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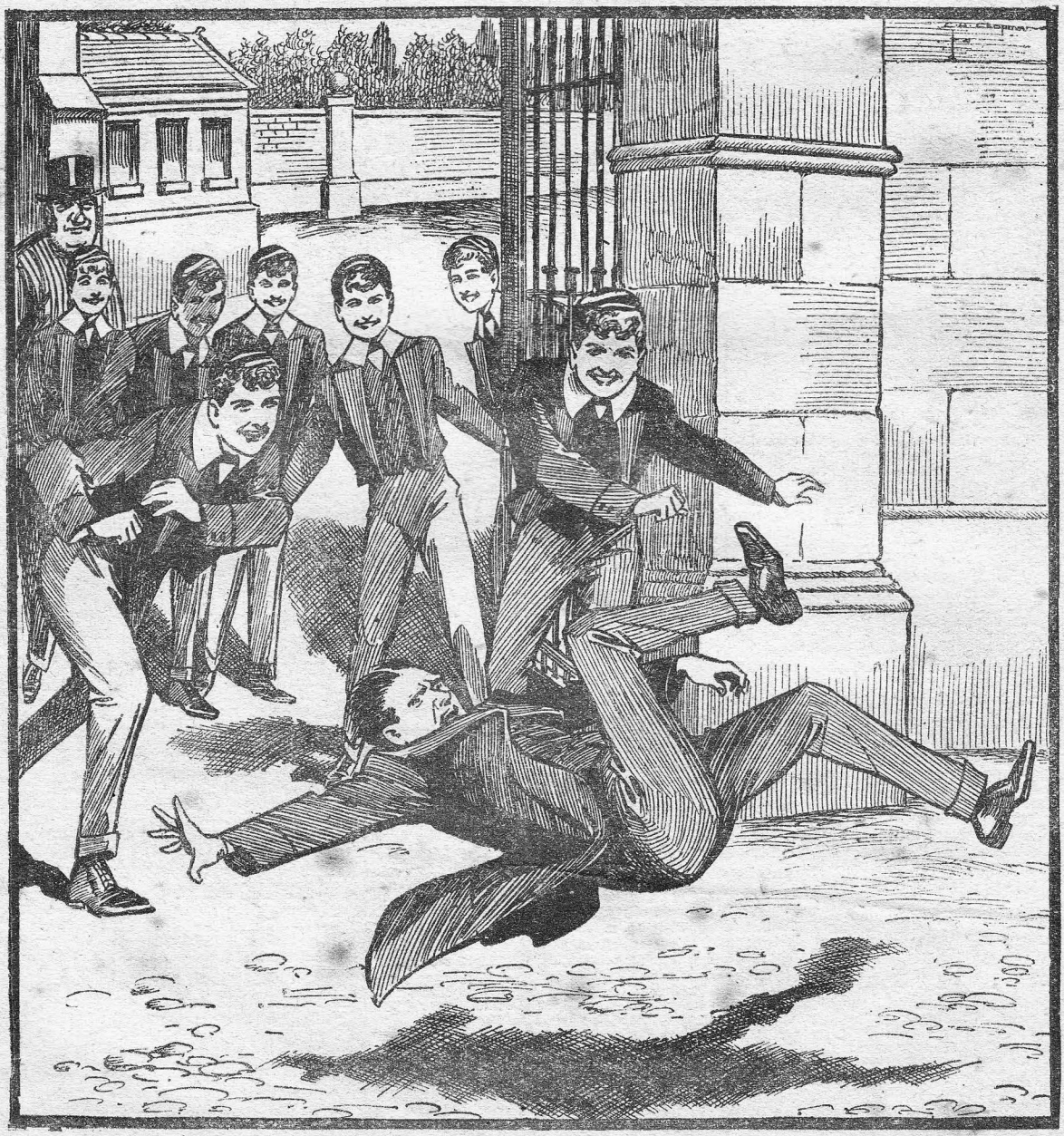
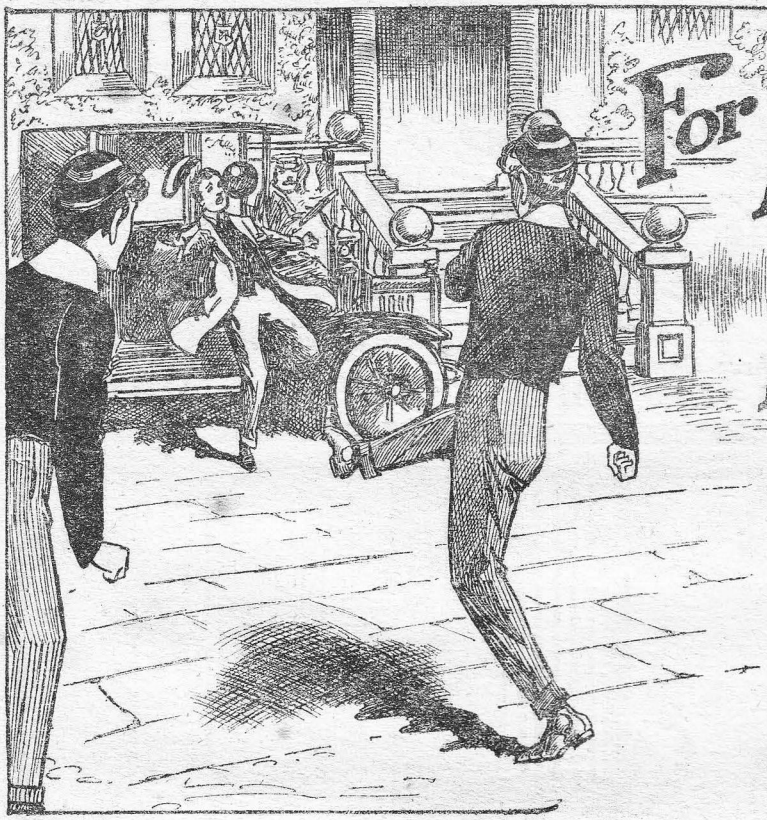


NOT WANTED AT GREYFRIARS!

(An Exciting Incident in the Magnificent Long Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)



For His Chum's Honour!

A MAGNIFICENT LONG COMPLETE STORY OF HARRY WHARTON & CO. OF GREYFRIARS.

... By ...

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
A Visitor for Skinner.

"WHO comes?"

It was Bob Cherry of the Greyfriars Remove who rapped out the question.

The Famous Five had been punting a football about in the Close, but they suspended operations as a taxi-cab swung through the school gateway.

"That taxi comes from Courtfield," said Frank Nugent. "I've often seen it waiting outside the station."

"In that case," said Harry Wharton, "it's not difficult to guess who is on board. That slacker Mauly probably found it too much fag to walk back from his shopping expedition in Courtfield, so he chartered a taxi."

Bob Cherry nodded.

"Mauly's as lazy as ever, in spite of all my efforts to bring him up in the way he should go," he said. "I'll see if I can wake him up a bit!"

The taxi slowed up at the foot of the School House steps. The door opened, and, just as a youth was in the act of alighting, Bob Cherry took careful aim with the football. His foot met the leather fairly and squarely, and it whizzed through the air, striking its objective full in the face.

"Yaroooooh!"

The victim's yell rang through the Close, and he sat down violently on the flagstones.

"Good shot, Bob!" chortled Johnny Bull. "You've managed to wake Mauly up all right! He—— Why, my hat, it's not Mauly at all!"

"Great pip!"

The Famous Five rushed towards the stationary taxi with expressions of alarm on their faces.

What had happened?

It was not until the victim ceased dabbing his face with a huge handkerchief that the juniors recognised him. He certainly bore no resemblance to Lord Mauleverer, save in height. He was a thin-faced, crafty-eyed, weedy-looking specimen—not at all a desirable person to know.

"Craven!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"So it is!"

"Skinner's cousin, by Jove!"

Bob Cherry assisted Craven to his feet.

"Awfully sorry!" he said. "I mistook you for somebody else!"

"I don't believe you!" snarled Craven. "You knew it was me, and you kicked that football in my face on purpose!"

Bob Cherry flushed.

"Be careful," he said, "or you'll get something else in your face, as well as the football!"

"Namely?"

"My fist!"

Craven backed away in alarm. He was Craven by name, and by nature also. And he knew that Bob Cherry could have made shavings of him, so to speak.

"It was a case of mistaken identity," said Bob. "Are you prepared to take my word or not?"

"Of—of course I'll take it!" stammered Craven.

"That's all right, then."

And Craven looked very relieved as the Famous Five walked away.

Having paid the taxi-driver, Skinner's cousin went along to the Remove passage.

This was not his first visit to Greyfriars, and he knew his bearings.

He halted outside the door of his cousin's study, and rapped lightly upon it.

"Come in, fathead!" came Skinner's voice from within.

Craven obeyed.

"Why," exclaimed Skinner, starting to his feet, "this is a surprise and no mistake, Paul! You were here only last week, and now you've turned up again!"

"Any objection?" asked Craven.

"Of course not. You know I'm always jolly pleased to see you. By the way, have you been wrestling with a steam-roller? Your chivvy looks—er—slightly battered!"

Craven scowled, and recounted the little incident in the Close.

"Don't stand there with an idiotic grin on your face!" he concluded. "Take me to the nearest bath-room!"

Skinner obliged, and after a few minutes' rubbing and scrubbing, Craven succeeded in effacing the marks made by the football.

"Now I'm ready for tea," he said. "I had nothing to eat before I left London, and I could get nothing on the journey, barring a stale railway-sandwich, which nearly choked me. Are you in funds, Harold?"

"As it happens, yes," replied Skinner. "I backed Silver Melody yesterday, and she romped home at a good price. Result—happiness. Loder of the Sixth, who has a little flutter now and again, said that Silver Melody hadn't a ghost of a chance, and he backed Kite Balloon, which collapsed at the start. Result—misery!"

Craven grinned.

"Your little flutters will land you inside Dartmoor one of these days!" he said.

"Rats!"

The precious couple returned to Skinner's study, and the table was laid for tea.

Although he was a weedy specimen, Craven's appetite was enormous. It was almost Bunterian.

Nothing was said during the meal, but when it was over Skinner and Craven drew their chairs up to the fire for a chat.

"Why have you come down to Greyfriars again so soon?" inquired Skinner.

Craven chuckled.

"I've got news, my son—news that will warm the cockles of your heart!"

Skinner became interested at once.

"Has anything happened up at the office?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes."

"Have you succeeded in getting that bounder Carr kicked out?"

"Yes."

Skinner's face fairly glowed with satisfaction. This was indeed good news.

A short time before popular Dennis Carr had been compelled to leave Greyfriars owing to the death of his father. He had tramped the streets of London in search of employment, but with no luck. And then Sir Howard Prescott, a big auctioneer in the West End, had come to the rescue, and engaged Dennis as a junior clerk.

It so happened that Craven worked in the same office, and he had been jealous of Dennis. He had determined to bring about the downfall of the new clerk, and he had succeeded.

"How did you manage to work the oracle, Paul?" inquired Skinner.

"It was simple enough," said Craven. "I helped myself to some money from the petty cashbox, and insisted on lending some to Carr. He promptly bought himself a new pair of boots, and it aroused suspicion, for the boss knew that Carr hadn't any money of his own. The remainder of the stolen money—a few ten-bob notes—I managed to slip into Carr's pocket. There was an inquiry; Carr was ordered to turn out his pockets, and then he was branded as a thief and kicked out."

"A very smart piece of work!" said Skinner. "How did Carr take it?"

"He had the surprise of his life, of course. He knew it was a trick, but he couldn't for the life of him make out how the trick had been played."

"And he was actually sacked there and then?"

"On the spot. In fact, he had a narrow shave of being handed over to the police."

"My hat!"

"He won't find it easy to get another job in London," said Craven. "Sir Howard Prescott won't give him a reference."

"So he'll have to start tramping the streets again, hunting for work, and finding none?"

Craven nodded.

"I simply had to get him kicked out of our show!" he said, as if trying to square his conscience. "You see, he was trying to cut me out, and in time he would have shot ahead of me, and they would have had no further use for my services. There wasn't room for both of us in the office. Somebody had to go."

"And Carr's gone!" chuckled Skinner. "That's great. I expect we shall see him at Greyfriars soon."

"At Greyfriars!" echoed Craven. "What makes you think that?"

"When he finds he can't get work in London, he'll come down here and start sponging on the Head."

Craven frowned.

"We don't want that to happen," he said. "The Head might take pity on him, and find him a soft job somewhere."

"Quite!" said Skinner. "But I don't see how we're going to prevent it."

"I do!" said Craven quickly. "If we advertise the fact that Carr's been sacked for dishonesty, the fellows will be so furious that they'll never allow him to plant his foot inside the school-gates any more."

Skinner looked doubtful.

"Carr's very popular with the Remove," he said.

"That may be; but his popularity will burst like a bubble when the fellows think he's a thief. They'll wash their hands of him for good, and he'll never be able to show up at Greyfriars again."

Skinner was impressed.

"I believe you're right, Paul," he said thoughtfully.

"Of course I'm right!" snapped Craven. "Am I ever otherwise? All we've got to do is to publish the news of Carr's dishonesty through the Remove. Then nobody will want anything more to do with him."

Craven did not seem to be content with causing Dennis Carr to be sacked. He meant to take steps to see that Dennis' reputation was damaged not only in London, but at his old school.

The two cousins were gloating over Dennis Carr's downfall. But they would not have gloated quite so much had they been aware of the fact that the whole of their conversation had been overheard by Billy Bunter, whose ear had been glued to the keyhole for the past ten minutes.

When the conversation was at an end, Billy Bunter rolled away down the passage, chuckling to himself.

"If ever there was a chance of getting rich quick," he muttered, "I've struck it now! I ought to be able to get quids and quids out of Skinner for keeping his secret. And if he doesn't pay up and look pleasant, the fellows shall hear the truth about Dennis Carr! And Messrs. Skinner and Craven will wish they'd never been born! He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter's gloating chuckle accompanied him into the Close.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Fired Out of Greyfriars!

HAVING decided to inflict yet another injury upon Dennis Carr, Skinner and Craven sauntered along to the junior Common-room.

Harry Wharton & Co. were roasting chestnuts at the fire, and quite a crowd of Removites was present.

Some of the fellows, who had not met Skinner's cousin before stared at him rather curiously as he came in with the cad of the Remove.

"This, gentlemen," said Skinner, "is my cousin, Paul Craven. He chucked schooling long ago, and he's now a man of the world. In short, he is private secretary to Sir Howard Prescott, the well-known auctioneer and public man."

"He's won very rapid promotion, then," said Mark Linley. "When I last heard from Dennis Carr he mentioned that there was a fellow called Craven in the office—a junior clerk."

Craven scowled.

"You're a fool if you take any notice of what Carr says!" he exclaimed. "Carr's one of the biggest bounders——"

"Go easy!" said Mark Linley, his eyes gleaming with a dangerous light. "Dennis Carr's my chum!"

Craven laughed harshly.

"I should advise you to buck up and disown him, then!"

There was a murmur from the crowd of Removites.

Mark Linley advanced a step nearer to Craven.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

Craven faced the Lancashire lad calmly.

"I mean," he said, "that when you've heard the facts about Dennis Carr you'll be his pal no longer."

"Tell me the facts, then, quickly!" commanded Mark Linley.

Seldom had Mark's schoolfellows known him to raise his voice, but he was raising it now.

All eyes were fixed upon Craven. Everybody was anxious to hear what he had to say concerning Dennis Carr.

"The facts are these," said Craven. "Carr's been fired out of his job for dishonesty!"

Had the speaker suddenly exploded a bombshell in the junior Common-room the effect could not have been more startling.

A loud murmur of astonishment arose.

Harry Wharton was the first to find his voice.

"Do you realise what you are saying, Craven?"

Craven nodded.

"I was in the office at the time, so I ought to know," he said. "Carr helped himself to the petty cash, and the money was found in his possession. Sir Howard Prescott was going to hand him over to the police at first, but I urged him not to go so far as that. So he gave Carr a week's money in lieu of notice, and kicked him out!"

"That's so," said Skinner. "And serve him jolly well right! If a fellow can't learn how to keep his hands from picking and stealing, he must expect to get it in the neck. Personally, I always did regard Carr as a bit of a burglar—one of the light-fingered brigade, you know!"

All this time Mark Linley's face had been working convulsively, and his hands were clenched.

At first he had been inclined to regard the whole thing as a fabrication.

Then he remembered that he had not received Dennis Carr's usual weekly letter, and he knew that something must be seriously wrong, for Dennis had faithfully promised to write each week.

Not for one moment did Mark Linley believe his chum to be guilty of theft. Neither did Harry Wharton & Co., for that matter. They knew Dennis Carr to be the soul of honour.

And yet it was only too obvious that one part of Craven's story was correct, namely, that Dennis had been "sacked." Had everything been going on as usual he would have written to Mark Linley.

For a full minute silence fell upon the crowd in the Common-room.

Then Mark Linley confronted Craven and Skinner with blazing eyes.

"This is a trick of some sort!" he exclaimed, in ringing tones. "I'm convinced of it! It's a trick to ruin poor old Dennis! I can quite believe that he's been sacked, but he's innocent—and you know he's innocent, you cads!"

"Hear, hear!"

Every fellow in the room was on his feet now. And everyone was glaring at the two cousins.

Skinner and Craven exchanged dubious glances.

Things were not working out quite so smoothly as they had anticipated.

They had expected the Remove to believe the story of Dennis Carr's dishonesty; instead of which the Remove seemed to be convinced that Dennis was innocent.

"Marky's quite right," said Bob Cherry. "This is a trick of some sort, and these two precious rascals are at the bottom of it! We know Skinner only too well, and his charming cousin is cast in the same mould. They've organised this business between them. Skinner's always been up against Dennis Carr; and Craven, by the look of him, would always be up against anyone who was decent. Somehow or other they've caused Dennis to be slung out of his job."

"Shame!"

"Rush the cads!"

"Bump them!"

But something worse than a bumping was in store for Skinner and Craven.

Mark Linley, unable to control his wrath any longer, hurled himself at the two cousins.

Biff!

Skinner went down like a ninepin before the Lancashire lad's fierce attack.

Craven offered some resistance, but it was of the very feeblest order. He went sprawling on top of his cousin.

"I haven't finished with you yet, you cads!" exclaimed Mark Linley. "Get up and have some more!"

Skinner and Craven lay writhing and groaning on the floor of the Common-room. They made no attempt to rise. It was perhaps only natural that they should not desire to renew their acquaintanceship with Mark Linley's fists.

"I've hardly touched you yet!" said Mark contemptuously. "If you don't get up, I'll lam you with a cricket-stump!"

"Here's a stump, Marky!" said Frank Nugent.

Skinner and Craven did not wait for Mark Linley to castigate them. They scrambled to their feet, and backed away towards the door.

The Lancashire lad followed up, hitting out right and left.

He was angry—furiously angry—at the thought that these two cads had in some way compassed Dennis Carr's downfall.

Both Skinner and Craven were very much the worse for wear when they finally staggered through the doorway and collapsed in the passage.

"That won't cure you of your caddishness," panted Mark Linley, "but it will serve to show you what I think of you!"

"Ow!"

"Yow!"

The victims groaned in a dismal duet.

Craven was the first to pick himself up. He blinked at Mark Linley and at the crowd behind with his one sound eye.

"I'll see your Form-master about this!" he muttered thickly. "I'll tell him how I've been treated!"

That was the most unfortunate threat Craven could possibly have made. A chorus of indignation arose from the crowd.

"Sneak!"

"Kick him out!"

"Chuck him off the premises!"

Paul Craven recoiled at this fierce outburst.

"Come on, Harold!" he muttered. "Let's get back to the study before these beasts do any more damage!"

But before Craven could move away the crowd surged round him, and he was seized by many hands and frog's-marched along the passage and into the Close.

"Steady on!" panted Craven. "What's the game?"

"We're going to kick you out!" said Harry Wharton grimly. "And we'll repeat the performance every time you have the cheek to show up at Greyfriars!"

"Let me alone! How can I go back to London in this state?"

"It's your own fault that you've been knocked about. Did you imagine we'd swallow your story about Carr being a thief? Do you think we don't know Carr better than that? Why, he's as straight as a die! And any fellow who suggests otherwise is fairly asking for trouble!"

"Hear, hear!"

Craven was marched down to the gates in the grip of his captors.

The Remove's blood was up, and they showed him no mercy.

Gosling, the porter, came out of his lodge, and stood blinking in astonishment at the strange procession.

"Young rips!" he growled. "Which I've never seed sich goings hon! Wot I says is this 'ere—all boys oughter be drownded at birth! Leave that young gent alone!"

Ignoring Gosling, the Removites passed on with their prisoner.

And then, at a signal from Harry Wharton, Craven was hurled bodily through the school gateway.

He alighted in the roadway with a bump and a yell, and the heavy iron gates were slammed in his face.

"If you come here again trying to blacken Carr's character," said Mark Linley, "you'll know what to expect!"

Paul Craven lurched to his feet, and stumbled away in the direction of Friardale.

When he was at a safe distance he turned, and flourished his fist savagely at the juniors.

Having eased his feelings a trifle in this

way, he moved on, muttering to himself as he went.

One thing, at least, was certain. Paul Craven would never again pay a visit to Greyfriars. That famous school was too much of a hornets' nest for his personal comfort!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Mark Linley's Resolve.

"GOOD riddance to bad rubbish!" said Bob Cherry. "Having shown Craven the way out, I vote we go in to tea!"

"Hear, hear!"

There were six to tea in Study No. 1, Mark Linley having been invited as the guest of the Famous Five.

Although supplies of tuck were plentiful, it was not a merry party.

The news concerning Dennis Carr was weighing on everybody's mind.

Dennis was "sacked"!

Craven had plotted to bring about this result, and he had succeeded.

The Famous Five were very fond of Dennis Carr, and they considered it was very rough luck that Dennis' father should have died penniless, and that Dennis himself should have been compelled to leave Greyfriars and earn his own living.

Dennis was now in a terrible plight. He had been turned out of his job, branded as a thief; and in such circumstances he would not be likely to find another situation in a hurry.

The Famous Five were concerned for Dennis; but not so concerned as Mark Linley was.

Mark had been Dennis Carr's closest chum, and he always felt a chum's misfortunes far more acutely than his own.

"Why, you're not eating anything, Marky!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"I'm not hungry, Bob—thanks!"

"Rats! You're worrying about Carr, that's what it is! And going without grub won't lessen the worry."

"I simply couldn't eat anything just now," said the Lancashire lad. "It would choke me, I think! When I think of poor old Dennis starving in London——"

"Starving!" echoed Harry Wharton.

Mark Linley nodded.

"He's not likely to be able to keep his head above water for long," he said. "He was paid a week's money when they turned him out of his job; but that won't see him very far. He's got to start all over again, trying to find work. And nobody will take him unless he can produce a reference."

"That fellow Craven's a cur!" said Johnny Bull. "We let him off far too lightly. We ought to have dragged him up before the Head, and made him confess everything."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"He would never have confessed," he said.

"Afraid not," said Mark Linley. "All the same, things mustn't be allowed to remain as they are. Dennis must be cleared somehow."

"But how?" asked Nugent helplessly.

For a moment Mark Linley was silent. He appeared to be thinking the matter out.

"The only way," he said, at length, "is for me to go up and see Sir Howard Prescott, and convince him that Dennis isn't a thief!"

The Famous Five stared at the speaker in amazement.

"Impossible!" said Wharton.

"Of course!" said Bob Cherry. "You're talking out of your hat, Marky. In the first place, the Head would never give you permission to go to London——"

"I think he would," said Mark, "if I explained all the circumstances."

"My hat!"

"But, even supposing the Head let you go, how would you convince Sir Howard Prescott that Carr was innocent?" asked Wharton.

"I'd insist that it was a low-down trick on Craven's part. And if Sir Howard is a fair-minded man, he'll make investigations."

"Afraid it's a forlorn hope, Marky," said Bob Cherry. "You'd better get the idea of going to London out of your head."

Mark Linley looked up indignantly.

"Do you think I can cool my heels at Greyfriars when Dennis Carr's in need of me?" he exclaimed. "I sha'n't be able to settle down, either to work or sport, until this business is cleared up. I'll go and tackle the Head at once, and if he refuses to let me go to London, I shall consider the advisability of taking French leave!"

"Now you're talking absolutely tommy-rot!" said Frank Nugent. "If you went to London without permission, you silly duffer, you'd be sacked from Greyfriars!"

"I'd chance that!"

The Famous Five saw that Mark Linley's mind was made up—that he had resolved to go to London in an attempt to vindicate his chum's honour.

And when Mark Linley had made up his mind to a thing, he was as obstinate as a pack of giddy mules, as Bob Cherry expressed it.

"I've had some experience of being thrown on the world, and I know what it's like," said Mark. "If you haven't got a job, and you've no hope of getting a job, and there isn't a pal to stand by you in your trouble, you get pretty desperate, I can tell you!"

Wharton nodded.

"I understand that," he said. "And I admire your loyalty in wanting to help Carr when he's down. But you're tackling too big a proposition altogether. You've got to get to London first—and that's no easy matter, unless the Head gives you permission—and then you've got to prove to Sir Howard Prescott that Carr didn't steal that money. You're a good sort, Marky, but I'm afraid you'll have no luck."

And the others agreed with Wharton.

"I'll go and tackle the Head, anyway," said Mark Linley, "and see what he's got to say about it."

And the Lancashire lad went along to the Head's study.

"Well, Linley?" said Dr. Locke kindly, as the junior entered.

"I wish to ask you a special favour, sir."

"Yes, yes! What is it?"

"I should like to go to London to-morrow, sir, for the day—perhaps longer."

The Head looked surprised.

"That is a rather singular request to make, Linley. Are you prompted to go to London by a desire for pleasure?"

"No, sir. By a sense of duty."

"Bless my soul!"

"The fact is, I'm very anxious about Carr, sir."

"Carr! I trust nothing is wrong with him?"

"He's been deprived of his job, sir, through cunning and trickery."

Dr. Locke gave a gasp.

"How did you know this, Linley?"

"The cad who brought about his downfall has been here boasting about it, sir. He's a clerk in the office where Carr worked, and I suppose his motive for doing Carr an injury was jealousy. Anyway, he managed to get Carr accused of theft, and Dennis was sacked."

"Dear me!" said the Head, looking very distressed. "You are quite sure of your facts, Linley?"

"Quite, sir! Carr's not a thief; and I want you to let me go to London to try and prove his innocence."

"Do you really think, Linley, that your going to London would do any good?"

"It couldn't do any harm, sir. Carr is probably feeling too down and out to fight his case, and a pal by his side might make all the difference!"

Dr. Locke debated the matter in his mind for a few moments.

He had no objection to Mark Linley missing lessons for a day or two, for Mark was an excellent scholar, and would soon make up the leeway when he got back.

The thing that really mattered was that Dennis Carr was in trouble; and the Head had a warm regard for Carr. He had offered to use his influence with the governors for Dennis to stay on at Greyfriars after his father's death; but Dennis had been too proud to accept charity.

If Linley could be of any assistance to Carr by going to London, the Head reflected that it would be hardly fair to refuse his consent.

"Very well, Linley," he said at length. "You have my full permission to go to London."

"Thanks awfully, sir!"

"And I shall expect you back within three days. If it should become imperative for you to remain longer, you will send me a telegram."

"Very good, sir!"

"What will be your address, Linley?"

Mark gave the address of Dennis Carr's lodgings, and the Head made a note of it.

"Very well, Linley," he said. "You may go to London in the morning."

The Lancashire lad again expressed his thanks, and he felt considerably brighter in spirits when he re-entered No. 1 Study a few moments later.

"What luck, Marky?" asked Bob Cherry.

"The Head's given me permission to go to London."

"My hat!"

"You must have jawed to him like a Dutch uncle!" said Johnny Bull. "I didn't dream he'd let you go."

"Wish we were going, too!" said Wharton.

"Yes, rather!"

"When are you coming back, Marky?" inquired Nugent.

"As soon as I've cleared Dennis Carr."

"And supposing you don't clear him?"

"Then I shall stay with him in London until he finds another job."

"What a giddy surprise for Carr when he sees a Greyfriars fellow roll up at his lodgings!" said Bob Cherry. "He'll be awfully bucked, I should imagine. Whither bound, Marky?"

"I'm going to pack a few belongings," said Mark Linley.

"Not going to-night, surely?" ejaculated Wharton.

"No; first train in the morning."

And Mark Linley went along to his own study and packed a handbag.

Apart from the Famous Five, nobody in the Remove knew that the Lancashire lad was going to London to fight for the honour of his chum. Had Skinner known it, he might have slept a little less soundly that night.

Mark Linley was up and doing before the rising-bell clanged out next morning.

He did not breakfast in Hall at the official time, but obtained a snack from Mrs. Kebble, in the school kitchen.

Then, anxious to meet his old chum—the chum who stood in such sore need of help—Mark Linley hurried to the railway-station, arriving just in time to board the first train to London.

He kept the object of his journey steadily before him.

He was going to save Dennis Carr; or, if he could not save him, he would help him to the very best of his ability.

In Dennis Carr's hour of need his best chum—Mark Linley, of Lancashire—was not likely to fail him.

* * *

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Through Thick and Thin.

DENNIS CARR stirred restlessly in his bed, and awoke.

The sun was not streaming in at the window of his bed-room, for two reasons. First of all, his bed-room—a mere garret—possessed no window. Secondly, there was no morning sunshine—nothing but a dense yellow fog.

Dennis Carr shivered—not so much with the cold as with the knowledge that he was in a desperate plight.

Several days had elapsed since he had been "sacked" from Sir Howard Prescott's office, and during those few days Dennis had written dozens of letters, and obtained dozens of interviews, in the hope of getting another job.

But the supply of applicants for vacant posts had proved greater than the demand, and Dennis had written letters and interviewed employers in vain.

It had been the same old story every time, "Sorry, sir, but we're suited."

And sometimes a cheeky office-boy had followed up with the advice, "Mind the step!"

Dennis felt that he was playing a lone hand against the world—that nobody wanted him.

It was not a nice feeling. And it was even less pleasant to reflect that he was now at the end of his resources.

He hadn't a pennypiece left. Food and rent, and tram and tube and 'bus fares had absorbed his little store of capital.

It was a hopeless dawn indeed.

Dennis Carr rose and dressed himself, not with the vigour of one who has a definite object to achieve during the day, but slowly and listlessly, as one without hope.

What was to happen now?

Dennis had plenty of imagination, and he saw the future clearly, as through a mirror.

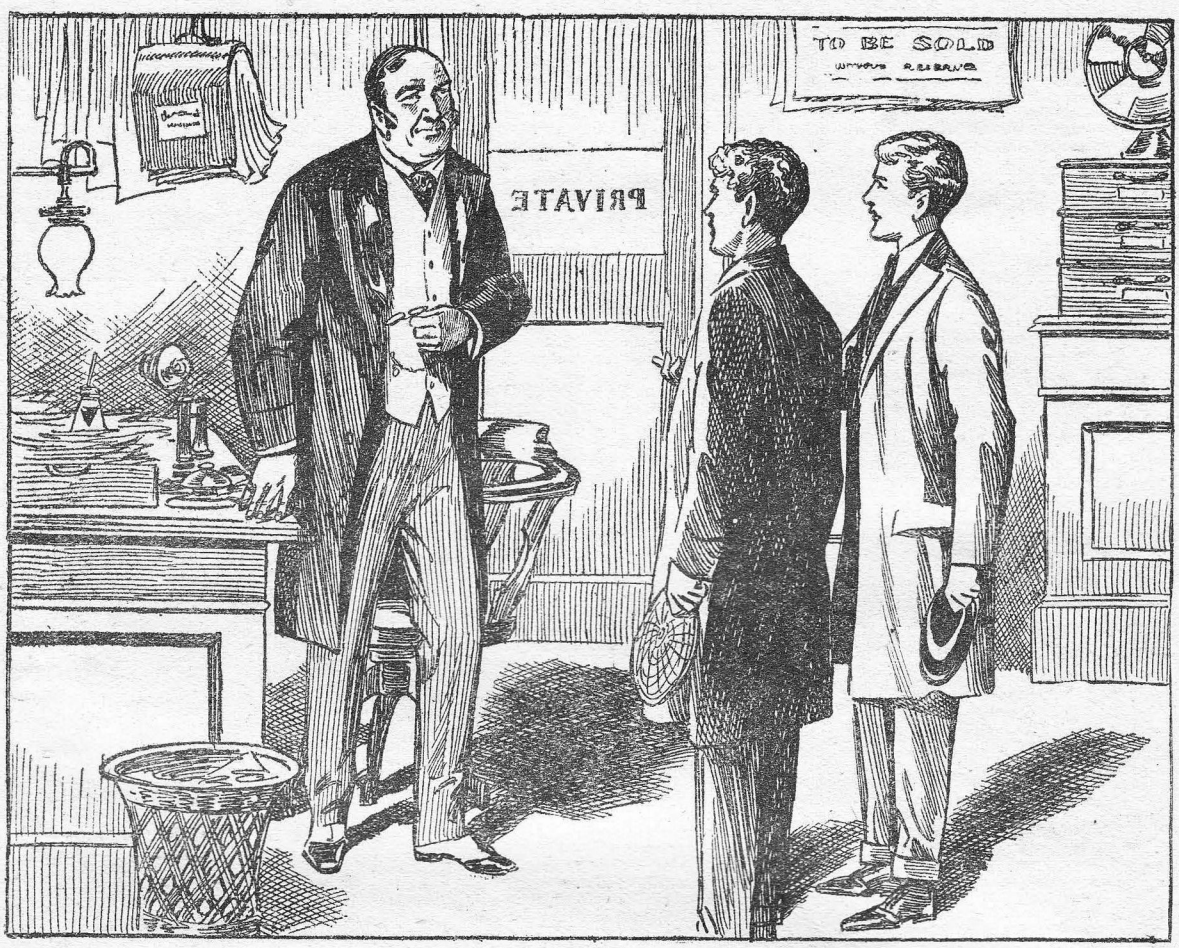
He saw himself turned out of his lodgings through failure to pay his rent. He saw himself tramping the streets, aimlessly and hopelessly, until starvation put an end to his misery.

Starvation!

And only a year before Dennis Carr had been the prosperous son of a prosperous father!

A wild idea of enlisting in the Army entered the boy's head. He was too young, he knew; but other fellows had misstated their age, so why shouldn't he?

Life in the Army would not be a bed of roses; but he would at least have something



"I want to convince you," said Mark Linley, "that Carr's honesty is beyond question—that he would never touch a penny that did not belong to him." Sir Howard frowned. "You will never be able to convince me on that score," he said. (*See page* 6.)

to eat and somewhere to sleep. Whereas if he remained in London——

Dennis Carr's reflections were cut short by a rat-tat-tat on the door of his bed-room.

"Letter for you, Mr. Carr!" said the landlady.

And she thrust the missive under the door.

"Thanks, Mrs. Grubb!" said Dennis.

He ignored the letter for a few moments. Then, picking it up, he found it was from one of the firms to whom he had written for a job.

Messrs. Fraser & Neate, wine and spirit merchants in the City, wrote to the effect that they had an opening for a capable youth, just left school—a youth with a complete knowledge of shorthand, typewriting, and book-keeping. If Mr. Carr would care to call upon them at ten o'clock that morning the senior partner would grant him an interview, and consider his application for the post.

This letter—totally unexpected—roused Dennis Carr from the depths of despondency, and filled him with a new hope.

"Ripping!" he muttered. "I shall just be able to walk to the City by ten!"

Dennis hastily finished his toilet, and hurried down the rickety stairs.

"What about your breakfuss, Mr. Carr?" came the raucous voice of the landlady from below.

"Oh, let it rip!" answered Dennis.

He stepped out into the street, into the thick and treacherous fog, and started on his tramp to the City.

Despite the fog, he never once lost his bearings. He had tramped the streets of London so often in search of employment that he was now thoroughly familiar with them.

Ten o'clock was striking as he entered the offices of Messrs. Fraser & Neate.

A couple of girls were seated at typewriters. Dennis watched them for a moment at their work; then he inquired for Mr. Fraser.

"What name, please?" said one of the girls, rising.

"Carr—Dennis Carr."

The girl disappeared into an adjoining room. She emerged a moment later, and beckoned to Dennis.

Jerking his tie straight, and flicking some London mud from his trousers, Dennis advanced into the room.

Mr. Fraser, a sharp-featured, middle-aged man, greeted him briskly.

"Good-morning! Take a seat, will you?"

Dennis did so.

"You're keen on coming here as a general clerk—eh?" said Mr. Fraser.

Dennis replied that he was exceedingly keen.

"Are you a good shorthand-writer?"

"Yes."

"And typist?"

"Yes."

"And you can juggle with intricate columns of figures?"

"Yes."

"Good! You seem to possess all the necessary qualifications. Just let me have a look at your references."

Dennis flushed.

"I—I haven't got any!" he stammered.

Mr. Fraser looked surprised.

"You don't expect me to engage you without a reference as to your character and ability, surely? You've had a previous job, I take it?"

Dennis nodded.

"Where?"

"With Sir Howard Prescott, in the West End."

"How long were you there?"

"Only a week or two."

Mr. Fraser shrugged his shoulders.

"Doesn't sound very promising," he remarked. "Why did you leave Sir Howard Prescott's?"

Dennis flushed again.

"There was a misunderstanding," he said, rather vaguely.

Mr. Fraser was looking rather grim now. He stepped to the telephone, and asked for a number which Dennis knew well. It was the number of Sir Howard Prescott's office.

After a brief conversation on the telephone, Mr. Fraser replaced the receiver on its hook with a snap. Then he turned to Dennis.

"Get out!" he said curtly. "We don't want your sort here. Sir Howard Prescott tells me that you were convicted of theft, and fired out of his office!"

"I was falsely accused——" began Dennis.

"Bah! Don't come to me with your fairy-tales! If you're not out of this office inside a minute, I'll have you thrown out!"

With a heavy heart Dennis turned to go.

He passed through the clerks' office—the girls glancing in surprise at his pale face—and emerged into the fog, which now seemed thicker than ever.

"No go!" he muttered wretchedly. "It's impossible to get a job without a reference!"

Hope was dead now in Dennis Carr's breast.

With hands plunged deeply into his pockets, he strode through the dense fog which enveloped him.

At length he found himself on the Thames Embankment—that gloomy resort of the failures and the outcasts.

Presently he halted, and peered down at the water, which could be faintly discerned through the fog.

How easy it would be to slip down that flight of stone steps, Dennis reflected, and plunge into the icy water, thus severing the knot of life and all its troubles!

Hitherto, the thought of suicide had not occurred to him. But now, as he stood there, utterly sick and spent, it seemed the only way out.

He would not be the first person, by any means, to go down that flight of steps and seek a watery grave.

What did life hold for him? Nothing!

What would death mean? Rest, at any rate.

In his normal mood Dennis Carr would not have dreamed of putting an end to his life.

But his mood at the moment was not normal. He imagined that death was inevitable—that if he did not put an end to himself now he would have to face the cruel alternative of starvation.

Far better to die now, quickly and quietly, than to linger on without food or shelter, for he was certain to be turned out of his lodgings if he failed to pay his way.

Then, once again, the thought of joining the Army occurred to him.

Yes; that was his last resource. He was young and fit, and, although his age might be questioned, there was just a chance that he could squeeze in.

Dennis was in the act of turning away when a hand fell upon his shoulder, and a voice—a cheerful, familiar voice—greeted him.

"So I've found you at last, Dennis!"

For a moment Dennis was too thunderstruck either to speak or act. Then he shot out his hand, and it met that of Mark Linley in a tight grip.

"Marky! Why, what are you doing here?"

"I thought I might be able to give you a helping hand," explained Mark. "I heard all about your being sacked, and I knew it was a trick on the part of that cad Craven; so I got the Head's permission to come up and see you—and here I am! I called at your digs, but your hatchet-faced landlady informed me that you were out. So I was just taking a stroll, with the intention of calling back later."

"Marky, old man," said Dennis, with a quiver in his voice, "this is awfully decent of you! You always were a glutton for fighting another fellow's battles! But—but I'm afraid you can't help me now!"

"Rats! Of course, I can help you! I didn't come to London on a fool's errand! Let's go and have some grub somewhere, instead of standing in this confounded fog, and we'll talk things over from A to Z."

So saying, Mark Linley took his chum's arm, and led him away.

They went up a narrow street which led to the Strand, and Mark Linley turned into a popular restaurant.

"Look here, Marky!" protested Dennis. "I'm broke!"

"Well, I hardly expected to find you rolling in shekels!" said Linley, with a laugh. "Now, I want you to understand, old man, that so long as I'm in London you come under me for rations, accommodation, and discipline! I'm going to foot the bill! Is that clear?"

"I can't sponge on you——" began Dennis.

But Mark Linley cut him short.

"If you talk any more tommy-rot of that sort, I'll punch your head!" he said. "Come on!"

And the two friends seated themselves at one of the tables.

Mark Linley ordered something substantial, for he could see that Dennis had not had a meal that day.

Dennis was about to speak, but the Lancashire lad again cut him short.

"Grub first, and jaw afterwards!" he said briefly.

Mark Linley's presence acted like a tonic to Dennis.

Half an hour before he had been utterly cast down. Now the sun was shining again—metaphorically, of course, for the January fog still hung in a thick pall over the Strand.

When the meal was over and the colour was restored to Dennis Carr's cheeks, Mark Linley spoke.

"The first thing we've got to do," he said, "is to go and see Sir Howard Prescott."

"Why?" asked Dennis, in some alarm.

"To clear you, of course! To convince the old buffer that you're not, and never will be, a thief!"

"Impossible!" said Dennis, shaking his head.

"My dear chap, the word "impossible" ought to be chucked out of the dictionary! Nothing's impossible! You're not going to leave Craven master of the situation! You're going to get your job back!"

Dennis Carr's eyes sparkled.

"How I wish I could!" he murmured. "By the way, Marky, how did you know I'd been sacked?"

"Craven came down to Greyfriars to see Skinner, and he gloated about it. Tried to pretend that you had helped yourself to the petty cash. Of course, we weren't going to swallow a yarn like that, so we showed Craven the way out—and we handled him none too gently, either!"

Dennis smiled.

How decent the Greyfriars fellows were! Their faith in him had not wavered. They were assured of his innocence.

"Undoubtedly it was Craven who got you fired out," said Mark Linley. "Though exactly how he did it is a mystery!"

"Three ten-bob notes were found in my possession," said Dennis. "He must have slipped them into my pocket."

Mark Linley nodded.

"Anyway, we'll do our best to expose him and get you back in your job," he said.

"When are you going back to Greyfriars?"

"Not until I've seen you through. Come along! We'll tackle Sir Howard now."

Mark Linley paid the bill, and the two chums walked up to the West End together.

Dennis located the office at length, and they passed in.

Craven and Terry—the two clerks with whom Dennis had previously worked—were seated at their desks.

They both had a shock when they saw Dennis, and Craven looked very uneasy on catching sight of Mark Linley, from whom he had received such a severe thrashing at Greyfriars.

Terry jumped to his feet.

"Get out!" he said sharply. "You were warned what to expect, Carr, if you came near this place again!"

"We've come to see Sir Howard Prescott," said Mark Linley fearlessly; "and you sha'n't stop us!"

Terry, who was a big, athletic fellow, took a step forward.

"Get out, before I kick you out!" he said.

Mark and Dennis stood their ground, and Terry was about to put his threat into execution when the door of the adjoining room suddenly opened, and Sir Howard himself appeared.

"What's all this?" he exclaimed. "Carr! What are you doing here? You have been dismissed with ignominy from my employ, and yet you have the audacity to turn up again at my office!"

Dennis was about to reply, when Mark Linley forestalled him.

"We would like to speak with you in private, sir," he said.

Sir Howard rather liked the look of Mark Linley. And there was an earnest appeal in the eyes of the Lancashire lad, which did not fail to impress him.

"Very well," said Sir Howard.

And he beckoned the two chums into his private office.

"You are a friend of Carr's?" he inquired, turning to Mark Linley.

"Yes, sir."

"And you've come to champion his cause—eh?"

"That's so, sir. I want to convince you that Carr's honesty is beyond question—that he would never touch a penny that didn't belong to him."

Sir Howard frowned.

"You will never be able to convince me on that score," he said.

But Mark Linley stuck to his guns.

"Carr was accused of rifling the petty cash, sir," he said. "The money was found on him, and that was regarded as complete evidence of his guilt. As a matter of fact, it was nothing of the sort."

"How, then, do you account for the money being in Carr's possession?"

"It was slipped into his pocket, sir, by a jealous cad, who wanted to ruin him."

"Preposterous!" said Sir Howard, frowning. "Do you expect me to credit such a wild supposition for a single moment? And who is the person whom you allege to be a jealous cad?"

"Craven, sir."

"What?"

Sir Howard became really angry.

"Do you wish me to believe," he said, "that Craven would be guilty of such low-down cunning and duplicity?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I refuse to hear another word from you! Craven has been six months in my employ, and he has never swerved for a single moment from the path of honour. He is a lad whom I can confidently trust. I flatly decline to believe that he could be capable of so base and criminal an offence! You are talking piffle, boy—sheer, unadulterated piffle!"

"I'm not, sir! What I say is the truth. I——"

"You are from Greyfriars, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you permission to be in London?"

"Yes, sir. Dr. Locke allowed me to come——"

"Dr. Locke is an old friend of mine. Next time I see him, I will acquaint him with your unscrupulous conduct. What is your name?"

"Mark Linley. And it's Craven's conduct that's unscrupulous, sir—not mine!" exclaimed the Lancashire lad with some heat.

"Silence, boy! If you slander Craven any further I shall take steps——"

Dennis Carr caught his chum by the arm.

"It's no use, Marky," he said, in a low tone. "You'll never convince him that I'm innocent. Nothing ever will. It was waste of time to come!"

Mark Linley shook himself free from his chum's grasp, and faced Sir Howard Prescott.

"It's unjust!" he exclaimed, in ringing tones. "Monstrously unjust! I tell you the whole thing was planned and plotted by that cad Craven! Dennis Carr is innocent. And what's more, his innocence is going to be proved up to the hilt. I——"

Sir Howard touched a bell, and the next moment the sturdy, athletic form of Terry appeared in the doorway.

"Terry, kindly eject these young rascals!"

"Certainly, sir!"

And Terry laid violent hands on Mark Linley and Dennis Carr, and hustled them from the room.

"If you had cleared out in the first place," he said, "this wouldn't have happened. Out you go!"

And, to the intense delight and relief of the weedy Craven, the two chums were forcibly ejected into the street.

It was a bitter blow for Mark Linley, though not quite so bitter for Dennis, who had not expected the mission to prove successful.

"If you show your faces in this office again," said Terry grimly, "I'll send for the police!"

And with this Parthian shot he retired, leaving Mark Linley and Dennis Carr standing on the pavement, baffled in their attempt to convince Sir Howard Prescott of Craven's guilt, and of Dennis' innocence.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Standing by Dennis.

"HE, he, he!"

Mark and Dennis were still standing outside Sir Howard's office, when that gloating cackle came to their ears.

Turning, they found themselves confronted by Craven, who had his hat and coat on prior to going to lunch.

"Your little excursion to Sir Howard's office proved rather a wash-out—what!" sneered Craven.

"You cad!"

Mark Linley's tone was fierce, and anger blazed in his eyes.

Craven cackled again.

"You thought you could get Carr's job back for him," he said, "but we've no use for low-down thieves in this establishment—see?"

Craven did not dream, as he said those words, that Mark Linley would attack him here, on the very threshold of Sir Howard Prescott's office. He considered he was quite safe, and that it didn't matter what he said, or how he said it.

He was swiftly deceived.

Exasperated beyond measure at hearing his best chum described as a low-down thief, Mark Linley clenched his fists and rushed at Craven.

The latter had the coward's instinct to turn and flee, but there was no escape for him.

Biff!

Mark Linley delivered a smashing right-hander between the eyes, and Craven reeled.

As he reeled, another blow landed home—an upper-cut this time—and to the delight of the little group of onlookers who had been attracted to the spot, Craven measured his length on the pavement.

Mark Linley paused breathlessly.

"That's for being a cad and a worm!" he panted. "If you want any more, I'm quite willing to oblige!"

Dennis Carr caught his chum by the arm and swung him back.

"Come along, Marky!" he urged. "You've done quite enough damage. You don't want to kill him, do you?"

"I feel as if I could!" said Mark fiercely.

But he suffered himself to be led away by his chum.

For some time they tramped on in silence. Mark Linley was the first to speak.

"I only wish we could get at the facts!" he said vehemently. "I'd like to get Craven by the throat, and make him confess. It's only too obvious that he stole the money himself and planted it on you."

"But he'll never admit it, and Sir Howard will never believe it," said Dennis gloomily. "You did your best for me, Marky, but I knew it would be no go. You'd better go back to Greyfriars, old man."

Mark Linley shook his head.

"I'm not going back," he said, "until you've either got your old job back or obtained a new one."

Dennis laughed rather grimly.

"If you had been in London as long as I have," he said, "you'd realise that it's impossible to get work."

"There you go again, with your confounded 'impossible'!" said Mark. "I admit that it's been impossible to convince Sir Howard of your innocence; but it's not going to be impossible for you to get another job."

"I've tried and tried and tried, and then some——" said Dennis.

"Quite so. But we'll try together, see? Two heads are always better than one, and I've no doubt we shall work the oracle between us."

Dennis Carr did not share his chum's optimism; but he said he was game to have another try.

"I did think of joining up," he confided to Mark.

"Joining up! In what?"

"The Army!"

Mark laughed outright.

"You silly duffer! Things aren't so desperate as that yet!"

"Life in the Army is better than it used to be," said Dennis. "The pay's much higher, and the conditions of service are more rosy."

"Yes; but do you think they'll look twice at a kid of fifteen, you chump? Not likely!"

"I should pass for eighteen——"

"Not unless the recruiting sergeant happened to be totally blind!"

"If the sergeant happened to be a decent sort, he'd wangle me through," said Dennis.

"Not another word about the Army," said Mark Linley. "The life may be quite all right, but you can be doing something a jolly sight more useful than soldiering in peacetime. If the Huns were running riot, I should raise no objection. But the Hun's a very subdued animal just at present. What you've got to do is to get a job—and it needn't necessarily be a clerk's job, either."

"What then?"

"Oh, any old thing, just for the time being!" said Mark Linley vaguely.

Dennis laughed.

"You forget the most important thing of all," he said.

"Namely?"

"I haven't got a reference."

Mark Linley's face fell, but only for a moment.

"We can soon overcome that little difficulty," he said. "I can give you a reference."

"You!"

"Certainly! Let's come along to your digs, and I'll soon fix it up!"

A twopenny 'bus-ride enabled the couple to reach Dennis Carr's lodgings in a few moments.

When they had clambered up the rickety stairs into the garret, Mark Linley produced a clean sheet of notepaper and a fountain-pen. Then he wrote as follows:

"This is to certify that I have known Dennis Carr for the past eight months, and have formed the highest opinion of his honesty, integrity, and capabilities.

"I feel sure that the employer who is fortunate enough to secure Carr's services will be more than satisfied.

"(Signed) MARK LINLEY."

Dennis Carr looked over his chum's shoulder, and when the document was completed he laughed aloud.

"What good will that do?" he exclaimed.

"All the good in the world!" answered Mark, smiling. "The notepaper, as you will see, is headed 'Greyfriars School, Friardale, Kent,' and an employer will think the signature is either that of the Head or one of the masters. It's only natural that he should jump to such a conclusion. There's just a shade of deceit about the business, I admit; but, dash it all, when a fellow's hard up against it, like you are, it's quite justified. Besides, what I have written is the truth. I've known you for the past eight months, and I've formed the highest opinion of your honesty, integrity, and——"

"Stow it!" said Dennis. "This is awfully good of you, Marky, but I reckon this reference will be questioned. If I'm asked who Mark Linley is, I shall have to admit that he's a fellow in the Remove Form at Greyfriars."

"You won't be asked," said Mark Linley. "In fact, it's possible to get a job without having to show a reference of any sort."

"Everything seems possible to you, Marky. But I must say that I shall be astonished if miracles come back again."

"Come on!" said Mark, leading the way downstairs. "If something doesn't turn up in the course of the afternoon I'm no prophet!"

"Something's turned up already," said Dennis, as the landlady met them on the stairs with a telegram.

"For Linley," said Mrs. Grubb.

The landlady's tone was quite respectful, and Dennis Carr marvelled that this should be so. He did not know that Mark Linley had paid Mrs. Grubb a week's rent in advance for both of them.

Mark took the telegram in some surprise. He opened the buff-coloured envelope, drew out the flimsy paper, and read as follows:

"Any luck, Marky?—THE FAMOUS FIVE."

"Nothing wrong, I hope?" said Dennis Carr.

"No," answered Mark. "The fellows at Greyfriars are anxious to know if things have panned out all right."

"You'll have to answer in the negative."

"Afraid so."

Mark Linley's return wire ran thus:

"Wharton, Greyfriars School, Friardale.—No luck yet; but nil desperandum.—LINLEY."

"'Nil Desperandum'—Never Despair!" murmured Mark Linley to himself.

The wire was duly despatched, and the two chums started on what Dennis Carr regarded as a hopeless quest.

They halted at length outside a large grocery and provision store.

"There ought to be something doing here," said Mark Linley. "Come on!"

Mark Linley led the way into the establishment.

A bald-headed man, obviously the proprietor, came towards them.

"What can I do for you, young gentlemen?"

"My friend here," said Mark Linley, "wants a job."

"What sort of a job?"

"Anything!" cut in Dennis quickly.

The proprietor seemed favourably impressed by Dennis Carr's apearance.

"Well, I certainly want another assistant behind the counter," he said. "To be quite frank, however, I'm not prepared to pay a very high wage. People come in here every day demanding ten-pound-a-week jobs. I don't know whether they mistake my place for a munition factory!"

"What's your figure?" asked Dennis.

"Two pounds a week to a really smart lad."

"Jump at it!" muttered Mark Linley.

Dennis needed no second bidding.

"I'll take it, sir," he said, "like a shot!"

"Very well. What's your name?"

"Carr."

"You're honest and trustworthy, I suppose?"

"Quite!"

"Then you can start to-morrow morning, on a week's probation."

"Oh, good!"

Dennis Carr was hugely elated as he quitted the premises with his chum.

Mark Linley's optimism had been amply justified, after all.

"I can see the mistake I made before," said Dennis. "I was chasing round after a clerk's job all the time, quite forgetting that there was a chance of work in one of the big stores."

"A grocer's assistant isn't what you might call a high-class calling," said Mark Linley. "Still, it's a stepping-stone to higher things, and you needn't starve, anyway."

"Marky," said Dennis, "you're a giddy marvel! I should never have got this job on my own."

"It only proves that you never know what you can do till you try," said Mark. "Do you know anything about the grocery business?"

"Well, I know enough to be able to discriminate between starch and sugar!" said Dennis laughing. "Afraid I shall be rather slow at stringing up parcels, though."

"We'll have a rehearsal to-night, at your digs," said Mark Linley. "You can be the assistant behind the counter, and I'll be the customer rapping out orders. 'Two of lump, two of granulated, half of butter,' and all that sort of thing, you know. You'll soon pick it up."

"I'm not so sure——"

"Rats! You'll be serving out stuff hand-over-fist to-morrow, as if you've been at the game all your life! There are some fellows who could never be successful as grocers' assistants—Billy Bunter, for instance. He'd be sampling the biscuits and currants half the time! But you—why, you'll soon get into the way of it! As I say, we'll have a full-dress rehearsal to-night in your attic, and by to-morrow you'll be an expert. Shouldn't be surprised if you get a rise in the first week!"

Dennis laughed.

"I say, wasn't it lucky that I wasn't asked to produce a reference?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, rather! But a reference isn't always necessary for a job like that. They can soon see, during your week's probation, whether you're a wroung 'un or not. The proprietor will pretend not to take any notice of you, but he'll have you under his eye all the time, just like old Quelchy in the Form-room!"

The two chums were chatting away merrily now. They had almost forgotten that painful and unpleasant interview with Sir Howard Prescott and the leering face of Paul Craven.

"Time we had tea, I think," said Mark Linley at length. "This way!"

"Look here!" protested Dennis. "I flatly refuse to sponge on you any longer. You stood treat at lunch-time, and——"

For answer, Mark Linley literally swept his chum into a tea-room near at hand, steadily ignoring all his protests.

Tea was quite a happy meal; but Mark Linley threw rather a damper on the proceedings when he announced his intention of returning to Greyfriars on the morrow.

"I should like to stay up here a week," he said. "But I promised the Head I'd return as soon as you were fixed up with a job, and I must keep my word."

"Of course!" said Dennis.

That evening Dennis and Mark Linley carried out the proposed rehearsal; and Dennis soon acquired the knack of tying up a number of parcels quickly and dexterously.

"Ripping!" said Mark at length. "You'll do!"

The Lancashire lad stayed the night with Dennis, returning to Greyfriars early next morning. He went remarkably early, as a matter of fact, before Dennis was up, explaining that he hoped to reach Greyfriars in time for morning lessons.

Shortly after his chum had gone Dennis discovered, under the pillow, an envelope addressed to himself. Opening it, he found three pound-notes within, with the following message:

"You simply must accept this, old chap, to tide you over until you draw your first week's money. You can pay me back when you've risen to be the owner and proprietor of Carr's World-renowned Grocery Stores!—MARK."

"What a decent fellow he is!" said Dennis. And the tears welled into his eyes.

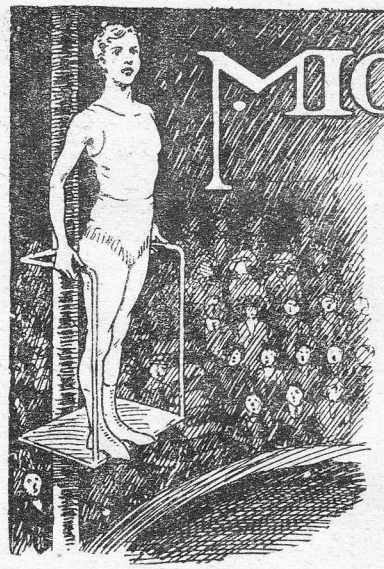
Without Mark Linley's valuable assistance he trembled to think what might have happened.

It was with a light heart that Dennis Carr set out to work that morning.

But he was not destined to remain long in his new job. Fate was preparing a big surprise for him—and the nature of that surprise must be revealed in another narrative.

THE END.

(Another grand long story of Harry Wharton & Co. next week, entitled "Brought to Book!" Order your copy of the PENNY POPULAR *in advance.)*



MICK O' THE MOVIES

OUR GRAND NEW SERIAL DEALING WITH THE ADVENTURES OF A YOUNG ACROBAT WHO ROSE TO FAME AND FORTUNE AS A CINEMA STAR.

SYNOPSIS.

Micky Denver, an orphan lad, is an acrobat in Beauman's Gigantic Circus. One night, in Liverpool, he is found by Boris Beauman, the proprietor, among the caravans, whither he has followed his little wire-haired mongrel dog Chappie, who has been chasing a rat. Beauman is in one of his worst bullying moods, and after a quarrel Micky leaves him, and repairs to the circus ring.

Just as the lad is about to do his most dangerous trapeze feat, the proprietor rushes in and accuses him of stealing a gold watch. Micky misses his balance, and might have been killed but for alighting on Beauman. The infuriated bully has Micky arrested, but by a trick the young acrobat escapes.

During the night he reaches the river-front, and is mistaken by a night-watchman for a lad who should have joined the tramp-steamer Plunger, which is lying in mid-stream. Micky gets out to the vessel and stows away in a lifeboat. He is discovered, and finds a friend in the first mate, Mr. Hopcraft, but Puncher Hogarth, the giant bo'sun of the tramp, makes himself the lad's enemy. Hogarth ill-treats the young stowaway, and Micky, in self-defence, crashes a belaying-pin on the bo'sun's head, and sends him senseless to the deck.

(Now read on.)

By STANTON HOPE.

Micky's Desperate Decision!

IT was fortunate for Puncher Hogarth, the giant bo'sun of the Plunger, that he had his peaked cap on when Micky dealt him the blow that stretched him senseless on the deck, otherwise even his thick skull would not have been proof against the weight and force of the brass belaying-pin. As it was, it took a deal of effort to revive him.

One seaman, who boasted a considerable knowledge of first aid, filled a bucket with sea-water from a pump, and, with great heartiness, swamped the recumbent bo'sun from head to foot with the restorative. Not until he had applied half a dozen bucketfuls of the remedy did Puncher Hogarth show any signs of returning interest in life.

Meanwhile, Micky stood by with folded arms, defiantly awaiting the issue. No one interfered with him, for there was not a man among the seaman there who was not heartily glad to see the big bully get a portion of the desert due to him.

Finally, the bo'sun opened his eyes, and looked round in dazed fashion.

"Wh-where am I?" he muttered. "What struck the ship—a cyclone?"

"Ay, bo'sun," said an old salt: "and it up and biffed you on your figurehead!"

"I—I thought it was them there spooks what did it," murmured the Puncher, whose thoughts were wandering somewhat—"that there stowaway an' his dawg what went to Davy Jones an' came back to 'aunt me! Ooo—groo! What a 'eadache I've got!"

"Now, did it feel as if a spook 'ad 'it you, bo'sun?" asked the old seaman. "Come, pull yourself together, and see if you can't manage a swig from the big bottle o' rum!"

"Rum!" The word seemed to revive Hogarth quicker than the whole half-dozen buckets of sea-water had done. "Rum!" he repeated. "Where?"

"In the skipper's cabin, I expects," murmured the old seaman, with a wink to his mates.

Hogarth staggered to his feet, and gazed round at the circle of faces until his eyes rested on Micky's.

"Howlin' gales!" he roared. "I remember now! It was you, you swab o' a stowaway! I'll—I'll——" He took a step forward, as though to smash his late assailant then and there; but, thinking better of it, he finished: "I'll have you put in irons for this! It was mutiny! Mutiny on the 'igh seas!"

"It was jolly bad luck for you, mate, anyway!" muttered the old seaman, under his breath.

With unsteady gait Puncher Hogarth pushed his way through the knot of seamen and mounted the companion to the upper-deck. In spite of his huge bulk he had no desire for the present to try conclusions with Micky again; but his intention was to report the affair to the captain, and get him to punish the lad. His own opportunity would come later.

Hardly, however, had he reached the upper-deck than the first mate intercepted him.

"Where are you off to, Hogarth?" asked Mr. Hopcraft, narrowly surveying the bo'sun's face.

"I'm goin' to see the cap'n!" said the Puncher surlily.

He made as though to proceed on his way, but the mate raised a detaining hand.

"Is it about young Denver you want to see the captain?" asked Mr. Hopcraft. "If so, I've something to say to you before you go farther."

"It is about 'im!" snarled Hogarth. "'E ought to be put in irons, 'e did! 'E struck me without any provocation, and——"

"Struck you! Ha, ha! That's good!" laughed the mate. "What'll the captain say, I should like to know, if you go whining to him, admitting you can't deal with a mere boy without his help?" Then his voice took a more serious tone. "But, look here, Hogarth! After I had given the lad into your charge, I came on deck for a constitutional, and I happened to witness the whole affair. It was your own fault, and it serves you right! And let me tell you this, if ever I catch you attempting to vent your spite on the lad, I'll lay you out myself! Now, get down below and carry on with your work!"

The memory of the broken jaw he had sustained in his one and only encounter with the dapper mate was quite sufficient for the cowardly bully. Muttering oaths under his breath, he turned on his heel and beat an undignified retreat.

Meanwhile, Micky was calmly waiting on the well-deck, not, however, without a certain amount of trepidation, for he full expected to be put into irons for his hardihood in hammering the bo'sun. Ships' boys, he knew, got more kicks than ha'pence; but they were supposed to grin and bear it.

He stooped to pat Chappie, who was obviously a bit unnerved and dizzy with the curious antics of the deck, which persisted in corkscrewing beneath his feet, when he heard a pleasant voice addressing him.

"I've just heard about your exploit, old son, and I congratulate you! Sorry I wasn't there to see it."

Micky looked up, to behold the seaman, Dicky Rickey, who had tried to shield him earlier in the day. Rickey was wearing a long oilskin, and was limping as a result of his recent treatment at the hands of the bo'sun, while a livid scar showed on his face where the rope's-end had slashed him.

The lad held out his hand.

"It was jolly good of you to stick up for me like you did!" he said. "I wonder the beast didn't kill you!"

"I was bruised badly from my fall," admitted Rickey; "but there are no bones broken, thank goodness! But we must look out for squalls in the future!"

"Yes; the bo'sun won't like me any the better for this affair," said Micky. "A little while ago he thought I was a spook, but I think I hammered that illusion out of his thick head! And I'm jolly glad!" Then, snapping his fingers to Chappie, he cried: "You are, too, aren't you, Chappie?"

Chappie gave a little yap of assent.

"Up, Chappie!"

Rather pathetically Chappie got on to his hind legs.

"Walk, Chappie!"

The little mongrel ran a few steps, and disappeared round a raised hatchway on one foot, in imitation of his famous namesake.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

A great gale of laughter shook the crew.

"Well, splice me spinnaker, if I ever saw the like o' that!"

"Bust me braces, if it ain't the Chaplin walk he's doin'!"

The little dog poked his head round the hatchway.

"It's all right for you to laugh," his eyes seemed to convey, "but if you were feeling like I am, you wouldn't want to do any Chaplin walks!"

And, not feeling in the mood for any sugar or any other reward, Chappie cawled off forward to find a bed for himself.

But the roll of the ship made no difference to Micky's health and spirits.

"Houp-la!"

With joyous imitation of old Clancy, the circus clown, Micky leaped from the deck and caught the foremost ratlines. Then, to the astonishment and apprehension of all hands, he gave a lightning display of acrobatic tricks. In the midst of them Puncher Hogarth, the bo'sun, came down the companion from the upper-deck.

"Look out, old son!" shouted Dicky Rickey. "Here's the Puncher! And it looks as though the skipper had given him a flea in his ear."

"Come down from there, you young swab!" roared Hogarth. "I've got some work for you!"

Micky, who was hanging head downwards from the ratlines by his toes, let go his hold, made a perfect somersault, and landed on his feet in front of the enraged bo'sun.

"I'm ready, sir," he said meekly.

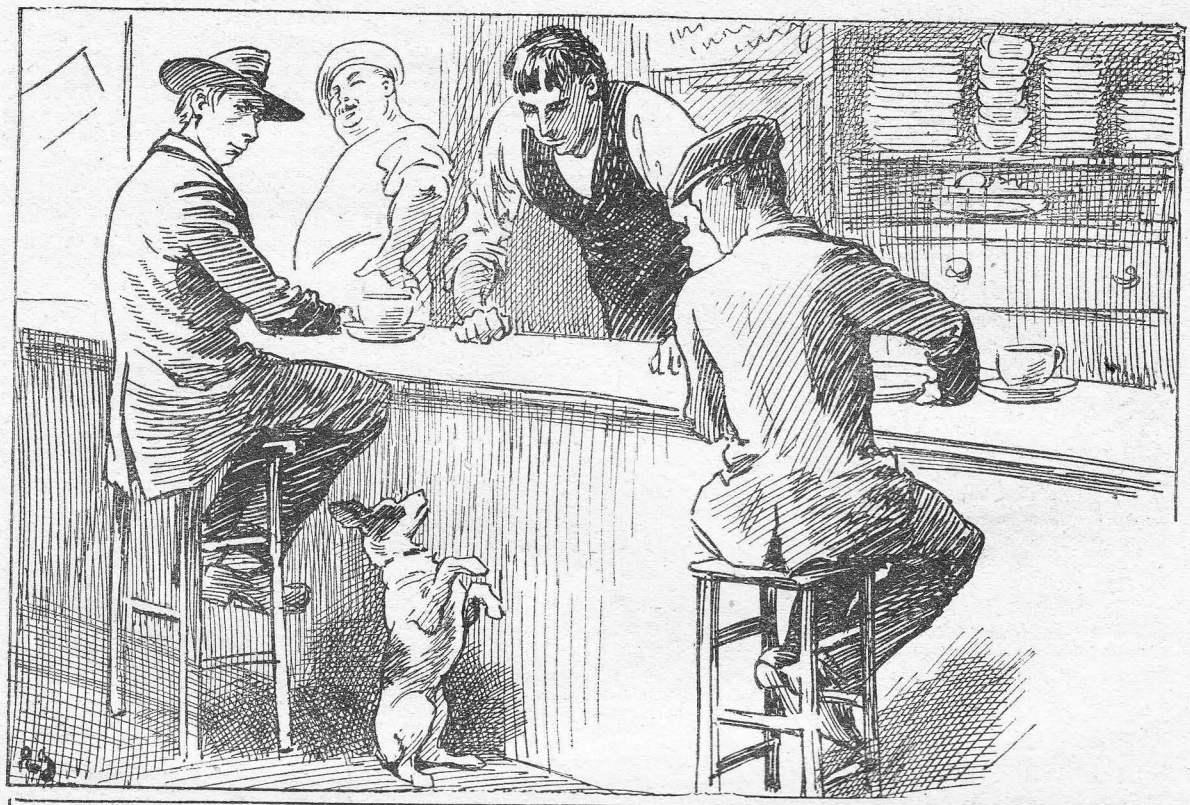
Hogarth was too flabbergasted to speak. He beckoned Micky to follow him, and found the lad the coldest, wettest, and hardest task he could think of on the spur of the moment.

But, although the bo'sun remained his deadly enemy, Micky became a general favourite on board the tramp steamer.

Chappie, too, wormed his way into the affections of all, with the exception of Hogarth, and became the owner of a fine large kennel made for him by the carpenter at the instigation of the kindly first mate.

Day followed day as the Plunger nosed her way through the mighty rollers of the wide Atlantic. She slid down vast valleys of olive-hued water, and shipped the sea-green over her fo'c's'le-head; then rose to the crest of the next mountainous billow and shook herself like a big Newfoundland dog after a bath.

From a spectacular point of view the ocean voyage was wonderful to Micky; but the weather helped the bo'sun in his endeavours to make things as unpleasant for the lad as possible. From early morning till late at night—for Micky had not been put into a watch, like the rest of the crew—he was kept hard at it. Sometimes, with a bucket of "soogee" so strong that it burst his finger-



Chappie sat up and begged, with one eye cocked appealingly to his master, as a luscious pile of hot cakes and a cup of steaming coffee were placed on the counter. (*See page* 10.)

nails, he was put to work on the exposed deck swabbing paint-work; and the least unpleasant task the bo'sun gave him was peeling piles of potatoes for the cook on the deck outside the galley.

On the day before the ship was expected to arrive in New York Harbour he sought out Dicky Rickey.

"Rickey," he said, "you, the first mate, and most of the others, have been jolly decent to me, and I am grateful; but I can't stick this life. I'm going to clear out when we reach America."

Rickey looked serious.

"I don't blame you for wanting to, Micky," he said, "but I don't think you'll manage it. The skipper will have a watch set on you. Besides, they don't allow folk to land in the States unless they've got proper credentials."

"Nevertheless, I'm going to have a shot at getting ashore and staying there. I've always wanted to go out to the West."

"What for?" asked Rickey, knocking the ashes from his pipe. "D'you want to tackle ranching?"

"No. Cinema acting!"

"Eh?"

Rickey looked up in astonishment at the lad's earnest face.

"I mean it. I want to be a screen actor—a cinema star—one who does thrilling stunts, rescues chaps from whirlpools, leaps from one aeroplane to another in mid-air, dashes up in a racing motor-car and saves the heroine from the villain through the window of an express train. I believe I'm cut out for the work, and am bound to succeed."

Rickey's pipe dropped to the deck, and he stared at Micky in blank amazement. Almost any other man would have laughed at the lad and wounded his feelings, but Rickey felt something dynamic in the composition of the young stowaway-acrobat which forbade levity.

"Well, Micky," he said, "they say that half the battle of success in life is belief in oneself, and I don't doubt but what you'd get on well enough if you could get a start."

"Anyway," said Micky, "I'm going to clear out of the Plunger when we reach New York, and then I'm going to cross the continent to Los Angeles, the great cinema city, and try and get a job."

"You'll want a whole heap of money to go there by train from New York," said Rickey. "Why not stay by the ship? She's going to Panama and round to 'Frisco—that's certain. Afterwards, of course, she'll have a roving commission, and probably pick up some cargo for Japan or China. But why not clear out in 'Frisco, which is only a bit to the north'ard of Los Angeles."

"Because I'm in a hurry," said Micky. "I'll get across the States somehow. It's true I haven't a penny in the world at present, but I expect Chappie and I can earn some money by giving shows at street-corners."

"Maybe," said Rickey doubtfully. "Anyway, I wish you luck, and you can rely on me to keep the matter dark."

It was getting on to dusk on the following day when the Plunger crept past the statue of Liberty and dropped her hook in the North River.

Micky gazed with fascinated eyes at the towering forms of the great skyscrapers of New York, and all that he had heard and read about the greatest city in the New World came back to him with redoubled force, and made him yearn to set foot ashore.

Just before taking up his anchor station on the fo'c's'le head, Puncher Hogarth, the bos'un, sought out the lad.

"Now, see 'ere, me fine young shaver," said he, "you're to understand you've got to stay on board all the time this 'ere packet's in port. The cap'n told me that if you're caught tryin' to get ashore you're to be clapped in irons immejately. So you know what to expect if you get up to any tricks."

Micky was not intimidated by this warning of Hogarth's, but he debated long and seriously in his mind as to his best course of action. On the following morning the Plunger was going to her berth at Hoboken, but Micky felt convinced that the greatest precautions would be taken on board to prevent him from getting ashore while the vessel was alongside a wharf, and he would have to pass Customs and other officials even if he did manage to get clear of the ship.

At last he decided on a bold line of action, which afforded at least one or two advantages lacking in any course he might wish to pursue after a delay. He decided to make a bid for freedom that very night. He would have a long and risky swim to reach the shore, but with the Plunger lying out in the river, no attention would be paid to him, for no one would dream of his making an attempt to desert under such circumstances.

Late in the evening, when his work was over, Micky pencilled a hurried note to Mr. Hopcraft, thanking the mate for all the kindness shown him, and then sought out his friend, Dicky Rickey.

"Come up on the fo'c's'le head, Rickey," he said. "I want to request a favour of you."

When the two were out of hearing of the rest of the crew, Micky drew the letter from his pocket.

"Rickey," he said, "I want you to leave this note somewhere where Mr. Hopcraft will find it after I have gone. Yes, I'm going to clear out to-night and swim ashore. It's a big chance, I know, but I'm willing to take it, and I think I shall succeed." Micky gazed across the dark waters of the North River to where the myriad lights of the great metropolis blazed on the Manhattan side.

"I'll do all I can for you, Micky," said the seaman, taking the letter, "and if you want me to lend you a hand, you have only to say the word."

"It's jolly good of you!" said Micky, greatly touched. "And, believe me, I am grateful. But I don't want to involve you in this affair. I'm going to play a lone hand, and I think I shall win through."

The seaman remained silent for a few moments, and then he laid a hand on the lad's arm.

"See here, Micky!" he said. "I think I can be of some assistance to you. Wait here a minute!"

Before Micky had time to question him, Dicky Rickey turned on his heel and left the fo'c's'le head. In less than five minutes the seaman returned with a small brown-paper parcel, tied securely with twine, in his hand.

"I want you to accept this as a little souvenir from a pal," he said, handing Micky the package. "I've had it by me since I was last in New York three months ago. I kept it, knowing I should come back, and thinking it would be useful to me. However, I can see it will help you more than it will me now, for it is the finest introduction I know to even the best American people. Stick it in your pocket, and you are not to open it until you get ashore."

"Thanks, Rickey!" said the lad, stowing away the little parcel in his coat. "I hope we shall meet again, and perhaps we shall, as the Plunger is going round to California, and

I, too, am going to follow the sun to the Golden West!"

A Bowery Acquaintance.

THE fo'c's'le of the tramp steamer Plunger was in deepest darkness when Micky, dressed in singlet and shorts, cautiously slid from his hammock and quickly made his clothes into a compact bundle. The air blowing through the open ports, made him shiver slightly, but he felt an inward glow at the thought of the adventure before him. The time was two a.m., as he learnt by the four bells striking as he crept towards the iron companion.

His idea was to get up on deck, take his little four-footed friend Chappie from the kennel in the bow, and slide down a rope from the forward well-deck into the water. The first part of his programme he accomplished successfully, but the seaman of the watch standing out on the well-deck frustrated his next contemplated move. Holding Chappie under his arm, he slid down to the fo'c's'le again and set the little mongrel on the deck, tapping the terrier lightly on the nose as a signal for perfect silence.

Quivering with excitement, Micky whipped the blankets from his hammock, knotted them together, and tied the corner of one to a brass port-screw in the starboard bulkhead. He knew he could slip out of the port, but how to get Chappie out was the difficulty. After a few moments' thought he solved this problem by opening his bundle, and making it up again with Chappie among the clothes. The little dog seemed quite satisfied with this arrangement, and, with his head poking out of the top of the bundle, remained perfectly quiet.

Micky slung the unattached end of the blankets through the open port and worked himself out feet first, holding his precious bundle in his left hand. It was tricky work, but his acrobatic skill stood him in good stead. Grasping the rope of blankets firmly between his knees, and holding on with his right hand, he lowered himself to the water.

Knowing little of sailoring, Micky had taken no account of the tide, but, fortunately for him, as soon as his body entered the water he was borne from the dark, towering side of the Plunger towards the Manhattan shore. By the greatest care and skill he kept his bundle aloft in his left hand, for he was anxious not to get his clothes wet. As soon as the lad had got his bearings he turned on his back and swam easily towards the shore with Chappie resting happily in the bundle supported on Micky's chest.

Not a sound proceeded from the steamer he had deserted, and he felt safe from that quarter, but he had yet to make his landing and meet other tremendous difficulties. An emigrant landing in the United States must have at least ten pounds in his pocket, but Micky knew not that. What he did know, however, was that any penniless lad landing in a strange country would have to tread a path of great, if not insuperable, obstacles.

Helped by the tide, the young athlete soon found himself under the high stone walls of the docks which bordered the water-front. But where to land was the next question for which he had to find a solution. He was getting numbed with cold, but, after swimming almost completely round one basin, he discovered a flight of stone steps, with a couple of boats moored alongside. No one was in sight, and he clambered out, and, hauling Chappie from the bundle, proceeded to make a change into dry clothes.

When fully dressed, he mounted the steps and walked towards the dockyard gates. Just in time he discerned the burly form of one of the dockyard police in the shadow of an archway, and he turned back to find a shelter until the morning, when the gates would be open, and he would have a better chance to get away. As no ship was working cargo there that night, all the sheds were locked; but Micky was lucky in finding a heap of sacks containing raw sugar from the West Indies, and among these he found a snug resting-place for Chappie and himself.

An arduous day's work on board the Plunger and the exertion of his swim had tired out the lad, so it was not until after daybreak that he awakened from a refreshing sleep. Probably he would not have awakened then but for Chappie, who was disturbed by somebody or something in a near-by shed, and started growling and fidgeting by his side.

Micky had no means of telling the time of day, but he determined that he might as well take the bull by the horns at once, and try and get out of the dockyard. Accordingly, he arose, and, followed by Chappie, made for the gates. As he was about to pass through a burly policeman, with a strong Irish brogue, stepped out of a small lodge built into the archway, and addressed him.

"Be jabers!" he exclaimed. "Where did you spring from? Oi didn't see you come in!"

"Probably not," retorted Micky, "if you were asleep!"

A man in the uniform of the United States Customs Service looked out of the doorway of the lodge.

"Ha, ha! That's one on you, Murphy!" he laughed.

The big Irish policeman was a bit taken aback at Micky's quick retort, but he was not lacking in ready wit himself.

"Faith, and is thot so, me young spalpeen?" he said. "But Oi'm afther guessing you niver came in this gate at all, at all! 'Twas from one o' thim 'ships you landed, or Oi'm a Scotchman!"

"Say, you're a rotten guesser, Murphy!" said the Customs man. "There's no ship in this basin, and there won't be one either until noon to-day. Perhaps you'll guess next that this guy and his wolfhound, or whatever it is, swam ashore, though he and the dog's as dry as a bone. Aw! Quit it, you big bonehead!"

A friendly rivalry existed between the Customs official and the policeman, and the latter was loth to admit himself at fault; although, having spent a portion of his early-morning spell of duty arguing on the Irish question with others inside the lodge, he strongly suspected himself that the lad had slipped into the dockyard gates without his knowledge.

"Oi bet the bhoy came into the docks for no good purpose, anyway," he said. "As loike as not 'tis afther smuggling something he is."

"That's soon decided!" said the Customs man. Then to Micky he said: "Hold up your hands, kid!"

Micky obeyed, and the official casually ran his hands over him.

"As I thought!" he said jocularly. "He's not padded with cigars, pearl necklaces, nor scent-bottles. But don't you come sneaking into this dockyard again, kid, or my friend Murphy will be having you put away in the Tombs or Sing-Sing! Now, beat it—quick!"

"A'right, sir!" said Micky brightly. "Good-morning!" Then, turning to the policeman, he said politely: "And good-day to you, sir! I'd have wakened you up if I had known you were so anxious about anyone coming into your dock!"

"You cheeky young spalpeen!" roared Murphy. "Oi'll help you out wid the toe of my boot, begorra!"

But Micky and Chappie were much too quick for him, and, with high hearts, they bounded out into the street. They were free in New York City—free to roam as they willed throughout the great American continent.

With joyous steps, Micky made his way along West Street, and then wandered, with no very definite purpose in his mind, towards the heart of the city. Chappie darted hither and thither, delighted at getting his paws on to good solid ground again, for he had not proved as good a sailor as his master during the journey on the tramp steamer.

A couple of hours later Micky wandered into the business quarter, and stood bewildered by the rush of business men and women, who poured from trolly-cars and elevated railways on their way to their day's work. He was getting very hungry, and was beginning to wonder seriously how he was going to raise the wherewithal to purchase a meal. The only thing he could think of was by giving a street performance of acrobatic tricks, but for that he would have to select a suitable locality, and wait until the policeman had passed along his beat.

Meandering along, with Chappie close at his heels, Micky passed down Broadway, and turned into East Fourth Street, stopping every now and then to gaze longingly into cafeterias, "quick-lunch" parlours, and various other restaurants. Although he knew it not, he had come now to the famous Bowery district of New York, a low-class cosmopolitan quarter of the city, and the haunt of gamblers, crooks, and yeggmen.

Guided by no particular reason, he turned into West Orchard Street, which ran at right angles to East Fourth, and, little though he suspected it, that apparently unpremeditated step was to have a potent effect on the next few years of his life.

A little way down the street Micky stopped, for a most delicious odour of grilling pancakes wafted to his nostrils from a small eating-house called the Carolina. In bold letters under the name were the words, "The Bowery Buckwheat Emporium," and a printed placard announced, "A stack of bucks and maple-syrup, 35 cents."

Micky gazed with fascinated eyes in at the window of this attractive place, where numbers of the delicious Southern buckwheat pancakes were frying over sizzling, blue gas-jets. A slim youth, wearing a slouch hat, sauntered into the restaurant, and Micky, with the pangs of hunger gnawing at his vitals, had the chagrin a few moments later of seeing a white-garbed cook toss out half a dozen of the buckwheat cakes, browned to a turn, and pour hot, melted butter and maple-syrup over them ready to be served.

"It's no good hanging about here, Chappie," said Micky to his little dog, who was standing up, sniffing at the plate-glass window. "Let's go and try to earn some money, and then we'll come back and have the feast of our lives. I'd sell my cap and boots now to have a dollar in my pocket! Empty pockets and an empty feeling make a bad combination, Chappie!"

Micky thrust his hands into his coat, and was about to turn away, when he felt the little parcel that the seaman, Rickey, had given him on board the Plunger. The lad drew the packet from his pocket, and weighed it in his hand.

"Good old Dicky Rickey!" he murmured. "I wonder what it contains?" Then, patting Chappie on the head, he said: "We'll open it later, old fellow, when we have earned some money and have had a square meal."

Chappie leaped up and pawed at his young master, yapping lustily.

"You're impatient to see, aren't you, old curiosity?" laughed Micky. "So am I, so here goes!"

The lad untied the string of the parcel, and as the brown paper opened out there dropped to the ground a roll of American notes.

Micky gazed at the money with starting eyes; then he gingerly picked up the wad and counted it.

"Twenty dollars!" he gasped. "Enough for fifty meals!"

He pushed the money into his breast-pocket, caught the little mongrel in his arms, and danced towards the entrance of the Carolina. Suddenly he stopped short, and put Chappie down.

"I think I ought to send it all back, Chappie," he said seriously. "It's not fair to accept such a gift from one who cannot afford it."

For a few moments the lad was torn between his conscience and his crying physical needs till a satisfactory compromise suggested itself to him.

"I know what I'll do," he thought. "I'll accept it as a loan, and I herewith make a vow that I will pay good old Rickey back a hundredfold for his kindness!"

With light heart, Micky stepped into the restaurant, and Chappie bounded in after him, his stumpy tail wagging vigorously in joyous anticipation.

"A big plate of cakes, please," ordered Micky, taking his seat on a high stool before the counter, "and plenty of butter and syrup!"

The waiter stared hard at Micky, as though viewing a new kind of animal, his jaws slowly masticating a quid of pepsin chewing-gum. Then he snapped out a monosyllabic question:

"Coffee?"

"And a large steaming cup of coffee," assented Micky.

The waiter turned his face towards the window.

"Stack o' bucks an' coffee!" he roared.

Only two or three customers were in the restaurant, and on the stool next to him Micky recognised the young American he had seen enter while he and Chappie were standing outside. But the appearance of the luscious pile of hot cakes and the steaming coffee took Micky's thoughts temporarily away from all else. Immediately Chappie sat up and begged, with one eye cocked appealingly to his master. Having dropped the little terrier a nice cake to be going on with, Micky set to work with a will, and soon polished off his stack.

While the waiter went to replenish his

plate Micky had a subconscious feeling that he was being watched narrowly, and, looking round, he saw the eyes of the American youth were not particularly prepossessing, having rather a sallow face, a scar on his right cheek, and hair of the tint usually described as "ginger."

Micky gave Chappie a goodly portion of his second plate of cakes, and, having finished the remainder himself, he drew out the wad of notes to pay for his meal. The eyes of the youth on the next stool lighted greedily; and when Micky, who was feeling refreshed and heartened, left the restaurant, with Chappie at his heels, the ginger-haired individual strolled casually out after him. Outside, Micky stopped to debate his next course of action.

"Kin I direct you somewhere, kid?"

Micky swung round to face the sallow American youth. He was not smitten with the appearance of the fellow, but he was glad enough of having a word or two with anyone, utterly friendless as he was in a strange land.

"I was just wondering," said Micky, "where I might find a cheap and respectable lodging-house."

"Guess I kin help you there!" said the American. "I know a joint not a couple o' blocks from here which will suit you down to the ground! I live there myself."

The fact that the ginger-headed one resided there himself did not appeal to Micky as a recommendation exactly; but he thanked the youth, and accepted an offer to show him the place.

"Thet's a nice li'l' dog you've got there!" said the American, as the two walked along together. "What breed d'you call him?"

Micky was always delighted when anyone took notice of his pet, and he began to feel more kindly disposed towards his companion.

"I don't know exactly what you'd call him," he answered; "but he's a fine dog, and can do the most stunning tricks! Some ways he's almost human. Aren't you, Chappie?"

The little mongrel gave a sharp yap at being addressed, and the American laughed.

"He replied 'Yep!' All right!" he cried. Then, after a short pause, he said: "Say, I guess you're a Britisher, and a stranger to the Yew-nited States!"

"That's right," said Micky. "How did you guess?"

The Yank laughed.

"Is that meant to be smart, bo?" he queried. "Say, what line are you in?"

"Line? Oh, I used to be an acrobat in a circus in England, but——"

Micky stopped short, and the American noticed his confusion.

"You had to skin out—eh, kid? A li'l' trouble which the cops poked their long noses into, I'll be bound?"

Micky quailed beneath the stare of his companion, and strode along in silence.

"By the way, I don't know your name," said the American. "My tally's Alec P. Figg. What's yours?"

"Micky Denver."

"Well, here's the place I told you about, Micky," said the American youth sprightly. "Come inside and I'll give you a knock-down to old Mrs. Stocker, the landlady."

The lodging-house was a villainous-looking place; but Micky did not mind that much, for he determined to get out of New York on the following day at the latest. For a few moments he was left standing in a dirty, narrow passage, while Figg went through to speak to somebody at the back of the house.

As he waited, Micky heard a woman's voice exclaim, "Why, it's Smart Alec!" and his newly-found friend retort, "Shut your trap, you old gas-bag!" But a door which slammed to prevented him from hearing anything more.

In five minutes Alec P. Figg came back alone.

"Old Mrs. Stocker ain't well," he announced; "but she says you kin have a room upstairs for two 'bucks' a day. Follow me, and I'll show it to you!"

Micky felt far from comfortable as he followed the American up the rickety staircase, though he laughed at himself for entertaining any fears at all. In spite of himself, however, he felt that there was some sinister mystery about both the house he was in and the man he had met at the Carolina.

The room proved plainly but satisfactorily furnished, and Micky decided to take it. For half an hour Figg stopped and chatted, but Micky avoided all reference to his past life, and merely enlarged on his desire to get out West and seek work with a cinema company.

Something seemed to evolve in Figg's mind.

"So you want to go out West—eh, kid?" he said. "Don't think I want to butt in on your private affairs, but tell me, what's the size o' that wad o' greenbacks?"

"How much money have I?" said Micky, surprised at the question. "Well, all I have in the world is this." And he showed Figg the change from his twenty dollars.

The American looked disappointed.

"See here," he said. "I want to go West myself, and I'm down almost to rockbottom, too. Let's be pards. I'll make you a proposition. Meet me at the Carolina at eight o'clock to-night, and I'll show you how to get on the way to Los Angeles, your cinema city o' the Golden West!"

And Micky shook hands on it, with Smart Alec, one of the most expert cracksmen on the American continent!

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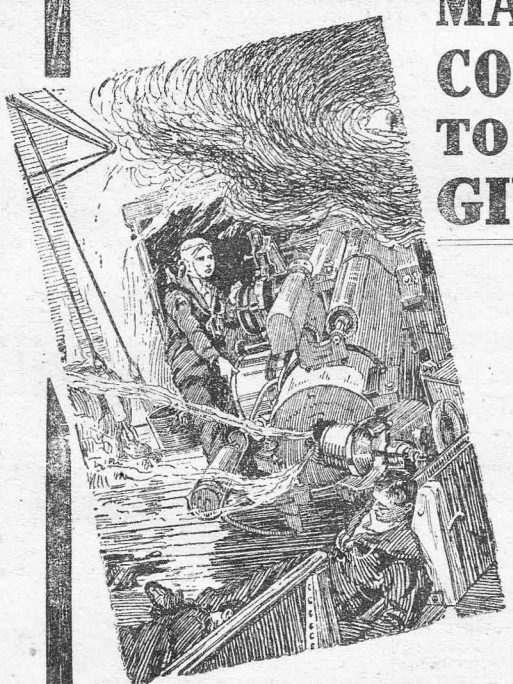

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Wally's Wangle!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"BLEST if I know where's tea's coming from! I haven't got a cent!"

Thus Wally D'Arcy of the Third Form at St. Jim's to his bosom friend Jameson.

It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and it was getting near tea-time. The fags of the Third could have the school tea provided for them in Hall, of course. But they usually contrived to supply themselves with the wherewithal to have a sort of picnic tea in the Third Form-room, where on such occasions the odours of frying kippers and similar savoury comestibles was wont to be terrific.

Jameson made a grimace.

"I'm stony!" he said. "Here's Curly, though. Perhaps he is flush."

A third fag, who rejoiced in the nickname of "Curly" Gibson, approached the two, with his hands in his pockets.

"Got anything for tea, either of you?" he asked, thus effectually forestalling the inquiry they were about to address to him on the same subject.

"No, ass!" growled Wally. "We thought perhaps you——"

"No bon!" said Curly curtly, pulling out the linings of his trousers-pockets, and displaying nothing more valuable than a bent halfpenny embedded in a half-melted chunk of toffee. "Only this halfpenny, and I think that's bad. Dame Taggles wouldn't take it at the tuckshop yesterday!"

Jameson gave a sniff.

"It's rotten! We shall have to have a mouldy tea in Hall, I suppose! Where's that kipper you had yesterday, Wally?"

"It was a bit too niffy!" returned the young scion of the noble House of D'Arcy. "It was nearly walking about, as a matter of fact."

"Pity to have wasted it, though; I'm hungry!" said Curly pathetically.

D'Arcy minor grinned.

"It wasn't wasted exactly!" he said cheerfully. "I saw Knox's shoes outside his study door, so I jammed the niffy kipper into 'em—a bit in each!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox was a prefect, and a highly-unpopular one amongst the fags. Jameson and Curly evidently quite approved of Wally's method of disposing of the too "lively" kipper.

"We ought to be able to wangle something for tea, somehow," said Wally, thoughtfully.

"Hallo, Gus! Who'd have thought of seeing you?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's was strolling gracefully along the passage. He jammed his eyeglass in his noble eye, and surveyed the three fags with a somewhat severe glance.

"Weally, Wallay!" he remarked. "I wegwet to notice the dustay condish of your twousahs!"

Arthur Augustus was an excessively elegant youth, and the mirror of fashion in the Fourth Form. In this he was a great contrast to his young brother, who was a happy-go-lucky young scapegrace, and entirely careless of his personal appearance, in spite of D'Arcy major's frequent remonstrance upon the point.

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!" said Wally independently. "My trousers aren't any dustier than usual!"

"Possibly not, Wallay; but they are a disgwace, all the same! And look how wumpled your jacket is!"

Gussy's voice was positively pained.

"Oh, rats!" said Wally.

"Weally, Wallay! I stwongly disappwove of that wemark! If you would onlay listen to my lectuahs on the subject of dwess——"

Wally shrugged his shoulders, and was about to give vent to an impatient exclamation, when a sudden thought struck him.

"That's a toppin' idea, Gussy!" he said sweetly. "Isn't it, you fellows?"

Jameson and Curly Gibson were quite in the dark as to what Wally was driving at; but they could see he had some "little game" on, so they backed him up loyally.

"Oh, toppin'!" they chorused heartily.

Arthur Augustus blinked at the hopeful trio through his monocle somewhat suspiciously.

"Eh—what?" he inquired.

"Why, for you to give us a lecture on dress, Gus!" said Wally enthusiastically. "These chaps want it as much as I do! Look at Jimmy's bags!"

Arthur Augustus turned his monocle disapprovingly on Jameson's trousers.

"Howwid!"

"And Curly's collar and tie!"

"Feahful!"

Wally took his brother affectionately by the arm, at the same time bestowing a wink upon his two chums.

"Now's your chance, Gus, to tell us all about it!" he said. "Dress is an—an awfully interesting subject; and Jimmy and Curly and I have nothing to do for half an hour before tea. We're quite game for a little lecture from you, old man."

Arthur Augustus was both surprised and flattered. Was it possible that his endless admonitions of his untidy young brother were at last beginning to have effect? Evidently it was, for, as he scanned each of the fags' faces through his monocle, he noted that they wore most earnest and serious expressions.

D'Arcy major almost purred.

"I will do it with weal pleasuah, Wallay!" he beamed. "I am twuly pleased that you are at last beginnin' to see how important it is always to be weally well dwessed! You want a fellah of tact and judgment——"

"Quite so, Gus!" said Wally. "But where will you give the lecture? The Third Form-room is full of fags——"

"Pewwaps they would like to benefit by the lectuah, Wally!"

"No fear—I mean, I don't think it's likely," said Wally promptly. "They're more likely to want to rag you—roll you on the floor, you know——"

"Bai Jove! The howwid little wascals!" said Arthur Augustus, with a shudder. "That would uttahly wuin my clobbah!"

"Exactly!" said Wally gravely. "Where can we go?"

Arthur Augustus looked thoughtful.

"Bettah come to Study No. 6, I think," he said at length, while Wally winked joyously at his companions. "We shall be quiet theah, and I can show you a new waistcoat I have just got fwom my tailah of a vewy special cut."

"Oh, good!" said Wally. "Come on!"

The four repaired forthwith to Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, the famous apartment which D'Arcy major shared with Blake, Herries, and Digby of the Fourth. The study was empty, the other three inmates of it being down at footer.

"Now we sha'n't be long!" said Wally, seating himself on the edge of the table. "Fire away, Gus!"

"Weally, Wallay——"

"Get on with the washing, old man! We—we want to hear something about the latest cut in cuff-links, or something, don't we, chaps?"

"We do!" said Jameson solemnly.

"We does!" echoed Curly.

"Weally, Wallay, theah is no need to be extwavagant in the mattah of cuff-links!" said D'Arcy major gravely. "Plain gold ones are in the best taste, though some authowities pwefer a small monogwam engwaved on each link."

"Go hon!" said Wally gravely.

"Yaas, wathah! Myself, I pwefer them plain, you know. What is your opinion, Curlay?"

"I like 'em poached!" said Curly.

"Poached! Bai Jove, that's vewy stwange!" said Arthur Augustus, much astonished, while Wally restored Curly's wandering wits by giving him a Hunnish glare. "I've nevah heard of cuff-links bein' poached! Is it a new pwocess, Curlay?"

Curly, who had been thinking of tea, hastened to correct himself, declaring that his preference was all for plain links.

Arthur Augustus, reassured on this point, proceeded to turn his discourse on the—to him—important subject of collars.

He explained that with care a properly-laundered collar could be made to last until lunch-time without requiring renewal; and gave a number of other equally interesting items of information upon this subject.

As the three fags thought nothing of rushing down to calling-over in the morning wearing the same decidedly grubby collars that had done duty the day before, it is possible that the beauty of Arthur Augustus' remarks was somewhat lost upon them.

They fidgeted and yawned surreptitiously as he prosed on, until he accidentally caught Curly Gibson shaking his fist at Wally.

"Weally, Curlay, deah boy!" he said, with great dignity. "If am borin' you, pewwaps I had bettah stop!"

"Not at all, Gus!" said Wally hastily. "The fact is, it's tea-time, but we don't want to tear ourselves away while you are being so—so interesting!"

"Bai Jove!"

"We don't want to break up the—the discussion, you know," went on Wally. "The only thing is, I suppose, for you to come down to the Third Form room and have tea with us."

"Oh!"

"I dare say we could raise a kipper for you somehow, as the honoured guest, you know."

"Bai Jove!"

"Might be a bit niffy, of course; but if it's well toasted, with plenty of margarine, you don't notice the high flavour much!" said Wally, watching his elegant brother closely. He had burnt his boats now, with a vengeance. "The fags will be a bit noisy, but I can thump 'em if they try to rag you."

"Rather!" said Jameson.

Arthur Augustus shuddered. The thought of a fag tea with a crowd of inky Third-Formers, with the great probability of a rough-and-tumble thrown in, was very far from appealing to him, as his young rascal of a brother knew very well.

To the punctilious Arthur Augustus there seemed only one thing to do, as the fags were, in a way, his guests in No. 6 Study. And, in addition, his vanity was secretly flattered by the attention they gave—or appeared to give—to his valuable discourse on dress.

"Blake and the othahs do not appeah to be comin' in to tea, deah boys," he said, while the fags hung breathlessly on his words. "I should be much honahed if you would take tea with me in the studay!"

"Hooray! I—I mean, certainly, Gus! Now you're talking!" said Wally, with a triumphant grin at his fellow-conspirators. "Have you got the grub in the cupboard, or shall Curly cut down to the tuckshop and lay in a few things?"

"Pewwaps it would be best to get a few extwa things, if Curlay would be so kind," said the simple Arthur Augustus, producing his pocket-case, and extracting therefrom a crisp Treasury-note.

"What-ho!" said Curly promptly.

"I am much obliged to you, Curlay," said Arthur Augustus, in his stately way.

Curly grinned, and bolted out of the study. Wally and Jameson were grinning, too.

"I'll make the toast," said Wally. "You lay the table, Jimmy!"

"Weally, Wallay——"

"Don't you bother, Gus; we'll do everything. You go on with the lecture—we sha'n't take any notice—ahem!—I mean, you won't interrupt us a bit!"

"Vewy well, Wallay. As I was sayin', the

(Continued on page 18.)

DISGRACING ... THE ... SCHOOL!

By OWEN CONQUEST.

A MAGNIFICENT LONG COMPLETE STORY OF JIMMY SILVER & CO., THE CHUMS OF ROOKWOOD.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
A Little Too Lordly.

JIMMY SILVER sat up in bed, and yawned.

The rising-bell was clanging out over Rookwood School.

The sun shone cheerily in at the high windows of the dormitory. Jimmy Silver yawned, and turned out. Jimmy was generally the first fellow out of bed, and he was always ready to lend a helping hand to any fellow who was disposed to slack. He jerked the bedclothes off Arthur Edward Lovell, bumped Raby with a pillow, and squeezed a sponge over Newcome—kindly assistance for which his chums did not testify the slightest symptom of gratitude.

"You silly ass!" said Newcome, dodging out of bed. "Keep that sponge away, you frabjous idiot!"

"Shall I help you, Towny?" asked Jimmy Silver, dipping the sponge into a jug of water.

Townsend, the dandy of the Fourth, rolled out of bed in hot haste.

"No, you chump! Gerraway!"

"Topham, the rising-bell's stopped."

"Blow the rising-bell!" mumbled Topham drowsily. "I'm sleepy. I—— Yow-wow-wow-wooop!"

The wet sponge was dabbed on Topham's face, and dispelled his sleepiness quite suddenly. Topham made one jump out of bed.

"Groogh! You beast!"

"Now, then, Muffin!" said Jimmy Silver.

Tubby Muffin, the fat boy of the Fourth, looked nervously at Jimmy Silver. Tubby liked to snatch a few extra minutes of repose. But Jimmy Silver seemed in a very active mood that morning. He came along to Tubby's bed, and Tubby rolled out on the other side of it just in time to escape the sponge.

"Keep off, Silver, you beast!"

"Oh, buck up!" said Jimmy. "Don't be a slacker!"

Jimmy turned to his washstand, and was soon splashing merrily in cold water from head to foot. The rest of the Classical Fourth had turned out, with one exception. The exception was the new boy in the Fourth—Mornington. Mornington was awake, but he showed no sign of getting up.

"Time to turn out, Mornington!" said Townsend.

"I shall not be gettin' up yet," said the new boy. "Don't make such a ow in the room, please. I'm going to sleep!"

"Risin'-bell's gone."

"Hang the rising-bell!"

Jimmy Silver, towelling himself down, looked across at the new boy.

"You'll have a prefect after you if you're late down!" he called out.

"Mind your own business!" snapped Mornington.

The new boy had already had some little rubs with the captain of the Fourth.

"You'd better get up, old chap," said Townsend persuasively. "You have to come down with the rest of us, you know."

"I shall do nothing of the kind!"

Mornington laid his head on the pillow again. It was his first morning at Rookwood. At home Mornington had been monarch of all he surveyed, and he had developed into a self-indulgent slacker. He had yet to learn that between Rookwood School and his luxurious home there was a great gulf fixed.

Jimmy Silver grinned, and finished his towelling. Having dressed as far as his shirt and trousers, he walked along to Mornington's bed. With a powerful jerk, he stripped off the bedclothes.

There was an exclamation of rage from the new boy as he sat up.

"You rotter! Leave my bedclothes alone!"

"Turn out!"

"I won't!"

"Slackers aren't allowed in this dorm," said Jimmy Silver. "Out you go!"

"I won't!" yelled Mornington.

Jimmy Silver smiled, and caught his ankles. Mornington came out of bed with a bump.

He jumped up in a fury, and rushed at Jimmy Silver.

It would have been easy enough for the athletic captain of the Fourth to knock him across the bed with a single drive. But he refrained. Jimmy contented himself with knocking up the new boy's clawing hands, and grasping him. His strong grip closed round Mornington, who was held as helpless as if he had been in the coils of a boa-constrictor.

He struggled and panted, his furious face looking into Jimmy Silver's smiling one.

"You rotter! Let me go!"

"Had enough?" smiled Jimmy.

"Confound you! Let me go!"

Jimmy Silver sat him on the floor, and left him there, and returned to his dressing. Mornington staggered up, panting. He seemed inclined for a moment to return to bed; but that was evidently useless with Jimmy Silver in the dormitory.

He gave Jimmy a glare of hatred, but did not come to close quarters again. His weedy limbs were still aching from Jimmy's iron grip.

"Better buck up, Morny!" murmured Townsend. "We have to be down by half-past, you know."

"Where is the bath-room?"

"Too late for that," said Townsend. "You have to turn out jolly early to get a chance at the bath-rooms. There isn't one each, you know. Bath here."

"Where is the hot water, then?"

"The what!"

"The hot water."

Townsend grinned.

"We don't have hot water in the morning."

"Am I expected to bath in cold water?"

"Well, we all do."

"I refuse to do anything of the sort!"

"H'm!"

"You ain't forced to bath if you don't want to," said Muffin, who had already finished his ablutions. Muffin's ablutions did not extend farther than his chin. "Don't bother about it, Morny."

Mornington uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"You dirty beast! Do you think I can go down without bathing?"

"Well, I do," said Muffin contentedly. "I don't believe in all this washing. I think it's unhealthy."

"Pah! I must have hot water. Where is the bell?"

"The bell!" ejaculated Lovell.

"I suppose I must ring for hot water."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mornington frowned at the laughing juniors, and proceeded to look for the bell. There was no bell to be found. The juniors watched him with great merriment. The idea of a fellow in the Fourth Form ringing for hot water in the morning tickled them greatly.

"Nonsense! I must have hot water! Someone fetch me some!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will give half-a-sovereign to whoever fetches me a can of hot water."

"For goodness' sake shut up, you purse-proud bounder!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver impatiently. "Do you think the fellows will be paid to fag for you?"

"Mind your own business! Who will fetch me hot water for half-a-sovereign?" said the new boy, looking round.

There was a derisive chuckle from most of the Classical Fourth. But Tubby Muffin came to the rescue.

"I'm your man!" he exclaimed promptly. "Hand over the tin!"

Mornington felt in his jacket, and carelessly tossed a ten-shilling note to the fat junior. Tubby Muffin rolled out of the dormitory at once. Tubby was not bothered with any feelings of personal independence or dignity. Tubby was always hard-up, and ten shillings was a fortnight's allowance to him. Money was little to Mornington, who had much more than was good for him. But it was a great deal to Tubby.

Mornington glanced at Jimmy with a sneering smile. Jimmy's face became very grim. The new boy sat on his bed to await Tubby's return. Jimmy Silver, who had finished dressing, waited, too.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Cold Water.

"HERE you are, Morny!"

Tubby Muffin came into the dormitory with a big can, steaming. He plumped it down beside Mornington's washstand. Some of the Fourth-Formers were grinning, but some of them looked grim. Lovell took Tubby Muffin by the ear.

"Muffin, you fat worm——"

"Yow! Leggo, Lovell!"

"You're not allowed to fag for that swanking cad, Muffin!"

"Yow-wow!"

"If you fag for him again, you'll get it in the neck!" continued Lovell, compressing his grip on Muffin's plump ear. "Do you savvy?"

"Yow-wow-wow! Leggo!"

"Get out, you worm!"

Lovell led Tubby to the door by his ear, and planted his boot behind him. Tubby departed along the passage at a great rate, with a loud yell. Meanwhile, Jimmy Silver had picked up the hot-water can.

"That is mine!" said Mornington, between his teeth.

Jimmy shook his head.

"I won't be hard on you, as you're a new kid," he said. "But you've got to understand that you can't swank in the Fourth Form at Rookwood. You can keep your filthy money in your trousers-pocket. Cold water is good enough for us, and good enough for you, if not a little too good. This water is going out of the window!"

"You hound, give me that can!"

Jimmy carried the can towards the window.

"Will you give it to me?" shrieked the new boy.

"No jolly fear!"

Mornington made a rush after Jimmy, his hands clenched. Lovell and Raby and Newcome promptly collared him, and held him back. The new boy struggled in their grasp, kicking furiously, and scratching like a cat.

"My hat! What a blessed wild beast!" ejaculated Lovell. "Sit on him!"

Bump! Mornington went down, and Raby sat on his chest, smiling down at him. Lovell stood on his legs.

"Now keep quiet, you rotter!"

Jimmy Silver mounted on a chair at the window, and calmly poured out the hot water into the ivy outside.

He stepped down when the can was empty.

"Now, are you going to bath in cold water?" he asked.

"You hound! No!"

"We can't let you go down without washing," said Newcome. "Even Muffin washes a bit. You've got to wash."

"Let me go, you rotter!"

"Are you going to wash in cold water?"

"No!"

"Then we'll jolly well wash you!" said Lovell determinedly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lend a hand here, you fellows!"

The Classical juniors willingly lent a hand. Townsend and Topham and Peele, who had their own reasons for wishing to keep well with the wealthy new boy, did not join in; but they did not go to the rescue. They left the dormitory quietly, leaving Mornington to settle with Jimmy Silver & Co.

A dozen hands were on Mornington. His pyjamas were yanked off, and Jimmy Silver swamped water into the foot-bath, and dipped a sponge in it. There was a gasp and a yell from the new boy, as the cold, wet, sponge plumped on him.

"Yoooogh! Yooop! Oh!"

He struggled desperately in the grasp of the laughing juniors.

But there was no escape for him. He was to be bathed, and bathed he was. Jimmy Silver swamped water over him, Oswald rubbed on soap, and Dickinson minor rubbed another cake of soap into his hair.

In a few minutes he was frothing with soap from head to foot, and shrieking with rage. Never had he been so unceremoniously handled in all his lordly life before.

"There!" said Jimmy Silver approvingly. "Now he can finish himself—unless he wants to go down dressed in soap!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The unhappy new boy was released, and he lay panting and gasping. The Classical Fourth streamed out of the dormitory, leaving him to his own devices.

Mornington staggered up, and shook a soapy fist after them, stuttering and spluttering with rage and soap. He was left splashing wildly in the foot-bath, striving to clean off that liberal allowance of soap.

The Fistical Four strolled out cheerily into the quadrangle in the cold, sunny morning. They felt that they had done their duty, and deserved well of their country.

"We shall cure that swanking cad in the long run," remarked Jimmy Silver. "If he stays at Rookwood long enough, we'll make him quite decent. It's kill or cure!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mornington was down in time for breakfast. He scowled savagely at the Fistical Four across the breakfast-table, and Jimmy Silver & Co. replied with cheery smiles.

Mornington was accustomed to causing dismay with his frowns, but he was making the painful discovery that matters were very, very different at Rookwood.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Mornington Takes French Leave.

MORNINGTON took his place in the Fourth Form for the first time that morning. He was the object of a good deal of curiosity in the Fourth.

A new fellow, simply rolling in money, was naturally an object of interest. It would not have been difficult for Mornington to become popular in the Form if he had been a different kind of fellow. But "swank" and overbearing manners did not conduce to popularity.

Townsend and the other Nuts were willing to be friendly with him, and put up with his uppish manners. Tubby Muffin would have stood anything from a fellow who had so much money, but very few others were inclined to stand his nonsense—least of all Jimmy Silver & Co.

The Modern Fourth were in the Form-room for first lesson, and they regarded the new boy very curiously. Tommy Dodd & Co. had seen something of him already, and heard more. Their opinion of him was that he was a rank outsider, and that the Classicals were very welcome to him.

Mr. Bootles was very patient with him that morning. The Fourth-Form master knew a good deal about his early training, and could make allowances for him. Perhaps, also, the fact that his guardian was a governor of the school had its influence.

Mornington had lost both his parents at an early age, and his guardian, a busy political gentleman, had neglected him, so there were excuses to be made for him.

The new boy had to go to the bottom of the class, even below Tubby Muffin, who had been the champion dunce of the Fourth before Mornington's arrival. But that did not affect him in the least. He took no pride whatever in Form work, and evidently regarded it as a miserable infliction, only to be submitted to because it could not be avoided.

After morning lessons Mornington was joined by the Nuts as he came sullenly out of the Form-room.

His nature was haughty and unpleasant, but he had already realised the need of friends of some sort, and he allowed Townsend and Topham and Peele to be friendly, though in a condescending manner. But Townsend & Co. were ready to take any amount of condescension from a millionaire.

They sympathised with him, somewhat hypocritically, for, as a matter of fact, the scene in the dormitory had tickled them. But they fully agreed with him in his dislike of Jimmy Silver & Co., and their sweet flattery was something of a solace to him.

After dinner, while most of the Classical Fourth had gone down to football Mornington strolled in the quadrangle with his new friends.

"You don't care for football?" asked Townsend.

Mornington sniffed.

"No! Rubbish!"

"Quite my idea," agreed Townsend. "Those duffers of the end study fag at it no end. I don't believe in workin' at footer. I don't care twopence whether we beat St. Jim's or not!"

"Rotten bore football!" said Peele.

"Is there anythin' doin' here?" asked Mornington. "It looks to me as if I shall be bored to death in this rotten place! Beastly of my guardian to send me here!"

"Well, we make things lively sometimes," said Topham. "We can introduce you to a chap who knows all about geegees, if you like."

"There are races on this afternoon," said Mornington. "Do you ever go to the races?"

"Well, we've done it on a half-holiday," said Townsend cautiously. "Of course, it's strictly on the Q T. It means the sack if it comes out!"

"They wouldn't sack me. My guardian's a governor of the school."

"Well, we're not in the same boat, and we have to be jolly careful. Can't be done this afternoon; it's not a holiday."

"Same old grind in the Form-room, I suppose?"

"Yes; can't be helped."

"I don't see why it can't be helped. Suppose we go, all the same?"

"What! Cut lessons?"

"Yes."

"No jolly fear!" said Peele. "Why, it would mean a flogging!"

"Must draw the line somewhere," said Townsend, shaking his head. "It's risky enough on a half-holiday!"

Mornington sneered.

"I took you for sportin' fellows!" he said.

"We're sportin' enough!" said Townsend a little artly. "But it's no good runnin' one's head against a brick wall!"

"Look here, I'll have a car out, and we'll have a rippin' run!" said Mornington. "I'll stand the car; I've got plenty of tin."

"Make it Saturday afternoon, then."

"Rot! I'm sick of grindin' lessons! Let's make it this afternoon. I suppose I can telephone from here for a car?"

"Ye-es; but——"

"You can dodge into Bootles' study and use his 'phone when he's not there," said Peele. "We do sometimes. But——"

"Well, then. We'll make the car come to Coombe, so that we sha'n't be spotted goin', and walk down to the village and meet it!"

"But we can't cut lessons!" exclaimed Topham.

"We can make up some lie for that," said Mornington coolly. "The car ran away with us, and we couldn't stop it, or somethin' of that sort."

"My hat!"

"Or we had a breakdown somewhere. Anythin' will do for a yarn. And we can have a rippin' afternoon out."

"Phew!"

"Better than grindin' in the Form-room—what!"

"Yes, rather! But——"

"Well, come!"

Townsend & Co. looked at one another. It was a strong temptation, but the thought of the possible consequences made them hesitate.

"Well, you are a goer!" said Townsend at last. "I—I wonder if we could risk it?"

"Suppose it's a lickin', we can stand it," said Mornington. "I tell you I'm fed up with this place, and I'm goin' to have some excitement, anyway. We could have a rippin' afternoon. We can tell any lie you like when we get back."

"It might be worked!" said Townsend thoughtfully. "We got in the car for a ten-minutes' run, the blessed thing ran away—breakdown tryin' to get back—long walk home—what!"

"Wouldn't do for the Head, but it might do for Bootles," said Peele. "Bootles is a simple old duffer. Let's chance it."

Topham nodded.

"Chance it," he said. "You'll have to dodge Bootles to get at his telephone, though. Let's go and scout."

The four juniors entered the School House. Townsend tapped at Mr. Bootles' door, with an excuse ready if the Form-master happened to be there. But the study was empty.

"Better let me 'phone," said Townsend. "They know me at the garage at Lantham."

"Go ahead, then!"

"It's understood that you're footin' the bill?"

"Yes, yes!"

Townsend entered the study, his comrades keeping watch in the passage. The dandy of the Fourth rang up the garage at Lantham. He was known there—in times of prosperity Townsend had had a car out before. In a few minutes the arrangements were made, and Townsend quitted the study.

"All serene!" he said. "They're sendin' a car at once to Coombe, to wait for us outside the station. A good car for four, I told them."

"Good!"

"It'll be there soon after we get there, if we walk," said Townsend.

"Come on, then!"

The Nuts left the House in great spirits. Townsend and Topham and Peele were quite under Mornington's influence by this time.

Townsend stopped to speak to Tom Rawson in the quad. Rawson was his study-mate, but they were on the worst of terms; but that did not matter to Towny when he had an axe to grind.

"Tell Smythe I've gone down to Coombe, will you, Rawson?" he asked. "Tell him we're comin' back in a car."

"Certainly!" said Rawson.

"We shall be back before afternoon lessons," said Townsend.

"Right-ho!"

The Nuts went on their way. Townsend was grinning, pleased with his own astuteness.

"Bootles is sure to inquire after us when we don't turn up for lessons," he said. "Rawson will tell him all that. It will show that we only intended to go out for a half-hour or so before lessons, and bear out the yarn we've got to spin when we come back. Savvy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Nuts of the Fourth strolled out of gates, and walked away merrily down the road to Coombe.

Mornington struggled and kicked to free himself from the porter's grasp. But he was helpless—and the cane rose and fell upon his back! (*See page* 18.)

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
The Truants.

"THERE'S the blessed bell!" said Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four were still on the football-field when the bell rang for afternoon classes.

They joined the Fourth, streaming to the Form-room.

Mr. Bootles came in, and found all his Form in their places save four. He noted the four empty places, and frowned.

"Townsend, Topham, Peele, and Mornington are not here," he said.

The Fourth Form were already aware of that, and they were wondering where the absentees were.

"Do you know why these boys are not here, Silver?"

"I haven't seen them since dinner, sir."

"H'm!"

The lesson proceeded, but the absentees did not appear. First lesson being over, the four places still vacant, Mr. Bootles' frown grew more and more portentous.

"Does anyone know what has become of those four boys?" he asked.

Rawson stood up.

"They went out after dinner, sir. Townsend left a message with me for Smythe of the Shell."

"Where did they go, Rawson?"

"To Coombe, sir. I'm afraid there may have been an accident," said Rawson. "Townsend said they were going for a run in a car, but would be back before lessons."

"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Bootles' anger vanished at the thought of an accident.

"You are sure they were going in a motor-car, Rawson?"

"Townsend said they would come back in a car, sir."

"M'm, h'm!" Mr. Bootles looked worried. "Surely nothing but an accident could have detained them so late! Silver, I shall leave you in charge of the Form for a few minutes."

Mr. Bootles quitted the Form-room hastily. He hurried to his study to telephone to the police-station at Coombe for news of an accident.

"What the dickens has happened to the bounders?" said Lovell. "They can't be cutting lessons, surely, on purpose?"

"Just like Mornington to do it!" grinned Oswald. "I shouldn't think the others had the nerve, though."

"Bet you they're cutting lessons, and they'll come back with a thumping yarn about a breakdown!" said Dickinson minor.

Jimmy Silver nodded thoughtfully. That was his own belief. He knew that Mornington was reckless of consequences, and it looked as if he had led the Nuts into an escapade. There would be trouble for all four of them when they returned, there was no doubt about that.

Mr. Bootles came back into the Form-room, frowning.

He did not inform the class of the result of his inquiry or make any further reference to the absentees.

The police had been unable to give him news of any accident, and Mr. Bootles concluded that Mornington and his companions had "cut" lessons. There was a rod in pickle for them when they came back.

In the Fourth there was a considerable amount of suppressed excitement. The Nuts' escapade was almost unheard-of, and some of the fellows were almost inclined to admire them for their nerve. But no one envied them their interview with Mr. Bootles when they reappeared at Rookwood.

Lessons went on, but there was no sign of the four. When the time came for the class to dismiss they had not returned.

The Fourth-Formers went out in a buzz of excitement.

"This puts the lid on, and no mistake!" said Lovell. "They're staying out for a lark. Why, it will mean a flogging all round!"

"Unless they can stuff Bootles up," said Jimmy Silver.

"He will want a lot of stuffing! Bootles is an ass, but not quite so much an ass as all that!"

"They must be off their rockers, I think," said Jimmy Silver. "They've got a good nerve, but it isn't quite the game to cut

lessons, and it's rotten caddish to tell lies about it afterwards—and that's their game!"

"Silver!"

Mr. Bootles looked out of the doorway of the School House.

"Yes, sir?" said Jimmy.

"I should like you to go down to Coombe and see if you can find out anything of Mornington and his companions. I fear that something may have happened, though I cannot get news of any accident."

"We'll go with pleasure, sir," said Jimmy.

"If you get any news, bring it to me at once."

"Yes, sir."

The Fistical Four started at once. They soon arrived at Coombe. But there was no sign in the village of the missing four. Information was obtained at the village tuckshop, however. Old Mrs. Wicks had packed a lunch-basket for four young gentlemen in a motor-car, and the four were Townsend & Co. They had gone off in the direction of High Coombe, Mrs. Wicks told them.

The Fistical Four quitted the tuckshop, looking grave enough.

"That means that they've gone to the races," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "We're not bound to mention that to Bootles, though. My hat! Mornington is rather an improvement on the giddiest of the Giddy Goats, I think! Fancy cutting lessons to go to the races!"

"The rotter ought to be kicked out of the school!" growled Lovell.

"They must be coming back soon," said Jimmy. "Let's have a stroll round, and see if we see anything of the car. They're playing the giddy ox, but we might as well give them a tip what to expect."

"Oh, bother them!" said Raby. "Let's get back and get some footer before dark."

"They may really have had an accident, you know," said Jimmy. "Come on; a trot over the hill to High Coombe won't hurt us!"

"Oh, all right!"

And the juniors took the road to High Coombe.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Not a Merry Outing!

"STOP here!"

Mornington snapped out the words. He was in an exceedingly bad temper. Townsend and Topham and Peele were looking surly and sullen.

The big car was whizzing along the road homeward in the dusk. The four juniors were tired, hungry, dispirited, and exasperated.

That afternoon at the races had been a splendid prospect—viewed at Rookwood before they started. It did not seem quite so splendid looking backward.

The result had been what they might have expected. They had seen the races; and they had seen horsy gentlemen quite willing to accept their bets. They had plunged on their "fancy"—with the lamentable result that Townsend and Topham and Peele were "cleaned out"; and Mornington, large as was his supply of cash, was in the same condition.

Mornington had lost ten times as much as all his companions put together, but all the loss was probably not so serious to him. But it was sufficient to make him sulky and savage.

As for the three Nuts, they were in low spirits and terribly chagrined. And now that the escapade was over, the consequences loomed near, and seemed much more serious than they had seemed before.

Altogether, there had seldom been a surlier or more ill-tempered party than the four young rascals in the big car.

Mornington signalled to the chauffeur to stop, as the car was passing a wayside public-house on the High Coombe road, a few miles out of Coombe. The car came to a halt.

"What are we stoppin' for?" asked Townsend sulkily. "We're late already. We don't want to miss callin'-over."

"Hang calling-over!"

"That's all very well!" growled Topham. "But there's the dickens to pay already, and we don't want to make it worse."

Mornington sneered.

"Beginnin' to get scared?" he asked bitterly.

"Oh, go and eat coke! It was a rotten idea, anyway!"

"Pah! Keep your courage up! I'm not afraid!"

"You've got a governor of Rookwood to step in for you!" said Peele sulkily. "We haven't!"

Mornington stepped out of the car.

"I want somethin' to drink," he said. "And we can't get home yet, anyway. We've got to turn off to Lantham."

"Lantham! What the thunder for?"

"The car's got to be paid for. I shall have to get some money there. I've left all my tin at High Coombe."

"Precious ass you are!" growled Topham. "The chauffeur has to be paid for the car."

"Well, I can't pay him!"

"Oh, rotten! We've no time to go to Lantham. Besides, how can you get money at Lantham? The bank's closed."

"I can get money there," said Mornington. "I arranged that before I came to Rookwood, in case I should have a flutter and go stony. I've a friend there who'll see me through."

"A moneylender?" exclaimed Townsend.

"Well, yes. You needn't be afraid!" sneered Mornington. "I sha'n't ask you to pay for the car! Come in and have a drink!"

"A—a—a—a drink!"

"Yes, a—a—a drink!" mimicked Mornington. "I want a pick-me-up!"

He strode into the public-house, and the Nuts, after a little hesitation, followed him. Most of their recklessness had evaporated. They had sampled some champagne at the races, but its effect had passed off, leaving them feeling low and miserable.

"May as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb!" said Townsend recklessly. "Come on!"

The chauffeur, sitting stolid in the driving-seat, looked after his peculiar passengers curiously, and shrugged his shoulders. He had driven Rookwood fellows before, but never a party quite like this.

Mornington strode into the inn, with a disdainful glance around him. A fat and rubicund man came to ask what he wanted.

Two or three carters were in the dusky room, drinking ale and smoking, and they looked at the Rookwood party.

"Can I have some champagne here?" asked Mornington.

"My eye!" said the landlord, in astonishment. "I don't keep champagne 'ere, and I shouldn't serve it to boys if I did."

"Don't be a fool! What have you got to drink?"

The rubicund gentleman looked steadily at Mornington. Mornington had already drunk more than his companions, and his face was flushed, and his head a little unsteady.

"Looks to me as if you've been drinking already," said the landlord. "You won't drink here, sir."

"You insolent rascal!"

"Wot!"

"Give me some whisky, if you have nothing decent to drink."

"Come away, you fool!" muttered Townsend.

"Do you hear me?" shouted Mornington. He fumbled in his pockets, and produced the loose cash he had left, and threw it on the counter. "Now serve me!"

The landlord shook his head.

"I don't serve whisky to schoolboys, sir," he said. "You'd better go."

"You silly fool!"

"And you'd better keep a civil tongue in your head, or you'll be put ouside, and sharp!" said the publican angrily. "I'll serve you with lemonade, if you like, and that's all you'll get 'ere."

"Lemonade! Fool!"

"My hat!" muttered Townsend. "The silly fool's tipsy! Come away, Mornington. Let's get back to the car. Do you hear?"

Mornington shook his hand off angrily. His face was flushed crimson, and his eyes gleamed. His savage temper had full play now. The wine he had foolishly drunk was running riot in his head.

"Will you serve me?" he shouted.

"No, sir, I won't!"

"Then I'll help myself."

"By gosh!"

Mornington grasped at a bottle of whisky among those on the bar. The landlord, quite out of temper now, caught him by the arm and dragged him back. The next moment Mornington's fist was dashed full in his face.

"Oh, great Scott!" gasped Peele.

The stout landlord staggered back, and collapsed on the sanded floor. He sat there dazedly, Mornington glaring down at him.

"Now will you serve me, you scoundrel?"

Mine host staggered to his feet. He placed himself with his back to the door.

"You cheeky young rascal!" he gasped. "I'll show you! I'll keep you 'ere while I send for the police!"

"Now we're in for it!" groaned Townsend.

"What fools we were to come out with that mad blackguard!"

Mornington strode to the door. He was sobered now.

"Let me pass!" he exclaimed.

"You don't pass," said the publican grimly. "I don't want your sort in the Peal o' Bells, my fine young gentleman. You'll wait for the policeman."

"Let me pass, you scoundrel!"

"For goodness' sake let us go!" exclaimed Topham, in utter dismay. "We shall get into a row over this."

"That you will," said the boniface. "I'll see to that. I know where you come from—Rookwood. I know Rookwood caps. If you want to go, you'll give me your names, and I'll come up to the school and speak to your 'eadmaster. Either that or wait 'ere for the policeman."

"Throw him aside!" shouted Mornington.

"Joe! Tom! Lend a 'and 'ere!"

Two big carters, grinning, joined the landlord at the door. Mornington dropped his hands. There was no chance of escape.

"We—we can't give our names," stammered Townsend. "We—we——"

"You won't go till you do!"

"We will give our names, if you like," said Mornington, a sudden gleam coming into his eyes. "My name is Silver—James Silver."

Townsend started. In a moment he caught the idea.

"Mine's Lovell!" he muttered.

"Raby!" said Peele.

"Newcome!" said Topham.

Mr. Snaggs wrote the four names with a stump of pencil upon a dirty shirt-cuff, and stood aside from the door.

"You'll 'ear of this," he said.

The four juniors passed out, glad to escape. They clambered into the car.

"Pretty mess you've got us into, you tipsy fool!" muttered Townsend.

"Oh, shut up! Lantham, driver!"

The big car glided away to Lantham. Mornington burst into a laugh.

"That fat scoundrel will go to Rookwood and make a complaint. It will be a pleasant surprise for that meddling cad, Silver!" he exclaimed.

"It was a dirty trick, all the same," said Topham. "But better him than us. I wish we'd never come out!"

Townsend and Peele fervently shared that wish. Blackguards as they were, their blackguardism stopped a good deal short of that of Mornington. But it was a little too late to think of that now. The car glided away through the dusk to Lantham, with three faces in it, at least, darkly clouded.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Condemned!

"SOMETHING'S up!" remarked Smythe of the Shell sapiently.

A good many of the fellows agreed with him, though what was "up" they could not guess. Several of them had observed a visitor being shown into Dr. Chisholm's study—a very peculiar visitor for the Head of Rookwood to receive. Jobson of the Fifth knew who it was. Jobson mentioned that he had seen the man before—a chap named Snaggs, who kept a public-house on the High Coombe road.

What the landlord of the Peal of Bells could want with the Head of Rookwood was a mystery. He had driven up in a trap, and he was quite a long time with the Head. While he was there Mr. Bootles was sent for. Tubby Muffin, scouting in the passage, heard a murmur of voices, but that was all. The publican had been shown out at last, and had driven off in his trap, and Mr. Bootles was seen to be looking very disturbed and glum. He had also directed Bulkeley of the Sixth to bring Jimmy Silver and his companions to him as soon as they returned to the school.

It looked as if the Fistical Four were booked for trouble of some kind. They had not returned yet, though it was close on time for evening call-over.

Mack, the porter, was about to close the gates when the chums of the Fourth arrived, breathless, and came in just in time. They appeared at calling-over, and answered to their names, Mr. Bootles taking the call. Mornington and his three friends were still absent.

Bulkeley called to the four juniors as call-over finished:

"You're wanted in Mr. Bootles' study—Silver, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome."

"Yes, Bulkeley," said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

"What's the row?" whispered Oswald.

"Nothing. Bootles sent us to look for Mornington & Co., that's all."

That was all, so far as Jimmy Silver knew. The Fistical Four repaired to their Form-master's study, and found Mr. Bootles with a grim brow.

"Follow me to the Head!" said Mr. Bootles curtly.

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy, in wonder. "We haven't found Mornington and the rest, sir. We looked for them a good while."

"Never mind that now. Come with me."

Mr. Bootles rustled away.

Jimmy Silver & Co., somewhat surprised, followed him, and entered the Head's study at his heels. They found Dr. Chisholm with a frowning brow.

"So they have returned," said the Head.

"They are here, sir," said Mr. Bootles.

"Silver," rumbled the Head, "I have received an extraordinary complaint respecting you and your companions. What have you to say?"

"I don't know what the complaint is, sir."

"You have visited a public-house!"

"I have!" ejaculated Jimmy, in amazement.

"You and your companions. You demanded to be served with drink, and caused a disturbance when you were refused, and struck the proprietor, who very properly requested you to leave."

Jimmy Silver gazed blankly at the Head.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were simply agape. They could scarcely believe their ears.

"What have you to say?" demanded the Head sternly.

"I—I don't know what to say!" gasped Jimmy. "We haven't done anything of the kind."

"What!"

"We've certainly not entered any public-house; and as for asking for drink, I should think you'd know us better, sir," said Jimmy, with spirit. "If anybody has told you so, it was untrue."

"A jolly thumping lie!" said Lovell vigorously.

"Mr. Bootles will tell you that we're not that kind of chaps, sir," said Raby.

Mr. Bootles looked at them sadly, but did not speak.

"So you deny the whole matter?" said the Head, eyeing them grimly.

"Certainly we do, sir."

"Where have you been?"

"Mr. Bootles asked us to go to Coombe, and look for some fellows who have stayed out, sir."

"Did you go along the High Coombe road?"

"Yes, for some distance."

"Did you enter the Peal of Bells public-house?"

"We did not go so far as that, or we shouldn't have been back for calling-over."

"Ah! I see you know the place!"

"We have passed it lots of times on our bikes, sir, going to Lantham," said Lovell. "We couldn't help knowing it."

"You are acquainted with the landlord?"

"Not in the least, sir."

"I am sorry, but I cannot accept your statements," said the Head grimly. "The landlord of the Peal of Bells, apparently a very honest man, has driven over to the school to complain of your conduct. You entered his place—strictly out of bounds for Rookwood boys—and made a disturbance there. He made you give your names before you left."

Jimmy Silver almost staggered.

"He must be mistaken, sir, or he has lied," he said.

"Is the man a perfect stranger to you?"

"Perfectly."

"Then why should a perfect stranger take the trouble to drive several miles to make an unfounded complaint against you?"

"Oh!" murmured Newcome.

That was a poser to the Fistical Four. They stood staring blankly at the Head, in a state of bewilderment.

"But—but we haven't been there," stammered Jimmy Silver. "We haven't, sir. If you know the distance, you must know we couldn't walk so far, and get back in time for call-over. Mr. Bootles will tell you the time we started."

"This is mere prevarication," said the Head. "You hired a motor-car or a taxicab. Mr. Snaggs stated distinctly that you arrived in a car of some kind."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

As in a flash he understood.

Four young blackguards in a motor-car. He did not need telling that the party at the Peal of Bells must have been Mornington and his companions. His sudden exclamation was not without its effect on the Head, though Dr. Chisholm drew a wrong impression from it.

"You see, all is known, Silver," said the doctor coldly. "Further denials will be useless, as you can perceive. You are convicted of having acted in a disgraceful manner—disgraceful to yourselves, and disgraceful to the school you belong to. Mr. Bootles has spoken very favourably of your previous character, or I should expel you from the school. As it is, I consider that a severe flogging will meet the case, and I trust it will be a lesson to you."

"A—a—a flogging!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "But it's all a mistake, sir; we were not there."

"Nonsense!"

"We weren't, sir!" exclaimed Lovell hotly. "We haven't been near the place, and we haven't been in a motor-car to-day. Unless Snaggs was telling lies, some other fellows must have given him our names."

"That is enough, Lovell. Mr. Bootles, you will kindly see that these boys are sent to my study for a flogging after prayers to-morrow."

"Yes, Dr. Chisholm," said the Form-master heavily.

"But——" burst out Jimmy.

"Silence! You may go!"

"It's unjust!" howled Lovell, almost beside himself.

"Remove that boy, please, Mr. Bootles."

Mr. Bootles dropped his hand on Lovell's shoulder, and the junior, choking with rage, was pushed from the study. Jimmy and Raby followed, bewildered and enraged.

"My boys—my boys," said Mr. Bootles sadly, "this is a blow to me! How could you be guilty of such conduct? I have had every confidence in you."

"We're not guilty, sir," said Jimmy Silver, as calmly as he could. "Someone else gave our names."

Mr. Bootles shook his head.

"Who could have done so?" he said. "Mr. Snaggs positively stated that he knew the Rookwood caps of his unruly visitors."

"I know jolly well——" burst out Lovell.

Jimmy checked him with a glance and a pressure on the arm. Whatever the consequences, the chums of the Fourth could not betray the young blackguards who had got them into this scrape. And they could not be sure, though their suspicion was well grounded. There was a chance, at least, that it was not the Nuts of the Fourth who had given their names. And in any case, they did not feel that they could sneak.

"What were you about to say, Lovell?"

"N-n-nothing, sir!" stammered Lovell.

Mr. Bootles sighed and walked away. The Fistical Four went to the end study, savage and furious. It was past tea-time, but they were in no mood for tea.

"Why didn't you let me tell Bootles?" demanded Lovell angrily. "You know jolly well it must have been Mornington and his set. They were in a car, anyway."

"We can't be sure!"

"Sure enough!" growled Raby.

"We can't give them away," said Jimmy, with a shake of the head.

"Not after they've used our names!" exclaimed Lovell.

"We haven't proof they did. I believe they did, but we haven't any proof. Anyway, I'd rather not sneak, even if it's justified. There's other ways."

"Blest if I see it! We're booked for a flogging in the morning for something we haven't done!" exclaimed Lovell savagely.

"Put not your trust in princes—put it in your Uncle James!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully.

"Oh, don't gas! What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to speak to Bulkeley."

"What the merry thunder for?"

"Come with me and see," said Jimmy Silver.

And Lovell & Co., with visible signs of impatience, followed their Uncle James to the study of the captain of Rookwood.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

"Bulkeley is a Brick!"

BULKELEY of the Sixth looked sternly at Jimmy Silver & Co. as they came in. He evidently knew all about the story of the visit to the Peal of Bells.

"Well, you young rascals, what do you want?" he asked.

"We want you to help us, Bulkeley!" said Jimmy Silver calmly. "We've a right to ask you, as you're captain of the school!"

"Bulkeley can't help us, fathead!" snorted Lovell. "He believes that we've been pub-haunting—look at his face!"

"I haven't much choice about believing it," said Bulkeley. "I understand that you're to be flogged. I must say you deserve it."

"We should, if we'd done what we're accused of," said Jimmy Silver. "The point is that we haven't!"

Bulkeley looked at him keenly.

"The Head won't listen to us, and Bootles has turned against us," said Jimmy. "He might have known us better. But you can prove it, Bulkeley, if you choose, and I think we've a right to ask our captain to see justice done."

"You've a right to ask that, certainly," said Bulkeley, with a nod. "Do you mean to say that you deny the whole thing?"

"Yes, from beginning to end. Other parties gave our names at the Peal of Bells."

Bulkeley looked incredulous.

"It's clear that the fellows who went there belonged to Rookwood," he said. "Do you accuse other Rookwood fellows of borrowing your names to get out of a scrape?"

"There's nothing else to account for it. We don't accuse anybody—that isn't our business. We want to prove that we weren't the parties, that's all!"

"How can you prove it?"

"We can't—but you can." Jimmy Silver

took a photograph from his pocket, and laid it on the table. "Look at that!"

"It's your photograph," said Bulkeley.

"Yes."

"What do you want me to do with that?"

"I want you to take it to the Peal of Bells, and ask Mr. Snaggs whether that's one of the boys who came into his place to-day," said Jimmy Silver calmly.

Bulkeley jumped.

"I'll go!" he said promptly.

The prefect slipped the photograph into his pocket and left the study.

A few minutes later the Fistical Four had the satisfaction of seeing Bulkeley wheel his bicycle down to the gates. As Mack opened the gate for Bulkeley, four dusty juniors came in. Bulkeley glanced at them. Mornington and his merry party had returned.

"Report yourselves to Mr. Bootles," said Bulkeley. And he mounted his machine, and rode away towards Coombe.

Townsend & Co. made their way to the master's study.

Mr. Bootles greeted them with a frown, and with mingled relief and anger. He was glad to see that there had been no accident to the absentees, as he had feared. But that made his anger all the keener for the needless anxiety they had caused him.

"Well, where have you been since dinner?" the Form-master asked grimly.

"Awf'ly sorry, sir!" began Townsend.

"We've had an awful time, sir!" said Peele pathetically.

"Simply worn out, sir!" said Topham.

"What has happened, then?" exclaimed Mr. Bootles.

"I'm very sorry for this, sir," said Mornington calmly. "I asked these chaps to come for a run with me in a motor to Lantham. We fully intended to be back in time for afternoon lessons. The fool of a chauffeur took a lonely road across the moor, and the motor broke down!"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Bootles.

"We've had an awful time!" groaned Townsend. "I—I thought we were quite lost, and should have to stay all night on the moor."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Bootles, his anger quite disappeared. "You should not have gone out in the motor at all. However, if the matter is as you say, I shall excuse you for missing lessons. I may point out to you that if you had joined in the scouting excursions, Townsend, you would know your way about the country much better, and this would not have happened. I shall, under the circumstances, excuse you; but please do not let anything of the kind happen again. You may go, and ask the housekeeper for supper."

"Thank you, sir!"

The four young rascals quitted the study, almost breathless with delight at their good luck.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Not Quite a Success.

JIMMY SILVER & Co. looked anxiously out of the doorway of the School House, into the darkness of the quad.

They were anxious for the captain of Rookwood to return. Townsend & Co. had joined a merry party in Smythe's study, little dreaming of danger, and firmly believing themselves well out of their scrape. The was, however, a surprise in store for those cheery young gentlemen.

"There's the gate bell," said Lovell at last, as a tinkle was heard across the silent quad.

"Bulkeley at last," said Raby in great relief.

The lights of a trap glimmered through the darkness. A stout man drove up in a trap to the House, followed by Bulkeley on a bicycle. The captain of Rookwood jumped down and came in, followed by the proprietor of the Peal of Bells. Jimmy Silver & Co. did not know the man, but they guessed whom it was.

Mr. Bootles came out into the hall, and frowned slightly at the sight of the red-faced Mr. Snaggs. He had supposed that he had seen the last of that gentleman.

"This is that—— What—what!" said Mr. Bootles, in his jerky way.

"I have asked this gentleman to come here, sir," said Bulkeley. "It appears that Silver was not in the party that made a disturbance at his house to-day, and he has very kindly consented to come and clear him."

"Which I'm sorry, sir," said Mr. Snaggs. "The young limb gave me that there name, which I believed 'im. And I says to myself, says I, I ain't going to allow the wrong feller to be licked, says I, to save me a little trouble. So 'ere I am."

"Bless my soul!"

"I showed Mr. Snaggs a photograph of Silver, sir," explained Bulkeley. "He did not recognise it."

"Dear me! Silver! Lovell! Mr. Snaggs, please look at these juniors! Are they the boys who visited your place to-day?" asked Mr. Bootles, very much flurried.

Mr. Snaggs scanned the Fistical Four. They submitted cheerfully to the inspection.

"Never seed 'em before, sir," said the publican.

"Bless my soul! Would you mind stepping into the Head's room and assuring Dr. Chisholm on that point?"

"Werry pleased, sir."

Dr. Chisholm looked up as the publican was shown in.

"Really, Mr. Bootles——" he began.

Mr. Bootles explained hastily.

"Which that's the truth, sir," said Mr. Snaggs. "I 'ave never clapped heyes on these young gents afore."

"I am much obliged to you for coming to tell me so, sir," said the Head courteously. "You have prevented a very serious injustice being done. My boys, I am sorry for this mistake! It is clear now that your names were given by other persons. Mr. Snaggs, you are of opinion that your visitors were, however, boys of this school?"

"I knowed the caps," said Mr. Snaggs.

"Then perhaps you may be able to point out the real delinquents, since you are here. Mr. Bootles, will you have the kindness to assemble the Lower Forms in Hall?"

"Certainly, sir!"

There was considerable excitement in the school when the Head's order went forth. Shell and Fourth, Third and Second, turned out of their studies and the Common-room, and were called in from the gym, to assemble in Hall, most of them wondering what was in the wind.

The Fistical Four took their places in the ranks of the Fourth. Mornington and his comrades were there, looking somewhat uneasy. They had not seen Mr. Snaggs yet, but their consciences were not at ease.

There was a hush as Dr. Chisholm entered the Hall. Then Townsend gave a gasp of terror as the fat form and red face of Mr. Snaggs appeared, following Mr. Bootles in.

"By gad!" muttered Mornington.

"The game's up!" groaned Townsend, under his breath.

Mr. Snaggs, will you be good enough to point out the four boys who visited your house this afternoon, if they are here?" came the deep voice of the Head.

Mr. Snaggs' beery but keen eyes roved over the ranks of the assembled juniors. He stopped before the Fourth, and pointed to Townsend & Co., with a slight grin.

"'Ere they are!" he said.

"Mornington, Townsend, Topham, Peele, stand out!"

The Nutty Quartette stood out, pale and dismayed. The game was up now.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Bootles. "These boys have been absent since dinner, Dr. Chisholm, and they deceived me—deceived me grossly—with a story of their car having broken down on the moor!"

"Indeed!" said the Head grimly. "Mr. Snaggs, I am very, very much obliged to you! Good-evening, sir! Bring those four boys here, please, Mr. Bootles! Now, what have you to say?"

Townsend & Co. had nothing to say. But Mornington shrugged his shoulders, with a sneer.

"You visited a public-house, made a disturbance there, and gave the names of four of your Form-fellows!" said Dr. Chisholm.

"I—I——" stammered Townsend helplessly.

"We—we—— It was all Mornington's fault!" mumbled Peele. "We—we didn't want to go! He dragged us into it!"

"Is that the truth, Mornington?"

Mornington nodded coolly. Whatever were his faults—and their name was legion—he did not want for coolness and pluck.

"Yes, it is true!" he said, with another shrug of his shoulders. "I was bored to death, and I wanted a little excitement. It was my idea from first to last!"

The Head's brow was thunderous.

"I am glad you are frank, at least," he said. "But for the fact that you are a new boy, Mornington, I should expel you from the school for this! It is not only your rascally escapade, but your baseness in uttering

(Continued at foot of next column.)

WALLY'S WANGLE.

(Continued from page 12.)

choice of a fancay-waistcoat wequiahs a fellah of tact and judgment——"

Arthur Augustus rambled on with his valuable lecture, while the two fags briskly set about preparations for tea.

"Got the jam, Jimmy?" said Wally, plying the toasting-fork with the dexterity born of long practice.

"What-ho! Plenty here!"

"The choice of a tie, too," went on Arthur Augustus.

"Cake, too?" queried Wally.

"None here—Curly'll bring some!"

"Weally, deah boys——" protested Gussy.

"Sorry, Gus—carry on! Don't mind us," said Wally. "We're listening like—like anything—ain't we, Jimmy?"

"Like one o'clock!" grinned Jameson. And with that, though he looked a little doubtful on the point, Arthur Augustus had to be satisfied. He rambled on until the arrival of Curly with an armful of good things caused him to announce an interval for tea—whereat the fags heaved a sigh of relief.

Having taken so much trouble to "wangle" the invitation out of Wally's unsuspecting brother, the three young rascals ate a very hearty tea indeed, and the board was very nearly bare by the time they sat back in their chairs and announced that they could not eat any more.

"Full to the busting-point!" was Wally's elegant way of putting it—an expression that drew a horrified remonstrance from his brother.

"Pway do not use that dweadful expwession, Wallay!"

"Oh, come off, Gus! Don't be an old fogey!"

"I wefuse to be called an old fogay!"

"Brrr! We must be trotting now, old top!"

"I am just goin' to wesume my lectuah!" Wally grinned.

"Nothin' doin', old bean! We've had all the grub we can eat, and all the lecture we can stand——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you young wascal——"

"Now we must mizzle! We're much obliged for the tea, Gus——"

"Hear, hear!"

"And we forgive you for the lecture——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ungwateful young wuffians——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Any port in a storm, you know, Gus!" grinned Wally, round the door. "We were stony, and we had to wangle a tea somehow——"

"Bai Jove!"

"So we wangled it out of you—see? Neat, wasn't it? Ta, ta, old egg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three young rascals retreated rapidly down the passage, laughing loudly.

Arthur Augustus stared blankly at the door.

"B-bai Jove!" he stuttered.

And then, after a moment's further thought, he added:

"Bai Jove!"

THE END.

DISGRACING THE SCHOOL!

(Continued from previous column.)

deliberate falsehoods to place your guilt on other shoulders—that is the worst. You will be flogged before the whole school to-morrow morning! Your companions will be caned, and will write a thousand lines each!"

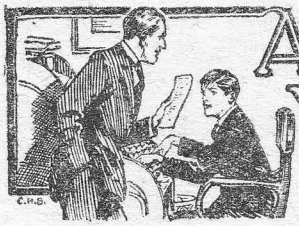
"Flogged! I!" exclaimed Mornington. "I will not——"

"Silence! Dismiss!"

* * * * * *

The next morning all Rookwood was assembled after prayers to witness the flogging. Mornington did not submit quietly. He struggled and kicked, and a couple of prefects had to go to the assistance of old Mack, who had "hoisted" him. The flogging was all the more severe on that account, and when it was over the new boy was quite subdued. It was the severest lesson he had ever had, but it was a right and fitting punishment for the fellow who had been Disgracing the School.

THE END



A WORD WITH YOUR EDITOR

"RODNEY STONE."

I hope none of my friends will miss the grand new serial in the "Boys' Friend." "Rodney Stone" is the work of the famous writer, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, whose name is known all over the world. Conan Doyle is familiar to most of us as the creator of Sherlock Holmes, the detective.

In "Rodney Stone" the writer tells about the best yarn of the Noble Art that ever was set down in black and white. Moreover, you get wonderful pictures of the old days of romance. I am not going to suggest that there was actually more romance in the period dealt with in the new serial, but as described by the celebrated writer the stirring events of the past take on a new colour. Anyway, you will all of you enjoy reading "Rodney Stone."

SENSITIVE PEOPLE.

Every letter that comes to me is read. I make a point of replying personally wherever possible. Sometimes it is not possible. Occasionally the writer, though he asks a question, omits to put his address. Then I am done. Sometimes, too, it is possible to do what the correspondent wants without writing, and in these days of extra rush silence in such instances may be excused.

Among the questions I am asked is what should a fellow do when Nature provides him with a bushy moustache, whiskers and beard before his time. Well, he should either shave or make the best of the business. I was sorry for my chum who took the matter so very seriously. He complained that people stared at him and laughed. It seems to me he could have the last laugh here.

I knew a smart chap who grew a beard at sixteen, and his people were very proud of it, and begged him not to shave. They had reason, anyway, to be proud of the owner of the beard for his own sake, seeing that he won his spurs as an artist at Burlington House before he was twenty.

Well, it is not worth worrying about a few hirsute fixings which come early. I would not advise anybody to adopt drastic measures. The "victim" can always get a safety razor cheap.

THEODORE BATCHER.

It looks as though Master Theodore Batcher will make good at St. Jim's, though he may cause a peck of trouble. There are a great many of my readers who take more than kindly to the fellow with leanings towards natural history. Such a boy brings a rare lot of extra interest to life. I suppose no school has ever been minus a chap of the Batcher type—the weird-looking, brainy party whose inclinations go towards investigating the mysteries of Nature. There are many of these mysteries. It is only the enthusiast who discovers them. He—the enthusiast—lives for his hobby, and ordinary life takes second place. He cannot be trusted, I know. For all one can tell, he will bring tadpoles with him to a cinema, or let loose a covey of tame snakes at a concert. This sort of thing invariably causes confusion, and makes nervous people climb on chairs and tables.

But don't be hard on the big-brained scientist. He may seem clumsy, ill-dressed, different to others, but he shows others just what lies behind. One day, with his specs and his long hair, and his books under his arm, to say nothing of the specimens reposing in his pockets, he will be revealing some important discovery calculated to make the world sit up and take notice.

AN APPEAL FROM A MOTHER.

Mrs. Moran, of Green Street, Royston, Herts, asks me to publish the following:

ROYSTON.

Tom, do come home, or write to me for your clothes. We are quite willing for you to stay if you are employed and happy. Dad does not know why you went away. He thinks you did not like your work. Write or wire as soon as you see this, I am so unhappy.—Your Mother, E. M.

BILLY BUNTER.

There is something to be said about Billy Bunter every week, and it is not always flattering. This is to be regretted, because Bunter is doing his best—especially when he gets inside the tuckshop. But listen to this:

"I respectfully beg to write to you in respect to the tale entitled 'The Terror in Black.' Bunter plays the chief part in this, as he has done in a frequent number of tales of late. But I think the time has come to settle Bunter's hash once and for all by expelling him from Greyfriars."

Pretty severe, is it not? But if Bunter were expelled he would be sure to come back—hiding in the wash-basket or something. Anyhow, he would not be absent for long.

Just think of the fuss which was made during the great change over when Wally Bunter was on the scene! Nobody was quite happy about the absence of Billy Bunter from the scene at Greyfriars. He was wanted—and so long as the porpoise does not do anything so bad as to make him wanted in the other sense—to wit, by the police—I feel that we cannot do better than look over his defects, and be to his follies—you cannot call them virtues—very kind.

Your Editor

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1. A Trial Bottle of "Harlene," the wonderful hair tonic stimulant and dressing that literally compels a magnificent growth of hair.
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4. A free Manual explaining exactly how to carry out the "Harlene Hair-Drill."

You will find "Harlene Hair-Drill" will awaken your hair to new life, and will bring back all its natural health and abundance.

Write for your "Harlene Hair-Drill" Gift to-day, cutting out and posting the form below, together with 4d. in stamps to cover cost of return postage.

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Does your hair fall out when you comb and brush it in the morning? If so, this is a sign of hair weakness that can be overcome by a two-minutes-a-day Healthy Hair Exercise.

Dryness clinging to the roots of the Hair retards its growth just as weeds check young flowers. "Harlene Hair-Drill" is the most effective method of removing the Dryness and Scurf.

You may possess a healthy head of hair, abundant, bright, beautiful, if you adopt the popular remedy for all hair weakness. Test it Free by sending the coupon below.

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Dear Sirs,—Please send me your Free "Harlene" Four-Fold Hair-Growing Outfit as announced. I enclose 4d. in stamps for postage and packing to my address. *Penny Popular*, 31/1/20.

NOTE TO READER.

Write your full name and address clearly on a plain piece of paper, pin this Coupon to it, and post as directed above. (Mark Envelope "Sample Dept.")

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