

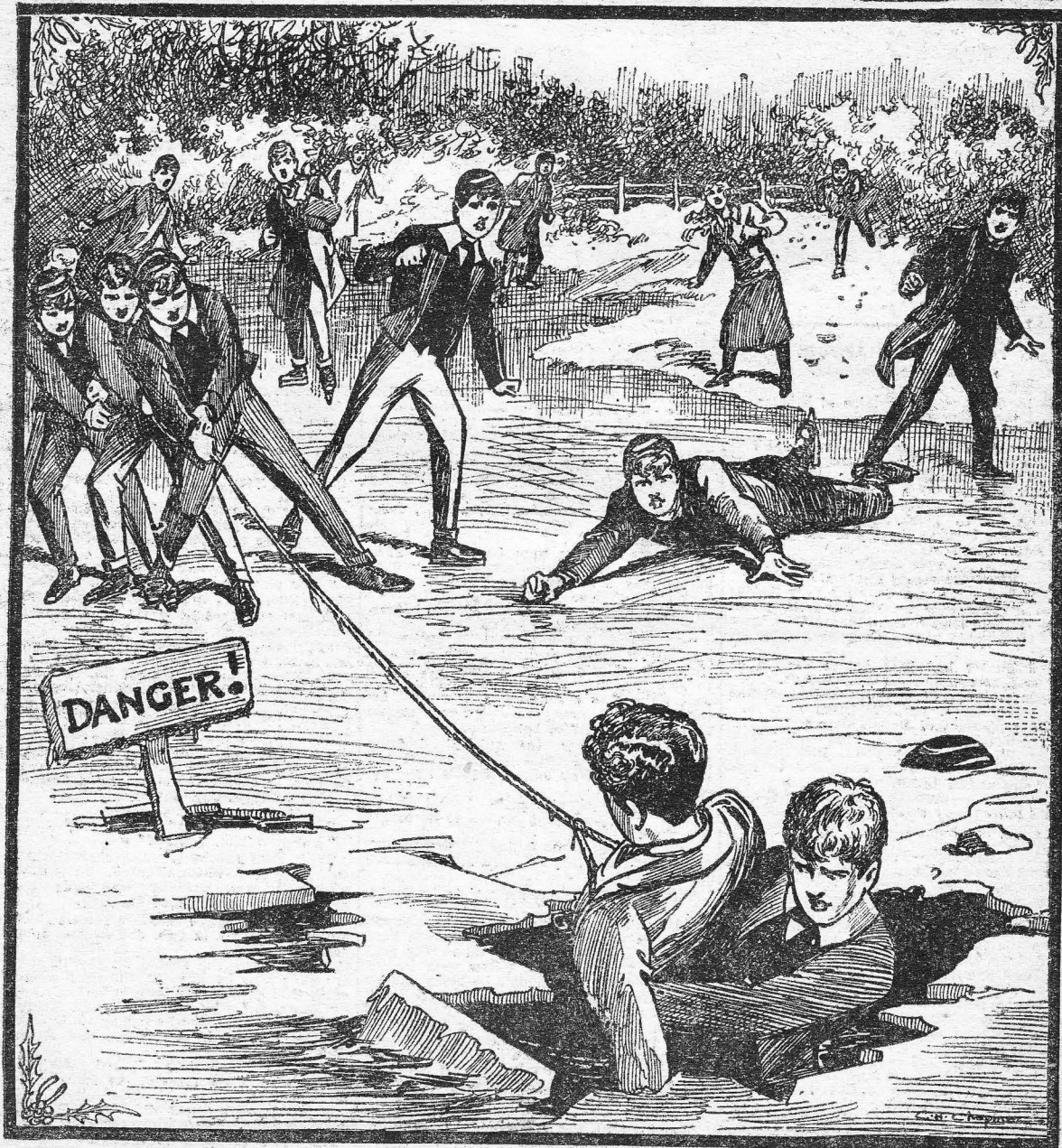
49
A BRIGHT AND HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL!

The Penny **1 1/2** Popular

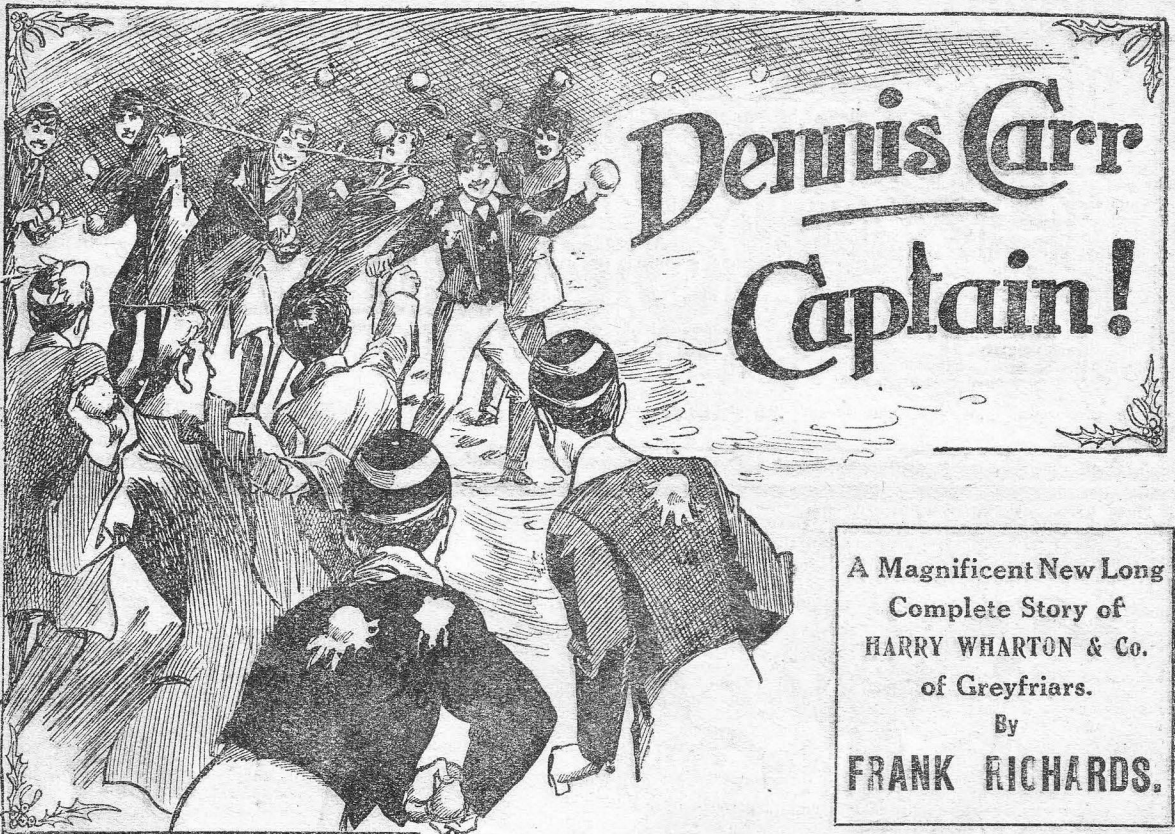
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NEW
SERIES.

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DECEMBER 27th, 1919.



DENNIS CARR'S GALLANT RESCUE!
(A Thrilling Scene in the Magnificent Long Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)



A Magnificent New Long
Complete Story of
HARRY WHARTON & Co.
of Greyfriars.
By
FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. No Luck for Skinner.

"IT'S a jolly shame!"

That was the opinion of Skinner, of the Remove. And Skinner's audience, which consisted of Stott, Snoop, Hazeldene, Bolsover major, Trevor, and Treluce, were in complete agreement with the cad of the Remove.

"The election of a Form-captain was a farce," Skinner went on. "It was unfair from start to finish. By rights, Bunter should have been at the top of the poll!"

"Hear, hear!"

Skinner & Co. were deeply disappointed at the result of the recent election.

They had voted in a body for Billy Bunter—not because they regarded the fat junior as a suitable leader, but because they knew that they would have a slack time under his rule.

And Bunter had been beaten—beaten on the post, so to speak—by Dennis Carr.

By a majority of one, Dennis had secured the captaincy of the Greyfriars Remove.

The supporters of Dennis Carr were naturally jubilant; but the defeated candidates—Harry Wharton, Peter Todd, Dick Russell, and Billy Bunter—were compelled to hide their diminished heads.

The election—presided over by Mr. Quelch—had proved very thrilling and exciting, and the issue had been in doubt up to the last moment.

One of the voters—Vernon-Smith—had been captured outside the school by Ponsonby, of Highcliffe.

Fon had known all about the election, and he had badly wanted to put a spoke in Dennis Carr's wheel. He hated Dennis because the latter had thrown him over, and refused to have anything more to do with the Highcliffe cads.

By kidnapping Vernon-Smith, Ponsonby hoped to scotch Dennis Carr's chances of winning the election; and he would doubtless have succeeded but for one unforeseen circumstance.

Vernon-Smith had got away! He had severed his bonds, and had raced back to Greyfriars just in time to give what proved to be the deciding vote.

And that deciding vote had been in favour of Dennis Carr. Dennis, once an outcast and an outsider, had "made good." He had learned the value of playing the game, and

he thoroughly deserved his success. Every one admitted that—with the exception of Skinner & Co.

In the junior Common-room, which, earlier in the day, had been the scene of the election, Skinner continued to air his views.

"Of course," he said, "the whole thing was wangled."

"How?" asked Bolsover major.

"Why, Carr bribed Smithy to vote for him, of course! A pretty decent sum changed hands—something like a fiver, I believe."

"My hat!"

Skinner's listeners were impressed. They had no love for Dennis Carr, and they were quite ready to believe him guilty of a dishonourable action.

Skinner saw that he had made an impression, and he warned to his subject.

"Of course, it's a disgraceful business!" he said. "Bribery and corruption ought to play no part in elections. Everything ought to be fair and square and above-board. It isn't right that a fellow like Carr, just because he's got money to fling away, should be elected skipper of the Form."

"It's altogether too thick!" declared Stott. "Carr deserves to be kicked out of the school. He's only a beastly little upstart at best."

"And what about Smithy?" said Hazeldene. "Fancy allowing himself to be bribed like that!"

Practically everyone believed Vernon-Smith guilty, although they only had Skinner's word for it.

Trevor, however, was inclined to be doubtful.

"I can't understand why Smithy should do such a thing," he said. "He's not hard up. Only the other day he had twenty quid from his pater. And a fellow with twenty quid in his pocket wouldn't be likely to risk his reputation in order to get another five."

Skinner laughed harshly.

"You don't know Smithy!" he said. "He never turns up his nose at a chance of making money. The more he's got, the more he wants. You can take it from me that Smithy agreed to vote for Carr in return for a lump sum."

"Skinner, you cad! That's a rotten lie!"

The cads of the Remove spun round in alarm.

Standing in the doorway, his face flushed

with anger and indignation, was Vernon-Smith himself. He had arrived on the scene just in time to hear Skinner's dastardly allegation.

Skinner was quite taken aback. He tried to speak, but words refused to come.

Vernon-Smith advanced into the Common-room with clenched fists, and strode towards his accuser.

"Put up your hands, you rotter!" he exclaimed.

Skinner spoke at last—but not to Vernon-Smith. He appealed to Bolsover major.

"Back me up against this cad!" he muttered.

But Bolsover shook his head.

"Fair play's a jewel," he said. "You're one to one, and I'm not going to interfere."

Skinner saw that he would have to tackle Vernon-Smith off his own bat, and he covered at the prospect. He would have bolted for the door, but the Famous Five of the Remove had just come in, and they would not be likely to let Skinner escape.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "What's the matter, Smithy? You seem to be knocked all of a heap!"

"It's this cad who's going to be knocked all of a heap!" said the Bounder, his eyes flashing. "He's had the barefaced cheek to say that Dennis Carr bought my vote!"

"My hat!"

"What a beastly cad!"

"Pulverise him, Smithy!"

There were two outstanding characteristics about the fight which followed. In the first place, it was woefully one-sided; and, secondly, it was of short duration.

Skinner failed to land a single blow. Vernon-Smith got in two, and Skinner found them all-sufficient. The first took him in the chest, and the second on the point of the jaw; and he went to the floor with a crash that shook every bone in his body.

"Down and out, by Jove!" said Nugent.

"The esteemed Smithy has moppishly wiped up the floor with him!" chuckled Hurree Singh.

Skinner's supporters looked decidedly sheepish. But the faces of the Famous Five were radiant.

Not for one moment did Harry Wharton & Co. credit Skinner's wild accusation. They were quite satisfied, in their own minds, that both Dennis Carr and Vernon-Smith had

acted honourably with regard to the election.

"I say, you fellows!" It was the piping voice of Billy Bunter from the doorway. "Look out! Here comes old Quelch!"

"Old Quelch, Bunter, has already arrived!" said a stern voice.

The fat junior nearly fell down.

"Oh, crumbs!" he gasped. "I—I didn't know you were so close behind me sir!"

"Apparently not!" said Mr. Quelch drily, "or you would not have alluded to me in that disrespectful manner! You will take two hundred lines, Bunter, and they are to be completed before the school breaks up for the Christmas vacation."

"Oh!"

Meanwhile, Skinner had staggered to his feet; but Mr. Quelch could easily see that there had been fisticuffs.

"Skinner! Smith!" rapped out the Form-master. "You have been fighting!"

"Yes, sir," said Skinner.

And Vernon-Smith nodded without speaking.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"I will not tolerate these continued disturbances!" he exclaimed. "Who struck the first blow?"

"There were only two blows struck, sir," said Vernon-Smith. "I struck both."

"Indeed! And why did you attack Skinner?"

"Because he made a beastly accusation against me, sir."

"It was true!" chimed in Skinner. "You can't deny it! Carr bribed you to vote for him at the election. You made a fiver out of it!"

Mr. Quelch looked grave.

"That is a very serious statement to make, Skinner," he said. "Can you substantiate it?"

"I know it's correct, sir," said Skinner sullenly.

"That is hardly good enough, Skinner. I want proof—proof that Carr handed five pounds to Vernon-Smith in exchange for the latter's undertaking to vote for him. Can you produce such proof?"

Skinner was silent.

"He knows he can't, sir!" said Vernon-Smith. "There isn't a shadow of truth in the story. I voted for Carr because I considered him the better man. There has been no secret transaction between us."

"I believe you, Smith," said Mr. Quelch quietly. "I am satisfied that Skinner has trumped up this charge, and I will deal with him accordingly. You will accompany me to my study, Skinner!"

Mr. Quelch rustled away, and the cad of the Remove followed very reluctantly.

"Serves you jolly well right!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Hope Quelch lays it on hot and strong!"

Bob Cherry's hope was realised.

When, ten minutes later, Skinner crawled out of the Form-master's study, he seemed to be trying to fold himself up like a penknife.

The cad of the Remove groaned dismally as he squirmed his way along the passage.

And the burden of his plaint was:

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Startling Discovery!

"CLEAR the deck for action!"

It was Harry Wharton who spoke.

The members of the editorial staff of the "Greyfriars Herald" had foregathered in No. 1 Study. They were faced with the task of preparing the New Year issue.

A cheerful fire cracked and spouted in the grate; and the leaping flames seemed to say: "All contributions—especially stale articles and long-winded poems—thankfully received!"

Harry Wharton had lost his position as captain of the Remove, but he was by no means a dead letter. He still edited the "Herald," and thereby retained some of his former influence.

Dennis Carr's victory had been a bitter pill to swallow, but Wharton had taken it like a sportsman. He had been among the first to congratulate Carr when the result of the election was made known.

Wharton had lost; but instead of repining, as many fellows would have done, he was as cheerful and alert as ever.

"The New Year number's got to be a corker!" he told the members of the staff. "Have you written the Personal Column yet, Bob?"

"It will be complete, O King, in half an hour."

"Good!"

"I've started on my weekly cartoon," said Nugent.

"And I'm half-way through a yarn," said Johnny Bull. "If you don't use it in this New Year's issue, perhaps you can hold it over for a few years!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a topping yarn," continued Johnny. "about four old men—"

"In that case, it will be topical when we're about ninety!" said Wharton. "You can take your time over it. I should write about a word per annum, if I were you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you going to turn out any verse, Dick?" inquired the editor of Dick Penfold.

"I'm half-way through a stunning ode!" was the reply. "But I forget how to spell 'queuè'—a line of fellows waiting to be served with plum-pudding, you know!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"I thought you were a scholar, Pen! It's spelt 'c-u-e,' of course!"

"Rats! That's a billiard-cue!"

"Might I proposefully suggest that the corrective spelling is 'k-e-w'?" murmured Hurree Singh.

"Ass! That's a town in Surrey."

Harry Wharton gave tongue with the air of the well-informed man.

"'Q-u-e-u-e' is correct," he said.

"Bosh!"

"He will have his little joke, bless him!" said Bob Cherry.

"You silly chump!" roared Wharton. "Do you think I should be floored by a word of five letters?"

"Three!" corrected Nugent.

"Oh, help!" gasped Wharton. "Hand over the dictionary, and we'll jolly soon see who's right."

"Our dictionary's wounded and missing," observed Johnny Bull. "We used it as a booby-trap for old Prout, if you remember, and Prout collared it—after it had nearly busted his cranium!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Carr's got a dictionary," said Nugent. "I'll go and borrow it."

On arriving at the study which Dennis Carr shared with Lord Mauleverer and Sir Jimmy Vivian, Nugent found a great celebration in progress.

The new captain of the Remove presided at the head of the table, and all was merry and bright.

"Sorry to barge in on this suspicious occasion," said Nugent, "but would you mind lending me your dictionary, Carr?"

"With the greatest of agony!" said Dennis. "You'll find it on the top shelf of the bookcase."

"An' mind you return it, dear boy," said Lord Mauleverer. "Bein' without a dictionary is very embarrassin', begad!"

"I'll return it in two ticks," said Nugent.

"I'm just borrowing it to settle an argument."

Frank secured the volume, and hurried back to No. 1 Study, where his chums awaited him with eager impatience.

"Turn it up!" said Bob Cherry. "You'll find it under C."

"My worthy chum means under K," said Hurree Singh.

"You're both off-side," said Wharton, "for the simple reason that it's under Q."

Frank Nugent opened the dictionary.

As he did so, a scrap of paper fluttered out of the book and on to the table.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "What's all this?"

Harry Wharton picked up the document and examined it. It was not in the form of a letter, and Wharton therefore assumed that there was nothing private about it.

"Looks like Smithy's handwriting," remarked Dick Penfold.

Wharton nodded, and started to read the document aloud.

"An Agreement made between Dennis Carr and Herbert Vernon-Smith—"

"Quite a legal flavour about that!" said Johnny Bull. "What's the agreement about?"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Wharton.

"Surely it's about something more important than your hat?"

Harry Wharton's astonishment gave way to indignation.

"The cads!" he exclaimed. "Then Skinner was right after all! Carr bribed Smith to vote for him!"

"Never!"

"That takes some swallowing!" said Nugent.

Wharton displayed the paper to view.

"It's here, in black and white," he said.

"Look for yourselves!"

The juniors did so. And this is what they saw:

"AN AGREEMENT MADE BETWEEN DENNIS CARR AND HERBERT VERNON-SMITH.

"I, Herbert Vernon-Smith, hereby agree to vote for Dennis Carr at the forthcoming election on the express condition that he hands me the sum of five pounds for so doing.

"(Signed) HERBERT VERNON-SMITH.

"I, Dennis Carr, hereby agree to pay to Herbert Vernon-Smith the sum of five pounds, provided he assists me to become captain of the Remove by giving me his vote.

"(Signed) DENNIS CARR."

The agreement was dated "Election Day," when it had presumably been drawn up.

The whole of the handwriting, with the exception of Dennis Carr's signature, appeared to be Vernon-Smith's.

Harry Wharton & Co. were thunderstruck. They stared at the document and at each other in growing astonishment and dismay.

Bob Cherry broke the long silence.

"Well, I'm beat!" he said slowly.

"Same here!" said Nugent. "I would have staked my life that Skinner was lying! And yet—and yet—"

"This agreement proves otherwise," said Wharton.

"Exactly!"

"It's Smithy's fist, right enough!" said Johnny Bull.

"And the second signature is Carr's," added Dick Penfold.

"So that's how Carr wangled the captaincy!" said Wharton bitterly. "He bought it; that's what it amounts to!"

"Shame!"

"Carr's a cad!"

"And so's Smith!"

"They both deserve to be sent to Coventry!"

Feeling ran high in No. 1 Study.

Dennis Carr was supposed to be a reformed character. But the discovery of this document seemed to suggest that his reformation was merely a blind.

Vernon-Smith also was supposed to have turned over a new leaf; but his recent conduct pointed to a relapse.

"You could knock me down with a feather!" declared Bob Cherry. "I quite thought that Carr had won the captaincy fairly and squarely."

"And all the time he had bribed Smithy to vote for him!" said Nugent. "My hat. I'll never trust either of them again!"

"Carr must have slipped this agreement into his dictionary, and forgotten all about it," said Wharton. "He'll have a rude reminder of its existence presently!"

"Yes, rather!"

There was a light step in the passage, and Dennis Carr came into the study.

The new captain's face was flushed, but not with guilt or fear. Dennis had been celebrating, and he was in high spirits.

The newcomer quite failed to notice the expressions on the faces of Harry Wharton & Co.

"I say, you chaps, there's four inches of snow in the Close!" he said. "What price a snow-fight with the Upper Fourth?"

A stony silence followed Dennis Carr's suggestion.

"Getting deaf in your old age?" inquired Dennis. "Come along, and we'll challenge Temple & Co. to a snow-fight!"

Harry Wharton & Co. did not budge, and Dennis Carr realised at last, as he scanned their accusing, reproachful faces, that something was wrong.

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Dennis.

It was Bob Cherry who answered.

"We've found you out, you cad!" he said hotly.

"Found me out? What the thump do you mean?"

"Candidly, Carr, we don't like your methods," said Harry Wharton. "Why didn't you go into the captaincy contest with clean hands?"

Dennis Carr stared at the speaker more in wonder than in anger.

"I did!" he exclaimed. "Dashed if I can understand you, Wharton. Are you suggesting that I didn't play fair?"

Johnny Bull gave a snort.

"He'll try and brazen it out, Harry, so show him that agreement now."

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 49.

Wharton held up the incriminating document for Dennis Carr's inspection. "This dropped out of your dictionary," he said. "And it shows you up in your true colours."

The juniors expected Dennis Carr to change colour—to be visibly taken aback by this evidence of his guilt. The new captain, however, did not look like a person whose offence was being brought home to him. He stared hard at the paper, certainly, and he was puzzled and bewildered, but that was all.

"This is jolly queer!" he exclaimed. "Some idiotic practical joker must have been at work."

"Oh, come off!" said Nugent. "Are you trying to pretend that you know nothing about it, and that the second signature isn't yours?"

"It certainly isn't mine," said Dennis, "though I admit it's quite a clever imitation."

"You deny all knowledge of this agreement?" exclaimed Wharton. "Absolutely!"

"You didn't have a private arrangement with Vernon-Smith?"

"Of course not!" snapped Dennis. "Only a pack of silly asses would accuse me of such a thing! I had no idea whom Smithy intended to vote for at the election. And as for bribing Smithy, as this paper suggests, why, I should have been knocked into the middle of next week if I had tried it on! Do you imagine for one moment that Smithy would be a party to a thing like this?"

"Well, it certainly came as a big shock to all of us," admitted Wharton. "But we can't doubt the evidence of our eyes. There's this paper—"

"Rats! It's a practical joke, I tell you!"

Dennis Carr's explanation of the affair, however, sounded lame and unconvincing. It was inconceivable that any fellow would go to the criminal extent of forging the signatures of two of his schoolmates.

"If you had a shred of decency left, Carr," said Dick Penfold, "you'd own up!"

An angry light blazed in Dennis Carr's eyes.

"I've nothing to own up to!" he declared, with indignation. "Either this is a practical joke, or it's a low-down trick to ruin my reputation and Smithy's. I give you my word of honour that this is not my signature."

"Your word of honour," said Wharton contemptuously, "is worth exactly nothing!"

Dennis clenched his hands.

"Look here—"

"Oh, get out!" growled Johnny Bull. "We're sick of the sight of you! You're captain of the Remove, but only in name, thank goodness! Nobody's likely to follow your lead after this."

A sense of acute depression came over Dennis Carr.

Only ten minutes before he had been the happiest fellow in the Remove. And now the old feud with his schoolfellows was revived, and they were more bitterly disposed towards him than ever.

Even Mark Linley, who had stood by Dennis through all his former trials and troubles, was against him now. And the Lancashire lad could hardly be blamed, for the evidence of Dennis Carr's guilt seemed overwhelming.

Dennis paused in the doorway. A bitter smile played about his lips.

"You fools!" he exclaimed. "I should have thought you'd have known me better by this time. Whatever you say, and whatever you think, I came by the captaincy honestly, and you can persecute me as much as you jolly well like, but I sha'n't budge. You called me a cad, Cherry, but it's you that's the cad—you, and these other bright specimens. You've convicted me on the strength of a scrap of paper, which any Tom, Dick, or Harry might have written. Fools! I think I'll leave you to come to your senses!"

And Dennis Carr strode out of No. 1 Study, shutting the door behind him with a slam which re-echoed the whole length of the Remove passage.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Fight in the Snow!

WHEN Dennis Carr returned to his own study he found that apartment crowded.

All the fellows who had voted for him at the election were present. Vernon-

Smith and Tom Brown, Squiff and Bulstrode, Dick Rake and Monty Newland, were there, besides Mauly and Jimmy Vivian. They all had their caps on, in anticipation of being summoned to take part in a snow-fight against Temple & Co., of the Upper Fourth.

"What's the verdict, begad?" inquired Lord Mauleverer. "Is Wharton willin'?"

Dennis Carr shook his head.

"You mean to say Wharton won't back us up?" exclaimed Squiff.

"He's not in a snow-fighting mood at the moment," said Dennis. "Something pretty awful has happened."

"My hat!"

"What's wrong?" asked Vernon-Smith quickly.

"You recollect Skinner's accusation this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Well, Wharton & Co. believe it to be true!"

Vernon-Smith jumped.

"But—but they agreed that Skinner was talking through his hat!" he exclaimed.

"At the time, yes. But there have been fresh developments. Nugent borrowed my dictionary just now, and a scrap of paper was found in it—an agreement supposed to have been written by you and me."

"Great Scott!"

"According to the paper," continued Dennis, "I promised to pay you a fiver if you'd vote for me."

"My only aunt!"

"But—but who on earth wrote the agreement?" asked Squiff.

"Somebody with a sense of humour that will land him in prison one of these days!" growled Dennis. "The rotter, whoever he was, taked Smithy's signature and my own!"

"And Wharton, of course, believes us guilty?" said Vernon-Smith.

"Not only Wharton, but all his pals."

"Did you explain that you knew nothing about the paper?"

"Of course! But it was found in my dictionary, and Wharton and the others regard that as convincing proof."

Dennis Carr scanned the faces of his supporters. He had half expected them to take the same view as Harry Wharton & Co., and to condemn him. But he was agreeably surprised to find that they were backing him up to a man.

"Wharton's acting like a cad!" said Squiff. "Are you going to take this lying down, Carr?"

"I don't see what else I can do."

"Fight, Wharton, of course! Make him eat his words."

"Hear, hear!" said Vernon-Smith. "If you don't fight him, Carr, I will!"

"That's the spirit, begad!" murmured Lord Mauleverer approvingly. "I'm a law-abidin' citizen, an' a lover of peace an' good will—especially now that Christmas is comin'; but you really can't overlook this, Dennis. It's up to you to give the lie to this beastly accusation."

"Yes, rather!"

"Will you tackle Wharton, or shall I?" inquired Vernon-Smith.

Dennis Carr squared his shoulders.

"I will!" he said.

"Good!"

The occupants of Dennis Carr's study were very excited. They had forgotten all about the proposed snow-fight with Temple & Co., and their one desire was to see the new captain of the Remove defend his honour with his fists.

Harry Wharton & Co. had condemned Dennis without hesitation; but Carr's own chums—the fellows who had stood shoulder to shoulder with him during the election campaign—stoutly believed in his innocence.

"Come along, kids!" said Tom Brown.

And the party marched along to No. 1 Study, where the editorial staff of the "Greyfriars Herald," their New Year issue forgotten for the time being, were excitedly discussing recent events.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as Dennis Carr came in at the head of his little army. "Looks like war, by Jove!"

Dennis Carr strode up to Wharton.

"Do you still believe that I bribed Smithy to vote for me?" he asked.

Dennis laughed scornfully. "I've no use for gloves," he said. "Of course, if Wharton prefers them—"

"Bare fists will suit me all right," said Harry.

"Better have it out behind the chapel, in that case," said Johnny Bull.

This suggestion, being unopposed, the juniors made their way to the familiar spot where all their differences were settled.

It was a bitterly cold night. The snow lay thick on the flagstones, and the flakes were still falling as the juniors crossed the Close.

News of the forthcoming fight had spread in a surprising manner. Possibly Billy Bunter had paused outside the door of Study No. 1 to tie his bootlace, and had heard what was afoot. Anyway, the crowd which assembled in the clearing behind the chapel was a considerable one.

"Groo!" muttered Lord Mauleverer, with a shiver. "It's perishin' cold, begad! Buck up an' get it over!"

Dennis Carr removed his coat, and handed it to Vernon-Smith. Harry Wharton handed his to Bob Cherry.

"What about a referee?" suggested Bulstrode.

"We don't want one," snapped Dennis Carr. "There aren't going to be rounds, or anything like that. It's to be a fight to a finish with bare fists!"

"Good!"

"I say, Carr!" said Billy Bunter. "I'll keep one of your front teeth as a memento!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was much speculation as to the probable result of the encounter.

Harry Wharton's chums confidently expected their leader to win, for Wharton was a very good fighting man, when he kept his head.

Dennis Carr's chums had equal confidence in the new skipper of the Remove.

Dennis had been away from Greyfriars for a spell, and during his absence he had taken lessons in the noble art of self-defence. The result was that he had improved out of all knowledge. Whereas, a few weeks back, Wharton could have beaten him with one hand, he would find Carr a much tougher proposition now.

"Carr will win hands down!" said Squiff.

"He'll have all his work cut out, though," said Vernon-Smith. "He hasn't Wharton's weight and reach."

"But he's got the satisfaction of knowing that he's in the right, and Wharton's in the wrong," said Tom Brown. "That ought to pull him through."

Wharton and Carr now stood facing each other, and at a mutual signal each rushed to the attack.

Standing ankle-deep in snow, the spectators craned forward eagerly, not wishing to miss a single detail of the struggle.

The fight started in a very one-sided fashion. It was all Carr, and Wharton's attack was not in evidence. Indeed, Dennis appeared to be using his opponent as a punching-ball.

"Stick it, Dennis!" chortled Jimmy Vivian delightedly.

And from the Whartonites came an anxious cry of "Buck up, Harry!"

Wharton seemed to be all at sea. He could make no headway against an opponent who gave neither quarter, nor expected it.

Twice in quick succession Dennis Carr's left shot out. The first blow caused Wharton to reel, and the second laid him on his back in the snow.

"Hurrah!"

"A knock-out, by Jove!" exclaimed Squiff.

But Vernon-Smith shook his head.

"It's going to take more than that to dispose of Wharton," he said.

And he was right.

For a few seconds Wharton lay motionless. Then he sprang up like a jack-in-the-box, and rushed to the attack, spurred on by his supporters.

A drastic change came over the encounter. It had been all Carr at first; now it was all Wharton.

Left and right, right and left, Harry's fists shot out, pounding Dennis Carr's ribs until Dennis felt like a deflated tyre.

"That's the stuff to give 'em!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Polish him off, Harry!"

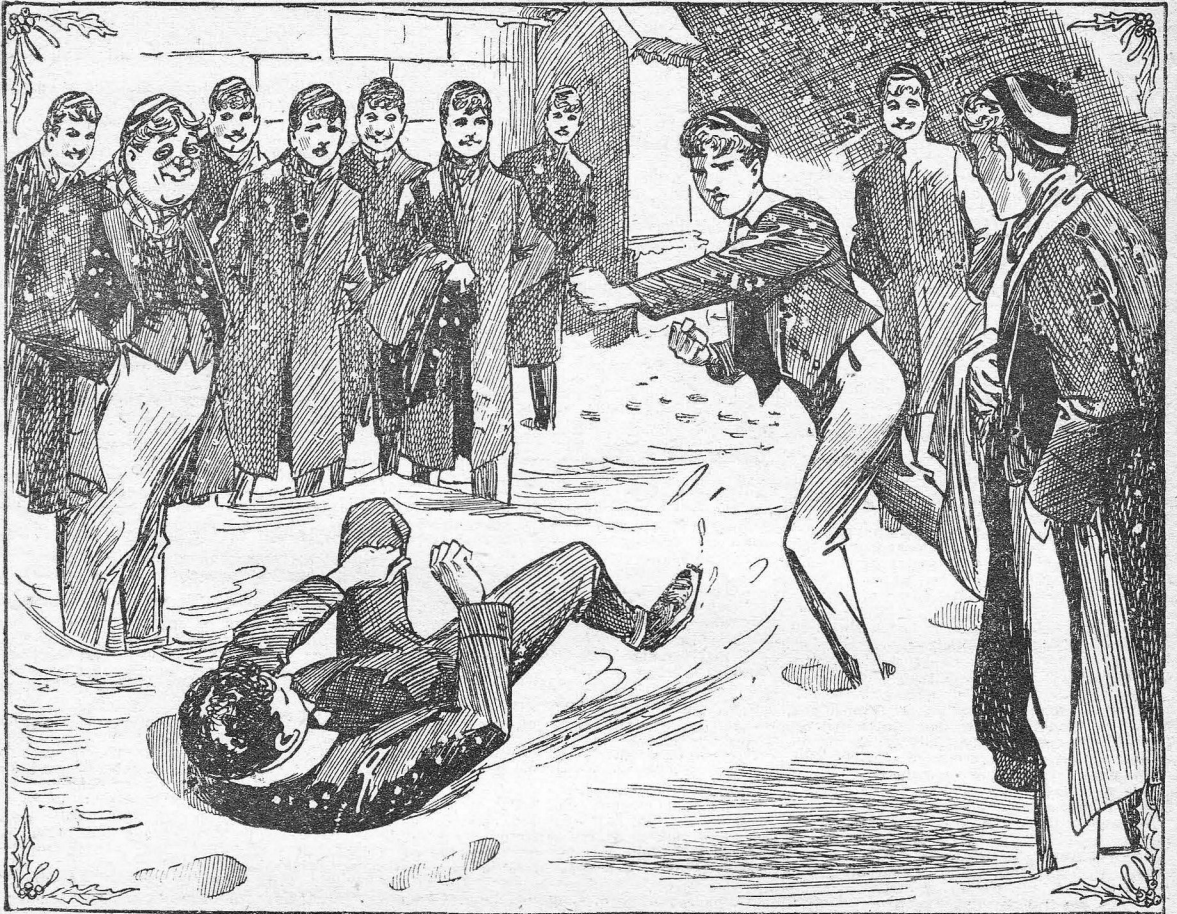
Dennis Carr took his punishment in plucky fashion, but he knew that this state of affairs could not go on much longer. Already he experienced a sickening sense of impending defeat.

"I must pull myself together!" he re-

W

HEN Dennis Carr returned to his own study he found that apartment crowded.

All the fellows who had voted for him at the election were present. Vernon-



Dennis Carr launched a smashing blow at his opponent's jaw, and Harry Wharton pitched over in the snow. Pluckily he endeavoured to rise, but the effort proved futile. "Carr wins!" exclaimed Squiff. (See this page.)

flected grimly. "I undertook to lick Wharton, and I must keep my word!"

Was it possible, even at this stage, for Dennis to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat?

The spectators didn't seem to think so, but Dennis himself did. He roused himself with a great effort, and hurled himself at his man.

The crowd looked on spellbound, while the combatants tramped to and fro in the slush and snow, hitting out vigorously.

Biff!

Dennis Carr launched a smashing blow at his opponent's jaw. Wharton ducked, but he failed to evade the blow, which caught him between the eyes. He staggered, and at the same instant Dennis Carr again shot out his left. Straight from the shoulder it came with relentless force—and it proved to be the last blow of the fight.

Harry Wharton pitched over in the snow, and although his chums urged him to rally, he had no fight left in him. Pluckily he endeavoured to rise, but the effort was futile.

"Carr wins!" exclaimed Squiff. "Bravo, Dennis!"

Dennis looked anything but a victor as he reeled into the arms of Vernon-Smith. His face was bruised and discoloured, his breath came and went in great gasps. It had been a hard and strenuous fight, and both combatants were very much the worse for wear.

Vernon-Smith helped Dennis Carr on with his coat; then he threw out a challenge to Wharton's supporters.

"If you cads are still of the opinion that Carr bought my vote, I shall be pleased to tackle any one of you!" he declared.

"Right you are!" said Bob Cherry. "You can start on me!"

"Hold on, Bob!" muttered Harry Wharton. "There's been quite enough scrapping as it is."

"But that cheeky cad—" protested Bob.

"We'll send him to Coventry—and Carr as well! Neither of them are fit to associate with any decent fellows, after the low-down trick they played!"

"Oh, rats!" growled Squiff. "That agreement you found in Carr's dictionary was a fake. Carr and Smithy are innocent!"

"Innocent be hanged!" said Johnny Bull warmly. "They're a pair of rank outsiders—"

Biff!

Johnny Bull broke off suddenly as a snowball, deftly aimed by one of Dennis Carr's supporters, smashed in his face.

"Yaroooh!" roared Johnny. "Back up, you fellows!"

A moment later, a wild and whirling battle was in progress.

Those who believed Dennis Carr innocent and those who believed him guilty were pretty evenly matched, and they proceeded to pelt each other with snowballs at a furious rate.

Neither Wharton nor Carr took an active part in the proceedings. They stood aside, while their respective supporters kept up a fierce bombardment.

There was no time to erect fortresses of snow, but this did not matter.

"More ammunition, Inky!" panted Bob Cherry.

"Here you are, my worthy chum!"

Hurree Singh thrust a couple of huge snowballs into Bob's hands, and Bob launched them at the enemy with disastrous results. Squiff stopped one with his nose, and the other bowled Tom Brown over like a ninepin.

How the fight would have ended it was impossible to say. When it was at its height, a tall form loomed up in the winter dusk, and the stern voice of Wingate, of the Sixth, exclaimed.

"What does this mean? You kids ought to be indoors, doing your prep. Chuck it! Chuck it, I tell you!"

Bob Cherry obeyed—but not in the sense Wingate intended. He hurled a snowball at Vernon-Smith, who ducked, causing the missile to strike the captain of Greyfriars on the chin.

Wingate was a hefty fellow, but the throw had been a hefty one, too, and it caused him to sit down suddenly in the snow.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry, dismayed at having struck the wrong target. "Sorry Wingate!"

Wingate picked himself up with a grunt. "You can celebrate your sorrow by writing me five hundred lines!" he exclaimed.

"And now go inside, all of you! This is disgraceful!"

"Be lenient with us in our old age, Wingate!" pleaded Squiff. "Christmas is coming, you know!"

"My boot will be coming, if you don't obey orders!"

Reluctantly the snowballers ceased fire, and trooped into the building. But it was not peace. It was merely an armistice.

In the Remove dormitory that evening fire trouble broke out afresh.

Once again Dennis Carr and Vernon-Smith protested their innocence, and they were backed up by all the fellows who had voted for Dennis.

Harry Wharton & Co., however, were obstinate in their belief that Dennis Carr had won the captaincy of the Form by unfair means.

For ten minutes or so the rival factions amused themselves by shouting "Rats!" at each other, and words soon led to blows.

A pitched battle took place with pillows and bolsters, and once again Wingate intervened just when the fight was at its thickest.

On this occasion the captain of Greyfriars was armed with an ashplant, and he promptly brought it into action.

The Removites stampeded wildly to their

beds. Not many of them had escaped the ashlant.

"You silly young asses!" panted Wingate. "You're going the right way to get the Christmas vacation cancelled! This is the second disturbance this evening. If there is another, I shall report the matter to Mr. Quelch, so you can look out for squalls!"

Wingate's warning was quite sufficient, even for the hot-headed and impetuous Removites, and no further sound disturbed the harmony of the Remove dormitory that night save the loud and sonorous snores of Billy Bunter!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. A Tempting Offer.

EARLY next morning the following singular announcement was posted on the school notice-board:

"NOTICE!

"Whereas we, the undersigned, are satisfied that Dennis Carr and Herbert Vernon-Smith have acted in a thoroughly caddish and unsportsmanlike manner, we hereby order that they shall be sent to Coventry for the remaining days of the term.

"Any fellow in the Remove who is seen in conversation either with Carr or Vernon-Smith will be severely dealt with.

(Signed) H. WHARTON,
R. CHERRY,
F. NUGENT,
J. BULL,
H. J. R. SINGH.

"On behalf of the Form."

That notice had the effect of re-opening the feud.

Dennis Carr's supporters were highly indignant.

"What awful cheek!" said Monty Newland. "Wharton seems to think that he's still captain of the Remove!"

"He's got no right to send anybody to Coventry, anyway!" growled Squiff. "Wharton's a back number; and as for the others, they can go and eat coke!"

"Hear, hear!"
Tom Brown strode up to the notice-board, and tore down the offending document. He screwed it up into a ball, and hurled it from him.

"So much for that!" he said. "Now we'll show Master Wharton that two can play at his game!"

The Famous Five had a rude shock when they approached the notice-board after breakfast.

Their own announcement had disappeared, and in its place appeared the following:

"NOTICE!

"We, the undersigned, note that certain silly asses in the Remove have had the cheek to order Carr and Vernon-Smith to be sent to Coventry.

"Unless the silly asses in question behave themselves, we warn them that they will be sent also—not to Coventry, but to Colney Hatch!"

(Signed) TOM BROWN,
S. Q. I. FIELD,
M. NEWLAND.

"On behalf of the fellows who still retain their sanity."

Needless to state, that notice was torn down also! And the Famous Five went in search of Brown, Squiff, and Newland. They had something to say to them—fistily, if not verbally.

But Messrs. Brown, Squiff, and Newland were not on view.

It was a bitterly cold morning. The snow had hardened, and the local ponds and lakes were frozen over. The juniors rejoiced at the prospect of an afternoon's skating.

There was a surprise in store for the Remove when they trooped in to morning lessons.

Mr. Quelch was standing at his desk, and instead of bestowing the usual frown upon his pupils, the Form-master was actually smiling!

"Wonders will never cease!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Quelch's caught the Christmas spirit, I suppose."

But a bigger surprise was to come.

Mr. Quelch unlocked his desk, and produced—not a pointer, as the class had expected, but a pair of skates!

"My only aunt!" muttered Bolsover major. "Are we going to have a skating lesson instead of English history, I wonder?"

"Looks like it!" gasped Skinner.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 49.

"Quelch's arrived at his second childhood!"

"Silence, Skinner!" said the Remove-master.

Then, in the manner of a professional auctioneer, he added:

"I have here, my boys, a pair of skates."

"Well, we didn't think it was a lawnmower!" murmured Squiff.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is not a matter for frivolity," said Mr. Quelch, less sternly than usual. "I purchased these skates as a Christmas present for my nephew. I now find, however, that he prefers a shot-gun; and, rather than return the skates to the stores, I have decided to present them to one of my own pupils."

The Removites gasped.

Mr. Quelch was noted for many things, but philanthropy was not one of them. Very seldom indeed had he been known to give anything away. There was a legend to the effect that once, in a fit of generosity, the Form-master had given Skinner a couple of very sour and ancient cherries, with an injunction not to make a beast of himself. Apart from that doubtful incident, Mr. Quelch had never been known to play the part of a Santa Claus.

And now he was actually giving away—free, gratis, and for nothing—a pair of skates!

Billy Bunter, ever keen to seize an opportunity of getting something for nothing, rose to his feet.

"Well, Bunter?" said Mr. Quelch.

"Thank you, sir!" said Bunter.

"What?"

"Hand them over, sir!"

"Bunter!"

"Directly you made your kind offer, sir, I knew that you intended to give the skates to the most deserving fellow in the class. That—that's why I stood up, sir."

"Boy!"

"You needn't trouble to bring them across to me, sir," said the fat junior. "One of the fellows in the front row will hand them over."

The juniors giggled, and the smile faded from the Form-master's face.

"You are an utterly stupid boy, Bunter! Do you imagine for one moment that you are the most deserving boy in the class? If so, I can only say that your imagination is playing you tricks. I should think twice—in fact, several times—before making you a gratuitous award. You may sit down!"

"But, sir—"

"Sit down!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

And Bunter sat—just in time to receive the full benefit of the upturned tinctack which Skinner had placed on the seat.

A wild yell rang through the Form-room.

"Bless my soul!" Bunter! What ever is the matter?" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Yow! I sat on something, sir!"

"Indeed! Had you sat on nothing, Bunter, I should have understood the reason for your vocal effort. Be silent!"

"Ow-ow-ow!"

"Do you wish me to cane you, Bunter?"

"Nunno, sir! But I wish you could feel how it hurts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Reverting to the subject of the skates," said Mr. Quelch, "I intend to present them to the boy who, at the termination of morning lessons, happens to be at the top of the class."

"Good!" murmured the scholars.

"Rotten!" groaned the dunces.

Had Mr. Quelch offered the skates to the fellow who could display the biggest muscles, Bolsover major would probably have won them. Had he offered them as a booby prize to the fellow who finished up at the foot of the class, Billy Bunter would have proved successful. But the fact that they were to be awarded to the best scholar limited the field to Harry Wharton, Mark Linley, Dick Penfold, Dick Russell, and Dennis Carr.

The competition between these five proved very keen.

At the end of first lesson, Linley was top, Wharton second, and Carr third.

The second lesson consisted of an essay on "How I Shall Spend the Christmas Vacation."

Bob Cherry, whose chances of winning the skates had been regarded as extremely remote, wrote such a brilliant essay that he obtained full marks, and found himself at the top.

Dennis Carr had crept up to second place, and Wharton and Linley were third and fourth respectively.

Billy Bunter was at the foot of the class,

and he was likely to remain there until the word of dismissal came.

The fat junior nursed a wild hope that Mr. Quelch, in the excitement of making the award, would mistake the bottom of the class for the top.

Bunter's hope, however, was not likely to be realised.

During last lesson the struggle waxed very keen.

The great English poets formed the subject of the final lesson; and Bob Cherry, who knew more about the great English prize-fighters, fell from his high estate, and Dennis Carr went to top place.

Harry Wharton and Mark Linley did their best to assail the new captain's position; but Dennis, who wanted that pair of skates very badly, refused to budge. He retained pride of place, and, to the delight of his supporters, and the disgust of Harry Wharton's, he was awarded the prize.

"You have acquitted yourself very well, Carr," said Mr. Quelch. "I am very pleased with you."

"Rotten favouritism!" grunted Billy Bunter, whose hopes of securing the skates were finally shattered.

"Bunter!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "You were talking!"

"Oh, crumbs! I—I merely said to Skinner, 'Rotten day, isn't it?' That's all, sir."

"You will take a hundred lines, Bunter, for discussing the climatic conditions in the Form-room!"

"Oh!"

The fat junior took the hundred lines, but not the skates. Dennis Carr was the lucky winner, and he smiled serenely at his chums as the juniors trooped out into the passage.

"Just what I wanted!" said Dennis. "It's a half-holiday, and there's going to be skating on Friar Dale Lake!"

"As captain of the Form, you ought to consider it out of place to skate!" said Skinner.

"As captain of the Form, I object to rotten puns!" retorted Dennis. "Bump him!"

The cad of the Remove was lowered none too gently to the floor, and Dennis Carr & Co., after carefully wiping their boots on him, hurried away to make preparations for a first-rate half-holiday.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Nearly a Tragedy!

FRIARDALE LAKE was the chief centre of attraction that afternoon. A constant stream of fellows, carrying skates, passed through the old gateway of Greyfriars.

Harry Wharton & Co. walked on one side of the road and Dennis Carr & Co. on the other.

The feud was still in progress, but it no longer consisted of open warfare. Instead, the rival parties attempted to cut each other dead.

Coker & Co., of the Fifth, walked past the Removites with their noses in the air.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Coker's going to skate!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Coker turned his head.

"Yes," he said, "I'm going to skate—not barge about on the ice and bowl everybody over! I'm going to cut a figure of eight—"

"The only figure you'll cut," said Wharton, "is a sorry one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker was not sufficiently skilled in the art of repartee to reply to that sword-thrust. He strode on with burning cheeks, and the laughter of the Removites followed him.

Practically all Greyfriars, with the exception of the high-and-mighty Sixth, was bound for the lake. The Sixth, of course, had their dignity to consider, and they ruefully reflected that their skating days were over.

The Friars were not first on the scene, by any means. Ponsonby & Co., of Highcliffe, were already going strong; and several of the Cliff House girls were present—though they studiously avoided the "nuts" of Highcliffe.

"Accommodation seems to be limited," said Dennis Carr. "But we'll get a look-in, somehow!"

"Yes, rather!"

"I wonder," murmured Dennis thoughtfully, "if Miss Howell would care to have me as a partner?"

Bob Cherry happened to overhear that

remark, and he set his lips. He was on the point of saying that Phyllis Howell didn't want to skate with a rank outsider, but he restrained himself, and said:

"You needn't start poaching on another fellow's preserves, Carr!"

"Eh? Whose preserves?" asked Dennis.

"Mine," said Bob, flushing.

"Rats! It's a free country, and I've as much right to Miss Howell's company as you have!"

"You'll both lose your chance if you stand there snarling at each other like a couple of mongrels!" growled Johnny Bull. "Somebody else will act the squire of dames, and you'll find yourselves in the cart."

That dismal prospect spurred Dennis Carr and Bob Cherry to action.

"Race you for the honour!" challenged Bob Cherry.

Dennis nodded, and the couple stooped down and fastened on their skates. Then they sped away over the ice, each intent on reaching Miss Phyllis first.

The girl looked up with a smile as they approached. Phyllis liked Bob Cherry, and she had a warm admiration for Dennis Carr. She would not have declined to skate with either of them.

It was difficult to say who won the race. Dennis Carr was the first to reach Phyllis, but Bob Cherry was the first to pop the question.

"May I partner you, Miss Phyllis?" he jerked out.

"May I?" added Dennis. "I got here first, you know!"

Phyllis glanced from one junior to the other with a puzzled smile. She did not want to offend either by a refusal.

A way out soon suggested itself, however. "I'm such an uncertain skater," said Phyllis, "that I'm afraid I need plenty of support. Supposing you come one on each side?"

"Well, that's better than nothing," said Bob Cherry grudgingly. "Come on!"

And the trio, with Phyllis in the middle, flashed away towards the spot where the skaters were thickest.

"There seem to be a good many casualties already!" panted Dennis Carr. "Look at Bunter!"

The fat junior, who was experimenting with a borrowed pair of skates, had just come a terrible cropper.

"Ow!" he gasped, sitting up with a dazed expression on his face. "I wouldn't mind the ice, if it wasn't so slippery!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A short distance away, Bunter's unhappy experiences were being shared by Coker, of the Fifth.

Coker was trying to demonstrate his superior skill; and when Coker tried to do that, in whatever capacity, there was always trouble.

In attempting to cut a figure of eight, the great Horace turned a complete somersault. His acrobatic feat was hailed with shouts of laughter.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Phyllis Howell. "Coker will be the death of me! He's too funny for words!"

"The best of it is," said Bob Cherry, "he doesn't try to be a comedian. He's a natural one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Suddenly a cry of alarm went up, and all eyes were turned to that portion of the ice on which Ponsonby & Co. were performing.

The Highcliffe "nuts" could skate quite well in a dandified sort of way—Ponsonby, in particular, performed gracefully, but recklessly.

In order to impress the spectators, he was at that moment skating on very thin ice, close to a board bearing the ominous word "DANGER!"

No sensible fellow would have gone within a dozen yards of that board. But then Ponsonby was not a sensible fellow. He was playing to the gallery, and he was likely to regret his rash conduct.

The hearts of most of the onlookers were in their mouths as they watched Ponsonby's foolish antics.

"The fool!" muttered Dennis Carr. "The mad fool! Is he aware that the water's eight feet deep at that part, I wonder?"

"If the ice were to break—" began Phyllis.

Scarcely had the girl uttered the words when there was a tearing, splintering sound, followed by a splash and a yell.

The expected had happened.

The ice had given way, and Cecil Ponsonby was struggling in the chilly water.

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Bob Cherry, turning pale.

Gadsby and Monson sprang back out of the danger zone in the nick of time. The selfish pair seemed intent on saving their own skins. The thought of going to Ponsonby's assistance did not even occur to them.

After a terrible pause, Ponsonby's head rose to the surface. His face was deathly pale. The shock of the immersion seemed to have rendered him unconscious.

Dennis Carr whipped off his coat.

"What are you going to do?" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Jump in and hang on to him, of course, while some of you fetch a ladder or a rope."

"A ladder won't be any use," said Phyllis. "The ice is breaking up so quickly all round that a ladder would never hold. Run for a rope, Bob!"

Bob Cherry sped away as fast as he could go, and his chums, when they heard of his intention, followed him.

There was a cottage close at hand, and the juniors dashed towards it.

Meanwhile, Dennis Carr had hastened to Ponsonby's assistance.

When he neared the yawning hole, Dennis lay flat on the ice. By equally distributing his weight upon it in this manner he hoped it would not break.

The hope, however, was not realised.

The ice quivered and cracked, and, without any further hesitation, Dennis plunged into the water.

Ponsonby had gone under once; and when his head rose to the surface again Dennis grasped him round the body, supporting him in the water.

The plucky junior was aware of two things—firstly, that Ponsonby had lost consciousness; and, secondly, that unless help arrived almost immediately it would be too late, for the water was piercingly cold, and there was an imminent danger of cramp.

The onlookers wrung their hands helplessly. They could do nothing for Dennis and the fellow he had gone to rescue.

The ice was so thin and treacherous in the locality of the hole that it would have been madness for anyone to venture upon it.

"Good heavens!" panted Phyllis Howell. "They'll both be drowned!"

And the girl turned away her head. She was unable to endure the sight of Dennis Carr's pale, strained face.

Where was Bob Cherry and his companions? Why didn't they come? Had they been unable to procure a rope?

These questions were answered by a sudden shout, as the Famous Five were seen running along the bank of the lake with a stout coil of rope.

"Quickly!" panted Dennis Carr. "I—I'm nearly done!"

Harry Wharton & Co. scarcely heard Dennis. They hastily formed a noose at the end of the rope, which was sent whirling towards the gap in the ice.

Dennis Carr failed to catch the rope at the first attempt, and it was drawn back and rethrown.

On this occasion Dennis was successful, and with a desperate effort he contrived to slip the noose under Ponsonby's arms.

"Haul away!" he gasped.

Slowly and gently, the unconscious Highcliffe junior was pulled out of the death-trap.

Relieved of his human burden, Dennis Carr found little difficulty in keeping himself afloat until the rope came to him again.

Willing hands carried the inanimate form of Cecil Ponsonby into the little cottage, and shortly afterwards Dennis Carr was safely landed.

Scant of breath, and unable to speak, Dennis lay on the bank on an overcoat which had been spread out by Bob Cherry, and the cheers of the crowd thundered in his ears.

Everyone was cheering him—friends and foes alike. He had risked his life for that of another. But for his courage and fortitude, Cecil Ponsonby would undoubtedly have met his death.

"Well played, Carr!"

"Good old Dennis!"

"Hurrah!"

Cheer after cheer rang out on the frosty air.

As soon as he had recovered sufficiently, Dennis was escorted into the cottage, where he sat wrapped in blankets in front of a roaring fire while his clothes were being dried.

The Famous Five remained in the little kitchen with Dennis, and for a long time there was silence. Then Wharton said:

"Carr, I was a cad to accuse you of acting dishonourably. A fellow who did what you did just now couldn't possibly be guilty of such a shabby trick as wangling an election.

There's been a mistake, and we've condemned you unfairly."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry. "As soon as you get your boots on again, Carr, we want you to kick us—hard!"

"That's all right," said Dennis cheerfully. "Of course, that faked agreement made things look awfully black against Smithy and me. I wonder if we shall ever find out who did it?"

Little did the juniors dream that they would learn the true facts of the case within the next half-hour.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

"A Merry Christmas!"

PONSONBY had been conveyed to one of the bedrooms. He soon recovered consciousness, though he was not likely to get over the effects of his ducking for some days.

When he came round Ponsonby inquired of the housewife if any of the Greyfriars fellows were in the cottage. On being informed that there were six of them downstairs, he expressed a desire to see them.

The Famous Five and Dennis Carr went up at once.

Ponsonby sat up in bed.

"First of all," he began, "I want to thank you, Carr, for what you did this afternoon. I'm not much of a hand at expressin' thanks, but I'm grateful. I didn't want to shuffle off this mortal coil just yet."

"You were a chump to skate on that thin ice," said Bob Cherry. "It was fairly asking for trouble!"

Ponsonby nodded.

"I know I was a chump," he said. "So were you, Carr. If you had known how I hated you, an' tried to drag you down, you wouldn't have been quite so keen on fishin' me out of the water."

Dennis smiled.

"I was quite aware of the fact that you hated me, Ponsonby," he said.

"But there's one thing you weren't aware of. Confessions aren't much in my line, but I'd like to get one off my chest now."

And then Ponsonby explained that it was he who had drawn up the bogus agreement, with the intention of disgracing Dennis.

A certain fellow in the Remove, whose identity Ponsonby would not divulge, had supplied him with samples of Carr's handwriting and of Vernon-Smith's.

The rest had been easy.

Ponsonby had "faked" the agreement, and his confederate had slipped it into Dennis Carr's dictionary. That volume was frequently being borrowed by the Removites, and Ponsonby had counted on one of them discovering the document.

Pon's cunning scheme had succeeded, and over half the Remove had suspected Dennis Carr of obtaining the captaincy by unfair and unscrupulous means.

"It was a caddish trick," said Ponsonby, "an' an apology isn't worth much. But I simply had to tell you this after Carr saved my life."

"Well, there wasn't a great deal of harm done, as it happened," said Dennis. "I wasn't chucked out of the captaincy, or anything like that."

Ponsonby stared.

"You don't mean to say you're goin' to overlook it?" he exclaimed.

"Of course!" said Dennis. "This isn't the time to bear malice. We break up to-morrow for the Christmas vac. Of course, it wasn't a friendly thing to do—in fact, forgery's a dangerous game, and I should advise you to chuck it; but now that you've confessed, we'll say no more about it."

Ponsonby was touched by Dennis Carr's generous attitude.

"Pon my word, Carr," he said, "you're one of the best!"

This sentiment was re-echoed throughout the Remove Form that evening, when Ponsonby's confession became common knowledge.

The fellows who had stood by Dennis Carr through the crisis were hugely elated to know that his honour had been vindicated; and the fellows who had condemned Dennis were quick to ask his forgiveness, which was as quickly given.

Harry Wharton & Co. had a very shrewd idea as to the identity of Ponsonby's confederate. They suspected Skinner very strongly, but they took no action in the matter. After all, Christmas was near, and there was no room for unpleasantness.

So Skinner went scot-free. But the Famous Five resolved to keep an eye on the

(Continued on page 20).



BAGGY'S CHRISTMAS ADVENTURE

A New Long Complete
Christmas Story of
TOM MERRY & Co.,
the Chums of St. Jim's.
By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Baggy is Not Included.

"O H, don't be a beast, Cardew!" "I won't guarantee not to be a beast, Baggibus. But I will undertake not to be a dashed fool—at least, not such a dashed fool as to spoil a Christmas party by includin' you!"

"I'm glad you qualified it, Ralph!" said Ernest Levison, with a sardonic grin. "Considering two or three of the things you have done this term—well, if you are not going to be a dashed fool in future you'll have to turn over a complete new leaf!"

"Shut up, Levison! I'm talking to Cardew," said Baggy Trimble. Levison glared at the fat junior. Then the glare faded into a smile.

"Talk away, Baggy!" he said. "I know one thing—if you jolly well go I jolly well won't!"

"Pork on the table is all right now and then," remarked Sidney Clive. "But live pork at the table is the giddy limit!"

"You're vulgar, Clive! Look here, Cardew, we've always been pals!"

"First I've heard of that, Baggibus," replied Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"Oh, don't talk rot! You know we have. Look here, what's it matter whether Levison comes or not? We don't want him. Personally, I don't think very much of Levison."

"Lie down and die, Levison!" said George Durrance.

Durrance and Clive and Levison, and Levison's minor, young Frank, were all going to Barromby Hall, one of the several country seats of Lord Reckness, Cardew's grandfather, for Christmas, and Baggy Trimble wanted to go with them. In fact, Baggy had made up his mind to go with them.

"If Baggy thought a lot of me I should consider seriously whether I wasn't superfluous," said Levison. "As he doesn't, I'm rather inclined to go on living for the present."

"You see, Cardew, I've told my people that I'm coming with you!" went on Baggy.

"But they know you, Baggibus," said Cardew.

"Eh? Of course they know me! A fellow's own people are bound to know him pretty well, aren't they?"

"Then they must know that you never tell the truth, except by accident, an' that you'll be safe to rejoice their hearts by turmin' up for the festivities at Trimble Hall."

"But that's rot!" snarled Baggy.

"So we always suspected, dear boy!"

"Eh? I don't follow you."

"You'd better not! Nothin' doin' that way, I do assure you!"

"I mean—what's all rot, do you mean?"

"Trimble Hall!" replied Cardew.

"Ha, ha ha!"

Baggy scowled.

If any of the Fourth had ever believed in Trimble Hall that belief had long since been dissipated. Baggy's home was a respectable villa in a dull street of a dull little town, as utterly unlike the palatial residence ima-

ginatively pictured by Baggy as anything well could be.

"I tell you what we will do," said Clive. "We'll run over and see you, Baggy. The show we're going to isn't more than twenty miles from your home."

"You won't do anything of the sort!" returned Baggy in great haste. "I should refuse to have any of you under my ancestral roof-tree!"

"Wouldn't you have Cardew?" inquired Durrance slyly.

"No! Er—I mean, yes, of course! I thought you said Levison, and I bar Levison."

"Levison and Cardew do sound alike, don't they?" gibed the owner of the first name.

"But I am unfortunately prevented from extending the family hospitality to my pal Ralph because my people have all gone to the Riviera for the winter."

"The Riviera! Where's that? In Australia?" asked Clive.

"No, you ignorant duffer! In North Africa, or Arabia, or somewhere!" replied Baggy.

"I'll back 'Somewhere' both ways," said Cardew.

"Eh?"

"Oh, nothin'! Nothin' you could understand, that is. The fact of the matter is, Baggibus, that my grandfather is dashed particular. He bars anyone with a scandal in the family."

"Except his grandson!" jeered Levison.

"Oh, well, it's a different thing when it comes to one's own family skeletons, of course! I'm afraid the old boy may consider me a scandal at times. But he doesn't hear everythin' that happens."

"There isn't any such scandal in my family!" howled Baggy.

"Oh, it was a long time ago, I know! But you shouldn't remind people of it so often."

"I don't know what you're talking about!" protested Baggy.

"The feet of the young men," murmured Cardew.

"What young men? You're talking in riddles!"

"The young men who came to carry out Ananias and Sapphira," Durrance explained.

"Bub—bub—but Ananias and Sapphira haven't anything to do with me! Why, they're in the Bible!"

"Weren't they ancestors of yours?" inquired Cardew blandly.

"No, ass!"

"Then how do you account for it?" Cardew asked.

"Account for what? I don't understand you a bit, Cardew!"

"That's nearer the truth than you usually get, porpoise. You don't seem to understand me very well."

"Look here, am I coming with you, or am I not?" howled Baggy.

"There you are! You seem quite incapable of understandin' me at all!"

"Will you give me a straight answer?"

"The answer is in the negative."

"Do you call that straight?"

"If you want it straighter, take it! Try to come with us, that's all! The result will be a dead porker!"

"You mean you won't have me?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas; I did mean somethin' a bit like that."

"Then all I have to say is that you're an absolute rotter!"

"An' I really think that's nearly all you'd better say. If you said much more I might begin to get offended."

"I'm going!" howled Baggy, turning to the door.

"Quite a good move," returned Cardew. "Happy New Year, Baggibus!"

"Eh? It isn't anywhere near the New Year yet."

"No. But I don't suppose I shall see you again before the year that is comin' has attained quite a decent age."

In that, however, Ralph Reckness Cardew was wrong.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Off for the Holidays.

RYLCOMBE railway-station was crowded, for St. Jim's was going home, and the most popular train of the day was now due.

It was a clear, frosty morning, the kind of morning which sets the blood of a healthy boy tingling, and makes the slacker shiver and button his overcoat more tightly.

There were not many slackers among the crowd on the platform at Rylcombe, however. Rake was there, and so was Croke; but expensive fur-coats helped to keep them warm. Mellish showed a blue nose, and shivered, and Chowle and Clampe were grumbling at the weather. But the most hopeless slacker of all was not present.

"Anybody seen Trimble?" asked Clive.

"Weally, you do not mean to say that you are taking that fat fwaud with you, aftan all?"

"No, Gustavus, I don't. I only mean to say that he borrowed my knife this morning, and I think it's safer with me than with him for the hols."

"Ass to lend him it!" growled Herries.

"Anybody's an ass that lends Baggy anything."

"Will you lend Clive Towser?" inquired Cardew.

"What's Clive want Towser for?"

"I don't!" said Clive promptly.

"To find Baggy, of course," Cardew said gravely. "Towser's reputation as a sleuth-hound—"

"Brrrr!" growled Herries; and Towser, at his feet, gave a very creditable imitation of his master's growl.

"Try Pongo!" suggested Frank Levison.

"Wally's got him here somewhere. Hi, Wally! Pongo's wanted!"

D'Arcy minor hurried up with his canine treasure.

"Young donkey! I don't want Pongo!" said Clive.

"What's he wanted for?" demanded Wally.

"To get on Baggy's track," Frank answered, grinning.

"No go! He might bite him!"

"I don't think Baggy would bite Pongo," Ernest Levison said.

"Rats! I meant Pongo might take a bit out of Baggy!"

"Well, Baggy wouldn't miss it, and you needn't object," Durrance said.

"Baggy! What do you think I care about Baggy?" asked Wally.

"Thought you were afraid he'd be bitten."

"I don't mind Baggy being bitten a scrap, but I'm not going to have Pongo poisoned!"

"So that's that!" said Cardew, as Wally went off with his pet.

"Seen Baggy, Thomas?" asked Clive of Tom Merry. Tom and Lowther and Manners were off to Huckleberry Green, to spend Christmas with Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Tom's dear old governess.

"Lots of times. So many times, in fact, that I don't mind a bit if I never see him again!" replied Tom cheerily.

"Chump! I mean just lately!"

"I don't believe he was at brekker!" Manners said.

"There was early brekker for those who wanted it," said Durrance.

"But that doesn't prove anything, for Baggy always has it twice when it's like that," answered Lowther.

"What do you want Baggy for, Clive?" Tom inquired.

"I don't want him, fathead! I only want my knife," replied Clive, who had begun to get a trifle short of temper.

Cardew took out his own pocket-knife and handed it to his chum.

"Take this, Sidney, an' be at peace!" he said. "No doubt I shall get another from the Christmas-tree."

"Ass! It's my knife I want, not yours!" returned Clive snappishly.

"I saw Trimble this morning," said Grundy. "He was slinking off to the early train. He didn't tell me why."

"Then he's gone!" said Durrance. "For this relief, much thanks!"

"And taken my knife with him!" growled Clive.

Baggy had gone. But he had not gone home.

The podgy junior was fatuous enough for anything. He really had told his people that he was spending Christmas with Cardew—"My pal Ralph Cardew, grandson to Lord Reckness," he had written—and the consequence was that he had no home to go to.

The Trimble family had gone to relatives for the festive season, and had shut up their house.

Baggy had persuaded himself that he would get round Cardew some way or another; and Cardew's emphatic "No!" was a heavy blow to him.

But it was not a final blow.

If Baggy could not go to Barromby Hall with Cardew's consent, he meant to go without it.

And he had gone. When the mid-morning train rolled into Rylcombe, the fat Fourth-Former was already well on his way. He had reached Latchford Junction, where he had to change.

He had only taken a ticket as far as Latchford, intending to await there the arrival of Cardew and the rest, and to let Cardew pay for a ticket thence.

Now he found that he would have a long time to wait. He also found that those who came behind would not be obliged to change at Latchford. There was a through train.

It would not give Baggy much time to exert his persuasive powers—which had failed completely so far—upon Cardew. And perhaps he would not be allowed to get into the train without a ticket, and if he bought a ticket there would be nothing worth speaking of left for refreshments. As Baggy's home was not so very far from St. Jim's, his journey money was small.

Some refreshment he must have. Already he felt a horrible sinking feeling. The poor fellow had had only one breakfast, and nothing since except a pound or so of chocolates. The chocolates had been provided by Mellish for his own journey, not for Baggy's. But Baggy had seen, had been tempted, and had succumbed.

He went into the refreshment-room now.

A young woman with a fine crop of golden hair eyed him without favour, and went on talking to a young man with prominent teeth and an ivory-handled stick. The handle seemed to serve much the same purpose as a baby's corals serve the infant—unless, indeed, the young man had hopes of wearing down those teeth by means of it.

But, teeth and all, the young man seemed

to be of much more interest to the golden-haired siren than did Baggy.

Baggy had been heard to say that the Trimbles were quite as haughty a family as the D'Arcys. It might be true; but their haughtiness took a different line. Baggy's just now took the line of gobbling up all he could lay hands upon, and hoping that the young woman with the hair would not notice how much he had. She did not appear disposed to attend to him, so he attended to himself.

He did it with an ardour worthy of a better cause, though Baggy would hardly have admitted that there was a better cause than the comforting of the inner man of Bagley Trimble.

The young man with the teeth was as ardent as Baggy, but in another direction.

He had produced a sprig of mistletoe, and he wanted to persuade "Lal," as he called the young woman with the hair, that it was already in season.

"No fear, Bertie!" said the girl. "It wants two days of Christmas yet!"

Baggy, bolting sausage-rolls, saw and heard. He turned from the dish which had held the sausage-rolls to one of buns. He could have done with more of the first course; but there were no more rolls, and he was too modest to ask for more. So he went on to the buns, and stuffed them away at a simply appalling rate.

Only they three were in the refreshment-room, and Baggy felt sure that neither the young man nor the girl had eyes for him. By reaching far over the counter, he of the teeth had now succeeded in kissing her of the hair. It was on the nose he had kissed her; but it should have been satisfactory if the young man had any taste for powder.

Now Baggy suddenly became aware that the girl was looking at him. She signified the fact by giggling.

"Bertie, did you ever see anything like it in all your puff?" she whispered.

It was not so low a whisper but that it came to Baggy's ears, well practised at key-holes.

Baggy scowled. Then it occurred to him that it might pay him better to look pleasant, and get out with as low a payment as possible.

So he smiled, and opened his mouth.

"What's it doing?" asked Bertie, in tones of awe. "Something's gone wrong with what it calls its face!"

"I'll have a cup of coffee, please!" said Baggy, thinking it best to overlook these insults. "And I've had two sausage-rolls and two buns!"

"And the rest!" answered the girl emphatically.

Baggy stared. Had she eyes in the back of her head? It did not occur to Baggy that refreshment bar attendants usually know something about what is on the counter.

"It—it may have been three sausage-rolls!" he said weakly. "Yes, I think it was three!"

"Think again, and think somewhere nearer thirty!" said the young man encouragingly.

The girl giggled. Baggy began to feel uncomfortable. That was not because he had eaten thirty sausage-rolls. He had not; and it is doubtful whether that number would have caused him immediate discomfort. But he began to dread being called upon to pay for what he had eaten—and he knew that he could not.

"Seventeen sausage-rolls, Lal, thirteen buns, nine sandwiches—"

"I never even touched the sandwiches!" howled Baggy.

This was true. He had not touched them, because they had been out of his reach.

"I'll help you to count up, dearie!" said the young man, putting his head very close to the girls.

"I don't need any help, thank you, Bertie; and if you try to kiss me again—"

An inspiration came to Baggy.

"I've a jolly good mind to report you two to the station-master for your carrying-on!" he said boldly.

The young man with the teeth turned out to be quite an active young man.

Baggy made for the door as he spoke. But Bertie had his back to the door before Baggy was half-way.

"Make him cash up, and then kick him out, Bertie!" cried the girl. "He's a nasty, fat cheat—that's what he is!"

Baggy trembled like a jelly. Baggy abhorred violence.

"I—I haven't any money!" he bumbled. "And—oh, look here! If you say nothing about the sausage-rolls and buns, I'll say nothing about the kissing. He did kiss you! I can see the powder on his face now!"

That was really an extremely injudicious speech. It annoyed both Lal and Bertie.

"Turn the podgy little thief upside-down, and see what drops out of his clothes, Bertie!" cried the girl.

Bertie was strong as well as active, but turning Baggy upside-down was a task above his weight. It was considered a job for three able-bodied Fourth-Formers at St. Jim's.

But Bertie got Baggy on the floor, and thrust a hand into his right-hand trouser-pocket, where Baggy kept his silver, when he had any.

He had half-a-crown there before Bertie's search. After it he had not.

Bertie threw the coin to the girl, and lugged Baggy up by the scruff of his neck.

"It weighs about a ton!" he panted.

Then he opened the door, thrust the unfortunate junior out, and planted a foot behind him to expedite his going.

Baggy reeled, but did not fall. He turned and shook his fist at Bertie.

"I'll go and tell the station-master!" he howled.

Then he bolted, for Bertie was on his track.

Round the corner of the refreshment-room he rushed.

"Yaroooh!" he howled. "Lemme be, you beast!"

Then he fled on, feeling sure that Bertie was in hot pursuit.

But Bertie was not pursuing. At the corner he had turned back to the society of Lal and the solace of the ivory-handled stick.

A goods-train stood by the platform, and the door of an empty horse-box was invitingly open.

Baggy dodged inside, unseen by anyone. But hardly had he regained his breath, when the door was suddenly shut, and the train began to move.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Quite a Long Way Round!

"I—oh, let me out!" bellowed Baggy.

But no one heard him.

"Yooop! Yaroooh! I ain't going to be taken away like this!" burred the heir of the house of Trimble.

It appeared that he was wrong, however. The train was gathering speed.

"I—oh, what am I to do?" moaned Baggy.

He sank upon a heap of clean straw to review the situation.

Within a few minutes he had come to the conclusion that it might have been worse.

He had lost his half-crown, it was true.

But then he had had more than its value in grub.

He was going he knew not whither.

But then it was just as well to be beyond the reach of Bertie with the teeth, who looked a mere dude, but had quite a professional full-back's kicking-power.

The train was bound to take Baggy somewhere. And when he got there—wherever it was—he could cook up some yarn, and induce the railway authorities to let him go on to Barromby.

In fact, he could make them send him thither. Had they not practically kidnapped him, sending the train out like that when he was not expecting it to go?

Very likely he could get damages out of them.

With that comforting thought, he fell asleep, and snored with twenty-pig power.

The train went on its way, rumbling and jolting, stopping now and then, shunting into sidings, and proceeding when the line was clear for it.

Neither rumblings nor joltings, neither stopping nor shunting, disturbed Baggy's repose.

He snored on.

At last he awoke with a start. It was almost completely dark in the horse-box, and for the moment he could not imagine where he was.

When he did realise that, panic came upon him.

"Lemme out! Lemme out!" he howled.

And he beat with his podgy fists upon the door.

The train rumbled on. Even outside it was nearly dark now. Baggy went on beating until his hands were bruised and sore. When he had reached that stage he sat down on the straw and wept fat tears.

He would have given a good deal now—if he had had it—to be safe at home.

But hope revived in him when the train stopped and he saw a few dim lights.

He tried to wrench open the door, but failed in that attempt. Voices came to his

cars, and he thought of yelling out. But he feared to do that. Somehow it did not seem so easy to prove that he had been kidnapped now that it came to the point.

Fate decided for him.
The door was opened, and two dim figures in green corduroys appeared.
One of them held up a lantern.
"Ullo!" he said. "Ere's a passenger, Joe!"
"Wrong there, Bill," returned Joe, a burly fellow with a beard. "It ain't a 'im; it's a 't!"

Baggy thought that very rude. But he choked down his cholera. This was not the time for a display of the Trimble hauteur, he felt.

Perhaps it was the effect of choking down his cholera that made his voice, when he spoke, like nothing human.

"It squeaks!" said Bill, holding the lantern closer.

"This," said Joe severely, "is a 'oss-box, not a pig truck!"

"I'll report you!" snorted Baggy, unable to stem the hot tide of his wrath longer.

"For intrudin' upon your slumbers?" inquired Joe, with obvious sarcasm.

"I've been treated very badly," said Baggy. The threat of reporting did not seem effective, and he had the wisdom to drop it.

"You look as if you'd allus treated yourself very well," remarked Joe, eyeing him critically.

"A juiced sight too well!" said Bill. "Look at the eyes of 'im, Joe! Fair bulgin' with fatness they are!"

"I'm hungry!" wailed Baggy.

"Never mind!" replied Joe soothingly. "Chaps of your build can live a long time on their own fat. What are you goin' to tip us to be allowed to go on alonger the 'oss as we've got to put in 'ere?"

"I haven't got anything to tip you with, and I don't want to go on!" Baggy answered irritably. "I want to get to Barromby."

"Where?" asked Bill, scratching his head.

"Barromby," he said. But he can't mean Barromby," said Joe, scratching his chin through the thick beard.

"Is it very far away?" asked Baggy tremulously.

"Let's see, Bill." Joe said, winking.

"Barromby's in England, ain't it?"

"There or thereabouts," replied Bill, grinning.

"You takes the fust to the left outside the station, the ninety-sixth to the right after that, climb the Rocky Mountains, ford the Jordan, an' then—"

"Oh, don't rot!" pleaded Baggy. "Is it really very far?"

"Well, you're in Berkshire now, an' Barromby's close to where Sussex joins 'Ampshire. 'Tain't so far as Tipperary, but it's a bit farther than what the nearest beer'ouse is."

"I want to get there," said Baggy.

Joe chuckled.

"What! At your age? Now, don't you! You can pile on the fat fast enough without takin' to beer to 'elp you!" he said.

"I don't mean the beerhouse—don't be silly! I mean I want to get to Barromby."

"Afraid he'll be late for the killin', Joe!" said Bill.

"Wouldn't 'e make up into sossingers?" Joe returned, in a gloating manner that made Baggy's blood run cold for an instant.

"I—I say, hadn't I better see the station-master?" the fat junior asked.

"E's 'ad 'is supper, I 'bieve," said Joe. "But he's pertickler fond of pork. Yuss, I think you'd better see 'im. You're a curiosity, anyway, if there's no more to you!"

"I'll take the fat young image along," Bill volunteered.

They found the stationmaster in his office.

Baggy discovered that his inventive powers were not equal to the concoction of a really plausible story that was not partly true. It would not have been Baggy if he had told the whole truth; and, indeed, that would hardly have enlisted the official's sympathy.

Even as it was, Baggy did not find the stationmaster as sympathetic as he would have liked.

There was about all he said a certain dryness, an apparent doubt as to whether the story told was true, which naturally pained Baggy, who was much nearer the truth than usual.

"You'll be all right when you get to Barromby?" asked the official.

"Oh, yes!" replied Baggy. "My friends there are expecting me."

"Well, even if you get there to-night it will

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 49.

be late. The connection from here is a difficult one, and depends upon your catching a train at Borsham which you may or may not catch. Your friends will have gone to bed when you get there. I'm not sure that you hadn't better wait for the morning."

"Oh, they'll be only pleased to come down and let me in!" said Baggy.

"They must be very fond of you," said the stationmaster.

"They are!" said Baggy earnestly.

"Well, there's no accounting for tastes," said the stationmaster.

Baggy wondered what he meant.

"I say, you know, I'm hungry," the fat junior said.

"Refreshment-room's closed. There's a place a few yards away where you might get a meal of sorts. But you haven't much time."

"I haven't any money, either," whined Baggy.

"H'm! That makes it difficult."

"Don't you think you could advance me a trifle, and charge it to the company?"

"The company's not your father and your mother, and I'm not your wealthy uncle, my lad."

Again Baggy was left wondering. What little brain he possessed was even duller than usual.

But the stationmaster, though he had not precisely fallen in love with the egregious Baggy on sight, was humane. He spoke to his wife, and the result was a big packet of sandwiches and mince-pies, which Baggy took with unspoken gratitude. At least, it is but charitable to assume that he was grateful; but he did not express his thanks in words.

Joe and Bill and the stationmaster and two or three more of the staff all saw him off. Baggy would have regarded that as something in the way of a compliment, but for the manner in which they all grinned.

But as soon as the train had steamed out and he had opened his parcel of provender he forgot all about them. He cleared up the grub to the last crumb. Then he said:

"Mean beasts! They never thought of putting in anything for me to drink!"

At Borsham he found the refreshment-room still open, and all but missed his train in his quest of a drink. Feeling doggish, he ordered beer, and found that he didn't like it. Then he had coffee, and had to leave it after scalding his mouth. He was thrust into an already overfull compartment by an impolite porter, who said things about his physical proportions to which the things said by Joe and Bill were mere jests. He landed in the lap of an elderly lady who looked like his grandmother, but was not. She rejected him, and a burly farmer shot him off and on to the floor. There he stayed till half the occupants of the compartment got out two stations along.

He was going quite a long way round to Barromby. But his travels around the circumference of a rough circle were now bringing him nearer his destination, instead of farther from it, and he felt easier in mind.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Baggy's Pal.

"HOW far are we from Barromby?" asked Baggy some time later of the only fellow-passenger now left to him.

This was a man of middle age, with a crafty face, whose walk in life would have been hard to guess by anyone but a particularly astute detective.

"Eh? Oh, it's the next station but two! About a quarter of an hour—this train is a fair crawler."

Baggy looked at his watch. It was past midnight.

His companion looked at the watch also—out of the corner of one eye. Then he gave ever so slight a sniff.

Baggy's watch was not a valuable one.

"Going home?" asked the fellow.

"Not exactly home," replied Baggy. "It's almost the same thing, though—friends who will be delighted to see me."

He had almost persuaded himself that this was true. He felt that Cardew and the rest could not be flinty-hearted after they had heard the full story of his woeful wanderings.

"Ah! Might I ask where your friends live? I know a bit about Barromby, as it happens. You ain't going to the vicarage, I suppose?"

"Guess again," said Baggy.

He felt important. This stranger would certainly be no end impressed when he heard that his fellow-passenger was going to one of the stately mansions of Lord Reckness.

"Dr. Mackenzie's, p'raps?"

"Not likely!"

Baggy spoke as if the doctor were well known to him, but an inferior sort of person with whom he would not have condescended to spend Christmas.

"Well, the only other big house is the Hall, so you must be going there, sir," said the man.

He sounded much more respectful now. Baggy felt gratified. It was clear evidence that he looked a personage of importance.

He did not guess that this fellow happened to know the St. Jim's colours, and felt sure that even such a weird specimen of humanity as Baggy Trimble would not be wearing them if he were on his way to any of the score or so of cottages which, with the Hall, the vicarage, and the doctor's house, made up the hamlet of Barromby.

"Yes, I'm going to the Hall, my man," Baggy said grandly.

"Ah! Is his lordship there?"

"Not at-present. He may come down for Christmas Day, I believe. But the house-party consists of myself and my friends, including Ralph Cardew, his lordship's grandson, who is a particular pal of mine."

"Ah! An' very nice for you, too! They'll be sitting up for you, of course?"

Baggy was going to answer in the affirmative, because on the whole a lie always came more easily to him than the truth. He hardly knew why he changed his mind; but on that change of mind there hung much.

"No. I arranged with them not to sit up," he said. "A window will be left unlatched for me to get in at. We have to do these things at school sometimes, when we're a bit rorty, you know," he added, with a fatuous chuckle.

He was too wrapped up in the impression he believed himself to be making to notice that his companion's interest quickened at that.

"That's a queer thing," said the man—"a very queer thing, that is! I'm going to the Hall myself. Oh, not a front-door visitor, like you—I ain't that size, you know. But the third footman happens to be a cousin of mine, an' he's been allowed to ask me over Christmas. You may know him, sir—chap with long legs, of the name of Evans."

"I think I remember the fellow," replied Baggy. "I suppose he'll let you in? Then there will be no need for me to use the window. Evans can get me some supper, and show me to my chamber. I can't be sure whether my wire will have reached Ralph—I always call him Ralph, you know."

"Well, Evans may be sitting up, or he mayn't, but two sharp blades like you an' me—no offence, I trust, sir—won't have a lot of difficulty in making an entrance if he ain't, I reckon."

"I shall not take offence this time, but I don't like familiarity, my man," said Baggy haughtily. "In the circles in which I am accustomed to move we look for respect from our inferiors."

The fellow gave him a cool, quizzical glance. Mr. Albert Rookley was a much keener hand than Baggy.

He was so keen that he might have seen through Baggy completely, but for the fact that he knew Cardew and a party of friends to be staying at the Hall.

Baggy's yarn had thus some corroboration. Mr. Rookley, who had his own reasons for wanting to get inside Barromby Hall, thought the window might be a chance for him.

Baggy, on the other hand, banked on the third footman, Evans. Mr. Rookley knew that there was no third footman, and that Evans, a mere character in fiction, was hardly likely to help them in.

Window or no window, Baggy evidently meant to try to get in without arousing the house, and his success in that attempt would just suit Mr. Rookley, whereas his failure would leave that crafty gentleman no worse off.

"Here we are, sir!" said Mr. Rookley cheerily.

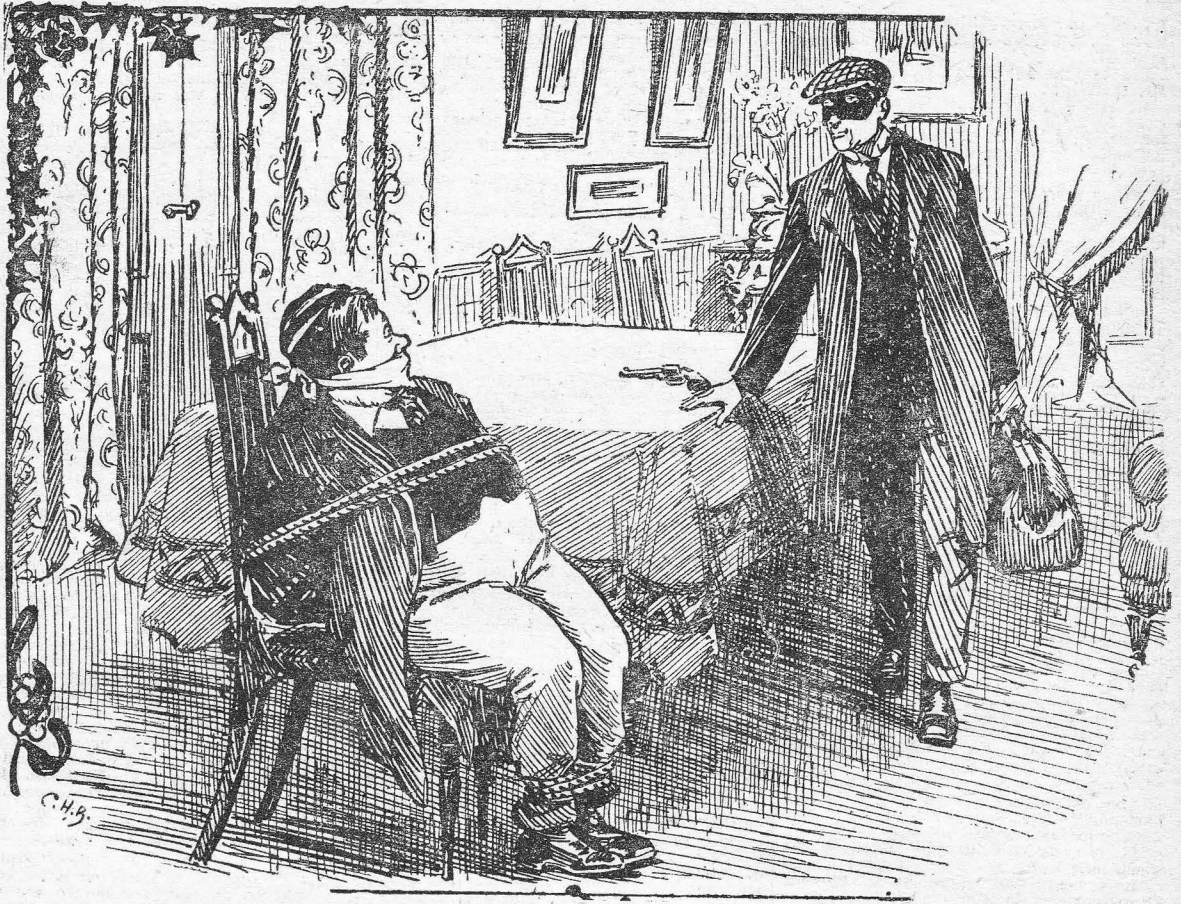
The train had drawn up at a gloomy and depressing little station, where only two or three dim lights flickered. A sleepy boy took their tickets. The snow was falling fast as they passed out.

"Real Christmas weather!" said Mr. Rookley.

Baggy only grunted.

He let his companion lead. As he did not know the way, this was necessary. But he said nothing about it, and he flattered himself that the fellow was unaware of it.

They tramped on through the snow till Baggy felt as though his legs would give way under him. He dared not ask how far they had still to go, but he began to



The light was switched on again, and Baggy saw a man with a black half-mask, carrying a bag which was evidently weighty. The burglar was Mr. Rookley. (See page 12.)

feel horribly afraid that the stranger had some dark design against him.

But his spirits rose when they passed through the wicket-gate by an unlighted lodge, and went on up a gloomy avenue.

At last there loomed up before them the dark hulk of the-Hall.

"Beasts! Snoring away in there while I'm out here in the cold, with nothing inside me!" muttered Baggy.

"Beg pardon, sir?" said Mr. Rookley smoothly.

"I was only speaking to myself, my man," replied Baggy.

"Ah! Now, where might this window as you told me of be, sir?"

"I'm not sure. We shall have to find it. But don't you think we'd better make our way to the back part, and see whether your friend Evans is waiting up?"

"I think not. The window will be better."

There was a change in the man's tone, and Baggy did not like that change a little bit. But he did not understand it, either; he had no suspicion that he was merely being used as a tool.

They tried half a dozen windows, all fast shut. Then the French window of a room at the side of the house gave to Baggy's hand. By some accident it had been left unfastened.

"Ah! That's your window!" whispered Mr. Rookley.

"Didn't I tell you?" returned Baggy. He felt a momentary glow of triumph. It was almost as though his story was true.

But next moment that glow of triumph faded. For that astonishing person, Mr. Rookley, seized him roughly by the throat, and held something round and cold against his forehead.

"You let out so much as a blinkin' breath in the way of warnin' the house, and I—no, I won't blow your brains out, 'cause you ain't got any, you fat peacock!" hissed Mr. Rookley. "But I'll drill a nice little hole through the front of your napper and

blow the back of it into smithereens! This is where I begin my little game!"

He forced Baggy into a chair, and thrust something into his mouth.

The gag was hardly necessary. Baggy was in too big a funk to attempt giving the alarm. But Mr. Rookley, whose features were well known to some people at Scotland Yard, was not the man to take needless chances.

The coolness and certainty with which he went about his work after he had fastened the gag fascinated Baggy.

First he pulled to the shutters and drew the curtain over the door, moving with noiseless steps in the dark to do these things. Baggy did not see them done, but he recognised the fact that they had been done when the electric-light was switched on.

Next Mr. Rookley cut the bell-cord, and with it tied Baggy's arms and legs. The arms were tied behind Baggy, and the legs were so fastened as to allow him to move in a hobbled way.

Then the gag was made secure.

Baggy's eyes goggled almost out of his head. He had arrived at the conclusion that his new-found pal was not a nice man. He had even some dim suspicion that the long-legged third footman was a myth.

"House is all asleep," said Mr. Rookley, taking his revolver up from the table and fingering it in an absent-minded kind of way that gave Baggy a shiver right up his spine. "Well, that don't hurt you, and it's all the better for me. I'm going to leave you here alone for a bit while I have a squint round and see what I can find that ain't too hot or too heavy to be carried off. I needn't tell you not to howl out, 'cause you can't, an' if you could you daren't. I shall put the light out, an' you can sit here in the dark an' meditate on your sins, if any. Au reservoir, my bloomin' toolip!"

He had switched off the light before he finished speaking. Baggy did not hear him

go out of the door, but he had no doubt that he had gone.

Here was an awful business!

It would have been bad enough had he been an invited guest.

The worst that could have been said then would have been that he was a fool for falling into such a trap. And "fat fool" was an epithet which had come Baggy's way too often to trouble him much.

But he had not been invited. In fact, as he saw things now, it was very clear indeed to him that no one at Barronby Hall wanted him.

What would they say?

Cardew could be an awful beast when he liked. He might say that Baggy was in league with this smooth-tongued rascal, who was plainly a burglar—or worse!

No, it was hardly likely he had come there to kill anyone. He had signified his intention of robbery. If anyone was in danger of death that person was Baggy—who, of course, mattered far more than anybody else!

But Baggy made up his mind that no display of rashness on his part should tempt this miscreant to kill him.

When the fellow had gone he would go. He would give up his visit. The other fellows would have to get along without him. Baggy felt almost sorry for them when he thought of that.

Somehow or other he would get to his own home town, and quarter himself for Christmas upon one of the neighbours. He could not think of any of them who was at all likely to give him an effusive welcome. But that could not be helped. At such a season his plea to be taken in and done for could hardly be resisted.

Such were Baggy's plans, and under their influence he began to feel rather more hopeful. After all, it did not matter to him that Barronby Hall should be burgled. Lord Reckness could stand that. And if Lord

Reckness was angry with Cardew—well, that would serve Cardew right for treating Baggy so badly.

But the fat fellow had reckoned without Mr. Rookley!

It seemed to him hours before the rascal came back. It was actually nearly an hour, for Mr. Rookley was a cool hand, and did not believe in rushing things.

When the light was switched on again Baggy almost tried to scream. He could not actually have managed a scream if he had tried ever so hard, on account of the gag.

He saw a man with a black half-mask, carrying a bag which was evidently weighty. Mr. Rookley had donned the mask directly he had left the small breakfast-room, and had forgotten to remove it.

Mr. Rookley seemed very cheerful as he set down the bag on the table and took up the revolver in a casual kind of way that made Baggy feel more shivery than ever.

"Now, I'm thinking what would be best to do with you," said Mr. Rookley, in a meditative manner.

Baggy gurgled. It was the nearest to speech he could get.

"I might leave you there till mornin', but I fancy I know a dodge worth two of that," continued the burglar. "I don't suppose as you've anything worth takin', but we may as well see."

He tumbled Baggy out of his chair, and made a rapid investigation of his pockets.

Baggy's watch might have been worth five shillings to anyone who had wanted a rather inaccurate timekeeper. Mr. Rookley did not; watches of that description were not at all in his line. Clive's knife was worth more than five shillings; but, as it chanced, Mr. Rookley failed to see that. It had fallen under the table as he pulled out the things. He gave a snort of disgust.

"If you'd had anything worth lifting, it would have counted one to you," he said. "If you'd been civil an' friendly, instead of putting on fat airs, it would have counted another. As it is—get up!"

Baggy struggled up, gurgling behind the gag. If he had been able to speak he would have hailed Mr. Rookley as his dearest friend—if only that gentleman would have let him depart in peace. But as he could only gurgle, that coming together of two affectionate natures was impossible.

With the revolver muzzle held to the back of his head, and a hand on his shoulder, Baggy was forced in hobbling fashion along a dark passage, and into a room that felt cold and dank.

The door was shut, and Mr. Rookley flashed an electric-torch.

"This will do for you, I fancy," he said.

Then he gave Baggy a hearty kick, and tightened the bell-rope round his legs. The torch was put out, and silence followed.

Baggy realised that he was locked into some room in the back regions of Barromby Hall. He also realised—though vaguely—that there was quite a number of people about who did not love him.

Cardew and the other fellows—Bertie and Lal—Joe and Bill and the stationmaster—the old lady and the farmer—even this fellow, to whom he might be considered a benefactor—they all seemed to think less of him than his eminent personal attractions deserved.

Baggy sank upon a cold floor of stone, and, musing on this mystery, fell asleep.

Weird sounds proceeded from his nose and from behind his gag. He snored and gasped and groaned and gurgled in his troubled dreams. But no one was near enough to hear him.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Found.

"**E**RNIE! Ernie! It's been snowing like one o'clock!" cried Frank Levison, pulling up the blind at one of the windows of the bed-room he and his brother had shared.

"Rotten! It will spoil the skating!" growled Levison major.

"No, it won't! Easy enough to sweep the snow off the ice, duffer! And we can have snowballing—hurrah!"

"Go and tell Ralph so," said Ernest, with a grin. And he snuggled down into his warm bed. After the early hours at St. Jim's, it was a real treat not to have to get up till one wanted to.

He knew that Ralph Reckness Cardew was as little likely as any St. Jim's fellow to get excited at the prospect of snowballing.

THE PENNY POPULAR—No. 49.

Cardew always voted that kind of thing a bore—until he got fairly started at it. Then he was like any other fellow.

But he would not mind Frank's visit. Even if he was awakened from slumber by the Third-Former he would only smile at him cheerily. Cardew thought a heap of Frank Levison. So did all his brother's chums, and Frank had fairly earned their affection.

He went to Clive and Durrance next door before he proceeded to the room in which Cardew slept in solitary state, in a wonderful old curtained bed that needed steps or activity to get into.

"Good egg!" said Clive heartily. "We don't get snow in South Africa!"

"Up early, aren't you, Franky?" asked Durrance, rubbing his eyes with his knuckles.

"Slacker!" returned Frank, in huge contempt. "It's past nine!"

The butler was at Cardew's door, and the butler was looking very grave. But in spite of that he had a smile for the little chap in the dressing-gown that was about a foot too long for him. The whole household had succumbed to Frank Levison's charm already. Even the footman, who had been crossed in love some months ago, and hadn't got over it, had smiled at him the night before, when he had given—by special request—his impersonation of Charlie Chaplin, a turn which the Third had cheered to the echo a dozen times.

"Is he awake, Mr. Robins?" asked Frank.

"I'm trying to wake him, sir. But Mr. Ralph was never one to wake if it didn't suit him. I dare say he's grinning in his sleep at the noise I'm making out here."

"I'll go in!" said Frank; and he went in at once.

"Hallo, Cardew! Wake up, you lazy bouncer! Mr. Robins wants to speak to you!"

"Hallo, Franky, my son! Why do you get up in the middle of the night? Anythin' wrong, Robins, old top?"

"The house has been burgled in the night, sir. I don't know to what extent you will look upon that as being wrong," replied Robins, with an attempt at sarcasm that was absolutely wasted upon Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"Well, I shouldn't think the chap who did it was quite the clean potato!" drawled Cardew. "An' I'm not dead-sure that Lord Reckness will be highly delighted. But I don't see what I can do about it. What would you suggest my doin', Robins, old file?"

"You might get up to begin with, I think, sir," answered the butler reproachfully.

"Think that will help? I don't see how, but I'll get up, out of consideration for your feelin', dear old boy. Franky, trot off an' look for clues!"

Frank went. Now Cardew's face took on rather a graver look. He slipped out of bed.

"Come inside, Robins, an' tell me all about it before I go to the bath-room," he said. "Much gone?"

"Not much in bulk, sir. But the burglar seems to have known his business; he has made a very careful selection of valuables. Some curios, but chiefly the gold plate—the old service, you know, sir."

"I'm afraid that won't exactly please grand-dad," said Cardew. "How did the gentleman get in?"

"Through the window of the east breakfast-room, sir. It must have been left unfastened, I fear."

"That's Wilkes'," Cardew said coolly. "The chap's been no use at all since that girl threw him over last summer. Poor old Wilkie! He'll be no end cut up about it."

"He is, sir! But I must share the blame with him. I ought to have gone round after him."

"Rats, Robins! You can't do everythin', dear boy. Any clues?"

"There are some faint traces of damp boots on the carpet, sir. The snow has fallen so thickly that it has covered all tracks outside. I have sent for the police, but I do not hope much from them."

Frank came rushing in.

"They got in through a window, Cardew!" he cried. "And see what I've found under the table of the room!"

He held up a knife. As he did so Clive and Durrance and Levison minor rushed in in various stages of dress. They had heard the news.

"A knife!" said Cardew. "But that doesn't help much!"

"But it's Clive's knife!" yelled Frank. "It's got his initials on it—S. C. Look, Sidney! That's yours, isn't it? And Baggy had it—Baggy!"

"It's certainly my knife, Ralph!" said Clive. "But—"

"Well, this beats it!" said Levison major. "Baggy's the limit; but I shouldn't have thought him capable of burglary!"

They stared at one another. Robins had cleared out now.

Could it be possible that Baggy had fallen so low? Yes, that might be possible, for Baggy was not honest at best. But he could never have had the nerve to commit a burglary; and how could he have come there?"

"Must have sold that knife to some rascal," said Clive. "I'll take care of it after this."

And he slipped it into his pocket.

"You can't do that," said Levison major, grinning. "It's an exhibit in the case. The police will bag it."

"But we can't tell the police anythin' about that fat rotter, y'know, dear boy!" Cardew said, knitting his brows.

"Oh, can't we? I should!"

Ernest Levison could be very hard at times, and he had no compunction where Baggy was concerned.

"We'll talk about that later," said Cardew. "I'm goin' to the bath-room now, an' I'm beginnin' to feel that brekker is on the programme, y'know. Franky, you musn't go findin' any more clues until you've washed an' dressed, like a good little kid. I'll wash the back of your neck—or shall I leave that to Ernest?"

"Rats!" snapped Frank, as he departed.

"Fancy Baggy as a Raffles!" said Clive.

"Baggy couldn't be!" replied Levison major.

"But—"

"Raffles was a burglar. But Raffles was a gentleman!" Levison said.

"Yes, that does settle it," answered Durrance thoughtfully.

None of them guessed that Baggy was within a very sort distance of them all this time. Baggy had woken up in a flagged room near the butler's pantry, a room never used in these days, and situated at the far end of a corridor. Mr. Rookley had stumbled upon it in his search for the Reckness' gold-plate. He had locked Baggy in, and had flung the key away.

The nearest constable came up to the Hall while Cardew and his guests were at breakfast. He had been sent for from five miles away. Robins had used the telephone; but the constable had had to struggle through the snow.

Nevertheless he looked happy, and his rubicund face fairly beamed as he said:

"Merry Christmas, gentlemen all!"

"What! Burns, with all this trouble in the house, by gad?" returned Cardew.

"Oh, that, sir! We'll soon put that right!" said P.-c. Burns, smiling more broadly than ever.

"Got a clue, constable?" asked Levison.

"Got the man what did it, sir!" replied Burns.

"What!"

"Not Baggy? No one would call him a man. He isn't really a human boy!" said Durrance.

"I don't think that's the chap's name. Far as I can make out, he's a pretty well-known Lunnon crook, with lots of aliases. Rookley's the best known of 'em."

"But how did you get him?" asked Clive.

"Promotion for you, Burns!" said Cardew.

"Well, sir, I dunno. It was a bit too easy for that, though if his lordship was to put in a word for me with the chief it might happen. You see, I found him as I rode over here. The snow clogged my bike, an' I got off to see to it, an' I heard a groan, an' there was my gentleman layin' in a ditch with a broken leg, and the bag beside him! He'd slipped on the ice, an' come down with his leg under him. He's at the doctor's now, safe enough. An' I've handed the loot over to Mr. Robins."

Burns cleared out, and within half an hour a big snowball battle was being waged in the grounds. Then the five went down to the ornamental lake with their skates, found that it bore, and had a big surface swept.

"Might run along and ask Robins to send us some lunch, Franky!" said Cardew about one o'clock.

"Right-ho!" replied Frank, always willing to lag for Cardew.

He was back in less than ten minutes.

"I say, Cardew, there's something up at the Hall!" he cried. "All the maids are scared to death. The cook's in hysterics. Wilkes is groaning and trembling at the knees, and even Robins is frightened. They think it's ghosts!"

"Ghosts! What! In broad daylight?" scoffed Ernest.

"Let's go and see!" said the ever-practical Clive.

They slipped off their skates and trotted back to the house. Frank talked as they went.

"Awful groans!" he said. "I heard them myself. And no one can make out where they come from. You can hear them all along the passage where Robins' pantry is, but they can't find anyone there. Cook thinks someone's been built up in the wall; they used to do that kind of thing hundreds of years ago. And she says—you don't mind, do you, Ralph?—that the Reckness family were always a queer lot, and she wouldn't wonder at anything they did."

"Oh, I don't mind!" answered Cardew. "I believe most of my ancestors were rather proud of bein' unmitigated ruffians. But I assure you, kid, that no one's been built up in the wall here by me, or with my knowledge and consent. Why, I'm not sure that I'd be so rough as that even on Baggy!"

"Baggy!" cried Clive. "Why, it must be Baggy they can hear!"

"What next?" snorted Ernest Levison. "He's about somewhere, else my knife couldn't have been. I'll bet it is Baggy!"

"But what on earth can he be doin' there, old gun?"

"That's more than I can tell you. But I'm sure it's he?"

"Any room you haven't been into along here, Robins?" asked Cardew, a few minutes later.

"Only one that's never used, sir. It's locked, and we don't know where the key is. Wilkes says he knows it was in the door last week. But there's no trusting to Wilkes' memory."

If you like this Story
you will like

THE GEM.

A Grand Long Complete
Story of Tom Merry & Co.
appears in this week's issue.

You will enjoy it.

"That's where the groans come from!" said Durrance, as they stood in front of the door in question.

"Baggy!" yelled Frank.

A groan answered him.

"That door's got to come open, if we have to break it in!" said Cardew.

And within ten minutes they had found the lost black sheep!

He was still gagged and bound, and the cold and the tightness of his bonds had made him really ill. He could not explain anything then; afterwards he told a graphic story, which no one believed, about his heroic struggle with the burglar. But Mr. Rookley told Burns how the thing had happened, and Burns told Cardew.

Poor Baggy!

He spent his Christmas at Barromby Hall, indeed, but he spent it in bed, on gruel and other slops. Dr. Mackenzie would not let him have even a mouthful of turkey or plum-pudding. And Baggy turned with loathing from milk-and-soda and such things. His only comfort was the grapes and other fruit that Frank Levison brought up to him.

None of the other four would go near him while he lay there, and Frank only came now and then, always to be ragged by Ernest if he were caught at it. Sounds of revelry and savoury scents floated up from below. Christmas at Barromby Hall was as merry as Christmas can be, but Baggy had no share in the merriment.

Poor Baggy. He went home two days after Christmas Day, looking a wreck. But the appetite he showed at his first meal under the home roof reassured his anxious mother. He could not be dying while he ate like that!

THE END.

(Another grand long complete story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "Lost, Stolen, or Strayed!" Order your copy of the PENNY POPULAR in advance.)

A Word with My Chums.

FOR long enough past I have been intending the first chance that offered to have a chat with my friends to whom the PENNY POPULAR is a paper which ranks second to none.

The "P. P." appears this cheery Christmas-time with a host of special features which will make it even truer to the name it bears. The fact is the PENNY POPULAR occupies a very important position among the Companion Papers, and the present Christmas Number will, I am sure, vie with anything that has gone before.

CARDEW TO THE FORE.

At least, it is not so much Cardew as the renowned and only Baggy Trimble. Come to think of it, what a mercy it is Master Bagley is an only specimen. I doubt if the world could do with more than one of his type. And here he is in the great yarn about St. Jim's which you will find in this number—just the old, original Baggy, greedy, mean-minded, and just as eager as ever to thrust himself forward where he is not wanted.

You will all have a rare hearty laugh over his adventures this time, not a doubt of it. Come to think of it, Baggy's Christmas was not what he expected when he forced his company on to the lordly Ralph Reckness Cardew and his friends.

You know what kind of a high-browed old aristocrat Lord Reckness is. The old nobleman, the grandfather of Cardew, dotes on his grandson, but he is not a man to stand much nonsense, as even Cardew himself has found.

DETAILS YOU WILL LIKE.

Times without number I have been asked by my correspondents to let them have something more about Cardew. Here, then, it is. "Gem" readers please note! The PENNY POPULAR is all in the family, and this yarn is one of the best and most exciting, as well as humorous, Cardew stories Mr. Martin Clifford has yet written.

I know I am saying a goodish bit here, for you will get remembering the famous narrative titled "Cardew of the Fourth"; but, for all that, I am disposed to think the statement will stand. Anyhow, Baggy, as you will see, does not enjoy his Christmas in the way he expected. In fact, he has a very thin time.

GREYFRIARS FOR EVER!

You will drop me a line, some of you, if you have time, and your trusty pens are handy, to let me know what you think of the fine Rookwood tale in this number, also the story about Greyfriars, in which Dennis Carr plays so notable and worthy a part in the rescue of the somewhat craven-minded Ponsonby.

I am not suggesting for a second that the present grand issue of the "P. P." is anything in the way of a fresh start, for the PENNY POPULAR is already right at the top; but I should like all my chums to understand that for the future the "P. P." will share some of the heavy work entailed by the notices from readers. If you do not see your notice in the "Magnet," the "Gem," or the "Boys' Friend," as likely as not it will turn up as large as life in this paper.

But that is all, of course, just by the way. I started these few lines for the purpose of wishing all my friends a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, also with the intention of saying a few words about Christmas and what a lot it means to every-one of us.

THE BEST TIME OF THE YEAR.

That's what Christmas is. You may get fed up with the autumn, you may think October is a month which has had a lot too much commendation in its time, and as for the next month—well, we all know what has been said about November—no light, no dark, no t'other side the way—November!

Truly in the big towns November would take a lot of beating for fog.

In London this last November we have had a rare experience of fog. It got into everything, and there was no escaping it. But that is not what I was going to say.

By the time you reach Christmas-time you are looking ahead. It is all clear into the New Year—the New Year, so young to its job, but eager to do its best—the New Year which brings spring and a host of happy things, to say nothing of the summer, with the willow once more taking first place, and the angler busy, and the scent of the good, fresh grass.

Christmas is the turning point, you know. Christmas brings endless joy to a myriad hearts because of what it signifies—peace and good will.

SOMETHING MORE AS WELL.

Christmas was given to us to enjoy and feel glad about. Hats off to Christmas, and all honour to be paid. And then, just after Christmas, in the time when the pantomimes are panto-ing hard, and folks are having a cheery time, as they should, for they have earned it, comes the New Year.

Just keep your eye on 1920. It is a sure thing. Nineteen hundred and twenty is going to be a really happy New Year. Perhaps there will be an opportunity to say something more about this subject, but there is no time like the present, as I have heard, and so here goes.

One point I like to turn over in my mind when there is an odd minute to spare—and that is not often—is linked up with this subject. There are thousands and thousands of my supporters up and down the old land—in snowy Scotland, in good old Northumbria, in the big, grey, hard-working districts which stretch from Birmingham, Worcester, through Bilston, and Tipton, and Chorley to the top of Lancashire and everywhere else, including the mighty countries overseas, who are busy all their lives giving others a good time.

I should like to shake them all by the hand. Possibly they do not know what fine chaps they are, but their ignorance on this matter does not signify a jot. The excellent work is done, and it is such magnificent work as will make the coming year have a special brilliance of its own.

GOOD LUCK!

So please take my wishes for a very happy Christmas as they are meant, my chums! May the morning be just the kind of morning you would have picked if you had gone to the shop and ordered it over the counter of old Father Time, and the afternoon ditto, to say nothing of the evening when old chums get together and have a fine old yarn while the shadows from the fire make merry on the walls of home.

There is one little point which brings us back to the matter of fact to which I want to refer. I am giving notices in the PENNY POPULAR regularly. If you have not seen your notice in one of the other papers, just look for it in the PENNY POPULAR. It all comes to the same thing, and I hate to postpone publication of readers' requests.

And just let me thank you all, too, for the manner in which you have stood so loyally by the Companion Papers in good and bad times. The days of war proved what real friendship was.

Your Editor



BOUND BY HIS WORD!

A LONG COMPLETE CHRISTMAS STORY OF JIMMY SILVER & Co., THE CHUMS OF ROOKWOOD.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Jimmy Silver's Promise.

IT wasn't Jimmy Silver's fault. Neither was it Tommy Dodd's. It just happened. When Jimmy Silver, captain of the Fourth Form at Rookwood, sat on the gate of the Head's garden he was thinking out the footer team for the forthcoming match with Bagshot.

And when Tommy Dodd, of the Modern Side, came sauntering along with his hands in his pockets he was thinking out a financial problem which would have puzzled the Chancellor of the Exchequer—how to supply a study tea for three with the sum of three-pence-halfpenny?

It was the Christmas season, of peace and good will, but Classics and Moderns seldom meet at Rookwood without mutual chipping. Tommy Dodd, as he caught sight of Jimmy Silver sitting on the gate, remarked cheerily:

"Hallo, Classical ass!"
To which Jimmy Silver rejoined:
"Hallo, Modern worm!"

It was then that it occurred to Tommy Dodd how extremely comical it would be to tilt up Jimmy Silver's feet and drop him over the gate into the Head's garden. That sacred garden being taboo to juniors added to the joke. Tommy Dodd, without wasting time, proceeded to carry out that excellent idea. He jumped forward and seized Jimmy Silver's ankles and lifted them.

"Leggo!" roared Jimmy Silver in alarm.
"Over you go!" said Tommy Dodd cheerily. "Never mind dropping on your head, old chap. It's comy to fall on something soft."

But Jimmy Silver did not go over so easily as the Modern junior anticipated. His feet were in the air in the grasp of Tommy Dodd, so he could not jump down. But instead of going over backwards, he hurled himself forward, as if he were trying to shut himself up like a pocket-knife.

His weight being thus thrown on Tommy Dodd, that cheery youth went staggering back, and Jimmy Silver sprawled over him and brought him to the ground.

"Yow-ow-ow!" roared Dodd.
"Gerrooh!" gasped Jimmy.
"You fathead! I'll wallop you!"
"You Modern duffer! I'll dust up the quad with you!"

"Yow! Take that!"
"Oh! Ah! Take that!"
That was how it began. It continued with vigour, the two juniors rolling over one another on the ground, punching and pommeling, with grievous damage to their Etons and collars.

It was then that Miss Dolly, the headmaster's daughter, looked over the gate from the garden.

Miss Dolly ejaculated:
"Good gracious!"
"Yow! You rotter!"
"Yah! You Classical chump!"
Punch, punch! Pommel, pommel! Thump, thump!

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 49.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Miss Dolly. "Oh, you bad boys!"

The juniors heard her shocked and startled voice then, and they let go one another as suddenly as if both had become red-hot.

They sat up and blinked. Tommy Dodd, with great presence of mind, executed a strategic retreat. He was up with a bound, and behind the beeches with another bound, devoutly hoping that Miss Dolly hadn't recognised him. For though it was according to all the rules—of the Fourth Form, at least—to punch some of the cheek out of a Classical bouncer, Miss Dolly, being a girl, might have looked upon him merely as a quarrelsome fellow with a taste for fighting. Which would really have been very unjust.

But Jimmy Silver's retreat was not so prompt. He was dabbing at his nose, from which a crimson stream was flowing. His nose occupied him too long for him to think of escaping unrecognised.

"Jimmy Silver!" said Miss Dolly, in a tone of great severity.

Jimmy Silver blinked guiltily at Miss Dolly. His whole face became as crimson as his nose. He felt, like Tommy Dodd, that Miss Dolly wouldn't understand, being a girl. There was no harm whatever in knocking some of the cheek out of a Modern duffer, but Miss Dolly might very probably regard him as a regular hooligan.

"Ye-e-es!" he stammered.
"You were fighting."
"Not exactly fighting," said Jimmy Silver cautiously.

"Then what were you doing?"
"Well, I—I—"

"I am ashamed of you!"
Miss Dolly was really several months younger than Jimmy Silver, but she might have been twenty years older from the severity of her manner.

Jimmy grinned a little.
"I'm sorry!" he murmured meekly. "I—I didn't know you were in the garden, Miss Dolly."

"You are always fighting!" said the headmaster's daughter severely. "Yesterday you punched Smythe of the Shell."

"Well, Smythe's rather a beast!" urged Jimmy.

Jimmy had punched Adolphus Smythe for giving a cigarette to a chap in Jimmy's own Form, but he did not feel that he could explain that to Miss Dolly.

"And the day before yesterday you were fighting with Cook."

"Well, Cook's only a Modern worm!" pleaded Jimmy. "We—we have to keep those Modern chaps rather in order, you know."

"And the other day you were sitting on Townsend. I saw you," said Miss Dolly. "You were rubbing his nose in the grass. Townsend isn't a Modern."

"He wouldn't come down to footer practice," said Jimmy defensively. "I'm captain of the Fourth, you know. I can't allow slacking."

"And one day you were fighting Flynn. Flynn isn't a Modern or a slacker."

Jimmy Silver made an effort of memory, trying to recall why he had been scrapping with Flynn of the Fourth. He was generally on the best of terms with Flynn.

"Oh, I remember! Flynn said the Dublin Fusiliers were miles ahead of the West Yorks. My cousin's in the West Yorks."

"I sha'n't speak to you any more," announced Dolly.

Jimmy Silver looked dismayed.
"I—I— Oh, I say—" he murmured feebly.
"Not unless you make me a promise," said Miss Dolly, relenting a little as she saw the effect of her crushing sentence.

"Anything you like, Miss Dolly," said Jimmy Silver eagerly. Jimmy was rather a favourite with the autocratic Miss Dolly, and he did not wish to forfeit that proud position. "I—I'll do anything! I—I say, would you like a white rabbit?"

"No, I wouldn't!" said Miss Dolly.
"Oh!" said Jimmy, crushed again.

"But I will let you make me a promise," said the girl generously.

"Anything you like!"
"That you will not fight anybody again for a whole week."

"Oh!"
"Look at your nose!" said Miss Dolly scornfully.

Jimmy Silver tried to look at his nose, very nearly becoming cross-eyed in the attempt.

"I was going to ask you to come and carry my parcels this afternoon," pursued Miss Dolly. "But I couldn't be seen with a nose like that!"

"But—but your nose isn't like that."

"I am speaking of your nose," said Miss Dolly, frowning, suspecting Jimmy Silver of an attempt at humour. "You had better go away and bathe it. I am ashamed of you!"

"But—"

"Oh, go away!"
"But I'll promise!" said Jimmy Silver recklessly. "I—I won't fight anybody for a whole week! Whatever happens! There!"

Miss Dolly melted again.

"Honour bright?" she asked.

"Honour bright!" said Jimmy Silver solemnly.

"Then I will forgive you," said Miss Dolly considerably. "Now you can go and bathe your nose."

Miss Dolly fitted away, and Jimmy Silver took her excellent advice, and went to bathe his nose. His nose was somewhat painful, and it worried him. But it did not worry him so much, upon reflection, as the promise he had made to the Headmaster's daughter.

Miss Dolly took a feminine view of matters. She did not understand the Fourth, and she was far from comprehending the necessity the Classical juniors were under of keeping the Modern bouncers in their place. Jimmy Silver, as he bathed his nose, realised that he had let himself in for a very serious undertaking.

How on earth was that promise to be

kept, considering—well, considering everything?

But Jimmy Silver was a slave to his word. The promise had to be kept.

But the captain of the Fourth Form at Rookwood looked forward with deep doubt and misgiving to the week ahead.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The End Study is Surprised.

LOVELL and Raby and Newcome stared at Jimmy Silver, when he came into the end study to tea.

Jimmy Silver's nose was usually a good-looking nose. Its good looks had departed now. It was swollen in shape and crimson in hue.

"Where on earth did you pick up that danger-signal?" asked Lovell.

"Scrapping with a Modern worm!" growled Jimmy Silver. "Does it show much?"

"Well, it could be seen about a mile off on a dark night, I should say."

"Oh, rats!"

"Never mind, if you licked the Modern," said Raby comfortably. "We've been waiting for you. Pile in, old scout!"

"And we've got a scheme," said Newcome, as Jimmy Silver sat down to tea.

Jimmy looked apprehensive.

That afternoon it had been agreed in the end study that the Moderns were getting their backs up in a way that couldn't possibly be allowed to continue. The time had plainly come for Tommy Dodd & Co. to be squashed. Jimmy Silver had contorted heartily.

Now there was a change. Apparently his promise to Miss Dolly was to be put to the test immediately.

"We've been jawing it over while you've been collecting that nose," said Lovell. "It's a ripping wheeze!"

"Up against the Moderns, you know," said Newcome.

"We're going to give them the real kybosh this time," said Lovell, emphatically.

"Knock them right out of time, you know," Jimmy Silver wriggled uneasily in his chair.

"I—I say—" he remarked haltingly.

"Perhaps we've been a bit too much down on the Moderns."

"Eh?"

"On the whole, these scraps are a little— a little overdone. Suppose we try to keep at peace with the Modern worms for a bit— say a week."

"Off your rocker?" asked Raby politely.

"You see, we—if that is, I mean that a girl would naturally be shocked by seeing fellows with swollen noses—"

"Well, we're not going to show our noses to a girl after licking the Moderns, are we?" asked Lovell, in utter amazement.

"Nunno! But—"

"If you're being funny, Jimmy, chuck it, old chap. Now, my idea is this—it looks like more snow, and we're going to have a regular snow-battle with the Moderns, and wipe 'em off the earth. Isn't that a good wheeze?"

"Well, in a way. But—"

"But what?"

"It might lead to scrapping."

"Might?" grinned Raby. "Jolly sure to, I should think."

"Well, there you are, you see," said Jimmy Silver.

"I don't quite see," said Lovell. "Why shouldn't we scrap with the Moderns? We always do!"

"Yes, but—"

"Has the Head been down on you?"

"The Head? No; but—"

"But what, fathead?"

"Nothing! Pass the cake!"

Jimmy Silver tucked into the cake, feeling decidedly uncomfortable. He felt that he could not confide to the end study the circumstances of his promise to Miss Dolly. He shrank from the general chortle which would have followed, and from having the matter become a standing joke in the Fourth Form.

But, without explaining, it was a little difficult to justify his remarkable new attitude to his chums.

"You can send a challenge to Tommy Dodd," resumed Lovell, after a curious stare at his study-leader. "If there's snow to-morrow, footer is off, and that will be a good chance for the snow-fight—see? We'll make the Moderns own up that we're top side of Rookwood this time."

"Next week—" began Jimmy.

"Better next week. There won't be any snow next week."

"The fact is—"

"Well?"

"The—the fact is, I—I think it would lead to scrapping with the Modern chaps," said Jimmy lamely.

"I know it would. Don't you want to scrap with them?"

"Nunno!"

"Why not?" demanded Lovell and Raby and Newcome in chorus.

"Because— Oh, because, you know, I—I think perhaps it would be better to— to live in peace, like—like lambs, you know—"

"Lambs!" said Lovell dazedly.

"Yes, like—like lambs, and—and treat the Moderns politely, and—and be very orderly and— and peaceful."

"Peaceful! Us!"

"Do the fellows call us the Fistical Four because we're peaceful?" demanded Raby.

"They'll call us the Funky Four if we follow Jimmy's fatheaded advice!" growled Lovell. "What's the matter with you, Jimmy?"

"Nothing!"

"Something'll be the matter with you soon if you give me any more of that piffle," said Lovell darkly. "I'm fed-up for one. You're asking for a study licking. Now, are you going to write that challenge to Tommy Dodd?"

"Can't be did!"

"You won't!" roared Lovell.

"No!"

"Then I jolly well will!"

"You jolly well won't!" said Jimmy Silver warmly. "Who's leader of this study?"

"Bow-wow!"

"Look here, Lovell—"

"If you are beginning to funk the Moderns you won't be study-leader long," said Lovell.

"I'm sending that challenge at once!"

"You won't!"

"I will!" roared Lovell.

It was mutiny in the end study. Jimmy Silver jumped up, and Lovell jumped up.

Edward Arthur Lovell was red and wrathful. He could not understand his chum in the least. Jimmy Silver was not quarrelsome, certainly; but he was by no means that most peculiar of all animals—a pacifist.

As a rule, he was well to the fore in every raid and rag on the Moderns; it was really his keen enterprise in that direction which had caused him to become leader and chief of the Classical juniors. His inexplicable backwardness now was exasperating.

Lovell shoved the tea-things aside, and dragged a sheet of impot paper towards him, and jabbed his pen into the ink.

"Go it!" said Raby.

Jimmy Silver jerked the impot paper away.

"Chuck it!" he said.

"Do you want a thick ear, Jimmy Silver?" bellowed Lovell.

"Go and eat cake!"

"Oh, bump him!" said Newcome. "This must be one of his awfully deep jokes; and he wants a bumping!"

"Hear, hear!"

The Co. were puzzled, perplexed, and exasperated. Bumping Jimmy Silver seemed the easiest way of solving the difficulty.

The three juniors closed in on him, and Jimmy promptly put up his hands.

"Chuck it, you silly asses—"

"Collar him!" shouted Lovell.

Three pairs of hands were laid on Jimmy Silver.

The captain of the Fourth struggled furiously, and the three juniors fairly waltzed round him. A drive on the chest made Lovell sit on the hearthrug with a bump.

Then, all of a sudden, Jimmy Silver's struggles ceased. He stood unresisting in the grasp of the Co. He had remembered!

"Honour Bright!"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Jimmy!

"Bump him!" roared Lovell, scrambling up.

Bump, bump, bump!

Three times Jimmy Silver descended forcibly on the hearthrug. He yelled at each concussion. But he did not resist. In sheer amazement the Classical juniors released him, leaving him gasping on the rug.

"What's the matter with you?" shrieked Lovell.

"Groooh!"

"Are you dotty?"

"Bow-wow!"

"It must be a jape," said Raby wonderingly. "Either that, or he's gone off his rocker."

"Well, I'm sending that challenge, anyway," said Lovell, with a stare at the gasping Jimmy.

He jabbed a pen into the ink again, and started. Jimmy Silver picked himself up, and sat down to finish his tea. Lovell gave him

a glare of defiance, but Jimmy Silver did not interfere again. He finished his tea quietly and sedately. His passiveness astounded the Co. What had come thus over the most warlike member of the Fistical Four they could not understand.

But there it was. After tea Jimmy Silver quietly left the study. Lovell and Raby and Newcome blinked at one another.

"What's the matter with him?" ejaculated Lovell.

Raby shook his head.

"Give it up. We know he ain't a funk, but he's acting just as if he was."

"Must be dotty!" said Newcome. "Let's get that challenge to Tommy Dodd, anyway. Jimmy will have to join in the snow-fight."

And the challenge was duly written and despatched by a Second Form fag to the Modern side.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Delightful for Adolphus.

JIMMY SILVER walked down the Fourth Form passage with a troubled brow.

He was very far from easy in his mind.

But his painful reflections were driven suddenly from his mind as he was passing Townsend's study.

The study door was closed, but from within there came, unmistakably, the scent of tobacco. And Jimmy Silver, as he stopped, heard the voice of Adolphus Smythe, the dandy of the Shell, the great leader of the estimable circle of merry blades known as the Giddy Goats.

"Give us a match, Torny."

Jimmy Silver's brow grew black.

That there was a good deal of slacking on the Classical side—much more than on the Modern side—was a fact which naturally irritated Jimmy Silver. Jimmy of the Fourth could not very well interfere with the Shell, and the Giddy Goats generally went on their way unregarded by him.

But when Smythe of the Shell led away Fourth-Formers from the straight and narrow path, Jimmy felt called upon to chip in.

He was Captain of the Fourth, and it was up to him. Townsend and Topham, who shared that study, were slackers of the first water. Jimmy found it difficult to keep them up to any kind of footer practice. Smoking in the study or behind the chapel, hanging round Smythe & Co., and talking geegees, that kind of thing was more in their line. They were satellites of the great Adolphus, and basked in the sunshine of his regard.

The great Adolphus had evidently descended to feed in Torny and Topy's study that afternoon, and he was finishing, as usual, with a smoke.

Jimmy Silver turned the handle of the door and kicked it open.

There was an exclamation of alarm in the study.

Townsend jumped up and pitched his cigarette hastily into the fire; Topham dropped his under the table. Smythe of the Shell concealed his cigarette in the hollow of his hand.

But there was no concealing the atmosphere of smoke in the study.

"By gad!" gasped Townsend. "Jimmy Silver, you rotter! I—I thought it was Bootles!"

"I—I thought it was Bulkeley!" stammered Topham. "What the thunder are you shoving into this study for, Jimmy Silver?"

Smythe of the Shell contented himself with a sneer, and with replacing his cigarette in his mouth.

Jimmy Silver frowned darkly at the three nuts.

"You silly young idiots!" he began. "You two duffers ought to have your heads knocked together. As for you, Smythe, I've spoken to you before about getting chaps in my Form to copy your fool tricks!"

"By gad!" yawned Adolphus over the cigarette.

Jimmy Silver pointed to the door.

"Get out!" he said.

"Eh?"

"Clear off!"

"Look here, Jimmy Silver!" roared Townsend furiously. "We're not standin' this! Do you think you're goin' to order a guest out of my study?"

"Yes, rather, when he starts smoking there. Suppose it had been Bulkeley who'd dropped on you?"

"That's our bizney."

"Mine, too," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 40.

"I give you one minute to clear out, Smythey. If you don't go you'll be put."

"By gad!"
"Clear off yourself!" shouted Topham. "What do you mean by interferin' with us, you meddlin' cad?"

"Are you looking for a thick ear, Topy?" asked Jimmy Silver sweetly. "If you are, you've only to call your Uncle James names again."

"Don't go, Smythey!"
Adolphus Smythe rose to his feet. His eyes gleamed, and for once he was tempted to try conclusions with the captain of the Fourth. He resisted the temptation, however. Only too well the elegant dandy of the Shell knew that Jimmy Silver would have made hay of him in a very few minutes.

He glanced at Townsend and Topham with a sneering smile.

"So this is how you allow your guests to be treated?" he remarked. "You won't find me in this study again in a hurry!"

"Don't go, Smythey!"
"He'll go, or he'll be chucked!" said Jimmy Silver. "It's a rule that no Shell fellow is allowed to play the giddy ox in a Fourth Form study."

"Who made that rule, you cheeky ass?"
"I did," said Jimmy calmly.
"Don't go, Smythey! There's three of us, and we'll chuck that interferin' cad out on his neck."

Smythe paused.
Three to one was long odds, and really it seemed like an excellent opportunity for turning the tables upon Jimmy Silver.

"Tain't my bizney," said Smythe, "but I'm willin' to back up you fellows if you want to kick that meddlin' cad out."

"Go for him!" shouted Topham.
"Collar the cad!"

"I'm with you, dear boys!" said Adolphus. The three nuts advanced upon Jimmy Silver in battle array.

Up went Jimmy's ready fists. He was not the chief of the Fistical Four for nothing. He would not have hesitated a single instant about taking on the three weedy slackers at once.

Nor was it a very dangerous attack. The trio had screwed up their courage to the sticking-point, but they all seemed to be trying to keep behind one another as they advanced upon Jimmy.

But Jimmy's hands dropped suddenly.
Again he had forgotten his promise to Miss Dolly, and again he had remembered it just in time.

With a deeply-troubled face, the captain of the Fourth backed away.
"Hands off, you funky cads!" he growled savagely.

"Go for him!" chirruped Adolphus, greatly encouraged by this unexpected and amazing retreat of the warlike Jimmy.

"Kick him out!" yelled Townsend.
"I—I'll talk to you about this next week," said Jimmy Silver. "I'll lick all three of you next week!"

"By gad, what a funk!" said Smythe, in surprise and great delight. "You sneakin' coward!"

"What!" yelled Jimmy.
"Sneakin' coward!" said Adolphus. "You came in here meddlin', and now you're goin' out on your neck! Collar him, dear boys!"

Jimmy Silver backed to the door, red with rage. The three nuts, their dubiousness quite vanished now, leaped upon him.

Jimmy Silver struggled in their grasp.
His fist was lashing out, but he stopped the blow. He was bound in honour not to fight. It was a terrible restriction—a really dismaying situation. But there it was.

"Out he goes!" chirped Adolphus.
Crash!

Jimmy Silver flew through the doorway, and bumped down in the passage.

"Ow!" he gasped.
A roar of laughter from the triumphant nuts followed him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Exit Jimmy Silver!" chortled Adolphus.

"Don't come meddlin' here again," said Townsend, wagging a forefinger at him. "We're not standin' any more of your rot, Jimmy Silver!"

Jimmy Silver sat up, crimson and panting. The crash in the passage had brought several fellows out of their studies. They stared at Jimmy Silver and at the grinning nuts in the doorway, hardly able to believe their eyes. Jimmy Silver had been chucked out of Townsend's study, and he was taking it lying down—literally. It was amazing—incredible.

Oswald ran to help Jimmy up.
"Go for 'em, old son!" he said. "I'll

back you up. Lend us a hand, Flynn! One to one is fair play."

"Sure, and I'm ready!" said Flynn promptly. "Come on, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver stood and gasped.
"Hold on!" he stuttered. "It—it's all right! I'm not going to scrap—not now."

"Haven't you been chucked out of that study?" demanded Oswald.

"Ye-ess!"
"And ain't you going for the cads?"

"No."
"Well, my only hat!"
"Howly Moses!"

Jimmy Silver, with a crimson face, turned away. A delighted cackle from Adolphus Smythe followed him.

"The blessed funk! Yah! Sneakin' coward!"
Jimmy Silver heard the taunt, but he heeded not. He walked away down the passage without a word. There was a buzz of amazement mingled with contempt. Even Leggett, the funk of the Fourth, would not have taken that quietly. But Jimmy Silver had!

"Well, that beats the band!" said Jones minor. "What's the matter with Jimmy Silver? I never thought he was a funk!"

"He isn't," said Oswald quickly.
"Then why don't he go for Smythey?"

"He's afraid to, my infants," said Adolphus loftily. Adolphus was as surprised as any of the juniors by Jimmy's amazing attitude, but he was highly delighted. "The fact is, dear boys, we've all stood too much cheek from that kid Silver, and I'm goin' to see about keepin' him in his place after this. We'll finish that little smoke, Towny."

"Yaas, you bet!" said Towny.
"The three 'blades' resumed their laudable occupation, and cigarette-smoke filled the study again. This time there was no interference from the captain of the Fourth.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Challenge Accepted.

"A GIDDY challenge!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Let's look," remarked Tommy Cook, putting down his teacup.
And Tommy Doyle suspended operations on a large cake.

The three Tommies had received the epistle from the Classical side. It was written upon a sheet of impot paper in Arthur Edward Lovell's somewhat sprawling hand. It ran:

"NOTICE TO TOMMY DODD AND ALL MODERN CADS!

"The Classical side hereby challenge the Modern worms to a Snow Fight to-morrow (Wednesday) afternoon, if there is enouf snow. They promise them a thundering licking, and if they have the cheek to turn up, they undertake to lick them to the Wide, and make them sorry that they came along.

"(Signed) A. E. LOVELL.
"For the Classical Fourth."

The three Tommies chuckled gleefully over that missive.

"That's the kind of syntax you get on a mouldy old Classical side," Tommy Dodd remarked. "Anybody guess from this which is 'they' and which is 'them'?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Blessed if it isn't like one of those epoch-making speeches by a great statesman—you have to guess what it may possibly mean," remarked Tommy. "But, I suppose, being interpreted, it means that they're sending us a challenge to a snow-fight. Well, the snow's falling already, and there'll be plenty by to-morrow afternoon. There won't be any footer, so we may as well lick those Classical cads."

"Hear, hear!"
"Any answer?" asked the Second-Form fag who had brought the note. He was waiting.

"Yes, rather," said Tommy Dodd. "You wait a minute, young Snooks. I'm going to write the answer."

"Buck up, then," said young Snooks. "Lovell's giving me a jam-tart for this, but I ain't going to waste time over it!"

"Dry up, you cheeky little worm!"
Tommy Dodd took a pen and a leaf from an exercise-book, and with many chuckles indited the following reply:

"TO THE CADS, WORMS, BOUNDERS, AND FREAKS OF THE CLASSICAL SIDE.

"Them having received the challenge of they, they and them will give them the licking of their lives. The Modern Side hope that they, them, those, these, other and which will all turn up.

"(Signed) TOMMY DODD,
"For the Modern Side."

The three Tommies roared over that excellent reply, and the fag was despatched with it.

Snooks of the Second returned whistling to the end study in the rival camp. The Fistical Four were all there beginning their preparation. Snooks came in and pitched the letter on the table.

"Where's my tart?" he inquired.
"Is that Tommy Dodd's answer?" asked Lovell.

"Yes. Where's my tart?" demanded Snooks. "The Modern cads were cackling like anything over your letter, Lovell."

"Oh, were they?" said Lovell wrathfully.
"Yes; they thought the grammar was all wrong," said Snooks cheerfully, as he took his tart from the study cupboard. "I dare say it was. You chaps in the Fourth don't know much."

Snooks of the Second hurriedly retired with his tart after making that remark. If he had lingered, he would have been in peril of taking a thick ear back with him to the lair of the Second.

Jimmy Silver grinned, and Lovell frowned. He opened the letter, and stared as he read it.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Lovell. "Talk about grammar! Look at that!"

The Classical chums looked at it, and burst into a roar.

"If that's their Modern grammar, give me Classical," said Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Look here—" bawled Lovell.

"I'm afraid he's pulling your leg a bit!" chuckled Raby. "Never mind; they accept the challenge and we're going to lick them to-morrow!"

"We're jolly well going to lick them, that's a cert!" grunted Lovell. "You'd better pass the word round to the fellows, Jimmy."

"You'd better do that," said Jimmy uneasily. "I can't."

"Ain't you skipper?"
"I leave it to you for to-morrow."

"Well, that's all right," agreed Lovell. "I dare say I shall handle it better than you would. But you'll have to back me up."

"Sorry! I—I—I—"

"I—I—I—" mimicked Lovell. "I suppose you're not going to funk a scrap with the Moderns, Jimmy Silver?"

"Nunno; but—"

"Blow your but! I suppose you want to stand out of it!" exclaimed Raby.

"Yes."
"Wha-a-t!"

"I—I'm going out on my bike to-morrow afternoon—"

"On your bike—in six inches of snow!" yelled Newcome.

"Ahem! Well, no; not on my bike. I—I'm going for a walk."

The Fistical Three stared at their leader, dumbfounded.

"You—you're going out just to get out of a scrap with the Moderns!" Lovell managed to articulate at last.

Jimmy Silver crimsoned, but he did not reply. The three exchanged glances, and wrath mingled with scorn in their faces. Jimmy Silver groaned inwardly.

His fatal promise lay like lead upon his heart. He was taking the only possible course, under the circumstances. But the chums were bound to misunderstand.

It was upon his lips to tell them of the promise he had made to Miss Dolly. But he did not utter it. Only too keenly he realised the ridicule that would follow. For a fellow to be tied to a girl's apron-strings was too ridiculous; he knew that he would never hear the end of it. He felt that Miss Dolly had been very hard on him. But there was no help for it now. It was hard, however, to keep smiling, when his chums were looking at him as they were looking at him now.

There was a long silence in the study. Lovell turned to his preparation again without a word. The look on his face was sufficient to express his thoughts.

Raby blinked at Jimmy Silver, and then began to work. Only Newcome addressed a word to the unfortunate chief of the end study.

"Jimmy, old man, are you trying to pull our leg?"

"No."
"Are you really going out to-morrow afternoon?"

"Yes."
"Why?"

"Oh, just because—because—" Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders irritably.

"Never mind why. I'm not a funk, you silly asses! But—I'm not going to scrap with the Moderns."



Tommy Dodd sprang up and made a rush for the flagstaff. As he did so, Jimmy Silver backed away. "Funk!" yelled Flynn, shaking his fist at Jimmy Silver. (See Chapter 5.)

Lovell looked up grimly. "I've heard that Smythe kicked you out of Towny's study," he said. "I suppose that's true?"

Jimmy did not answer. "Well, Jimmy Silver, if you want my opinion—"

"I don't!"

"You can have it, all the same. You're either a silly fool or a howling, rotten funk, and I'm fed up with you. Keep out of the scrap, if you want to—I sha'n't ask you again. But all the fellows will know what you're keeping out for, and you know what they'll think."

Jimmy Silver knew only too well. But he made no reply; and preparation was resumed in the end study—in grim and gloomy silence. The cheery harmony in that celebrated study seemed to be gone for good.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. The Snow Fight.

"RIPPING!" said Lovell, as the juniors came out after morning lessons on the following day.

It was really ripping, from the point of view of the juniors, who were looking forward to the snow-fight.

The quadrangle was a sheet of white, and snow gleamed on every wall and ledge and window. Keen frosty sunshine gleamed on the snow.

Nearly all the Classical Fourth, and many of the Third and the Shell, were merrily anticipating the battle. Jimmy Silver's face alone was clouded.

No one would have enjoyed an exciting snow-battle more thoroughly than Jimmy Silver. That keen, sunny, frosty afternoon seemed specially designed for it.

Jimmy debated seriously in his mind during dinner.

He had promised the autocratic Miss Dolly not to fight anybody again for a week. "Honour bright" lound him in unbreakable

bonds. But a snow-battle scarcely came within the category of "fights"—so long as it did not develop into fisticuffs. Fisticuffs were barred, but not snowballing. Only it was extremely probable that when snowballs gave out, the rivals of Rookwood would betake themselves to fists and twisted caps, and then—

Then Jimmy Silver would have to "chuck" it.

Lovell grunted at him as they came out after dinner. Lovell was looking sour.

"Are you coming with us, or are you funking?" he asked.

Jimmy Silver made up his mind. "I'll come—so long as it's only snowballing. But I'm not going to fight anybody."

"Why not?" shrieked Lovell.

"Oh, because—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

The Classicals marched out in battle array, with the Fistical Four at their head. Adolphus Smythe and his cronies watched them with supercilious smiles. Snow-fighting—or, indeed, any healthy open-air exertion of any kind—was not in the line of Adolphus and Co.

The Classicals set to work heartily. Behind the frozen, leafless old beeches the snow fort was erected, big blocks of snow jammed together in great style. The breastwork was piled high, and inside the fortifications piles of snowballs were prepared. Lovell & Co. did not mean to run short of ammunition.

Jimmy Silver helped heartily in that work. At three o'clock the attack was to come. The Classicals were to hold the fort, and the Moderns were to attack. Owing to the "slackers" standing out on the Classical side, the odds were on the side of the Moderns. But the fortifications were strong and well supplied with ammunition, and the Classicals had no doubt whatever about being able to hold their own.

As three chimed out from the clock-tower on the Modern side, Tommy Dodd & Co. appeared, in imposing array.

Tommy Dodd was armed with the bugle he used in paperchases, and he called his men together with stirring blasts.

"Ta-ta-ra-ra-ta-ra!"

"Here they come!" said Lovell. "Mind, they're not to get into the fort. If they get our flag down we're beaten. Straight from the shoulder, you know."

"You bet!"

"All hands repel boarders," grinned Raby. The Moderns advanced to the attack in four separate parties, to attack all four sides of the fort at once. Thus Tommy Dodd, who was a skilled general, had directed. The three Tommies and Towle led the four parties from the four quarters. Over the heads of the waiting Classicals the flag blew out on the breeze.

"Ta-ra-ra-ra-ra!"

The bugle blew the signal for the assault.

From all sides came the rush of the warlike Moderns, with armfuls of snowballs and a heavy, concentrated fire.

"Back up!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Go it, Classicals!"

From the snow walls of the fort snowballs flew in thick volleys. The rushing Moderns met a storm of missiles. From behind the cover of the fortifications the Classicals pelted them mercilessly.

Whiz! Whiz! Squash! Crash! Bash!

Howl!

The fun waxed fast and furious.

Back went the Moderns, blinded by squashing snowballs, bowled over by the rain of squashy missiles. On all sides of the fort they sprawled in the snow and gasped and roared.

Three of the attacking parties, hopelessly defeated, surged and sprawled away. But on one side Tommy Dodd came gallantly up to the breastwork, backed up by Lacy and Webb, and gained a footing. The Moderns behind him rallied at his yell, and rushed after him. Moderns driven off on the other sides came racing round to join the successful storming-party.

Snowballs filled the air, but the Moderns

came on. Tommy Dodd & Co. were too close now for snowballs to be much use, and the ammunition, ample as it was, was giving out.

It was hand-to-hand now.

Lovell grasped Tommy Dodd as the Modern chief sprawled over the snow-wall, and strove to hurl him back. But Tommy Dodd was not to be hurried. He clung to Lovell, and they rolled over together—inside the fort.

"Back up!" shrieked Lovell breathlessly.

"Pile in, Moderns!"

"Hurrah!"

All the garrison were crowding to the threatened spot, and it looked as if the attack, close as it was, would be driven back. But there was a yell from the other side, and Tommy Doyle and a crowd of juniors came swarming over an undefended wall.

They were inside the fort on its neglected side before the Classics could get back and man the walls.

"Pile in, ye spalpeens!" roared Tommy Doyle.

"Hurrah! Down with the Classical worms!"

"Back up!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

On all sides the Moderns were swarming in now, and numbers began to tell. Lovell was collared and dumped in the snow, and Tommy Dodd sprang up and made a rush for the flagstaff. As he laid his hand on it to drag down the Classical colours, Jimmy Silver dashed up and grabbed him by the shoulder.

Tommy spun round in Jimmy's grasp.

He put up his hands with a chuckle.

"Here's for your nose, you Classical ass!"

"Hold on!" gasped Jimmy.

"Eh? Why, I'll—"

Jimmy Silver backed away. His face was crimson—but he backed. Snowballing was over, and it had come to fisticuffs, as he had anticipated. But he could not fight Tommy Dodd.

Tommy Dodd was astounded. He had expected a terrific tussle for the flag. But as Jimmy backed away, Dodd laughed, and turned to the flagstaff again. With a wrench he tore it out of the ground, and the Classical colours came fluttering down.

There was a roar of triumph from the Moderns.

"Funk!" yelled Flynn, shaking his fist at Jimmy Silver. Flynn was sitting on Tommy Cook, and was very busy.

Jimmy did not reply.

The fight was nearly over now. The Classics missed the strong arm of Jimmy Silver in the final tussle, and the odds were too great. They were pitched headlong out of the fort, and the remainder of their own piles of snowballs whizzed after them.

Up went the flagstaff again, with a Modern cap floating at the top.

Cheer on cheer burst from the Modern juniors. The fort was captured, the Moderns had triumphed. And the Classics, with feelings too deep for words, had to leave the victorious enemy in possession of the fort.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Hard Cheese!

"FUNK!"

That unpleasant word, in a regular howl, greeted Jimmy Silver in the Fourth-Form passage a little later in the day.

"Funk!"

"Worm!"

The Classical Fourth could hardly think of epithets severe enough for Jimmy Silver.

A dozen pair of eyes had seen him back down before Tommy Dodd at the critical moment. The general opinion was that if Jimmy Silver had backed up, as he ought to have done, the battle would have been won. But the flag had been hauled down, and that settled it—all through Jimmy Silver.

Flynn shook his knuckles under Jimmy's nose in the Fourth-Form passage. Lovell and Raby and Newcome had not a word to say for their chum.

Jimmy's face was scarlet. He could not explain; and, indeed, if he had told the facts, his explanation would have been regarded as an excuse for funking.

"Funk!" roared Flynn. "Ain't ye ashamed to show ye're face, Jimmy Silver?"

"Oh, rats!" growled Jimmy.

"What's come over you, Jimmy?" exclaimed Oswald. "You used not to be a funk."

"So you think I'm a funk, too?" growled Jimmy.

"Well, what's a fellow to think?"

"Ye're afraid of a Modern cad!" howled THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 49.

Flynn. "Ye won't stand up to Tommy Dodd! Well, you can stand up to me! Put up your paws, you funk!"

Jimmy backed away.

"Hold on! I'm not going to fight you, Flynn!"

"Faith, and ye are!" said Flynn grimly.

"And that's for a start!"

"That" was a dab on Jimmy Silver's nose, and the captain of the Fourth staggered back. Without stopping to think, he let out his left, and Flynn rolled on the floor of the passage with a roar.

"Yaroooh!"

"Well hit!" grinned Lovell.

But Jimmy Silver stood conscience-stricken. He was fighting, after his promise!

He jammed his hands hard into his pockets. "I'm sorry, Flynn," he said awkwardly.

"I—I didn't mean to hit you! I forgot!"

Flynn scrambled up.

"Sure, I'll make ye sorer, ye spalpeen!"

He rushed to the attack. His right and left knocked upon Jimmy's crimson countenance.

Jimmy's Silver's hands remained in his pockets. He did not make the slightest motion to defend himself.

The juniors gazed on in amazement.

Flynn dropped his hands.

"Put up yer paws!" he bawled.

"I won't!"

Jimmy's face had turned pale now, but he was quite calm.

"You—you won't put up yer hands?" stuttered Flynn, taken quite aback.

"No."

"Is it dotty ye are?"

"Are you finished?" asked Jimmy grimly.

"Sure, I won't hit a chap who won't hit back!" said Flynn contemptuously, stepping back. "Ye're a rotten funk, and that's what ye are, Jimmy Silver!"

"By gad!" the drawing voice of Adolphus Smythe chimed in. "Did you ever see such a funk, dear boys? A disgrace to the side, I call it!"

Jimmy Silver moved away down the passage, but the elegant figure of Smythe of the Shell stepped in the way.

"Stop!" he commanded.

Jimmy Silver stopped. He could not go on without knocking Adolphus Smythe out of the way, and that was impossible under the circumstances, though easy enough under any other circumstances.

Adolphus smiled.

More than once he had felt the weight of Jimmy Silver's arm, and now his time had come. That sudden and amazing attack of "funk" placed his old enemy at his mercy.

And Adolphus was not merciful to a fallen enemy.

"You're a funk' cad, Jimmy Silver," he said.

"Let me pass!"

"Not yet," said Adolphus. "You're a meddlin', interferin' rotter, and I'm goin' to pull your ear!"

The Classical Fourth looked on, breathless. Would Jimmy Silver stand that from the dandy of the Shell? It was impossible—unthinkable! Smythe stretched out his hand—a little nervously, as a matter of fact—and seized Jimmy Silver's ear between his finger and thumb.

"Jimmy!" gasped Lovell.

The chums of the end study were red with humiliation. Jimmy Silver's pale face flushed crimson, but he did not withdraw his hands from his pockets.

Smythe pulled his ear!

There was a general gasp as Jimmy, when Smythe released his ear, walked away without a word.

"By gad!" chortled Adolphus. "What a rotten funk! Yarooop!"

Lovell's fist smote Adolphus fairly on the nose, and he went heels over head along the passage.

Adolphus landed with a crash. Lovell walked away with Raby and Newcome. But they did not follow Jimmy Silver. They were ashamed of their chum; and Jimmy, as he went out miserably into the snowy quadrangle, was ashamed of himself. Yet he had no cause for shame. He had made a reckless promise, and he was keeping it, as he was in honour bound to do.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Miss Dolly Is Sorry!

"JIMMY, what's the matter?"

Jimmy Silver was leaning on the gate of the Head's garden, as the dusk deepened over Rookwood School. He was feeling utterly dejected.

He had tasted the very dregs of the cup of humiliation.

Smythe of the Shell—the funky, lazy, lackadaisical Adolphus—had pulled his ear in public, and he had taken it without resentment.

His chums avoided him. If they looked at him, it was with scorn in their looks. His name was a byword in the Form of which he had been the leader.

And only two days of that terrible week had elapsed. What was to happen in the other five—bullying from mean fellows whom he had always despised, ragging, scorn, contempt, avoidance?

Even Leggett would wipe out old scores by licking him, now that it was safe. Townsend and Topham would cuff him; Smythe would pull his ears. He writhed with shame as he contemplated the near future.

True, when that awful week had elapsed, he would be able to wipe out the stain; he would have more fights on his hands than he had had during his whole career at Rookwood; but—

His ear was still burning from the grip of Smythe's fingers. It seemed to scorch him like a hot iron. He groaned aloud in his miserable dejection. Miss Dolly didn't know the harm she had done!

A soft voice from the other side of the gate startled him from his glum reverie.

He started and looked round. Miss Dolly was gazing at him over the gate, with concern in her pretty face.

"Are you ill, Jimmy?" she asked.

"Nunno."

"Then what's the matter?"

"N-nothing."

"You're looking awfully miserable," said Miss Dolly, inspecting him.

"I—I feel rather rotten, Miss Dolly."

"Have you been fighting again?" exclaimed the young lady severely.

Jimmy Silver groaned dimly.

"Of course I haven't! Didn't I promise you I wouldn't?"

"Did you?"

Jimmy Silver jumped.

"Did I!" he gasped. "Don't you remember—"

"Yes, I remember now," said Miss Dolly placidly. "I had forgotten."

"Forgotten!" Jimmy Silver felt almost dazed. "Forgotten! My hat! Well, I haven't had a chance to forget, Miss Dolly!"

"But what's the matter?"

"Forgotten!" said Jimmy, with growing indignation. "And I'm called a funk, and despised by every chap in the school—kicked out of a study, punched on the nose, had my ear pulled by a funky cad—all because I made you that promise, and you've forgotten!"

"I'm so sorry, Jimmy," said Miss Dolly softly. "Of course, I—I knew you would keep that promise. But what's the matter with your nose?"

"Knuckles," said Jimmy grimly.

"And—and your ear?"

"Pulled."

"Then you have been fighting, after all?"

"No, I haven't. I've been bullied and ragged and kicked, and made to look a cowardly worm!" groaned Jimmy Silver. "I—I didn't hit back, you see—only when I forgot!"

"Oh, Jimmy!"

Miss Dolly was silent for a few moments, and then her face dimpled.

"Why, you're laughing!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "It isn't a laughing matter for me, I can tell you, Miss Dolly!"

"I'm so sorry, Jimmy. I—I wish I hadn't made you make that promise," said Miss Dolly kindly. "I did not think this would happen. It was very hard on you, Jimmy. I'm really sorry. And I release you from the promise, too!"

Jimmy Silver brightened up.

"Do you mean that, Miss Dolly? I'll stick it out for a week if you like!"

"No, no! It was a mistake, and I don't want you to. Has a bad boy really pulled your poor ear, Jimmy?" asked Miss Dolly sympathetically.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" mumbled Jimmy.

"And you didn't punch him because you had promised?"

"Yes."

"He must have been a coward, Jimmy, to do such a thing. Will you make me another promise?"

"Tell me what it is first," said Jimmy Silver cautiously.

Miss Dolly smiled.

"Promise me to punch that bad boy's head, but—but not too hard!"

"What ho!"

Miss Dolly hurried away. Jimmy Silver

grinned. That dreadful promise which had weighed upon him like a nightmare for two days was rescinded now—it was replaced by another promise which it would be perfectly delightful to carry out.

Jimmy Silver whistled cheerily as he walked to the School House. There was a surprise in store for the Classical Fourth.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Jimmy Silver on the Warpath.

HERE he comes!"

"Classical funk!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tommy Dodd. "Let the poor beast alone! He can't help being a funk!"

The group of Modern juniors grinned. Jimmy Silver came up to them sedately.

"Anybody here call me a funk?" he inquired in polite tones.

"Well, if you put it like that, I do!" said Tommy Dodd warmly.

His hands went up as he spoke, and they were needed. Jimmy Silver was rushing at him.

"A fight!" yelled Lovell.

There was a ring round the two combatants at once. Jimmy Silver was going it. But Tommy Dodd was a redoubtable antagonist, and it was a terrific scrap.

How the terrific encounter would have ended cannot be said, for Bulkeley of the Sixth bore down upon the scene.

"Cave!" yelled Raby.

The two combatants separated, and retreated in different directions. The captain of Rookwood arrived upon the spot, but the juniors were gone.

Bulkeley grinned, and walked away. When he was gone, Lovell and Raby and Newcome reappeared from behind the beeches, and Lovell and Raby had linked arms with Jimmy Silver. The Fistical Four were on the best of terms again.

"Come in to tea, Jimmy," said Lovell affectionately. "I—I knew you weren't a funk, you know. But what the merry dickens were you playing that idiotic game for?"

"It was a promise!" growled Jimmy Silver. "But it's all over now, and don't ask any questions! I want to see Flynn."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four entered the School House, and Flynn was encountered on the upper landing. He grinned scornfully at the sight of Jimmy Silver.

"You called me a funk, Flynn, old chap!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

"Faith, and so ye are— Oh, my hat!"

For five minutes there was a terrific tussle on the landing. The Classical Fourth came round in a crowd to watch.

At the end of the fifth minute Flynn confessed that he had had enough. He certainly looked as if he had had a little too much.

"Shure, an' phwat's the matter wid ye, intoirly?" he mumbled, as he dabbed his damaged nose. "Pulling our leg, you baste? Groooogh!"

"Give us your fin, old scout," said Jimmy Silver, "and come along with me! I've got to see Smythe!"

Flynn grinned.

"Faith, I'll come with pleasure!"

Half the Classical Fourth marched with the Fistical Four to Smythe's study in the Shell corridor.

Jimmy Silver kicked the door, and stalked in. Smythe and Tracy and Howard were at tea. They burst into a merry chortle at the sight of Jimmy Silver.

"Here's the funk!" said Adolphus. "Have you come to have your ear pulled again, Jimmy Silver?"

"Exactly!" said Jimmy Silver calmly.

"Here it is!"

He bent his head towards Adolphus, while the Fourth-Formers crowded outside the doorway chuckled.

Adolphus looked surprised. He did not quite like the look in Jimmy Silver's eyes.

"Pull his ear, and kick him out!" said Tracy.

"Yaas, begad, if he don't go!" said Adolphus uneasily. "Get out while you're safe, Silver, you cheeky young cad!"

"Are you going to let me off, Smythe?" asked Jimmy.

"Yaas, I'm lettin' you off this time!"

"Thanks! But I'm not letting you off!" smiled Jimmy.

"Look here— Leggo! Hands off, you beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The table rocked as Jimmy Silver and Adolphus Smythe bumped into it, struggling.

Howard and Tracy jumped up, and retreated to the wall. Adolphus did not struggle long. The amazing funkiness on which he had relied had vanished, and Jimmy Silver was his old self again.

"Leggo!" moaned Adolphus. "I've had enough! Wow-ow-wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver fixed his finger and thumb upon Adolphus' prominent nose.

"Had enough?" he inquired politely.

"Wow-wow!"

The grip on Adolphus' nose tightened like a vice.

"Are you sorry?"

"Wow-ow! Yaas! Let go!"

Jimmy Silver let go at last, and Adolphus sank into a chair, clasping his nose with both hands in deep anguish.

Jimmy Silver sauntered from the study, amid the loud laughter of the Classical Fourth. The reputation of the leader of the Fistical Four was fully re-established.

There was a merry feed in the end study. Lovell and Raby and Newcome were all grins, and Jimmy Silver was looking his old self again; and Flynn, with a darkened eye and a damaged nose, was an honoured guest. The clouds had rolled by, and once more Uncle James was monarch of all he surveyed.

THE END.

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**"UP AGAINST THE NUTS!"**

is the title of next week's grand story of Rookwood School.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

—\*—

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BOYS' CINEMA 21

Weekly

DENNIS CARR, CAPTAIN.

(Continued from page 7.)

cad of the Remove when the new term started.

Next day there were animated scenes in the 'Close.

It was breaking-up day at last!

Fellows of all Forms emerged from the school building with their boxes and port-manteaus, and horse-cabs crunched their way through the snow in order to collect the cargo, human and otherwise.

Everyone was in high spirits—even Gosling the porter, who received more tips in a single hour than he had obtained all through the term.

"Wot I says, young gents, is this 'ere," said Gosling. "Which I 'opes as 'ow you'll 'ave a Merry Christmas an' a Nappy Noo Year!"

"You can leave the 'nappy' New Years to Manly!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "He's bound to want to go to sleep!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There were rousing scenes in the old Close. And happiness and high good-humour reigned on every side. Even when Bob Cherry knocked Coker's cap off with a snowball, the Fifth-Former took it in good part. He even asked Bob to do it again! And Bob tried to. But this time Coker drew his head back into the cab which was escorting him out of the gates, and the missile went harmlessly wide.

Handshaking and cheers; more cheers, and more hand-shaking.

Dennis Carr came in for the lion's share of both.

Never had the new captain of the Remove been so popular as at that moment.

Whatever the next term held in store, Dennis would always remember this one.

What an eventful term it had been! He had come to Greyfriars a spoilt and wayward boy, hating everyone, and being hated by everyone in turn. He had almost rushed headlong to ruin; but Fate had been kind to him at the finish, and he had come back to win the esteem and admiration of his school-fellows. He—who a few months before had been an outcast and a pariah—was captain of the Remove!

Would his position be permanent, or would it be wrested from him?

Harry Wharton was certain to fight hard to win back his old position.

Would Wharton succeed?

Only the new term could supply an answer to this question. Meanwhile, the glorious prospect of the Christmas vacation was occupying the thoughts of seniors and juniors alike.

Dennis Carr was standing on the platform of Friardale Station when the first "leave-train" went off. He could see the Famous Five leaning from one of the carriage-windows; and, as the train gathered speed, the voice of Bob Cherry was borne back to Dennis on the frosty air.

"Au revoir, Carr! Best of luck to you—and a Merry Christmas!"

Dennis tried to return the greeting, but no words would come. His eyes were filled with tears; but they were not the bitter, burning tears of shame, such as he had shed a few months since. They were tears of happiness.

For that moment was one of the happiest of Dennis Carr's life. And as he crossed over to the other side of the platform to wait for his own train, the whole atmosphere seemed to be charged with the words:

"A Merry Christmas!"

THE END.

(Another grand long story of Harry Wharton & Co. next week, entitled, "DOWN ON HIS LUCK." Order your copy of the PENNY POPULAR EARLY!)

GOOD STORIES.

Daddy's Darling: "Daddy, can any of the animals speak?"

Daddy: "No; of course not, dear."

Daddy's Darling: "But haven't you ever heard of 'deerstalking'?"

HUSTLING WITHOUT THE HUSTLE.

The hustling boss and two of the men met in the yard.

"Now, then—now, then!" said the hustling boss briskly. "Where are you going?"

"Please, sir," said one, "we're taking this 'ere plank to the sawmill."

"Plank! What plank?" snapped the boss. "I don't see any plank!"

The man looked down at his hand and over his shoulder, and then turned blandly to his mate.

"Why, bless me, Bill," he exclaimed, "if we ain't been and forgot the plank!"

Father: "My boy, when I was your age I carried water for a gang of labourers."

Son: "Dad, I'm proud of you! If it hadn't been for your pluck and perseverance, I may have had to do something of that sort myself!"

GAVE IT TO UNCLE.

"Doctor," said the young man with the fur coat and the jingling pockets, "I've come to thank you for your medicine!"

"So it helped you, did it?" replied the doctor, smiling. "I'm so glad!"

The young man nodded.

"It helped me wonderfully," he said. "And how many bottles did you find it necessary to take?" inquired the medico.

"Oh, I didn't take any of it!" replied young Fur Coat. "But I induced my uncles to take one bottle, and I'm his sole heir!"

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