Pringle, and Pringle alone, had voted for Bunter. And behold! here was a whole handful of papers containing a cross against the fat junior's name.

There was a breathless hush as Mr. Quelch arrived at the final figures, and requested Wingate and Gwynne to check them.

"Correct, sir!" said Wingate.

"Quite correct!" added Gwynne.

Mr. Quelch confronted the eager audience.

"I will now make known the result of the election," he said. "It is usual, in these cases, to start at the bottom of the list and work upwards."

There was a breathless hush as Mr. Quelch continued.

"Peter Todd—three votes!"

The tension was relieved somewhat by this announcement.

There were loud chuckles at Peter Todd's expense; and Peter himself realised, with a groan, that his dreams of the captaincy had "gone West."

"Richard Russell—" began Mr. Quelch.

Before he could proceed there was a startling and dramatic interruption. The door of the Common-room was thrown open, and a breathless and bedraggled junior rushed in.

Mr. Quelch did not recognise the intruder at once, but Dennis Carr did.

"Smithy!" he exclaimed joyfully.

And the name was taken up all over the room.

Vernon-Smith advanced towards the Form-master with an excited gleam in his eyes.

"Am I in time, sir?" he gasped.

Mr. Quelch stood thunderstruck.

"How dare you enter the room in this state, Vernon-Smith?" he exclaimed at length.

The Bounder paused, pumping in breath.

Then, in a few hurried sentences, he explained the why and wherefore of his untimely appearance.

"There has been foul play, sir. I was on my way to Courfield, to fetch my bike, and I was set upon by a gang of fellows, and tied to a tree. I've only just succeeded in getting away. I had to sever the rope with my teeth, and it's taken me hours!"

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "Who are the boys responsible for this outrage?"

"I'd rather not say, sir. They weren't Greyfriars fellows; but evidently they had an interest in this election, and they didn't want me to vote. I can see that I've arrived too late, sir!" added the Bounder, in desperation.

"But as my absence was unavoidable, and in no way my fault, I think it only fair that I should be given a chance to vote, sir."

"Hear, hear!" said Wingate approvingly.

Mr. Quelch debated the matter in his mind for a few moments.

"Fortunately," he said at length, "I have

not yet declared the result of the election in full. Kindly hand Smith a ballot-paper, Wingate. He will be allowed to vote."

"Hurrah!"

It was a spontaneous cheer from the supporters of Dennis Carr.

But supposing they were cheering too soon? Supposing Vernon-Smith had no intention of voting for Dennis Carr at all?

The cheering died away, and there was a hush as Vernon-Smith took up a pen and filled in his ballot-paper.

Against whose name had the cross been placed?

Dennis Carr was hopeful; and so were Wharton and Russell. But two of them were doomed to disappointment.

The paper was handed to Mr. Quelch, and Vernon-Smith staggered towards a seat. He explained in an undertone to his school-fellows that Ponsonby & Co. had waylaid him on his journey to Courfield, and had marched him into the wood and tied him to a tree.

Ponsonby's motive was only too obvious. He knew all about the Greyfriars election, and he guessed that Vernon-Smith intended to vote for Dennis Carr.

Ponsonby hated Dennis because the junior had refused to have anything more to do with him. And by kidnapping Vernon-Smith, the cad of Highcliffe hoped to prevent Dennis winning the election.

The Bounder, however, had got away, and he had raced back to Greyfriars at top speed, arriving just in the nick of time, as it happened.

Mr. Quelch turned once more to his audience.

"Richard Russell—seven votes!" he announced.

"Hard luck, Dick!" muttered Ogilvy.

"Looks as if you're beaten by a short head!"

"Harry Wharton—seven votes!"

The words rang through the Common-room.

"Licked!" muttered Wharton; but he stood with head erect and shoulders squared. He would at least show these fellows that he could take his defeat like a sportsman.

"William Bunter—"

Skinner & Co. were raised to a pitch of the highest excitement; and Billy Bunter himself was quivering all over like a jelly.

"William Bunter—seven votes!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Billy Bunter's face assumed a woebegone expression.

Skinner, however, was still hopeful.

Harry Wharton, Dick Russell, Billy Bunter—each had received seven votes.

It was possible that Dennis Carr, the remaining candidate, had received seven, too.

Mr. Quelch's next words, however, shattered that hope.

"Dennis Carr—eight votes!"

The scene which followed beggared description.

Regardless of the presence of the Form-master and two prefects, Dennis Carr's supporters surged round him, tied him shoulder-high, and marched round the Common-room in a triumphant procession, cheering boisterously as they went.

"Hurrah!"

"Carr's captain!"

Mr. Quelch made no attempt to check the demonstration. As soon as he could make his voice heard, he said:

"I congratulate you, Carr!"

Dennis breathlessly thanked the Form-master; and the first person to seize his hand and shake it, when he was set down, was Harry Wharton.

"Well played, Carr!" he said. "You've beaten the rest of us fairly and squarely—"

"All the same, the captaincy won't be yours for ever!" added Bob Cherry. "Wharton will come into his own again before long!"

"Perhaps!" said Dennis, with a smile.

"Our motto," drawled Lord Manleyverer, "is 'What we have, we'll hold! Isn't it, Carr?'"

Dennis Carr nodded happily.

And later in the evening, when he was alone with his thoughts, he reflected how wonderful it all was that such things had come to pass. A comparatively short time before, he had come to Greyfriars a spoilt and wayward boy, and he had been persecuted and exiled by his Form-fellows.

But the gods had been good, and he was now captain of the Remove.

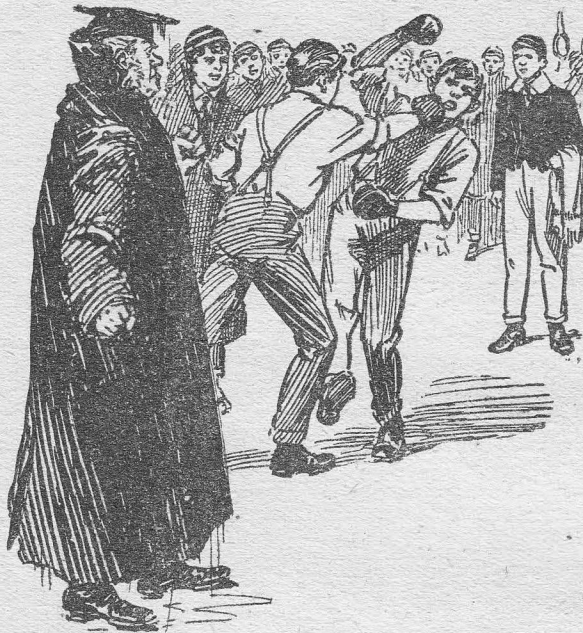
Whether he would make as good a captain as Harry Wharton remained to be seen.

THE END.

(Another grand long story of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars School next week, entitled: "Dennis Carr, Captain!"

By Frank Richards. Order your PENNY POPULAR in advance.)

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 43.



THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Terrible Tomalin.

"WHY, he's worse than Ratty!" Words could no farther go. It was felt that Tom Merry had summed up Mr. Theodosius Ribstone Tomalin fully and briefly.

But, of course, there were many more words. The St. Jim's Shell and Fourth held too many fellows who thought very highly of their own eloquence, and too many more who just chattered without thinking about that sort of thing at all, for this summing-up to be allowed as final.

Mr. Rateliff had gone away for a day or two, and had been taken ill while away. He had written to the Head to say that it might be some time before he could resume his duties, and Mr. Tomalin, who had lately resigned from the tutorial staff of another big school, had been engaged as locum-tenens for him.

This was after Mr. Latham, the Fourth-Form master, had told the Head very plainly indeed that taking charge of a House was not in his line. The New House was smaller than the School House, and had fewer unruly specimens in it, but a week of looking after it had been all too much for mild little Mr. Latham. The only reason why it had not turned his hair grey was that it was already grey.

As Mr. Linton, the Shell master, said, quite politely, but with all possible firmness, that he would not take on the job, Mr. Tomalin had been engaged in a hurry.

No one at St. Jim's had known Mr. Tomalin until he turned up there. Now, after he had sojourned among them a week, everyone knew him, and no one liked him.

"I should jolly well think he is!" said Manners. "Ratty did leave us alone mostly."

But Kerr shook his head. "He's not worse than Ratty," he said. "That's impossible, really. But I admit that Tommy's right from the point of view of you School House bounders. The Pippin's as bad as Ratty for us, and, as he takes more notice of you than Ratty ever did, he's worse for you. That's a mere matter of being more active. We're not going to have Ratty put second because the Pippin gets about more."

Someone had found out what the "T. R." in Mr. Tomalin's name, as he signed it, stood for, and "Pippin" was the natural result. What else could one call a man named "Ribstone"?

It was a wet afternoon, and the junior Common-room of the School House was crowded. The New House Shell and Fourth had migrated almost to a man. There was no peace in their own Common-room, they said; at any moment the crabbled face of the Pippin might appear at the door.

"He gave me a hundred lines for nothing at all!" growled Grundy.

"Serve you right!" snapped Manners, who had been given two hundred.

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"It wasn't for nothing at all, dear old bean," said Lowther. "It was for your face. He looked at that, and he simply couldn't help it!"

"What's the matter with my face?" snorted Grundy.

"Speaking comprehensively, I should say everything—as a face. As a gargoyle, however, it would be a tremendous success!"

"I'll make yours—"
"That's sheer envy, Grundy, and quite unworthy of you."

"I've had lines," said Tom, grinning. "Even Talbot, by long odds the best-conducted fellow in the two Forms, has—"

"Oh, cheese it, Tommy!" protested Talbot. "I'm not sprouting wings yet. But I must say I didn't see why the old boulder should jump on me."

"Everybody's had lines," Kangaroo said. "I wallow in them. But he's gone farther than that, bless his dear old heart! He's caned a School House chap!"

This was most unusual. Mr. Rateliff used to cane with a freedom which only Mr. Selby, of all the St. Jim's masters, emulated; but it was upon the juniors of his own House that he used it. Etiquette demanded that any offence by a School House junior detected by him should be reported to Mr. Railton.

But the Pippin cared nothing about the etiquette of St. Jim's. All he cared for was what he called discipline. The juniors called it "being a beast." Possibly their name was the more nearly correct, for Mr. Tomalin's notions of discipline were of the reformatory type.

"Name, dear boy—name!" said Ralph Reckness Cardew, loyning by the fire, with his shoulders against the mantelshelf.

"It was me!" squeaked Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth.

"Oh, well!" Tom Merry said.

His tone conveyed more than his words. School House patriotism was strong, but it was hardly strong enough to be roused to ardour by anything done to Baggy.

"Pass!" drawled Cardew. "As it was Baggy, one may apply the pathetic epitaph on Frederick, Prince of Wales once on a time, to the situation."

"What's the epitaph? I don't know that one," said Lowther.

"Some rot!" growled Grundy.

"Here lies Fred,
Who was alive, and is dead.
Had it been his sister,
No one would have missed her.
Had it been his father,
We would much rather.
Had it been his mother,
Better than any other.
But as it's only Fred—
Why, there's nothing to be said."

declaimed Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the crowd.

AN AWFUL ERROR!

A Magnificent New Long
Complete Story of
TOM MERRY & Co. at
St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Fred's family don't seem to have been highly popular!" remarked Lumley-Lumley.

"I don't see what it's got to do with the case," growled Grundy, who never could understand half what Cardew and Lowther said.

"Let me elaborate! Baggy has been caned by the new tyrant. Well, it's Baggy. We would have preferred that it should be Crooke. Rather even than Crooke, Racke! Mellish may stand for the sister; no one would have minded had it been Mellish. But it's only Baggy, so there's no more to be said."

Racke, Crooke, and Mellish were all present, as Cardew was very well aware. The fact did not trouble him in the least. If Cardew disliked a fellow, he took delight in letting that fellow know it.

"You'd better be careful, Cardew!" snapped Racke; while Crooke scowled, and Mellish looked sulky.

"I don't see why, Racke. I'm always quite ready to back up anythin' I've said, an' if you care to adjourn to the gym with me—"

"Come along!" flashed Racke, roused to fury.

Racke knew quite well that his own Form and the Fourth regarded him as an utter outsider; and he had moods in which the fact did not trouble him in the least—when, on the whole, he preferred to be so regarded by them. But the whiplash of Cardew's contempt could always cut him.

"Ghee-whiz! Racke's going to fight!" exclaimed Buck Finn.

Racke favoured Buck with an extra special scowl.

"Anybody coming along?" asked Tom.

"Anybody not coming, you mean, don't you?" returned Clifton Dane.

Raincoats and mackintoshes were being donned in haste by the New House fellows, and those who were at home in the School House were hurrying off to get similar protection from the rain, which poured down in such quantity that even the short journey to the gym meant getting wet through without protection.

"Weally, you know," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to Jack Blake, as they pulled on their raincoats in Study No. 6 on the Fourth Form passage—"weally, you know, dear boy, Cardew does ovasthep the limits at times. What he said to Wacke—"

"Rats! What's it matter what anyone says to Racke? They can't say anything worse than the sweep deserves."

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Horries.

"Going to second Racke, Gustavus?" asked Digby.

"I am most assuheadly not goin' to second Wacke, Digbay. But—"

"Oh, stop wagging your chin and come along, ass!" snapped Blake.

They ran after the straggling file of fellows that was crossing the quad.

"You will second me, of course, Ernest, dear boy?" said Cardew to Levison.

"Yes, if you want me to. But what on earth did you do it for, Ralph?"

"Eh? Oh, the Ribstone Pippin was gettin' more attention than he deserves, an' I thought it would be quite a good move to transfer some of it."

"Meaning to yourself, eh, Ralph?" Clive said.

"Meanin' to Racke, old fella. How could I guess that this was one of Aubrey's fightin' days?"

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Informer and Tyrant!

THE Shell and Fourth, almost to the last man, had adjourned to the gymnasium.

Almost, but not quite, to the last man. Baggy Trimble had not gone.

Baggy hated the wet as a cat hates it. This acute dislike extended so far that it was said in the Fourth that Baggy seldom washed his neck, and that his face ablutions amounted to little more than a lick and an unredeemed promise. This may have been exaggeration; but nothing was more certain than that Baggy did not go out in the rain without some strong reason therefore.

Baggy stood on the School House steps, sheltered by the porch, and watched Walkley and Lucas, last of the trooping crowd, enter the gym.

Then he turned his eyes to the New House, and became aware of something that interested him.

Out of the window of Mr. Ratcliff's study, on the ground floor, glared a face.

Baggy knew that face. It was the face of Mr. Theodosius Ribstone Tomalin. It was a red and angry face, and it had pale sandy side-whiskers. On a pale countenance those whiskers might have been described as red; on the beetroot physiognomy of the Pippin they had a curious effect of pallor, almost of whiteness.

Mr. Tomalin was also watching the migration to the gym—or, rather, had been watching it. For it was over now, and Cardew and Racke were taking off their upper-clothing for the fray—Cardew in his usual leisurely manner, Racke even more slowly than he. For now that it came to the pinch Aubrey Racke felt rather sorry he had let himself in for this.

On a sudden Baggy made up his mind. The fat young rascal could be very spiteful at times, and he was feeling spiteful with Cardew just then. If he thought about Racke at all, that thought did not give him pause. Racke was by way of being a patron of Baggy's. Baggy called him a pal. But Baggy never minded letting a pal down.

Daring the rain, Baggy ran across the quad, and gesticulated in front of the window at which Mr. Tomalin's face showed.

The sash was flung up.

"You have something to say to me, Trimble?" said Mr. Tomalin, in a voice that grated like a rusty hinge.

"Yessir! There's a fight on in the gym, sir!"

"What? But I guessed as much! I will come at once, Trimble!"

A few seconds later Mr. Tomalin, with an orcoat muffled over his head and trailing almost to his heels, emerged from the New House door.

Mr. Tomalin was a very short man. There were several juniors at St. Jim's taller than he, and Grundy would simply have towered over him.

The overcoat was Mr. Ratcliff's. Ratty was no giant, but he was a good deal taller than the Pippin.

"I—I hope you'll remember this, sir!" squeaked Baggy.

"Er—you mean—oh, yes, I will certainly remember it, Trimble!"

And Mr. Tomalin hurried off through the pouring rain.

Baggy did not feel at all sure that it would be remembered in the right way. He had hoped to establish himself in the good graces of the Pippin, whom he took to be the kind of master who could tolerate sneaks.

But even if he had not succeeded in that, he had raised trouble for Cardew, possibly for more than Cardew.

He followed Mr. Tomalin, and slunk into the gym unnoticed in his wake.

Racke and Cardew were hard at it, with Tom Merry refereeing, and Crooke seconding Racke.

The first round had not yet ended, and Cardew was not putting in all he knew. But already it was plain that Racke had little chance—no chance at all, bar accidents.

Cardew was altogether too clever for him. Racke's first wild rush had been met by a

cool, scientific defence. A taunting smile curled the lips of the dandy of the Fourth as he fought his opponent back, and got home on face or body, as he chose.

Racke already wished that he had not taken on this job.

Just as Mr. Tomalin entered, Cardew got in a hot one on Racke's jaw, and the black sheep went down with a crash.

"Really, I am amazed beyond words! But that is hardly correct. After a week here I am rapidly losing my capacity for amazement! Let me rather say that I am disgusted beyond words!" stormed the master.

"He does say a lot, doesn't he?" whispered Lowther to Manners. "I should like to play the Pippin on the stage. My gift of speech would come in no end usefully, and I could gag the part."

"He talks as big rot as you do, but not so much of it!" growled Manners. "I say, Tommy's in this up to his neck! We're all in it; but the Pippin's looking specially hard at poor old Thomas!"

It was even so. Racke, getting up with a scowling face, and Cardew, standing negligently at ease, were obviously secondary figures of the drama to Mr. Tomalin.

He had taken a dislike to Tom Merry from the first, and now he had his chance to show it.

"A prize-fight—eh, Merry?" he snapped.

"Hardly, sir," answered Tom. "There's no prize."

"That is sheer impertinence!"

"I trust that I know the meaning of the words I use better than the Pippin seems to know his," murmured the irrepressible Lowther. "Nothing could have been more absolutely pertinent than Tommy's reply!"

"Sheer impertinence!" repeated the master furiously. "Do you deny that this is—I should say, for it will go no further—a fight?"

"I suppose you might call it so," Tom said coolly. "But they're wearing gloves, so that, in effect, it's no more than a boxing-bout."

"That is merely to putter with words! Can you tell me that there is not bad blood between these two?"

"Asking Tommy to tell a lie," Lowther murmured. "But Tommy can't. I did it, Pippin dear, with my little axe!"

It was Cardew who answered Mr. Tomalin. "That's badly for Merry to say, sir," said Cardew. "For my part I deny that there is any more bad blood than usual between me an' Racke, as far as I am concerned. We don't all love one another, y'know, an' we don't pretend to. But that really isn't Merry's fault. Merry is—er—quite the harmonious blacksmith, I assure you."

Mr. Tomalin ignored Cardew.

"Merry, I understand that you are supposed to be captain of the Lower School?" he rapped out.

"I am captain of the Lower School, sir," replied Tom quietly.

"And yet you not only allow this sort of thing, but encourage it!"

"As far as allowing it is concerned, I have no authority to stop it. As for encouraging it, a referee is necessary to a decently-conducted fight, and I can't see anything in my office that makes it wrong that I should act as referee."

"Bravo, Tom!" said Talbot.

"Who spoke then?" snapped Mr. Tomalin.

"I did, sir," Talbot answered.

"You? I cannot understand, Talbot, how you are tolerated here! But that is Dr. Holmes' affair—"

"Hear, hear!" cried Lowther.

"What did you say, Lowther?"

"I said, 'Hear, hear!' I quite agree with you that it is Dr. Holmes' affair!"

"Meaning that it is not mine?"

"Meaning exactly that, sir," answered the undaunted Monty.

"Hear, hear!" cried two score or more voices.

The cruel sneer at Talbot had aroused anger in most of the fellows present. What Reginald Talbot had been they all knew. What he was they all knew, too—as straight and generous as any fellow at St. Jim's, and far better behaved than most. There was nothing of the prig about Talbot; but in many ways he was older than his years, and, because of that, he was more like a responsible senior than the average junior.

Mr. Tomalin's sandy whiskers bristled, and there was a nasty gleam in his green eyes.

"I know how to deal with this sort of thing!" he said. "Merry, you will write out five hundred lines of Virgil. Lowther, you will do four hundred. Talbot, four hundred. Racke and Cardew, three hundred each—no, Cardew five hundred; I must not overlook his gross impertinence. The rest of you, two

hundred each. I shall expect the impositions given now up to me within four days. You will now file out, giving me your names as you pass!"

For a moment no one moved. The rest waited for Tom Merry.

Then, with his chin up, Tom marched past the tyrant.

"Stop!" Tom halted.

"You have not given me your name!"

"I beg your pardon, sir. I really thought you knew it, Merry!"

Tom resumed his march.

"Talbot," said the next fellow in the line, looking Mr. Tomalin straight in the eyes.

The crowd was sorting itself out. No one had suggested it; but those who believed themselves unknown by name to Ratty's locum-tenens held back, while those who were sure that he knew them pressed forward.

"Kerr."

"Figgins."

"Wynn."

"Lowther."

"Manners major."

"Redfern."

"Cardew."

So it went on. More than twenty had filed past Mr. Tomalin before he got any information. Then:

"Lucas."

"What did you say?" thundered the master.

"Lu-cas," said the owner of that name, speaking very slowly and distinctly, but in all innocence.

"What?"

Poor Lucas stared, almost dumfounded at the master's fury.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Others had gotten to what Mr. Tomalin imagined Lucas to have said, if the speaker had not.

"How dare you!"

"I—I—I don't understand you, sir! How dare I what?"

"You know perfectly well what you said to me!"

"I said 'Lu-cas.'"

"And how dared you say 'Loek, ass!' to me?"

"Bub-bub-but it's my name, sir!"

"His name's Lucas, sir," said Ernest Lovison.

"That may be; but I am quite sure that he intended impudence!"

"I didn't, sir! Really, I didn't!"

"Fetch a cane from my study, Owen!"

Leslie Owen stood still.

"Do you hear me, Owen?"

"Yes, sir. But if it's to cane Lucas, I—I'm not going! It isn't fair!"

At that there came a burst of cheering. Owen's refusal would have deserved some recognition even had Lucas been his dearest chum. But Lucas was nothing to Owen. Lucas was nothing much to anybody—a fellow too wrapped up in his own pursuits to have any close chums. It was for right and justice that Owen spoke out.

Tom Merry came back.

"You're sure to consider it more impertinence, sir," he said. "But I feel bound to say this. We have a right of appeal against a caning by anyone but our own Housemaster or Form-master. And if Lucas doesn't appeal, I shall for him!"

The cheering rolled again. Seldom—even where such tyrants as Mr. Ratcliff and Mr. Selby were concerned—had there been stronger feeling against any master at St. Jim's than there now was against Mr. Tomalin.

"And if Merry doesn't, I shall!" bellowed Grundy. "I'm not going to stand by and see Lucas caned!"

Was the man a coward as well as a tyrant? It looked like it to them, for no one gave him credit for reconsidering his decision on its merits.

"You can pass on, Lucas," he said; "but I shall not forget this!"

"Grundy!" roared the great George Alfred, following Lucas, and giving back the Pippin scowl for scowl.

"Owen," spoke the New House junior quietly.

"Lawrence," said his chum, glaring almost as badly as Grundy.

So they passed. When all had gone but Baggy, that virtuous youth asked:

"Am I to do the lines, sir?"

"Certainly!" snapped Mr. Tomalin.

"Bub-bub-but, sir—"

"Not a word more, or your tack will be doubled!"

On the whole, the Pippin rather wished Baggy had kept silence about that fight. And, on the whole, so did Baggy!

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Chortlings and a Plot!

NEVER mind, Tommy, old top! We'll put our second eleven into the field next time, and then perhaps you won't get licked quite so badly!"

It was Jack Blake who spoke thus, in the common-room on Saturday evening, after a match between the Shell and Fourth.

That match was not as frequent or as popular a one as School House juniors v. New House juniors, for the sides were hardly as well matched.

The Shell was technically the senior Form. But that amounted to very little, as far as age, weight, or strength went. And the Fourth had not only more members, but a bigger percentage of useful players.

Tom Merry, Talbot, and Harry Noble might be a shade better than any Fourth Form trio, though Figgins, Kerr, and Blake, or Redfern, Levison, and Roylance would have run them hard. But after those three the Shell team fell away. Lowther and Manners were good; Glyn, at his best, was a fine goalkeeper; and Gore was more than useful. But there was no player of any real note among the few Shell fellows in the New House, Thompson, perhaps the best of them, being inferior to six or seven half-backs in the Fourth.

The Fourth had Figgins and Kerr and Wynn, Levison and Olive and Roylance, Redfern and Owen and Lawrence, Blake and D'Arcy. That had been their team in the match just decided. Herries, Digby, Cardew, Barrance, French, Clarke, Koumi Rao, Lumley-Lumley, Julian, Reilly, and Brooke had all been left out, and, though this possible second team could hardly have beaten the Shell, any of these would have been at least as good as the weakest three on the Shell side.

The game had been very one-sided. Kerr and Figgys had played in fine form at back; Roylance at centre-half had distinguished himself against Tom Merry; Fatty Wynn had proved invincible in goal; and the forward line—Blake, Levison, Redfern, Lawrence, and D'Arcy—had displayed both pace and cleverness. On the other side Glyn had had a bad day; the backs had miskicked too often; Thompson could do nothing with Dick Redfern, and Manners had been a passenger. Even Tom and Talbot had failed. Lowther and Gore had shown the best form, on the whole.

Result—five to nil in favour of the Fourth, acute disappointment among the vanquished, and unbold chortlings by the victors. Tom snorted at Blake's speech. Even Tom's sunny temper was ruffled. "Bettah play the Third, Tom Merry," said Arthur Augustus. "They are much neawah your form, you know. Not that we shall refuse you your vengeance, of course." "If they can take it," said Olive. "Which is a whacking big 'it,'" remarked Levison.

"What was wrong with the Shell team—" began George Alfred Grundy.

"Was that it didn't include the best player in the Form, eh, Grundy?" put in Lowther.

"I am surprised that you have the sense to see that, Lowther, but—"

"But Lowther didn't mean you, Grundy," Levison said.

"I don't see who else—"

"He meant Skinny, dear boy," said Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

No more hopeless duffer than Herbert Skimpie, the philosopher of the Shell, had ever stepped on to a pitch—not even Grundy, who really was pretty hopeless, though he could never be persuaded of the fact.

"What's the matter with you kids," said Tom Merry, "is—"

"Kids! I like that!" snapped Blake. "When we've licked you to the wide today!"

"That's just it. You've had a fluky win—"

"Five to nil! Call that a giddy fluke!"

"Yes, because it's a dead cert that you couldn't lick us five to nil on your merits. But that's no odds. Assume that we're weaker than you—"

"No need to assume it! You jolly well are!" put in Levison, with entire conviction.

"Even so, all this chortling's rot! That's what it is—rot!"

"The PENNY POPULAR.—No. 48.

"Tommy's got his wool off!" gibed Digby. "And enough to make a fellow get his wool off!" growled Manners.

"Oh, come on to prep!" Tom said. "We've had enough of these infants!"

"The infants who licked you five—love!" retorted Roylance.

"Well, your turn will come, one way or another," Talbot said. "Sure to—can't be off it."

"Talbot's got his wool off, too! Wonders will never cease," said Olive.

"Talbot hasn't!" snapped Talbot. But he had, a little.

"May I remark," drawled Cardew, "that it lacks twenty minutes yet of time for prep?"

"Oh, let them go!" said Blake. "They've got the needle badly, poor old crows!"

Tom Manners, Lowther, Talbot, Kangaroo, Dane, and Glyn all went. Gore and Wilkins were the only fellows left who had played for the Shell that afternoon, and as it was hardly worth while to keep up the chaff for the annoyance of Gore and Wilkins, the subject dropped, and the crowd began to talk of the Pippin, who was by long odds the most frequent topic of conversation at St. Jim's just then.

As it chanced, the talk of the seven Shell fellows who gathered in No. 10 Study also turned upon the Pippin, but in rather a different way.

"We shall have to take those bounders down some time before long," said Tom, quite gloomily.

"No mistake about that, my son," agreed Harry Noble. "I'm not a quarrelsome chap, but my hands had a sort of tingling sensation in them while Blake was crowing."

"I could have gone for Cardew with pleasure," admitted Manners. "He wasn't playing, and he didn't say a lot; but that confounded superior smile of his gets me on the raw."

"Has it ever occurred to you, gentlemen, that even such a rank outsider as the Pippin may have his uses?" asked Lowther.

"They stared at him.

"What's the Pippin to do with it?" growled Manners.

"He doesn't know a goalpost from a putter, I should say," said Dane.

"Everything has its uses, they say," remarked Glyn. "But, personally, I've never been able to see any use in rats, flies, Baggy Trimble, or the Pippin!"

A fat junior outside the door of No. 10, with his ear to the keyhole, glowered wrathfully at that.

Someone had seen Baggy speaking to Mr. Tomalin in the gym, and the fact that Baggy had played the informer had somehow leaked out, with the natural consequence that he had had a very unpleasant time during the last few days. He had not shared in the rejoicings of the Fourth, and had not even dared to show his podgy nose in the Common-room.

But he had seen the seven go along to the study of the Terrible Three, and he had scented something in the wind.

"Your list isn't long enough, St. Bernard," said Lowther. "You might add Rache and Ratty, Crooke and Selby, McIlish, and a few more who 'never would be missed.' But I wasn't talking of the Pippin in connection with footer: The use to which I should put him is—"

But perhaps I can better illustrate it in dumb show. Will you kindly turn your noble backs for a minute or two?"

They turned their backs. Lowther went to the cupboard, and took out some things. Baggy put his eye to the keyhole instead of his ear.

"Now look round!"

They looked round.

Before them stood what seemed to them the living image of the Pippin!

At the first glance, that is. At the second the difference between Monty Lowther's healthily-tanned cheeks and the red face of Mr. Theodosius Ribstone Tomalin was apparent.

But Lowther had on whiskers of exactly the pale, sandy hue of the Pippin's; and he wore cap and gown. If anything, he was a trifle taller than the temporary master of the New House, but not enough for the discrepancy to be marked.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom.

"My word!" ejaculated Kangaroo.

"You only need a touch of paint, old man," Talbot said.

"It's ripping!" cried Clifton Dane.

"Where did you get the gown and mortar-board?" asked Glyn.

"What's it all for?" growled Manners.

Baggy took away his eye, and put back his ear. He wanted to know, what it was all for quite as much as Manners did.

"There are few minds more prolific than that of Montague Lowther," said the humorist of the Shell, with beautiful modesty.

"You can cut that out!" Tom Merry said.

"We know all about your mind," added Manners.

"If any," finished Kangaroo.

"I fought the whiskers at Wayland. Sweetest ever in the way of face- fungus—what! The cap and gown have done service before. Once, I fancy, they belonged to Linton; but that is long enough ago not to matter. The idea is that I should appear to the Fourth—or as many of them as can conveniently be got together—in the guise of the dear old Pippin, and endow them with lines quant. suff.—which, for the benefit of the ignorant among you, I may translate as good and plenty!"

"It might work," said Talbot. "That creature's unreasonable enough for anything, and any excuse for handing lines to anyone is good in his little pigs' eyes!"

"It's going to work," Lowther said.

"But how?" asked Tom.

"Stampeed Blake and the rest somewhere—I meet them as the Pippin—give 'em lines all round. Picture the joyful surprise of the Pippin when endless lines that he never gave are handed in to him—picture the chortlers of the Fourth swotting over said lines—picture their faces when they learn—oh, my hat!"

And Lowther laughed until his whiskers quivered and fell off.

"It's all picturing so far," said Manners. "How are you going to stampeed them?"

"Oh, I'll think out a plan! A sudden alarm of some sort, I imagine to. Sha'n't ask you to give it, so you needn't worry."

"Just as well, for I shouldn't if you did," Manners replied.

"Talbot won't do, or Tommy?"

"Why not?" demanded Tom and Talbot together.

"You've got consciences and innocent faces."

"Rats!" said Tom.

"Wouldn't an innocent face be an advantage, rather?" inquired Talbot.

"Not with a conscience behind it, old fellow. I think you'd do, Kangy."

"Being without a conscience?" asked the Constable.

"Never knew it to be any inconvenience to you when there was a jape on, dear boy!"

"Well, I dare say you're right there. I say, Clifton—I say, Bernard—time for prep!"

Baggy bolted at that. He had not heard all he wanted to know; but he had heard a good deal. And by means of what he had heard he hoped to get back that small share of the goodwill of the Fourth which was his at ordinary times.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Be Prepared!

I SAY, Blake!"

"Scat!"

But Baggy did not scat. He held his ground, though Herries glared and Blake thundered, and Arthur Augustus and Dix looked anything but pleased to see him.

On the whole, Baggy considered Study No. 6 his best market. The four who inhabited that apartment were not in the least likely to pay in cash or kind for the news he was bringing. They would certainly draw the line at that; it would have been to encourage sneaking.

But they were the School House leaders of the Fourth Form, and could do more to make Baggy's existence comfortable than anyone else. Anyway, they had done as much as anyone to make it uncomfortable of late.

"I've something really important to tell you, Blake."

"Scat!"

"It's—"

"Scat!"

"It isn't anything of the sort!" howled Baggy. "It's a plot of the Shell bounders—"

Digby jumped up and shut the door.

Baggy looked at him rather doubtfully. Was this a trap?

"The Shell passage isn't quite a hundred miles away, and when you lift that sweet voice of yours, Baggybus, it travels some!" said Dig cheerily. "We'd better hear him, you fellows!"

"I should first desiah to know how Baggy became awaah of the plot he pretends to know about," said Arthur Augustus.

"Rats!" snapped Blake.

He had been going to ask very much the same thing himself; but a suggestion from Gussy was almost always sure to put Blake and Herries in opposition. If Gussy thought so, then the chances were that to think so



The swirling waters swarmed with heads black and fair and brown and red. Tom Merry and the rest of the fellows in hiding came running up. "No more" cried Tom. "There's enough of them in already!" (See page 12.)

was to think foolishly—that was something like their simple creed.

"What's the giddy plot?" growled Herries. "Look here, you fellows, I've had a dog's life lately—"

"You haven't!" said Blake. "We wouldn't treat a dog as we're forced to treat you. Dogs are decent animals!"

"If I saw anybody kick Towser," said Herries, "I'd go for him like a shot! If I saw anybody kick you, I'd say 'Encore!'"

"That's just it," Baggy answered forlornly. "The tender heart of Arthur Augustus was moved."

"Weally, deah boys, I think peywraps we have been wathah wuff on Twimble," he said. "My own belief is that he cannot help sneakin'. It is the matchah of the beast, y'know."

Baggy hardly looked grateful for that limited measure of support.

"Oh, never mind arguing about Baggy," said Dig. "We all know what he is. Let's hear about the giddy Shellfish plot!"

"Let us first heah how Twimble came to know—"

But Gussy was howled down. "It's like this," said Baggy. "There were seven of them—Tom Merry, Talbot, Manners, Lowther, Noble, Dane, and Glyn. And Lowther made up to look like old Tomalin—"

"Lowther's make-ups!" scoffed Blake. "I could do better myself! Old-Kerr's the boy for a make-up!"

"I don't know," said Dig. "Kerr's best, of course; but Lowther's no duffer. He's taken us all in before now."

"He'd take you in all right—that is, if it wasn't for me," Baggy said. "He's going to try it, anyway. And you're all to get lines, and when you hand them in to the old Pippin—"

"When!" ejaculated Herries.

"But you would have done it if it hadn't been for me, you know."

"We don't know anything of the sort!" Dig said. "When are they going to try this on?"

"I don't know. They haven't made up their minds yet. But I can tell you this—Kangaroo's the chap who's to lure you into the trap."

"I'd like to see him doing it!" snapped Blake.

"Well, he would if it hadn't been—"

"For the fact that Baggy Twimble is a wretched sneak an' Paul Pwy!" said Gussy loftily. "I don't like this affaiab, deah boys."

"We shouldn't like it, either, if it came off!" said Dig, grinning. "No good riding the high horse Gustavus. You can't cure Baggy, and I must say that he's been useful for once—if he's telling the truth."

"It is the truth—honest Injun, it is!" declared Baggy solemnly.

"Baggy's a scout this time, not a sneak, as per usual!" Blake said. "Was it just us four, Baggibus?"

"Oh, no! All the Fourth that could be roped in!"

"What's your motto, Baggy?" asked Digby.

The podgy junior stared.

"My—er—I don't know what you mean, Digby."

"You wouldn't. You're no scout—except by courtesy. Mine is the motto of all scouts—'Be prepared!' I vote, Blake, that we have some more of the fellows in, and take measures against the success of the Shellfish scheme."

"Right-ho! You can cut, Baggy. And don't you say a blessed word about this to anyone else, mind you!"

Baggy was half-inclined to try to make treaty terms before going. But he had told all that mattered, and Herries hustled him out without ceremony.

Prep was over now, and attendance at supper in Hall was optional. In five minutes, Levison, Cardew, Clive, Julian, Kerruish, Hammond, Reilly, Durrance, Lumley-Lumley, and Roylance had been rounded up, and were in No. 6.

"There's a tin of biscuits and plenty of cocoa. Gussy will make that," said Blake. "So you needn't bother about supper. It's urgent business, concerning the Fourth generally, and a scheme by the Shellfish to take down our giddy number."

And he proceeded to tell what Baggy had told.

"Good egg!" said Kerruish, when he had finished. "We'll have Lowther all to ourselves, and we'll jolly well lynch the crafty bounder!"

"We might do better than that!" drawled Cardew.

"How?" asked Roylance.

"Duck him!"

"Duck him in what?" Herries inquired.

"Well, I'm in favour of water, personally. That may be mere stinginess on my part. If you want to make it champagne, or even milk—"

"Ass! I mean, how are we to get him anywhere so that we can duck him?"

"Now I see, I think it might be wangled."

"Look here, Ralph, you're always wanting to over-elaborate your plots," said Levison. "On the face of it, our best chance of putting this thing through, and teaching Lowther a lesson, is to let them have their own way till it comes to the critical point."

"I weally wathah fail to undahstand you, Levison, deah boy!"

"Just what I should have expected of you, Gussy, dear donkey! You see, don't you, Blake?"

"I think so. Pass the word round to everyone we can trust to be ready to act the helpless victims when Kangaroo tries

his little spoof game, and then jump on Montague when we got him among us."

"Ah, now I see, dear boys!"
 "The tenth day?" yawned Cardew.
 "What rot are you talkin', Cardew?"
 "That's when puppies begin to get their eyesight," explained Dig.

"But I am not a puppy! Weally!"
 "Really? My mistake!" replied Cardew.
 "I'll see the New House fellows about it," said Blake. "Shurrup, Gussy! Haven't you any better manners than to disturb the meeting like that? Just you get on with the cocoa-making! That's your job."

"I uttably refuse to make cocoa, or anything whatever!"
 "Except an ass of yourself!" growled Herries.

"Can't be did!" said Digby. "Born, old top! Born, like the poets!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Error.

DOWN by the river!"
 Harry Noble shouted that, coming from the direction of the playing-fields. His face was full of excitement, and he yelled at the top of his voice.

There was quite a crowd of Fourth-Formers in the quad at the moment, but, singularly enough—or, perhaps, after all, it was not singular—not a single member of the Shell of any account.

"What is it?" shouted a dozen voices.
 But Kangaroo seemed unable to say what it was. He gasped for breath, and clutched at his chest as if he had reached the limit.

"Not half-bad!" said Dig critically. "Didn't know Kanny had got it in him."

But he did not let Noble hear that.
 "What is it, Kangaroo?" yelled Blake.

"In the river! Oh, hurry up!"
 "Come on!" roared Herries.

And the Fourth-Formers rushed off, with a few of the Shell fellows who did not matter, and were not in the secret.

Kangaroo grinned, and ceased to pant.

Jack Blake and long-legged George Figgins led the way across the playing-fields towards the Ryll, running high and muddy now after the rains.

A mist hung over the country, and was thick on the river bank. Whatever might have been happening down there, no one was likely to see anything until close to the river. But, as they knew very well that nothing was happening, that mattered little.

"Lowther can swim all right!" said Blake meaningly.

"Oh, yes! And if he gets into difficulties we can pull the boulder out," answered Figgins.

"A chance for your ducking scheme, Ralph," remarked Levison, a few yards behind them.

"Yaas, dear boy. If I had stage-managed it myself it could hardly have worked out better."

"Weally, I do not considah it safe, with the wivah so high, an'—"

"We're not going to drown Lowther, Gustavus, only to damp him a few," said Dig.

"But weally—"

Arthur Augustus might plead for Lowther, but he would plead in vain. Everyone else felt that a ducking was not at all too big a penalty for such an audacious trick as Lowther had planned.

Now the foremost runners neared the river. Not far away, hidden by the mist and with the cover of the bushes, lurked a dozen or so of the Shell. But Lowther was not with them. He was stalking along the bank in cap and gown, with reddened face and sandy whiskers, looking so like the Pippin that the Pippin himself must almost have thought it was he, had he seen.

"I don't see anything," said Grundy, who had not been told what was on foot, and who had run with the Fourth. "Where's Noble?"

"Where's Lowther? That's the question!" said Blake.

"Lowther? What on earth has he to do with it?"

"Everything!" replied Levison, grinning.

"Is—is Lowther in the river?" asked Grundy.

Grundy disliked Lowther heartily, but he would have plunged in to his rescue without a moment's hesitation.

"No. But he's going to be!" said Clive. "There he is!" cried Herries.

Through the mist appeared a short form in cap and gown, with sandy whiskers and red countenance.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 48.

"Rush him!" yelled Blake.

They rushed. They did not wait to have lines given them, or to be rated by the pretended Pippin. They just rushed.

A score of hands seized the master.
 "What does this outrage mean?" he panted furiously. "Oh, you shall pay dearly for this!"

"That's not Lowther—that's the Pippin himself, my noble kinsman!" drawled Cardew, turning to Gussy.

"Blake—Howdies—stop!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

But no one paid any attention to him. In fact, no one but Cardew really heard him.

"You clump!" breathed Cardew. And his hand was clapped over Gussy's mouth.

"Swing him!" Blake yelled.

They swung their victim. It did strike one or two of them that he was rather heavy. But they never doubted that he was Lowther.

"Stop this outrage! I—"
 Splash!

The Pippin smote the swirling water, and sent up a shower of spray before he went under.

"Now," shouted Cardew, "we've got to fetch him out! I don't believe the boulder can swim!"

"What! Lowther not swim? He's better at that than you are!" answered Digby.

"But that's not Lowther!"
 Cardew was tearing off his jacket and waistcoat while they stood staring at him in utter incredulity.

"It's certainly not Lowther!" spoke a well-known voice.

And out of the mist appeared a second Pippin, cap and gown, sandy whiskers, red face, and all. But the second Pippin spoke with the voice of Montague Lowther!

Into the river plunged Cardew. No splash this time. He clove the water cleanly, and was lost to sight at once.

Lowther threw off cap and gown. But before he could plunge in Blake and Figgins and Kerr and Julian had all followed Cardew.

And after them went Grundy, Lowther, Levison, Clive, Herries, Digby, Gussy, Redfern, Keilly, Owen, Lawrence, Kerruish, Roylance, Durrance, Fatty Wynn, Wilkins.

The swirling waters swarmed with heads black and fair and brown and red. Tom Merry and the rest of the Shell fellows in hiding came running up.

"No more!" cried Tom. "There's enough of them in already! Oh, Cardew's got him!"

Then Tom sprang in himself, for he saw what none of those around him saw—that Wilkins was in difficulties. The stream was running too strongly for any merely moderate swimmer.

Redfern was helping Kerruish. Lowther and Owen gave Cardew much needed aid. Mr. Tomalin had clasped his would-be rescuer round the neck, and, but for those two, Cardew's reckless folly might have been paid for with his life.

Lying flat on the bank, Talbot and Kangaroo and Dane managed to grip the master and drag him up. Manners pulled out Wilkins, Tom pushing from the rear. Redfern and Fatty Wynn got Kerruish out.

The others came scrambling up the bank, shaking the water from them like Newfoundland dogs.

Mr. Tomalin had not lost consciousness. But he was in no case to speak for the moment. He had to get rid of a gallon or two of Ryll first.

Then he spoke, and perhaps it was only natural that his first thought should be of the danger he had been hurled into, not of the promptitude with which the juniors had gone to his rescue.

"You shall all be expelled for this!" he howled. "In all my life I never heard of such reckless villainy!"

"They took you for me, sir," said Lowther.

"Absurd! Don't make matters worse by lying, boy!"

Then the Pippin looked up into Lowther's face, and saw the dripping, sandy whiskers, and gasped like a fish.

"You—you were masquerading as me, Lowther?" he roared.

"Yes, sir."

"This makes the offence a thousand times worse! How dare you?"

To that Lowther could not well reply.

"Shall I help you home, sir?" asked Kerr.

"No! Don't presume to touch me, any of you! But in precisely half an hour let every boy present meet me in Dr. Holmes' study!"

And Mr. Tomalin stalked off, shedding water as he went.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Lucky Escape!

"MY hat! We've done it now!" said Blake dismally.

"Weally, Cardew—"

"Don't trouble to let on, my noble kinsman! You will have prickin's of conscience, therefore, if you do. Let me confess. Gentlemen, I twigged at once that it was not Lowther, and I prevented D'Arcy from tellin' you."

"What!"

"You madman!"

"That's a bit too thick, Ralph!"

"What did you do it for?"

Not one there but was furious with Cardew. He had done many reckless things before, but this was the limit.

"Merely a whim," he replied coolly. "No, hardly that. As far as I can be said to have a conscience, it approved the action. The Pippin deserved what he got, dear boys!"

"And if we're all sacked—"

"Oh, you won't all be sacked, Merry! It's up to me now to explain to the Head. I only hope he will take a more reasonable view than you fellows appear to take, by gad!"

"Come along!" said Blake. "We shall have to change before we go to the Head."

"Almost a pity someone wasn't drowned!" said Levison cynically. "You, for choice, Cardew! If there had been a tragedy it might have averted the biggest sacking St. Jim's has ever known. As it is—"

He shrugged his shoulders and turned his back on his chum.

Cardew did not appear to care. He walked back alone, changed his clothes in the most leisurely way, without a word to anyone, and only reached the Head's study door at the moment Mr. Tomalin came up, when the other fellows had been congregated there for nearly five minutes.

The master, without even looking at them, tapped.

"Come in!" called Dr. Holmes.

Mr. Tomalin stalked in, and the crowd filed in after him.

The Head's eyebrows went up—"right to the roots of his hair," Lowther declared afterwards.

"I have been treated with the grossest disrespect, Dr. Holmes!" fumed the Pippin. "I may go even farther, and say that something very like an attempt upon my life was made!"

"What! Bless my soul, Mr. Tomalin—"

"I was seized by a horde of juniors, and flung bodily into the flooded river!"

The Head was staggered. He looked from one to another of the juniors—his boys, for whom he had a very real affection. He could hardly believe his ears. The pick of the Shell and Fourth were there, and among them all scarcely one he could readily have believed guilty of anything brutal or dishonourable.

Tom Merry, Talbot, D'Arcy, Blake, Figgins, Kerr—was it possible that such fellows as these had done this thing?

Cardew stepped forward, a shade paler than usual perhaps, but complete master of himself.

"Before this goes any farther I ought to say, sir, that I hold myself entirely responsible," he said.

Angry as they were with Cardew, the rest could not hear that and keep silence.

"No, sir!" said Tom Merry. "Cardew is to blame, but so are we all!"

"And I as much as Cardew, though not in the same way," Lowther said.

Clive and Levison and Durrance had thrust themselves in front of Cardew now. The Head was too agitated even to notice this move; but the juniors knew why those three had interposed. Mr. Tomalin, almost beside himself with fury, was striving to get at the cool dandy of the Fourth.

"Did everybody here lay hands on Mr. Tomalin?" asked Dr. Holmes sharply.

Some of them had expected that question; but it was not welcome. Now that it came to the last pinch, Shell and Fourth would stand together very nearly to the last man. They wanted no degrees of guilt inquired into.

"I fail to see that that affects the case, Dr. Holmes!" rapped out Mr. Tomalin.

"Pardon me, I must conduct this inquiry in my own way! Let all who did not touch Mr. Tomalin move to the right—those who did to the left."

There may have been two or three who made the move to the right gladly; but Gussy went sadly, for Blake and Herries and Digby were all among the goats to the left, and he would rather have been with them now. And the Terrible Three and Talbot and Kangaroo

& Co. were with them now. They wanted to take their full share of the blame.

"How do you come into this, Lowther?" asked the Head.

"Look out, Tommy! The Pippin will go for Cardew in a moment—perhaps for Monty, too!" whispered Manners.

Tom Merry, Talbot, and Kangaroo shifted nearer the irate master.

"I rigged myself up to look like Mr. Tomalin, in order to play a trick on the Fourth, sir," answered Lowther.

"And we knew of it, so we were going to duck Lowther, sir," spoke up Blake.

"But it was entirely my fault, for I recognised Mr. Tomalin at once, and when D'Arcy tried to warn the rest I stopped him," Cardew said coolly.

"Oh, weally, Cardew—look out, you fellows!"

Mr. Tomalin, gnashing his teeth with fury, sprang at Cardew, and struck him full upon the mouth with his fist. Talbot and Harry Noble seized the master, and, struggling frantically, he was forced away.

"Thank you, sir!" said Cardew. And he wiped the blood from his mouth with a cambric handkerchief, cool as ever.

The Head was upon his feet. Never had they seen him so angry.

"Mr. Tomalin!" he thundered. "It was unbearable, Dr. Holmes—the affront—the danger—"

"Cardew was first in to get him out, and if it hadn't been for other fellows he'd have drowned Cardew!" cried Sidney Clive.

The Head looked at Cardew, and his face softened, and then grew stern again.

"Boy, boy, when am I to hear the last of your recklessness and your foolishness and your courage?" he said, half to himself.

And then there came a change in Cardew's face. It worked queerly, and those nearest fancied they saw tears in his eyes—though that seemed impossible.

"I must finish this inquiry without you, Mr. Tomalin," said the Head.

"But I insist upon staying!" "Do you want me to order you to be put out?"

At that the Pippin went.

The inquiry was a long one. Many questions were asked that were difficult to answer, and not all of them were answered fully or frankly. But Dr. Holmes guessed more than he was told. It was plain to him that the tyranny of Mr. Tomalin had been greater than the juniors could be expected to bear patiently. That fact did not excuse Cardew or Lowther, but it made a difference.

What made the most difference, however, was undoubtedly the assault upon Cardew. The Head was shocked by that. It told him what manner of man Mr. Tomalin was. None of them ever knew what passed in the interview between the two masters which must have followed; but Mr. Tomalin left St. Jim's that same evening, never to return.

Punishment—heavy punishment, canings, impositions, gatings—was meted out to all the juniors concerned. But no one was expelled.

"All's well that ends well!" said Ralph Reckness Cardew in No. 9 that evening.

"We might believe that if you'd do our imposts!" growled Levison.

"I will!" answered Cardew.

It was quite the most surprising thing they had ever heard him say. But he meant it.

THE END.

GOOD STORIES.

Jubb: "How is your son, the builder, getting along?"

Tubb: "Oh, all right! But he'd do better if he had more patience."

Jubb: "So would my son. He's a doctor!"

Grace: "Generally speaking, women are—"

Knobbs: "Yes, they are."

Grace: "What?"

Knobbs: "Generally speaking!"

Sage: "I've heard that there are two thousand cases of mumps in the city."

Onions: "How many in a case?"

Gilbert: "Have you ever laughed until you cried?"

Filbert: "Yes. When a kid my father trod on a tack, and I laughed till he saw me—then I cried!"

Diner: "Waiter, it's half an hour since I ordered that ox-tail soup."

Waiter: "Sorry, sir; but, you know, an ox-tail is always behind!"

Uncle: "What! You've never won a prize?"

Jimmie: "No, uncle; but I got a certificate once."

Uncle: "What for, Jimmy?"

Jimmie: "For being born!"

Jones: "You say you were held up by robbers and stripped of your clothing?"

Jenkins: "Yes."

Jones: "Didn't you feel cold?"

Jenkins: "Oh, no, sir! They covered me with their revolvers!"

Elder: "Can you give me a sentence containing the word 'seldom'?"

Younger: "Sure I can! My father had six horses, but he 'seldom' 'em!"

Tailor: "I will make any alteration you like in that coat."

Customer: "Well, just make the alteration from the two-pun-ten to thirty bob, then!"

Master: "Boys, it seems to me that I have to work the cane harder than I ought."

Pupil: "Yes, sir. I shouldn't wonder if it came out on strike." It did.

Recruiting Sergeant: "Well, my lad, d'you want to join the Army?"

Youth: "No, sir. But mother keeps a servants' registry. Could you do with a few generals?"

Teacher: "What relation are these two parallel lines to each other?"

Boy (nervously): "T-twins, sir."

READERS' NOTICES.

Correspondents Wanted.

CORRESPONDENCE.

B. J. Ess, 1273, Upper Serangoon Road, Singapore, S.S.—with readers overseas.

Miss Muriel Baker, 20, Orrell Lane, Orrell Park, Aintree, Liverpool—with readers anywhere, age 16-18.

Too Kim Kuan, Church Street, Singapore, S.S.—with readers anywhere, interested in stamp-collecting, age 18-22.

C. C. Jackson, 84a, Coppur Road, Portsmouth, Hants, wants members for Correspondence and Exchange Club, magazine, competitions, etc.

F. T. Pennell, 21, Belgrave Place, Row-barton, Taunton, Somerset, wants members for his Correspondence Club, age 15 and upwards.

D. Smith, 476, Great Eastern Road, Parkhead, Glasgow, wants members for his "Magnet and Gem" Club.

Thomas J. Redmond, 102, The Faythe, Wexford, Ireland, wants members for the United International Correspondence League.

L. Tolminson, 120, Cremorne Street, Meadows, Nottingham—with readers interested in stamps.

Dennis Ellis, P.O. Box 4570, Johannesburg, S. Africa—with readers interested in stamp-collecting.

C. Sheehan, The Rosary, Cambridge Street, Sth. Grafton, N.S.W., Australia—with readers outside Australia interested in stamps.

Edgar Firth, 16, Cambridge Street, Gt. Horton, Bradford, will exchange album containing 700 stamps for a No. 2a, Brownie box camera.

Miss L. Harriss, 6, Collingwood Road, Northampton—with readers anywhere, age 16.

Miss M. Townley, 15, Collingwood Road, Northampton—with readers anywhere, age 16.

Miss M. Baxter, 8, Blackheath Hill, S.E. 10—with readers anywhere, age 16-18.

W. J. Moore, 4, Napier Street, Sandy Row, Belfast, Ireland, has for sale a stamp-album and 1,500 stamps. What offers?

Miss P. Stubbs, 59, Abington Avenue, Northampton—with readers anywhere, age 17.

Miss A. Harrison, 16, Clarke Road, Northampton—with readers anywhere, age 16.

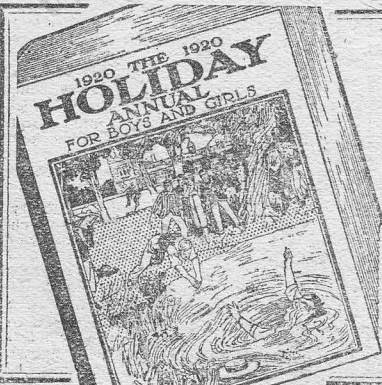
Miss Betty Bingham, 95, Clarke Road, Northampton—with readers anywhere, age 18.

Editor: "What do you mean by writing, 'Amongst the prettiest girls at the dance was Captain Andrews? The captain is a man, I presume?'"

Reporter: "Yes; but he was amongst the prettiest girls there the whole time!"

Nervous Gentleman (engaging chauffeur): "Have you a reference from your last employer?"

Chauffeur: "I can get one in about three months, sir—when 'e comes out of hospital!" Collapse of nervous gentleman!

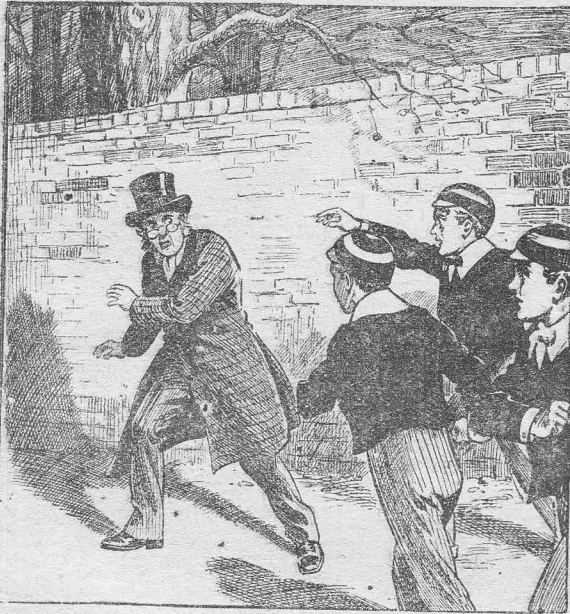


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THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Chopper Comes Down.

"TROUBLE for somebody!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

It looked like it.

All the Fourth Form at Rookwood, both Classical and Modern, were in the Form-room when Mr. Bootles entered.

There was a stern frown upon the brow of the Fourth-Form master.

A stern frown was so rare upon the kind face of the benevolent little Form-master that the Fourth were on the qui vive at once.

Somebody, evidently, had been "up" to something, and the "chopper" was about to come down.

There were quite a large number of uneasy consciences in the Fourth Form. Jimmy Silver & Co. and Tommy Dodd & Co. wondered whether it was their latest "scrap" that caused Mr. Bootles to frown. As a rule, the little rags between Modern and Classical were taken no notice of by the Form-master. But you never could tell. Form-masters were always an uncertain quantity.

Leggett, the cad of the Fourth, wondered whether any of his little money transactions had come to light, such as lending a shilling to a fellow who was hard-up at an interest of twopence a week. Leggett kept his eyes on his desk, and quaked. He was always in dread of being found out.

Townsend and Topham, the dandies of the Fourth, surmised that perhaps Mr. Bootles had become aware of their "doggish" ways, and they sat looking very uneasy.

Then there was Peele, the pal of Towny and Topsy, one of the "nuts." Peele looked quite white as Mr. Bootles came in.

Mr. Bootles stood regarding his class with a grim look, little dreaming of the extraordinary number of guilty consciences before him. In the innocence of his heart, Mr. Bootles fancied there was only one guilty conscience in the Fourth—the one he had to deal with.

The juniors waited on tenter-hooks. Mr. Bootles seemed in no hurry to begin. He coughed his little dry cough significantly. A pin might have been heard to drop in the Fourth-Form room.

Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd regarded each other with glances of eloquent sympathy. Classical and Modern ragged one another without mercy out of class; but if the chopper was to come down, they could join in mutual sympathy.

"Peele!"

Mr. Bootles jerked out that name, and all the Fourth Form, with one exception, breathed more freely.

Peele was the delinquent.

The rest of the Fourth brightened up, and almost smiled. Peele did not smile, however.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 48.

"Peele! Stand out before the class!"

With dragging steps, Peele of the Fourth moved out, and stood before the grim, frowning Form-master.

"What on earth's the row?" murmured Jimmy Silver. "Peele hasn't been ragging Moderns; he's too slack."

"Betting on geegees, you bet!" murmured Lovell. "That's Peele's little game, and he's been spotted."

"Serve him right, if that's the case!" said Jimmy unsympathetically.

Mr. Bootles glanced round.

"Silence in the class!" he exclaimed.

There was dead silence. Mr. Bootles adjusted his glasses very carefully, and blinked at Peele.

"Peele!"

"Ye-es, sir?"

"I have received a report from a prefect concerning you."

"Ye-es, sir?"

"Last evening," said Mr. Bootles, his voice growing deeper, "you were seen in conversation, Peele, with a man of the name of Hook—Joseph Hook—a person of the most disreputable character. This person, I understand, is a bookmaker, and is regarded as a bad character, even among men of his own profession. You were seen in conversation with him by Dickinson major. You ran away immediately, doubtless hoping to escape recognition. Dickinson major, however, recognised you. I have received this report. What have you to say, Peele?"

"I—I—I—" stammered Peele.

"I am willing to hear any explanation you have to make, Peele. Have you been engaged in any betting transactions with this man?"

"N-n-no, sir!"

"Has any money passed between you?"

"N-n-no, sir!"

"Then for what reason did you meet him?"

Townsend and Topham watched Peele with deep anxiety. They were in terror of their own little transactions with Joey Hook coming to light if Peele blurted out too much.

Peele drew a deep breath.

"I—I met him by chance, sir. He insisted upon stopping to speak to me. I—I didn't want him to—"

"Peele! You were seen in talk with him for more than five minutes—"

Peele gasped.

"I—I didn't mean to, sir, but—but he wouldn't leave me!"

"Have you ever spoken to him before, Peele?"

"No, sir!" gasped Peele.

"You have never had any dealings with him?"

"Oh, certainly not, sir!"

Jimmy Silver's lip curled involuntarily. If expulsion had been hanging over his head, Jimmy would not, and could not, have rolled

out falsehoods like that. But Peele was made of different stuff.

"I am glad of that, Peele. I accept your assurance," said Mr. Bootles, stroking his grey whiskers thoughtfully. "I trust you are speaking the truth. I cannot exonerate you, as you were greatly to blame for allowing such a character to enter into conversation with you. I shall cane you, Peele, but not severely. But, for your own sake, I shall keep you within gates for a considerable time. You will understand that you are not, for any reason whatever, to go out of school bounds until further notice. Now hold out your hand!"

Swish!

"You may go back to your place, Peele. I am glad the matter does not seem so serious as I at first feared."

Peele went back to his place without a word. His hand was tucked under his arm, and his eyes were burning.

"We will now proceed," said Mr. Bootles. And they proceeded.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. A Painful Duty Done.

JIMMY SILVER glanced at Peele when the Fourth Form came out of the classroom.

He was feeling a little sympathy now; to be "gated" indefinitely was a hard lot, though certainly the punishment was light enough, and most judicious. While he remained within school bounds Peele was removed from all danger of further attentions from the disreputable Mr. Hook.

Peele was looking savage and morose.

"Cheer up, kid!" said Jimmy Silver, tapping him on the shoulder. "It's hard cheese, but it might have been worse, you know."

"Gated for the rest of the term!" muttered Peele.

"Oh, Bootles will come round!" said Jimmy. "Just think what might have happened if he'd known the facts."

Peele scowled.

"And I'll tell you what," said Jimmy. "Why not chuck it, and stick to games instead? Footer's better than slacking about, betting on geegees, kid."

"Mind your own business!" growled Peele. "I'll do as I like, Bootles or no Bootles!"

And he stalked away angrily.

Jimmy Silver looked after him, greatly inclined to take him by the scruff of the neck and mop up the passage with him. Lovell and Baby and Newcome, who had listened, burst into a chuckle in chorus.

Jimmy looked at them rather morosely. "What's the cackle about?" he snapped. "Naughty boy, won't take the advice of his Uncle James?" grinned Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" said Jimmy Silver crossly. "The silly ass ought to be licked! He was lying to Booties like a Prussian! We know all about his little games with Joey Hook, and Towny's and Topsy's, too."

"Booties will tumble some day, and make an example of them," said Lovell. "No need for you to get your wool off, Jimmy. Let's go and punt a ball about till dinner."

"What about our rehearsal for our play?" said Jimmy.

"Oh, bother the rehearsal! We can do that in the evening. Come out!"

And the Fistical Four went out. They punted a ball about in the keen air of the quadrangle, and soon forgot all about Cyril Peele. Meanwhile, Peele was surrounded by sympathetic friends. Townsend and Topham of the Fourth, and Smythe and Howard of the Shell, were full of commiseration. As Adolphus Smythe remarked, it might have happened to any one of them.

"But you should have been more careful, Peele," said Adolphus. "You shouldn't have let yourself get spotted by a prefect. I never do, dear boy."

Peele grunted.

"I didn't know Dickinson was coming along across that field," he said. "Confound him!"

"Yaas, confound him, certainly!" agreed Smythe. "Like his cheek, meddlin' in a fellow's private affairs. But prefects will do these things."

"It's rotten," said Townsend. "We shall all have to be pretty careful for a bit."

"Look here, you'll have to help me out," said Peele. "After what Booties said, I can't meet Joey again for a bit—"

"By gad, you'd better not!"

"But I've got an appointment with him for this evening," said Peele.

"You can't keep it," said Smythe, with a shake of the head. "Too risky!"

"I know I can't! One of you fellows can go for me!"

The nuts of Rookwood exchanged glances. They were not unaccustomed to meeting the bookmaker on account of their own little speculations on the Turf. But the incident in the Form-room had scared them.

There was a general shaking of heads.

"Not good enough," said Adolphus Smythe decidedly. "Better give it a few days to blow over. I'm goin' to."

And Smythe and Howard strolled away, their minds evidently made up.

"Look here, Towny," said Peele angrily. "Joey Hook is coming to meet me this evening! It's a special appointment. He'll get waxy if I don't go—he may wait an hour for nothin'."

"Tain't safe," said Townsend.

"I owe him money, too," said Peele; "that's what we were talkin' about when Dickinson spotted us. You know what an uncertain beast Hook is—if he's kept waitin' for nothin', he may cut up rusty."

"You'll have to chance it," said Townsend decidedly. "It's too risky. I'm not goin' out of gates this evening!"

"Same here," said Topham, with equal decision. "Don't be an ass, Peele. It's no good lookin' for trouble."

"If you fellows won't go for me, I shall have to go," said Peele. "It's more risky for me than for you."

"Well, it's your bizney, not ours," said Topham.

"And I—I can't go. I'm taking part in that rotten rehearsal."

"Bother the rehearsal!" said Townsend. "What do you take up such rot for, with those cads in the end study? I wouldn't waste time on it."

"Well, they haven't asked you to play a leading part," said Peele unpleasantly.

"Oh, rats! I'm not goin' to meet Hook, anyway."

"If I cut off, they'll miss me, and there'll be talk," said Peele. "It makes it all the more likely that I shall be spotted."

"Don't go, then."

"Look here—"

"Oh, ring off!" said Townsend crossly. "I tell you, I'm not havin' a hand in it. I don't want to be sacked."

"Same here!" said Topham.

Towny and Topsy sauntered away to avoid impertunity. Peele was left alone, scowling.

He had an uneasy fear of what his estimable friend, Joey Hook might do, if he were left kicking his heels at the stile that evening.

Mr. Hook was not wholly a reliable gentleman, and Peele owed him money.

"I've got to go," muttered Peele savagely. "Those funky cads won't do it for me. I've got to go, unless I could let Hook know—and I can't! Hang it all!"

His moody meditations were interrupted. Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern side came along, and they immediately surrounded Peele. The three Tommies and Towie and Lucy made a circle round the Classical junior, and he glared at them. He was in no mood for "rags" now.

"What do you want, you Modern fat-heads?" he growled. "Let me alone!"

Tommy Dodd shook his head.

"Can't be did!" he replied severely. "We've got a painful duty to do."

"Let me pass!" shouted Peele savagely, striving to push his way through the circle of grinning Moderns.

But the circle stood fast, and he was pushed back.

"As top side of Rookwood," Tommy Dodd resumed calmly, "it's up to us to look after you Classical kids. You've been disgracin' the Fourth, Peele. We're ashamed of you!"

"Blushing for ye, bedad!" said Tommy Doyle.

"We're shocked!" said Tommy Cook.

"Shocked isn't the word!" said Towie.

"We're disgusted! Collar him!"

"Let go!" roared Peele.

"We've got a painful duty to do, Peele. I'm sorry, but England expects every Rookwood fellow to do his duty. Naughty Classical kids who talk to bookies, and tell lies to their Form-masters have to be bumped, according to Chap. I, Paragraph II, Section II, Sub-division IV, of the Suppression of Giddy Goats Act. You have broken the rules in a place within the meaning of the Act, and you are sentenced to be bumped according to law!" said Dodd solemnly. "The Court will now proceed to the execution of the sentence."

"Lemme go, Yaroo! Rescue!" yelled Peele, as the grinning Moderns grasped him and whirled him off his feet.

Bump!

"Yow-ow-woop! Rescue!"

Jimmy Silver came up with a rush. He had spotted the little scene from a distance. His rush knocked the Moderns right and left, and they tumbled and rolled over Peele.

"Collar him!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"You Modern worms—"

"Collar the Classical ass!"

Jimmy Silver hit out valiantly, but the Moderns were too many. He was whirled off his feet in three or four pairs of hands.

"Leggo!" he roared.

"Bump him for not looking after his Classical duffers better!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"A Form-captain musn't let silly kids go out meeting bookies. Bump him—on Peele!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peele, who was scrambling up, received Jimmy Silver on his chest, and was flattened down again. Then the Modern juniors streamed away, yelling with laughter. Jimmy Silver sat on Peele's chest, dazed and gasping.

"Gerroff!" gurgled Peele. "Gerroff, you silly idiot!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Gerroff!" shrieked Peele.

Jimmy Silver scrambled off.

"Why didn't you put up a fight, you slacker?" he demanded indignantly. "We could have licked them between us!"

"B-r-r-r-r!" said Peele.

He shook an ungrateful fist at Jimmy Silver, and limped away.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

An Interrupted Rehearsal.

RHEARSAL after tea," said Jimmy Silver, as the Fistical Four came out of the Form-room after afternoon lessons.

Jimmy Silver was very keen about the rehearsal.

It was Jimmy who was the founder and moving spirit of the Rookwood Classical Players; and it was Jimmy who had written the great comedy with which the Players were shortly to stagger humanity.

Mr. Booties had helped in that comedy—quite unconsciously. Mr. Booties was a kind little gentleman, and Fourth-Formers liked him and respected him greatly. But it could not be denied that the little gentleman simply lent himself to caricature. He was not much taller than the juniors, though considerably wider. His grey whiskers and the glasses perched on his nose were the easiest things in the world to imitate. And Jimmy—rather thoughtlessly, perhaps—had introduced a comic character into his comedy, who was the lifelike image of Mr. Booties.

Peele of the Fourth was to play the part. Peele was a slacker in most things; but he

had a taste for amateur theatricals, and he was clever at make-up. When he was in the "clobber" and make-up of the comic master in the play, he was as like Mr. Booties as Mr. Booties' twin-brother would have been, if he had had one.

And he could very cleverly imitate Mr. Booties' way of poking his head forward like a tortoise, and blinking over his glasses, and saying "What—what!" in a high-pitched voice.

Peele did not get on well with the Fistical Four, but in making up a caste for the great comedy, entitled, "Nice Boys at School," personal considerations of that kind were banished. Peele was the cleverest fellow for the part, so he was selected, and as it was the "fattest" part in the piece, Peele naturally jumped at it.

When the play came off, Mr. Booties was not likely to see it; but even if he did, he was not likely to recognise the caricature of himself. As Jimmy sagely remarked, Booties hadn't the faintest idea what a funny merchant he was. He would probably have regarded the character as exceedingly comic, never dreaming that it bore any resemblance to himself. Which was all to the good, for the merry juniors would have sacrificed the most effective character in the play rather than have hurt the kind gentleman's feelings.

Amateur theatricals filled the long evenings very pleasantly, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were very keen about their play—though Lovell and Raby and Newcome agreed that Jimmy was an ass to assign the "fat" part to Peele. Lovell and Raby and Newcome were quite sure that each of them could play it better; though they had doubts about one another. Oswald, too, felt quite equal to the part, and so did Flynn and Jones minor. But Jimmy Silver's word was law.

Peele joined the Fistical Four in the hall, with a clouded brow.

"What about the rehearsal?" he asked. "Is it coming off this evening?"

"Yes, rather," said Jimmy, with a stare.

"Rehearsals every day now; we've got to get into order, you know."

"That's all right," said Peele. "Suppose we have it early. I—I've got some extra French to do with Mossoo after tea."

"Well, I don't mind," said Jimmy. "What do you fellows say?"

"All serene!"

"Might have punted the ball about a little," said Lovell.

"Well, it's early or not at all, so far as I'm concerned," said Peele. "And I'm keen about the play."

"Oh, all right!"

Jimmy Silver proceeded to call together the other members of the caste of "Nice Boys at School." A box-room had been selected for the rehearsal—quiet and secluded, and not liable to interruption. Rehearsals in the Common-room were subject to merry interruptions from the Moderns.

The Fistical Four, and Peele and Flynn and Oswald and Jones minor were all there, and Townsend joined them.

Townsend had been offered a small part, which he had refused with disdain, but on second thoughts he had taken it.

Considering that they were only a junior club, the Rookwood Players had quite a large stock of effects. There were quite a number of beards and moustaches, and wigs and spectacles, and coats and trousers, and other articles, in the property-box.

It was a dress-rehearsal, and the juniors proceeded to make themselves up.

Peele's part was certainly the piece de resistance.

Clad in a man's clothes, pidded out to a suitable size, with elevators in his boots, he looked as big as Mr. Booties. With his face made up, and artistic wrinkles added, and grey whiskers, and glasses perched on his nose, he looked wonderfully like the Fourth-Form-master, and, with an old mortar-board belonging to Mr. Booties himself, the resemblance was complete.

Jimmy Silver chuckled as he watched him.

"It's jolly good, Peele!" he said. "Blessed if a chap wouldn't almost take you for Booties!"

"Yes, I must say it's rather good!" Lovell had to admit. "Not exactly as I should do it, but good."

A remark which caused Peele to sniff.

"Nice Boys at School" was in full process of rehearsal, when steps were heard outside, and a whispering voice:

"This is where the fatheads are!"

Jimmy Silver jumped.

"Modern cads!" he muttered.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 48.

It was a Modern raid. Tommy Dodd & Co. had evidently "noosed out" the secret retreat of the Rookwood Players, and were on the war-path.

"The rotters!" said Lovell. "If there's a rag here, the preps will be mucked up."

Jimmy Silver turned out the gas. "Quiet!" he whispered. "We don't want a scrap now, while we're in costume. Don't breathe!"

The Classical juniors remained quiet. The footsteps were still audible in the passage without, and the door suddenly opened.

"Not here," came the voice of Tommy Cook. "There's no light here."

"Faith, there was a light under the door, Tommy, a few minutes ago."

"They've turned it out," said Tommy Dodd. "Somebody's here, anyway. Strike a match. Scratch!"

The light flickered out. The Moderns crowded in the doorway peered into the box-room.

Peele, struck by a sudden inspiration, stepped forward into the dim light.

"Boys!" he exclaimed, in a high-pitched voice, in imitation of Mr. Bootles. "Boys! What does this mean? What—what?"

"Faith, it's Bootles!"

"Cave!"

The match went out instantly. There was a sound of gasping breath and scurrying feet in the passage, and then silence. The Moderns were gone.

Tommy Dodd & Co. had vanished with remarkable suddenness.

Jimmy Silver burst into a chuckle.

"My hat! Peele, old chap, that was a corking good idea! My aunt! They took you for Bootles! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chorused the Classicals.

Peele grinned.

"Better shove a trunk against the door, as there's no key," he remarked. "They might come back."

"Good egg!"

A big trunk was backed up against the door; but the Moderns did not come back. Having discovered their Form-master, as they supposed, in the box-room, they were not likely to venture there again intent on a "rag." And the rehearsal of "Nice Boys at School" went through without a hitch to a successful conclusion.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Peele's Little Game.

"WHY don't you change, Peele?"

Townsend asked the question. The rehearsal being over, Jimmy Silver & Co. were gone, but Peele, still in his disguise, lingered. He was seated on a trunk, apparently deep in thought.

Townsend remained with his chum after the others were gone.

Peele looked up, grinning.

"Those Modern cads took me for Bootles," he said.

"Yaas, in a bad light," said Townsend. Townsend was of opinion that he was a more suitable person to play the comic master in the comedy. "They wouldn't if the gas had been on."

"Well, they took me for him, anyway!" snapped Peele. "I'm almost his image in this rig."

"He lends himself to it, with his looks," remarked Townsend pleasantly. "Anybody could make up as Bootles, with a chivvy and whiskers like his!"

"Oh, rats! I'm not braggin', you ass!"

"What are you doin', then?"

"I'm thinkin'. I've got to get out this evenin' to meet Hook, and it's risky."

"Too jolly risky for me!" said Townsend, with a shrug of his shoulders. "You're a fool if you go!"

"I've got to."

"All the prefects will be keepin' an eye on you for days," said Townsend. "If you're seen out in the quad after dark, you'll be ordered back into the House."

"I know. But suppose I go like this?"

Townsend jumped.

"Like that!" he gasped.

"Why not?" said Peele argumentatively.

"Old Bootles has gone out this evening. He went out soon after lessons. It's his evening for whist in Coombe, you know. So he couldn't see. Any chap who saw me would simply think it was Bootles."

"Not in a good light!" said Townsend obstinately.

"Well, I'd keep out of a good light."

"Well, you might risk it," said Townsend.

"Blessed if I'd like to go out of doors in that rig, though!"

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 45.

"It's after dark," said Peele. "I don't see there's much risk—less than going in the ordinary way, too."

"Well, that's so. But—but Joey Hook will take you for Bootles if he sees you, and he'll clear off."

"That would be all right. He'd know then it was impossible for me to get out, if he thought Bootles was on the watch. What I'm afraid of is the beast thinkin' I'm leavin' him hangin' up, and gettin' ratty."

Townsend burst into a sudden chuckle.

"Oh, my hatt! Peele"—his voice sunk to an excited whisper—"Peele, old chap, if he takes you for Bootles—"

"Well," said Peele, "what are you cackling at? Suppose he does?"

"Don't you see?" whispered Townsend excitedly. "If he takes you for Bootles, you could keep it up that you are Bootles—"

"What-a-ai!"

"And make a bet with him as Bootles, and—and tell him to come up to Rookwood!"

gasped Townsend. "It would make old Bootles' hair simply curl, and perhaps get him into a row with the Head!"

"By gad!" ejaculated Peele.

"You owe him one for gatin' you," grinned Townsend; "and I owe him one for lickin' me the other day. We both owe him one. You can pay off both."

Peele's eyes gleamed behind the spectacles.

"What a wheeze!" he ejaculated.

"Now, I come to look at you, he's sure to take you for Bootles," said Townsend. "The Modern cads did, with a match alight. Well, Hook will see you in the dark—there's only a moon, and there's trees over the stile, you know. I don't see why he should have the least doubt, Bootles being supposed to be on the prowl there will be your excuse for not comin', and at the same time—"

Peele chuckled.

"Blessed if I don't try it!" he said.

"Just walk out of the House, and see if the fellows don't take you for Bootles," said Townsend. "That'll be a test."

"Good! You go and sneak one of Bootles' coats for me—that giddy ulster with the big check that can be seen half a mile on a dark night," said Peele. "He went out in a mac, so it's in his room."

"Right-ho!"

Townsend hurried out of the box-room, and returned in a few minutes with the check ulster. Peele slipped it on, still keeping on the mortar-board. Then he went down the stairs.

His heart was beating a little faster. But he had to pass through the junior quarters first, and detection meant no serious consequences. If he passed muster there, he had no doubts about going farther.

He made his way towards the big staircase through the Shell passage. Adolphus Smythe and Tracy and Howard of the Shell were chatting in the passage, and they stepped aside respectfully for him to pass. There was no suspicion in their looks. Peele stopped to speak to them.

"Smythe!" he said, in a high-pitched voice.

"Yaas, sir," said Smythe.

"Have you been smoking?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"What about that packet of gold-tipped you had in your study this afternoon, Smythe?"

Adolphus started. He had supposed that that packet of gold-tipped was known only to himself and his friends.

"Oh, sir! I—I—" he stammered.

Peele chuckled, and spoke in his natural voice:

"All serene, Smythe; I'm not Bootles."

"By gad!" gasped Smythe.

"Peele!" exclaimed Tracy.

"Yes, rather! Bootles is out. I'm goin' to meet Joey. I think I shall pass now," said Peele, grinning. "Ta-ta!"

He walked on, with Mr. Bootles' solemn walk. He left the nuts of the Shell staring blankly.

"By gad!" said Adolphus. "What a nerve! Blessed if I didn't think it was Bootles, and he'd bowled me out! Give me quite a shock, by gad!"

Peele went down the big staircase, and hurried into the quad. He did not wish to linger in a clear light. Outside, in the dusk, Bulkeley of the Sixth passed him, coming in, and saluted him unobtrusively.

Peele hurried on to the gates. He had intended to clamber out over the wall, but his confidence in his disguise was complete now. The gates had been locked since the real Mr. Bootles had gone out, and Peele called the porter.

Old Muck blinked at him. He had seen Mr. Bootles go out a couple of hours before, but had not seen him come in again.

"Kindly unlock the gates, Mack!" squeaked Peele. "I have mislaid my key to the gate."

"Yessir!" said Mack.

He brought out his keys and unlocked the gates, and Peele passed out into the dusky road. The gates clanged shut behind him.

Peele burst into a chuckle. After running the gauntlet in that way, he had no doubt whatever of passing himself off to Joey Hook as Mr. Bootles. And he walked cheerily down the shadowed lane to the stile.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Turf Transaction.

"MY hey!"

Joey Hook was leaning on the stile. He was smoking a big black cigar, the bery end of which

glowed through the gloom. He was waiting for Peele of the Fourth, and growing impatient and bad-tempered. Peele owed him a little bill of money lost on geegees, and Mr. Hook was anxious for a settlement. He was inwardly resolving to make matters warm for Master Peele if he did not turn up soon, when he spotted a gentleman in an ulster and a mortar-board bearing down on him.

Mr. Hook had seen the Fourth-Form master of Rookwood many times, and he knew the little, portly figure, the gleaming spectacles, the little jerks of the head, and the check ulster.

He murmured "My hey!" and went on smoking his cigar. Joey Hook's connection with the sporting fellows of Rookwood was, of course, a dead secret from the school authorities, but it looked to Mr. Hook as if something had come out now, and the Form-master was coming to interview him—probably to threaten him. Mr. Hook's unprepossessing face set doggedly at that idea.

The new-comer halted and peered at the cowering bookmaker over his glasses, in Mr. Bootles' well-known manner.

"Ah, you are Mr. Hook! What—what?" he asked.

"S'pose I am?" said Mr. Hook surlily.

"I have come out to see you."

"Which I ain't asked you to do, Mr. Bootles!"

"Pray do not misunderstand me, Mr. Hook! My object is not of an unfriendly nature."

"Wot?" said Joey Hook in surprise.

"I have reason to believe that a boy of my Form had an appointment here, and he is forbidden to leave school bounds."

"Ho!" said Mr. Hook, surprised to receive that information from the master of the Fourth. He had fully expected a "slanging."

"I took this opportunity of seeing you, Mr. Hook, I am very pleased to make your acquaintance—what, what?"

"My hey!" said Joey Hook.

"The fact is," went on the supposed Form-master, sinking his voice. "I have a fancy for a certain horse in the Snooker's Plate to-morrow. I understand that you are a bookmaker—what, what?"

"Yes, sir," said Joey Hook, astounded, but all civility now.

In an underhand way he had done business with Rookwood fellows of a sporty and shady character. But he had never dreamed of doing business with a Rookwood master. Naturally, the prospect delighted him. Mr. Bootles would probably be worth pounds, where his youthful dupes were worth shillings; and with a Form-master on his books his dealings with Smythe & Co., and Knowles and his set, would be on a much more secure footing.

"You are open to take bets?"

"This ain't a place within the meanin' of the Act, sir," said Joey Hook, with a grin. "But bless yer heart, sir, I'm always ready to do business with a real gentleman! Wot's your fancy for the Snooker Plate?"

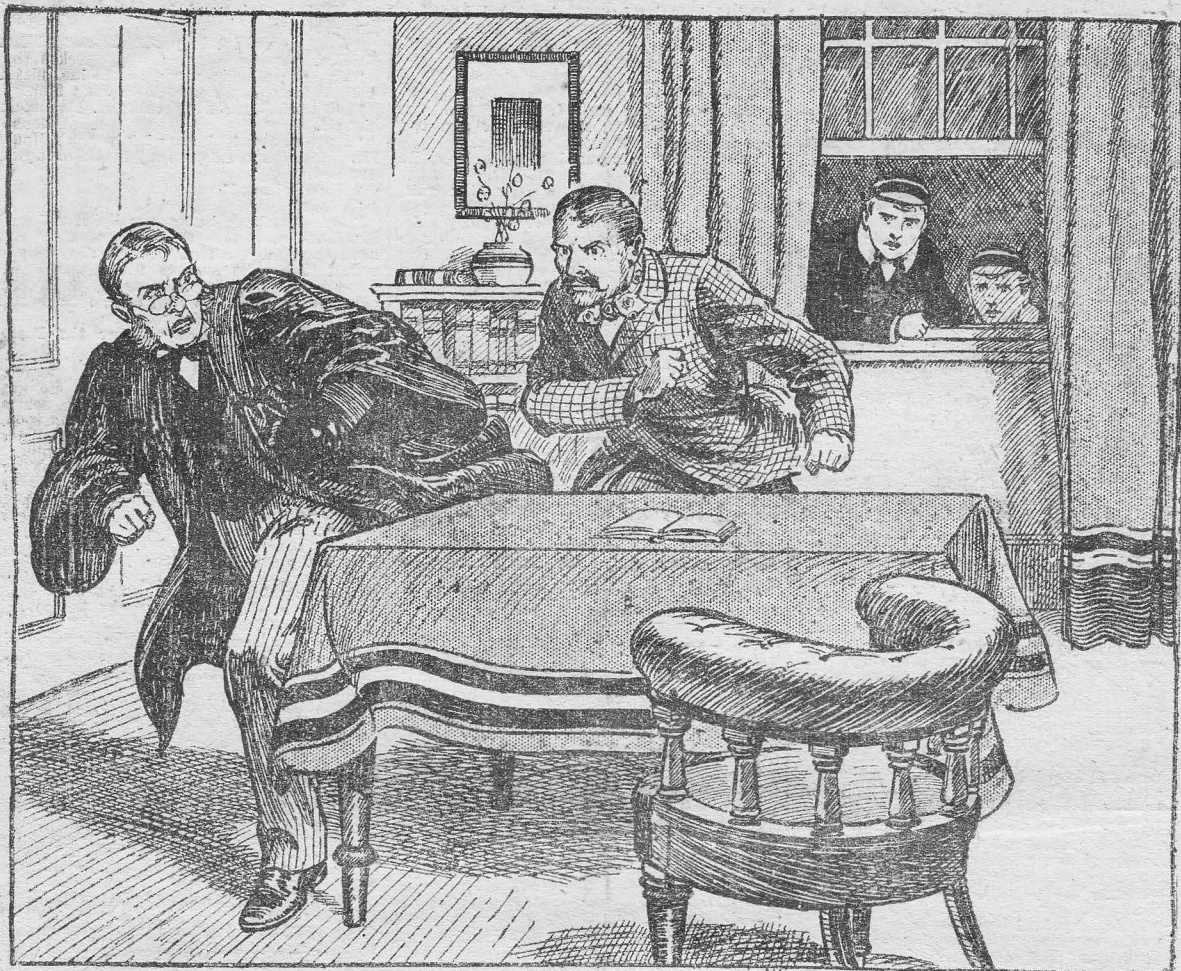
"I really am not very well acquainted with racing matters," said the little gentleman.

"But a friend has given me a tip—a very valuable tip, he said. Why should I not make a little money—what, what?"

"No reason at all, sir," said Joey Hook, "and very pleased and honoured, sir, to 'elp you in any way. Which I take this werry kindly, sir! And I'm entirely at your service."

"That is very kind of you, Mr. Hook—very kind! I understand that there is a horse called Wood Pigeon running in the Snooker's Plate?"

Joey Hook suppressed a grin. Mr. Bootles was quite correct; but Joey was aware that Wood Pigeon was a rank outsider, without the slightest prospect of getting anywhere near the winning-post. He was willing to take Mr. Bootles' money up to any figure on Wood Pigeon.



"Ave me thrown out, will yer, you welsing old spadger!" yelled Mr. Hook. "Why, I'll make mincement of yer!" "Help!" shrieked Mr. Bootles, as the enraged Mr. Hook rushed at him. "Help!" (See page 10.)

"Yes, sir; and a fine 'orse he is!" said Mr. Hook mendaciously. "Is that your fancy, sir? I see you know somethin'!"

"Really, I know very little of the matter; but I have received a tip from a racing friend. I desire to lay a bet on Wood Pigeon."

"I'm your man, sir, though you'll rook me; I've no doubt about that. But Joey Hook never refuses a sporting offer."

"What are the odds against Wood Pigeon?"

Mr. Hook was aware that the odds were seven to one against, but he replied, with perfect composure:

"Three to one agin, sir."

"Dear me! I understood that the odds were larger!"

"It's leaked out that he's a dark 'orse, you see, sir," explained Joey Hook.

"What, what! Oh, I see! Very well. Are you prepared to take me at that figure?"

"Up to any amount, sir!"

"Ah! My means do not allow me to make large bets!" said the little gentleman. "I desire to lay ten pounds."

Joey Hook's eyes glistened. Ten pounds did not often come his way so easily as that.

"I'll take you, sir. And me the money, and I'll book the bet!"

"Ah! Is it necessary for me to put the money down? I did not think of that. I have had little to do with racing matters."

"Bless your 'eart, sir, I'll trust a genelman like you, Mr. Bootles!" said Joey Hook. "I'll make a note of the bet, and that's all right. If Wood Pigeon loses you pay me ten quid, if he wins I 'and you thirty!"

"Done!"

Wood Pigeon had no chance of winning the race. But Mr. Hook did not think it necessary to acquaint his client with that little circumstance.

"I'll see you again to-morrow, arter the race," said Joey Hook. "Where shall I see you, sir?"

"Oh, come up to the school! Come up as early as you can after the race. I shall be anxious to know the result."

Joey Hook started.

"Up to the school, sir?"

"Yes, yes! Ask for me—Mr. Bootles!"

"But—but—"

"Ah! Perhaps you will be busy to-morrow—is that it?"

"Nunno, sir; but—but it won't do you no good for me to come a-visiting you at the school, will it, sir?"

"Ah! Ahem!" But I shall explain the matter. Let me see. I shall explain that you have called to assure me that you have no connection whatever with any Rookwood boys."

Joey Hook chuckled. He had never suspected the master of the Fourth, who looked so simple and innocent, of being so ingenious a rascal.

"That's good, sir—that's prime!" he said. "He, he, he! I'll come, sir, with pleasure! Wot time would suit you?"

"Shall we say five? Lessons will be over before then."

"Rely on me, sir."

"Thank you so much! And—and you will bring the money with you—the thirty pounds—if Wood Pigeon wins? I am sure he will win!"

"Depend on it, sir!"

"Thank you! Good-night! I must hurry back."

"Good-night, Mr. Bootles!"

The little gentleman hurried back towards the school, and Joey Hook blew out a cloud of smoke, and grinned. If by any wonderful chance Wood Pigeon should pull off the race, Mr. Bootles had as much chance of seeing Joey Hook at Rookwood as of seeing the

Sultan of Turkey there. But Mr. Hook was not doubtful about that. He was booked to visit Mr. Bootles on the morrow to collect ten pounds. It was a very pleasant prospect for Mr. Hook.

It was a very pleasant prospect for Peole of the Fourth, too. Mr. Bootles would certainly have a most uncomfortable time. And Joey Hook, in all probability, would be kicked out of the place—a just punishment for worrying Peole for his little debts, in Peole's opinion.

So both parties were satisfied.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise Visit.

"H OLD ON!" whispered Jimmy Silver. The Fistical Four were taking a sprint round the quadrangle before supper in their study. The sound of someone dropping in from the school wall caught Jimmy's keen ear. The chums halted.

"What is it?" asked Raby. "Some giddy kipper been breaking bounds!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "One of the Giddy Goats, I expect. Collar him and bump him!"

"Hear, hear!" "The Fistical Four rushed to the wall. A dark figure had dropped in there from the top of the wall, and was hurrying off. The four Classics closed round him.

"Not so fast!" said Jimmy Silver. "What—what—whom—Mr. Bootles! I—I—I beg your pardon, sir!"

The figure had drawn back, pausing with alarm. In the dusk the juniors recognised their Form-master, and they stood transfixed. For Mr. Bootles to enter the school by climbing over the wall like a truant dog was simply astounding.

"Jimmy Silver!" gasped the new-comer.
"Peel!" yelled Jimmy, recognising the voice.

"Peel!" howled Lovell. "You've been out like that!"

"Let me pass!" panted Peel. "I want to get these things off before Bootles comes in!"

"Well, you silly ass, what have you been up to?"

"Only—only a lark!"
Peel hurried away, the Fistical Four allowing him to pass. He disappeared round the back of the house. Peel was uncertain whether Mr. Bootles had yet come in or not, so he had not ventured to present himself at the gates. And he meant to get in by the box-room window and leave his theatrical "clobber" there."

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another in astonishment.
"The duffer's been out in his Bootles' rig," said Newcome. "What on earth's the little game?"
"Something fishy!" growled Jimmy Silver. The chums of the Fourth had little doubt about that, though they could not guess what was the "little game."

They resumed their sprint round the quadrangle, very much puzzled.

When they came into the end study a little later they found Peel waiting for them there—in Etons, and with all traces of his disguise removed.

Peel gave them an anxious look.
"You needn't jaw about seeing me come in," he began.

"We're not going to jaw about it," said Jimmy Silver curtly. "But what rotten game have you been playing?"

"Nothing. I had to see somebody, and as I was gated I thought it safer to go out like that. That's all."

"Nothing more?"
"Nothing."

"Rats!" said the Fistical Four, with one voice.

Peel shrugged his shoulders.
"Well, don't jaw about it, that's all," he said, and he quitted the study.

In the dormitory that night it was to be observed that Peel and Townsend were grinning at one another, seemingly enjoying a joke that was confined to their two selves.

"What's the giggle about?" Lovell asked them.

"Nothing," said Townsend.

"Then what are you cackling like a pair of chattering monkeys for?"

"Just caught sight of your face, that's all," said Peel cheerily. "It always has that effect on me."

And Lovell snorted and dropped the subject.

The next morning the Nuts of the Fourth still seemed to be in a state of great hilarity. Topham was a sharer in the joke now, and Smythe & Co. of the Shell. But outside their own circle nothing was said.

The Giddy Goats of Rookwood were looking forward keenly to Joey Hook's visit in the afternoon. What Mr. Bootles would do when the rascally bookmaker came up to the school and claimed acquaintance with him, they could not guess. The poor little gentleman would certainly be in a wild hurry.

"An' he's bound to come," chuckled Peel. "The bet's laid on Wood Pigeon, and Wood Pigeon hasn't an earthly. Hookey will come up for ten quid."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And there'll be a row if he doesn't get it," chuckled Peel. "He may dot Bootles in the eye!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The fellow would slaughter him," said Smythe.

"Serve him right! He's a low beast, and he's been worryin' me for money."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll keep a bit out of sight, though," said Townsend. "He might expect us to help him, and might get raty and blow the guff on us. But, my hat! It will be worth seein'. I'm anxious for him to come."

Never had lessons seemed so long to the nuts of Rookwood as they seemed that day. But everything comes to an end at last; and at last lessons were over.

Then the Nuts waited about near the gate—waiting for Joey Hook, Jimmy Silver & Co. were plying a ball about near the gate, when a fat, red-faced man, with a bowler-hat cocked rakishly on his bullet head, came in. The chums of the Fourth forgot their footer in their astonishment at seeing Joey Hook within the walls of Rookwood.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 48.

"That bouncer here!" ejaculated Lovell. Old Mack ran out of his lodge.

"Here, stop, you!" he called out. "Whatever you want here?"

Joey Hook gave him a lotty glance.
"I've called to see Mr. Bootles, by appointment," he replied. "And jest you mind your manners, my man, or you can look for the sack!"

"My word!" murmured Old Mack, quite overcome.

And Mr. Hook, with a strutting gait, walked on towards the School House.

Eyes were fixed on him from every side. The disreputable bookmaker was a well-known figure in the neighbourhood, and most of the Rookwood fellows knew him by sight. At the door of the School House Bulkeley of the Sixth met him.

"Here, hold on!" said Bulkeley. "What are you doing here?"

"Called to see Mr. Bootles, that's wot I'm doing here," said Mr. Hook independently. "Gentleman's at home, I suppose?"

"He's in his study," said Bulkeley suspiciously. "You've got no business with him, I know that."

"That's all you know," said Mr. Hook. "I'll take it kindly if you'll show me where the gentleman's study is, and you can see for yourself, young 'opeful."

"I'll do that!" said Bulkeley.

The captain of Rookwood led the way in. Jimmy Silver stared at his chums, and gasped.

"Well, that beats the band!" he exclaimed. "That awful blackguard calling on old Bootles! Well, my hat!"

"Nice example to us!" chuckled Townsend. "I'm shocked at Bootles!"

"Shoekin', by gad!" said Adolphus Smythe. "What's Rookwood comin' to, when Form masters do these things, dear boys?"

"There must be some mistake," said Jimmy Silver.

"He's gone in, anyway," said Lovell. "I can't catch on. I dare say it's pure cheek. Let's hang round in case Bootles wants him kicked out."

"Good egg! Come on, Smythe!"

"I wouldn't touch such a person for anything, dear boy," said Adolphus.

But the Fistical Four, and a crowd of other fellows, were quite keen to touch Mr. Hook, if they had half a chance; and they crowded round joyously, sincerely hoping that there was some kicking-out to be done.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

An Astonishing Interview.

"WHAT—what!" said Mr. Bootles. Bulkeley had tapped at the Form-master's door and opened it. Mr. Hook stepped past him jauntily, and entered the room.

Mr. Bootles rose to his feet in blank astonishment. If the Kaiser had stepped into his room, instead of a lesser rascal like Mr. Hook, it could hardly have astonished him more.

"What—what! Bless my soul! You are—er—Shook—I mean Hook? Your name is Hook, I—I believe? What—what?"

"That there's my name, sir," said Joey cheerfully. "I've called on business, sir."

"If you want that person shown out, Mr. Bootles, I am here," said Bulkeley.

"Bless my soul!"

"Which I've called to explain to Mr. Bootles that there ain't any grounds for suspicion that I got any dealings with his young gentlemen," said Mr. Hook, with dignity. "The gentleman's goin' to give me a 'earin', and you needn't wait, you young spadge!"

"Oh, I—I see!" said Mr. Bootles. "I comprehend! Thank you, Bulkeley; you may leave the man here!"

"Very well, sir," said the Rookwood captain, and he retired and closed the door after him.

Mr. Bootles blinked nervously at Joey Hook over his spectacles. He felt decidedly uneasy at being shut up in the study alone with such a character.

"You have—er—called—" he began.

He broke off, in sheer amazement, as Joey Hook winked at him.

Mr. Bootles could scarcely believe his eyes. But it was an unmistakable wink.

This frowsy, beery-looking, rakish ruffian was winking at the master of the Fourth in his own study! Mr. Bootles gazed at him open-mouthed.

"What—what!" he said feebly.

"Rely on Joey 'ook to play the game," said Mr. Hook affably. "I remembered wot

you told me, sir, and I've stuffed up that young spadge."

"What—what I told you?" stammered Mr. Bootles.

"Yes, sir; the tip you gave me last night. A nod's as good as a wink to Joey 'ook."

"I must be dreaming," said Mr. Bootles to himself.

"I got rather bad news for you, sir," said Mr. Hook. "I'm sorry to say as Wood Pigeon has lost."

"Wood Pigeon!"
"Yessir."

"You—you have lost a wood-pigeon?" said Mr. Bootles, unable to understand. "You have come here to look for a pigeon, do you mean? You—you suspect that some Rookwood boy has destroyed your pigeon with a catapult, perhaps. In that case, I am bound to hear your complaint."

Joey Hook wondered whether the Form-master had been drinking.

He looked very red and flurried, and his words were incomprehensible to the bookmaker. Joey Hook's were equally incomprehensible to the amazed Form-master.

"I ain't talking about no pigeon," said Joey.

"But—but you spoke of a pigeon—a wood-pigeon—lost, I think you said."

"I mean the 'orse."
"The—the horse?"
"Yes, suttinly."

"The horse is lost! What horse? Your horse? I do not understand you, Mr. Hook," said the little gentleman, trying to pull himself together. "I trust you have not come here with a misdirected sense of humour."

"Wot!" said Joey Hook, puzzled.

"You have stated that a pigeon was lost, and now you state that a horse has been lost. In either case, how does the matter concern me?"

"Blessed if I ketches on!" said the puzzled Joey. "It's your 'orse that has lost."

"My horse!"
"Suttinly."

"You are dreaming," said Mr. Bootles. "I do not possess a horse. It is many years since I have given up equestrian exercises."

"Wot!"

"If you have found a horse, and are under the impression that it belongs to me, I can only point out that it is a mistake. I do not possess a horse."

"What the 'oly smoke is he gettin' at?" said Mr. Hook. "Look 'ere, Mr. Bootles, there ain't nobody 'ere but our two selves. I come 'ere to tell you that your 'orse has lost."

"I must request you to retire from my study. I repeat that I have no such animal in my possession. I can only conclude that you are not sober."

"Your 'orse, Wood Pigeon!" howled the puzzled Mr. Hook. "He's lost! Have you forgotten? Wood Pigeon is the 'orse."

"Pray do not be so absurd, sir. How can a pigeon be a horse?"

"The name of the 'orse!" roared Mr. Hook.

"Oh, I—I see! Are you alluding to a racehorse?"

"Course I am! Your 'orse!"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Bootles. "Do you think I am connected with horse-racing? I should be ashamed to have any connection with such a disreputable pastime. I have never possessed a racehorse, and should decline to do so if one were offered me as a gift."

"Ort 'is 'ead!" murmured Mr. Hook. "Fairly ort 'is blooming onion!"

"And now, sir, as you seem to have made a mistake, I beg you to retire from my study."

"Not without the ten quid," said Joey Hook.

"What—what?"

"You owe me ten quid."

"Am I dreaming?" said Mr. Bootles, addressing space. "This—this person states that I owe him money! I must be dreaming!"

"Oh, come off!" said Joey Hook angrily.

He had been amazed at first, but he was growing suspicious now. It occurred to him that Mr. Bootles had already learned the result of the race, and intended to deny the whole transaction and refuse to pay up. That bare idea made Mr. Hook tremble with wrath. He had done a good deal of washing in his time, but it was not palatable to be welsed himself.

"I request you to go!" said Mr. Bootles mildly.

"And I requests you to pay up," said Joey Hook. "You owe me ten quid. You'd 'ave took the thirty fast enough if the 'orse had won."

"What—what!"

"Wood Pigeon!" shrieked Joey Hook.

"I can only conclude that you are intoxicated. Unless you leave my study immediately, I shall have to call for assistance, and have you ejected!"

Joey Hook's beery face became purple.

"Ave me ejected!" he roared. "Oh, you will, will yer? Without paying me my money—vot!"

"I certainly shall pay you nothing, as I owe you nothing," said Mr. Bootles, with spirit. "I am astounded at your impudence!"

"So you want to deny making the bet—is that it?" shouted Joey Hook. "That's why you 'adn't no money with you yesterday—hey?—so that you could crawl out of it if the 'orae didn't get 'ome! Welsher!"

"What—what!"

"I'm ere for ten quids, what I 'ave won fair and square, a-risking of my hown 'ard-earned money," said Joey Hook. "And, vot's more, you spaigier, I ain't a-goin' without the spondulies, so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

"Are you mad?" shrieked Mr. Bootles. "Are you drunk, sir? Do you mean to accuse me, a master of Rookwood, of making a bet—of having any concern whatever with so rascally a transaction as a bet?"

"Oh, come off!" said Joey Hook. "That wou'd do for me. You laid the bet fair and square—one agin' three on Wood Pigeon with the Snooker's Plate. I reckoned as you was a gentleman, and wou'd pay up. And I'm 'ere for the money, and I ain't goin' without it."

"You must be mad! Dare you assert that I have laid a bet with you?" raved Mr. Bootles.

"You know you 'ave, you fat little spadger!"

"Ruffian! Leave my study!"

"Not without the spondulies!"

Mr. Bootles rose to his feet, almost trembling with wrath and indignation.

"Insulting rascal! Go! Go at once, or I will have you thrown from the door!"

Joey Hook jumped up, too, as enraged as Mr. Bootles. The Form-master backed away as a dirty list was flourished in his face.

"Ave me thrown out, will yer, you welshing old spadger!" yelled Mr. Hook. "Why, 'll make mince-meat of yer!"

"Control yourself!" gasped Mr. Bootles, as a murmur of voices was heard under his open door. "How dare you make a disturbance in my study? Go! I command you! Go!"

"Har' you goin' to pay up, or har' you lot?"

"I will pay you nothing, as I owe you nothing!" Mr. Bootles rang his bell violently. "Go, before I have you thrown out, you vile ruffian!"

"Then I'll take it outer yer 'ide!" roared the enraged Mr. Hook, and he rushed at the Form-master.

"Help!" shrieked Mr. Bootles, as he skipped round the table. "Help!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Little Liveliest.

"RESCUE!" roared Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy Silver's idea of "hanging round" in case there was any kicking-out to be done had been a happy thought.

At the first call from the alarmed Form-master Jimmy came scrambling headlong through the open window.

He rolled into the study, head first, with a bump; but the captain of the Fourth did not care for a bump. He was on his feet again in a twinkling, and rushing to the rescue. After him, scrambling wildly through the window, came his chums, and half the Classical Fourth after them.

Well was it for Mr. Bootles that his devoted Form were at hand.

Joey Hook, almost blind with rage—for naturally nothing infuriates a swindler so much as being swindled, and Mr. Hook was fully convinced that Mr. Bootles was swindling him—almost stuttering with fury, the bookmaker chased Mr. Bootles round the study table, and caught him.

Mr. Bootles was not built for contests of that sort. He had no chance whatever against Joey Hook.

He fairly collapsed in the grasp of the infuriated bookmaker, and it would have gone hard with him had not rescue been at hand.

But just as Joey Hook grasped the Form-master, Jimmy Silver grasped Joey Hook.

He threw his arm round Hook's neck from behind, and dragged him backwards with the sudden attack.

The boy and the man crashed to the floor together.

"Rescue!" yelled Jimmy. "Pile in, the Fourth!"

Jimmy and the furious rascal were rolling over on the floor, fighting furiously. But Lovell and Raby were in the study now, and they fairly jumped on Mr. Hook. Newcome was only a second later, and he piled in with both fists. Oswald and Flynn came next, all struggling to get hold of Mr. Hook. The unfortunate bookmaker simply disappeared under the swarming juniors.

Mr. Bootles stood looking on, dazed and palpitating, almost thinking that the whole scene was some dreadful dream.

Outside, in the quad, fellows were shouting. The study window was blocked with active juniors swarming to the rescue. The door was thrown suddenly open, and Dr. Chisholm, the Head of Rookwood, strode in, and nearly trod on the struggling head on the floor, and backed away just in time. The Head's face was like thunder.

"What does this mean?" he shouted. "Mr. Bootles, this scene in your study—this disgraceful scene—that man, sir, whom I saw enter—his voice, sir, could be heard all over the school! What does it mean, Mr. Bootles?"

"We've got him, sir!" said Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Bootles gasped spasmodically.

"Dr. Chisholm, you cannot imagine I asked that man to come here! He has forced himself into my study, insulted me most dreadfully, and attacked me—assaulted me, sir! I—I am astounded—stunned! I—I presume he is violently intoxicated! I shall appeal to the police for protection! I—I—I—" Mr. Bootles' voice failed him, and he sank, palpitating, into a chair.

"Got him, sir!" said Jimmy Silver, looking up. He was seated on Mr. Hook's head, and the wretched Mr. Hook was gasping fearfully. "He insulted Mr. Bootles, sir, and we thought we had better interfere."

"Quite so—quite so, Silver! You have acted very well," said the Head. "This scene is unparalleled. The audacity of the man to come here! Bless my soul! He must be ejected at once, and I will communicate with the police."

"Groooogh!" came from Mr. Hook. "Yoop! You young villain—Yoop!"

"What language!" gasped the Head. "Bulkeley—Neville—Dickinson"—the prefects were hurrying up—"do you—do you think you would be equal to removing that drunken ruffian from the premises?"

"Certainly, sir!" said Bulkeley cheerfully. "Quite easily, sir! You can leave him to us, you kids!"

Somewhat reluctantly, Jimmy Silver & Co. allowed the Sixth-Formers to deprive them of their prey. Mr. Hook, stuttering and gasping, completely winded, was bundled out of the study in the grasp of the big seniors, and yanked bodily out of the House. There were loud cheers in the quadrangle as he was whirled down to the gates, and pitched into the road.

In the Form-master's study the flurried Mr. Bootles turned to Jimmy Silver & Co. with tears of gratitude in his eyes.

"My dear boys," he said, "thank you—thank you! I am sorry to see your nose is swollen, Silver. I might have been seriously injured if you had not come so promptly to my assistance. My dear boys, I thank you!"

"Not at all, sir," said Jimmy Silver. "You can always depend on the Classics, sir."

And the heroes of the Fourth marched off, feeling very pleased with themselves, and leaving Mr. Bootles still palpitating.

The strange affair caused quite a sensation in Rookwood. In Snythe's study, the Classical nuts howled with laughter over it, till they howled themselves almost hoarse. The other fellows were puzzled as to why Mr. Hook had come. But Peele and his friends weren't puzzled—they knew. But after some reflection, Jimmy Silver & Co. were no longer in the dark. From what they had heard the bookmaker say, they gathered that he had come under a mistaken impression—and they remembered Peele's expedition in disguise as Mr. Bootles—and they put two and two together correctly.

The result was that Peele did not find the affair so funny as he had supposed it at first, for he was collared by the Fistical Four and taken into the end study, where judgment was passed on him. As it was not in the game to give him up to punishment, the Fistical Four administered the punishment themselves—with the assistance of a cricket-stump—and then kicked the yelling Peele out of the study, and out of the Rookwood Players' Club at the same time. So that the humorous Peele for quite a long time afterwards felt anything but humorous.

THE END.

(Another grand long story of Jimmy Silver & Co., the chums of Rookwood, next week, entitled: "BOUND BY HIS WORD!" By OWEN CONQUEST. Order your copy of the PENNY POPULAR in advance.)

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