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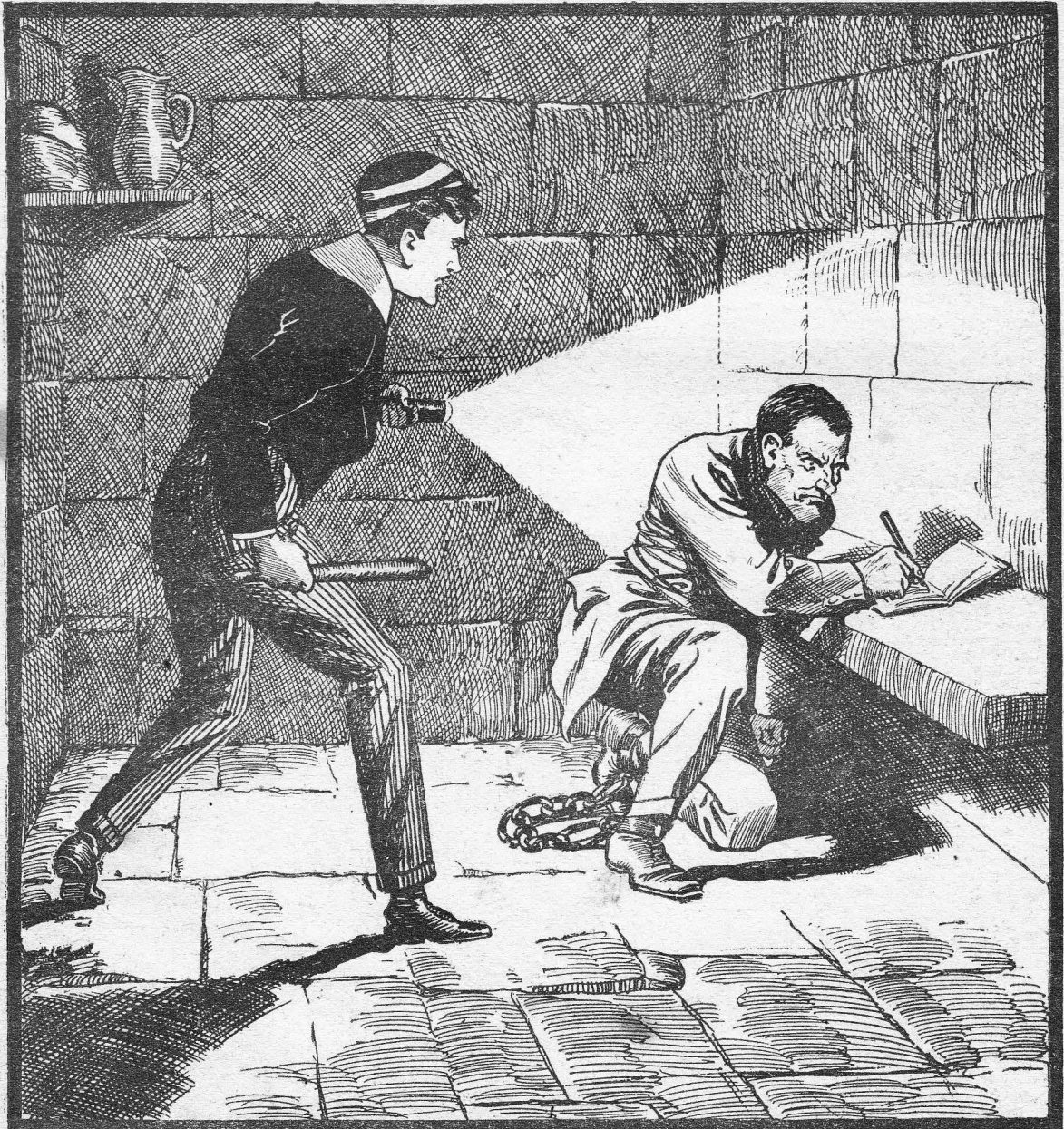
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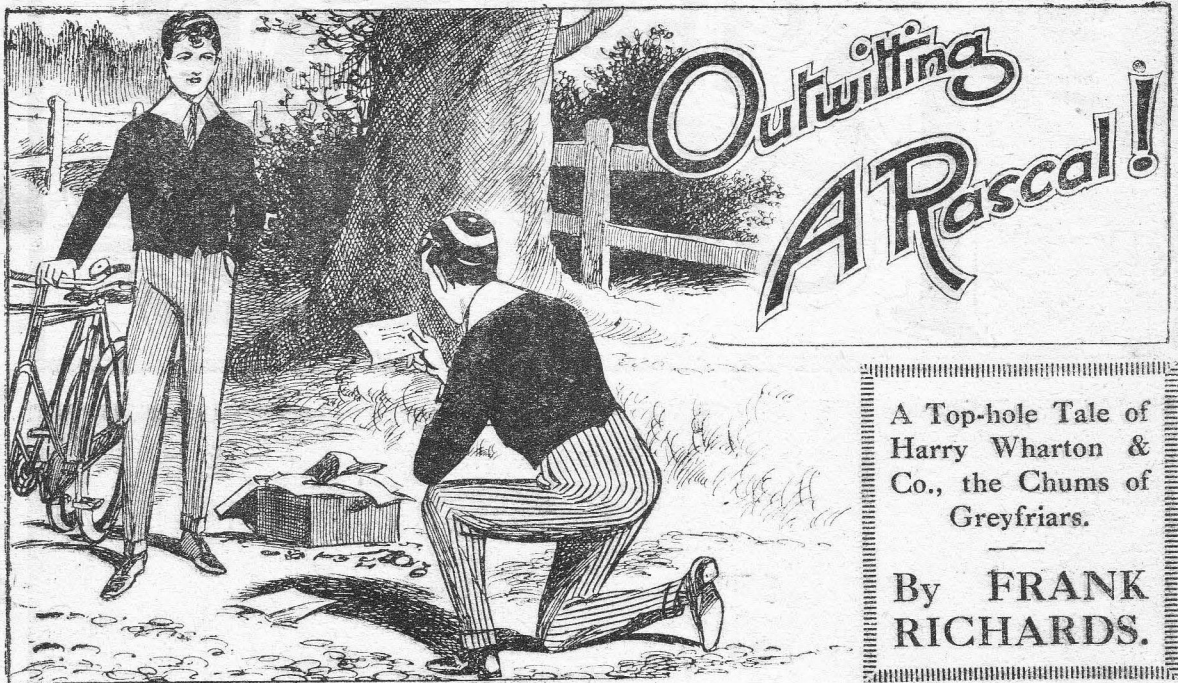


THE BOUNDER FORCES A CONFESSION!

(A Dramatic Episode from the Amazing Greyfriars Tale Inside.)

FORCING A CONFESSION!

The Bounder of Greyfriars has found himself in many tight corners, but none so desperate as the present. He realises at last that there remains only one way out of the difficulty. He meets cunning with cunning, and the results are amazing!

THE BOUNDER'S BOLD PLAN!

A Top-hole Tale of
Harry Wharton &
Co., the Chums of
Greyfriars.

By **FRANK
RICHARDS.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.**The Bounder's Resolve!**

EVERYBODY sympathised with the Bounder.

Harry Wharton, captain of the Remove Form, to which the Bounder belonged, sympathised more than anybody at Greyfriars.

For Herbert Vernon-Smith was experiencing a great deal of rough luck. He had led rather a fast life in the early days at Greyfriars, and now he was paying for it with a vengeance. For one of his late cronies, a disreputable scoundrel who went by the name of Jerry Hawke, possessed a letter which showed only too clearly exactly how big a fool the Bounder had once been.

Hawke used that letter to obtain sums of money from the Bounder—and Harry Wharton, sincerely believing that Vernon-Smith had kept his promise and kept to the straight and narrow path, took a hand in the game.

Mr. Jerry Hawke suffered as a consequence, Wharton treated him as Bob Cherry would have put it, to some of the rough stuff. And in so doing, Wharton had managed to obtain what he thought to be the letter which Hawke was threatening to expose. But it proved to be a copy.

The climax came when Jerry Hawke calmly walked on to the cricket field, where the Bounder was displaying his skill, and coolly demanded his hush-money. Naturally, the Bounder had to get the rascal from the school, and he and the man disappeared.

That was the last Wharton saw of them for the rest of that afternoon, and how the Bounder had got over Hawke, Wharton did not know. He found that the Bounder had returned, and went to seek him.

Vernon-Smith was in the common-room, reading, when Wharton found him. He put down his book, a shade coming over his face, as Wharton came up.

"I understood that I was in your confidence about this affair," said Wharton, rather abruptly.

"That's all right. What do you want to know?"

"Nothing," said Harry faintly. "I was going to ask you how you had got on with Hawke; but if you'd rather not tell me, it's no affair of mine."

"It isn't that," said the Bounder, very quietly. "I've settled what I'm going to do, that's all; and it's better for you not to know. I've given that rascal money to-day, and he refuses to give up the letter, or to

THE POPULAR.—No. 237.

tell me where it is. Some precious friend of his is taking care of it; that's all I could find out. I am still under his thumb, to have money squeezed out of me whenever he chooses, so he thinks. But he'll find me rather a dangerous customer to play that game with."

"I knowed it was all over, from the way you bucked up when you came back," said Harry. "You seemed to be in high feather."

"So I was—and am. I'd decided what was the only thing to be done, and made up my mind to do it."

"You do not mean being pally with him and his gang again?"

"No; only so far as serves my purpose."

"You mean, you are fooling him?"

"Yes."

"But that can't last long. He will screw you all the same, too—"

"I know that. But he thinks he's brought me to heel, and I'm letting him think so. He will find out his mistake."

"What are you going to do?" asked Harry uneasily. The glitter in the Bounder's eyes startled him.

"I'm going to have that letter from him."

"But how?"

"That's what I think I'd better not tell you. Trouble may come of it, and I don't want you to be mixed up in it."

"Can't I help you?"

The Bounder laughed.

"You could, perhaps; but I don't think you would if you knew the plan."

"You mean, it's something that you think I wouldn't have a hand in?"

"Something like that."

Wharton looked very disturbed.

"I wish you'd tell me what it is, Smithy."

"Better not. If there's trouble, the less you know about it the better. I've got my plans cut and dried. Nothing will stop me from carrying them out. If I don't succeed, I'm done for. Hawke will never give me another chance. And—it's a risky business. Much better for you to keep out of it."

"You—you don't mean that it's anything—anything against the law?" faltered Wharton.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"I hardly know. I know that what Hawke is doing is against the law, only I can't nail him down. I think I'm justified in stretching a point to stop his blackmailing me. I'm going to risk it, anyway."

"For goodness' sake, think what you do!

"I wish you'd tell me what it is, Smithy."

"Better not. If there's trouble, the less you know about it the better. I've got my plans cut and dried. Nothing will stop me from carrying them out. If I don't succeed, I'm done for. Hawke will never give me another chance. And—it's a risky business. Much better for you to keep out of it."

"For goodness' sake, think what you do!

You—you can't be thinking of—of violence or—" Wharton's face was paler now.

"I'm not going to knock him on the head, if that's what you mean," said the Bounder, laughing. "Not quite so thick as that. No—but it's a little game you wouldn't care to have a hand in—you are a little too soft to deal with a man like Jerry Hawke. What he needs is the iron hand, not the velvet glove. I've been under his thumb—now he's going to be under mine, and I'm going to put the screw on till he parts with the letter."

"Well, I suppose you'll go your own way, whatever comes of it," said Wharton uneasily. "Don't tell me if you'd rather not; but my mind would be easier if I knew."

"It wouldn't!" said the Bounder drily.

"You are meeting him again?"

"Not till Saturday—and not at night, either."

"That's why you can't play in the St. Jude's match?"

"Yes, I'm sorry; but you understand that this comes first. I've got to get out of this fix, at any price. I'm sorry to miss the St. Jude's match, too," the Bounder reflected. "Look here, if our side bats first I could come over and bat—but I couldn't stay for a second innings. It's a single-innings match, isn't it? Well, if we bat first, I can play—and you can have a substitute to field for the St. Jude's innings!"

"But if they win the toss—"

"Then I shall have to stand out. But I'll come over with you, anyway, if you like, on the chance."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Done!"

And Wharton had to be satisfied with that. That the Bounder's secret plan, whatever it was, did not worry him, or weigh on his mind, was very plain that evening. That was very like Vernon-Smith's hard and determined character; while the matter was unsettled, he was troubled; but as soon as he had come to a decision, however desperate, he was quite himself again. All the hardness, all the evil, in his complex nature had been roused by Hawke's persecution; and it was pretty clear that the measures he had decided upon were hard and pitiless. And once the matter was decided, the Bounder threw it aside from his thoughts. He was cheery enough that evening; he beat Murree Singh in a game of chess, and then beat Wun Lung, the little Chinese, who was a master of the game. Never had he seemed

to be in better spirits. The very danger of the resolve he had come to, seemed to have an exhilarating effect upon his curious nature. The Bounder was never more thoroughly master of himself than in the hour of stress or peril.

He hummed a tune as he went upstairs with the Remove at bed-time. He smiled genially at Gerald Loder, when the prefect came to see lights out. Loder looked at him surlily and suspiciously. The happenings of the previous night still puzzled the prefect, and he had by no means given up hope of catching the Bounder yet.

"Going to give us a look-in to-night, Loder, old chap?" asked Vernon-Smith, with a laugh, as he caught the senior's eye upon him. "Always a pleasure to see you, you know!"

And the Removeites chuckled.

Loder did not reply; but his face was grim as he left the dormitory. He intended to keep his eyes open that night; and not to be baffled a second time. He was assured that the Bounder had tricked him somehow the previous night, though in exactly what manner he could not say.

"Poor old Loder!" chuckled Bob Cherry, when the prefect's footfalls had died away down the passage. "It seems a shame that he should stay up so late without catching any fish. I really think we ought to take pity on him!"

"What are you thinking of now, ass?" asked Wharton.

"Well, Loder's pretty certain to drop in to-night—I could see it in his eyes. He won't be happy till he's caught somebody. Why shouldn't he make a catch, if it will make him happy? You are the bird he's after, Smithy—and, I think it's up to you. As soon as you hear his boots creak outside, all you've got to do is to slip under your bed—and let Loder find your bed empty. He'll jump for joy—and call Quelchy—and denounce your wicked goings on—or rather goings off—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And then all you've got to do is to show up, and explain that you did it to please Loder!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My only hat!" chuckled the Bounder. "You're getting quite brilliant in your old age. I'll do it—like a shot—if I hear him coming. And I shall hear him if he comes!"

"I'll guess I'll stay awake to see it," chuckled Fisher T. Fish.

"Same here!"

"Yaas, begad!" said Lord Maulverer. And most of the Removeites determined to stay awake and see the fun. But by the time half-past ten had sounded, most of them were deep in the arms of Morpheus. But the Bounder was not asleep. He was assured that the prefect would look in; and the chance of tricking and humbling his old enemy was too good to be lost.

Eleven o'clock rang out.

The Bounder listened intently.

Creak!

In the deep silence of the house, at that late hour, the slightest sound was audible. That creak from the passage, faint as it was, was enough for the Bounder. He whipped out of bed, and whipped underneath it, in a twinkling, leaving the bedclothes in disorder.

Creak! Then silence! The creeping prefect had stopped outside the door to listen. Two or three minutes passed; and then the door softly opened. A light gleamed in.

The Bounder lay close, scarcely breathing. He saw the trousers and boots of Loder, of the Sixth, as the prefect came quietly in, and cast his light upon the bed. Then he heard a triumphant exclamation of the prefect.

"Caught out, by thunder! I've got him at last!"

And the Bounder smiled softly.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Not a Triumph!

L ODER'S loud, sharp voice had awakened several of the Removeites. One or two of them had been awake already. Harry Wharton sat up in bed and blinked at Loder. The Sixth-former's eyes were gleaming with triumph.

"Hallo, loder, hallo!" yawned Bob Cherry. "You again, Loder! Blessed if you don't haunt the dormitory like a giddy ghost!"

"Anything wrong, Loder?" asked Wharton drowsily.

The prefect grinned.

"Get up, Wharton!"

"Gh!"

"Get up!"

"Taint rising bell, is it?" asked Wharton innocently. "What do you want me to get up in the middle of the night for, Loder?"

"Get up at once, and go and ask Mr. Quelch to step here. Tell him I've sent you!"

"Oh, rot! If you want Quelch, why can't you go and fetch him?" demanded Wharton warmly.

"Because I'm not going to give Vernon-Smith a chance to sneak back into the dormitory while I'm gone, and pretend that he was in bed all the time," grinned Loder. "He would lie till he was black in the face if he got a chance. I dare say he won't be back for hours yet, but I'm not taking risks. Go and call Mr. Quelch!"

"But I say—"

"I order you. Don't you know I'm a prefect you young sweep! Go and call Mr. Quelch at once!" said Loder harshly.

"Oh, all serene—give a chap time to get his clothes on," remonstrated Wharton. "You don't want me to go down in my pyjamas, do you?"

"Hurry up, then!"

Wharton dressed himself calmly. The rest of the Remove were sitting up in bed now, and trying to suppress their chuckles. Loder was not only caught in the trap; but he had fairly jumped into it. Harry Wharton was not in the slightest degree reluctant to call the Remove-master on the scene. The result might be a lesson to Loder, on the subject of prowling about junior dormitories in the night.

But as he glanced at Vernon-Smith's unoccupied bed, Harry Wharton gave a start worthy of a leading member of the Remove Dramatic Society.

"Hallo! Where's Smithy?" he exclaimed.

"That's for him to explain to Mr. Quelch—when he comes in," said Loder. "Get off, and fetch your Form-master here!"

"If you really mean it, Loder—"

"If you waste another minute, I'll give you a hundred lines!"

"Oh, all right."

Harry Wharton left the dormitory, and descended the stairs. The Remove master was still up, and Harry Wharton tapped at his study door and opened it. Mr. Quelch rose from his table in surprise at the sight of the junior, at that hour of the night.

"Wharton! What is it? Why are you out of bed?"

"Prefect's orders, sir," said Wharton meekly. "Loder's sent me, sir!"

"Loder! Why, what—"

"He's in our dormitory, sir, and he wants you to step here, he says."

"Oh! Very well!"

Harry Wharton returned to the Remove dormitory, the Form-master, puzzled and annoyed, following close behind. Loder had turned on the electric light in the dormitory now, and set down the lamp. His face showed the malicious triumph he was feeling; but, as Mr. Quelch entered, he composed his features into an expression of grave concern.

"Well, Loder, what is it?" asked Mr. Quelch tartly, not for the moment noticing the fact that Vernon-Smith's bed was empty.

"I'm afraid it's rather a serious matter, sir," said Loder. "I have had reason to suspect lately that someone has been breaking bounds at night from this dormitory. For that reason I looked in just now, and I'm sorry to say that one of the Remove is absent."

"Absent! At this hour! Bless my soul!"

Loder pointed to the empty bed.

Mr. Quelch looked at it. There was no doubt that it was empty. A dark frown gathered upon the Form-master's brow.

"Whose bed is this—Vernon-Smith's? You are sure he is absent, Loder?"

"He was gone when I came in, sir. I found his bed empty. I considered it best to report the matter to you at once."

"Quite right! Quite right! Where can he be gone? I am loth to believe—"

"It is common talk in the House, sir, that he received a communication from a bookmaker on Tuesday. He may have had to meet the man, and he would scarcely venture to do so by daylight—"

"But Vernon-Smith explained that matter to me satisfactorily—at all events, I regarded his explanation as satisfactory at the time. This, however—" Mr. Quelch frowned more darkly than ever. "But his clothes are here, Loder."

"He had other clothes in his box, sir. Probably he would not wear his everyday attire when breaking bounds at night, in case he should be seen out of doors."

"Yes, yes, very probable. This is a very serious matter. If Vernon-Smith has deceived me it will go hard with him. Wharton and the rest of you, were you aware that Vernon-Smith had broken bounds to-night?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"Begad, no, sir!"

"Faith, and we don't think he's done it, sir!"

"He is certainly not here," said Mr. Quelch. "Wharton, I ask you now, as head-boy of the Remove, and captain of the Form, and it is your duty to answer me frankly. Do you know where Vernon-Smith has gone?"

"Yes, sir!" said Wharton unexpectedly.

"Ah! You know where he is at the present moment?"

"Yes, sir!"

Loder thought he saw his chance. "I may say, sir, that I am not at all satisfied with Wharton's innocence in this matter. He is very probably Vernon-Smith's confederate in this kind of thing—"

"Pooh! Nonsense!" said Mr. Quelch sharply. "You have no right to make such a statement, Loder, without a shadow of proof. I have the most implicit faith in Wharton. He has answered me quite frankly, too. Now, Wharton, if you know where Vernon-Smith is, it is your duty to tell me."

"I have no objection, sir."

"Very good! Then where is he?"

"Under the bed, sir."

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"Under the bed, sir," repeated Wharton calmly.

There was a loud and prolonged chuckle from the Removeites. They could restrain it no longer.

Mr. Quelch stared at Wharton, dumfounded. Loder looked as if he were going to fall on the bed.

"Under—under the bed, did you say, Wharton?" stammered the Remove-master.

"Certainly, sir!"

"Vernon-Smith!" rapped out Mr. Quelch.

"If you are there show yourself at once!"

The Bounder crawled out from under the bed and stood respectfully before the Form-master. Loder gave a gasp. The Bounder was there in the flesh—there was no doubt about that. The trick that had been played upon him dawned on Loder's mind at last, and his look was almost murderous.

Mr. Quelch's frown was quite terrific.

"So you were hiding under the bed, Smith?"

"Yes, sir," said the Bounder calmly.

"Silence, boys! This is not a laughing matter—it is not a laughing matter at all! Have you been out of bounds, Smith?"

"No, sir."

"How long have you been under the bed?"

"Ever since I heard Loder sneaking along the passage to spy on us, sir."

"Ahem! You must not speak of a pre- in those terms, Vernon-Smith. Pray explain why you have been guilty of this utterly ridiculous and incomprehensible action. What possible motive could you have had for hiding under your bed?" demanded Mr. Quelch sternly.

"Only to give Loder a treat, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! What do you mean, Smith? Explain yourself!"

"You see, sir, Loder's got into the habit of sneaking and prowling about, looking for a chance to catch us napping," said the Bounder, with perfect calmness. "He was so keen to catch me, that I took pity on him and gave him the chance."

"Vernon-Smith!"

"You see, sir, I rather worries us, baving Loder dropping in at all hours; and I thought I would let him make his catch, and have done with it."

The Bounder made this statement in the most matter-of-fact manner, and with a perfectly grave face, as if he were in the most serious earnest.

The Removeites could not restrain their merriment. Loder's face, as he listened to Smithy's explanation, was quite a study. Mr. Quelch looked astounded at first; and then a smile broke over his face, though he suppressed it immediately.

"A most ridiculous proceeding, Vernon-Smith!" he said. "You should certainly not have played this trick on a prefect. Loder, it appears that there is nothing wrong, after

all—nothing but a practical joke, I am glad to say. Vernon-Smith should not have done this. Ahem! But I must remark, Loder—ahem!—that it must be annoying to a junior to be suspected without cause; and certainly you should have some tangible grounds for setting a watch upon any boy, as you appear to have done. You may go back to bed, Smith."

"Yes, sir."
"Isn't—isn't the young rascal going to be punished, sir, for this—this impudent trick?" demanded Loder, almost choking.

"Under the circumstances, no; as you have undoubtedly provoked it, Loder. And I do not approve of these surprise visits to junior dormitories, unless for some really adequate reason. I trust you will remember that, Loder!"

Loder did not reply; he could not trust himself to speak. He marched out of the room, taking his lamp. Mr. Quelch bade good-night to the boys, and followed. The door closed, and then a loud, long chuckle ran from end to end of the dormitory.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"
"Poor old Loder!" said Bob Cherry, wiping his eyes. "Did you see his face? It was worth a guinea a box, at least!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I fancy Loder will think twice before he calls Quelch in again!" grinned the Bouncer. "Perhaps we've done with his spying now. Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Removites chuckled themselves to sleep.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Turning the Tables.

VERNON-SMITH was as good as his word.

He played for the Remove against St. Jude's, knocked up a very pretty sixty-four, found a substitute to field for him, and then hurried back to the Old Priory, by Friarade, to meet Jerry Hawke.

The scoundrel appeared a few minutes after the Bouncer arrived. Jerry's face was flushed, and it was not difficult to guess where his money was going.

"Well?" said the Bouncer grimly.
"Ten pound, 'ere and now!" said Hawke bluntly.

"And after that?" said Vernon-Smith quietly.

"After that," said Mr. Hawke. "Well, after that you'll—and me as much as I choose to ask for. Five quid next week, and as much as I choose the week after. See? Tell your father you'll be kicked out of Greyfriars if you don't part, and I reckon he'll pony up. He's a millionaire, ain't he? Well, I'm goin' to 'elp him spend his money. Ten quid now, and five next week—that's for a beginnin'."

"And a hundred the week after?" asked the Bouncer, smiling.

"If I ask for a 'undred, you'll 'and out a 'undred, or you'll 'smart for it!" said Jerry Hawke threateningly. "Strike me! If you don't 'and out that tanner now, and sharp, I'll make it a 'undred on the spot."

And the rascal lighted his pipe.

Vernon-Smith laughed, but his eyes were glittering. If he had felt any remorse for the way he had planned to deal with the blackmailer, it was banished now. Jerry Hawke's price had gone up. To stave off exposure, if his demands were yielded to, large sums were required, and when all resources were exhausted the danger remained. But Jerry Hawke did not quite know the hard and determined character he was dealing with.

"You won't part with the letter on any terms?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Not on no terms!" said Mr. Hawke emphatically.

"And are you going to squeeze money out of me whenever you feel inclined, without limit?"

"That's the game."

"And you think I shall stand it?"

"I think you've got to."

"That's where you make a little mistake," said the Bouncer. "I suppose you know you can be put in prison for blackmail?"

Jerry Hawke chuckled hoarsely.
"I know it. But not without that letter being sent to your 'eadmaster!"

"That letter is going to be given up to me," said the Bouncer steadily, "and, after that, I shall be able to have you arrested for extorting money by threats."

THE POPULAR.—No. 237.

"After!" grinned Jerry Hawke. "But you ain't got the letter yet! And I ain't got it about me, neither—it's safe in a pal's 'ands, fur from 'ere. So don't you think of playin' any little game like your pal did the other night. 'Ere, 'ands off—I tell you I ain't got the letter about me!"

The Bouncer was upon him with the spring of a tiger.

Jerry Hawke grappled with him with his left hand, and swung back a stick with his right. But, before he could strike, the Bouncer had hooked his leg, and he fell heavily. Vernon-Smith came down heavily on the top of him. From under his jacket he whipped out a short, loaded stick, and whirled it in the air over Jerry Hawke's head.

"Keep quiet!"
"I'll smash yer!" granted the ruffian, and he made a desperate effort to rise.

The effort would have succeeded, too; but the loaded stick came down with a crash, and Jerry gave one gurgling gasp, and fell back insensible.

The Bouncer gave him a quick look, and then glanced round in the gathering shadows. Then he thrust the stick into his jacket again, and rose.

He did not waste a moment. Taking the insensible ruffian by the shoulders, he dragged him into the opening of the vaults. Then, exerting all his strength, he raised him from the ground, and half-carried, half-dragged him down the stone steps in the darkness.

There was a moan from Jerry; he was beginning to come to. In the vaults all was darkness—darkness so intense as to be almost visible. But the Bouncer knew his way well.

He dragged the ruffian on, and felt over the stone wall, and the secret door swung back on its pivot.

Vernon-Smith dragged the rascal into the secret chamber, and flung him down. Then a sudden gleam of light penetrated the blackness. The Bouncer had taken an electric lamp from his pocket.

The light gleamed on Jerry Hawke's face, showing now the signs of returning consciousness. But he was safe for at least five minutes yet; not that the Bouncer would have scrupled to use his loaded stick again if necessary.

He set the lamp down on the stone flags of the floor. On a corner of the secret cell lay a rusty pair of handcuffs, and a still more rusty pair of old leg-irons, such as were at one time carried on ships for recalcitrant seamen. The Bouncer picked them up, and bent over the ruffian.

Click, click, click!

The irons were rusty, but they were in good order, and very strong. A more powerful man than Jerry would have found himself helpless once in that iron clutch. The irons clicked fast on the limbs of the blackmailer, and Vernon-Smith, breathing hard, stepped back.

Jerry Hawke's eyes opened at last.

He blinked about him dazedly, and tried to rise, and fell back heavily, the irons clanking noisily on the stone floor.

As his fuddled brain cleared, Jerry realised his position. He sat up, propping his back against the cold stone wall of the cell. His eyes seemed to burn as he fixed them on the Bouncer. The latter was smiling—a cold, hard smile, that boded ill to the rascal who had persecuted him, now that the tables were turned.

"Crikey!" said Jerry Hawke, grinding his teeth. "Wot's this 'ere game? Let me loose! Do you 'ear—let me loose!"

"I hear," said the Bouncer quietly.

"Let me out of this!"

"It's my turn to make terms now, Jerry. You've made me pay you to keep your evil mouth shut. Now it's my turn. If you want your liberty, you've got to pay for it!"

"Pay for it!" mumbled Hawke.

"Exactly. And the price is—my letter to Cobb!"

"Wot!"

"Take time to think it over," said Vernon-Smith. "Try to get loose if you like. I don't think you will be able to do it. But try!"

Hawke was wrenching savagely at the irons. But it was useless, and he soon realised it. He panted as he gave up the effort.

"Wot 'ave you done this for? I ain't got the letter about me. I ain't going to give it up. You can't keep me 'ere!"

"Can't I?" said the Bouncer. "You will learn better, my friend. You came to the school yesterday; I paid you to clear off.

You refuse to give up my letter; you intend to keep it, and keep a hold over me for good—as long as I stay at Greyfriars, at all events. Do you think I'm the sort of fellow to be handled like that? You fool! I made you meet me here to deal with you. The bribe I gave you was the first—and the last! Yesterday I went to Courtfield, to old Lazarus' secondhand shop, and bought this set of old ship's irons. I brought them here and left them ready. You understand what for?"

"You can't keep me 'ere."

"You could be sent to prison for blackmail. Circumstances won't let me send you to prison, so I've taken the law into my own hands. I'm imprisoning you on my own," the Bouncer explained, with icy coldness. "You will remain here, in irons, until the letter is in my hands!"

"You won't get it!"

"Very well. Then you stay here. I've put a bottle of water and half a loaf in the corner there. That will last you till Monday."

"Monday!" shrieked Hawke.

"Yes. I shall be back on Monday to see you, and ask you whether you have decided to hand over my letter."

Jerry Hawke looked at him with growing terror. There was a merciless hardness in the Bouncer's face; it was only too clear that he meant every word he said. The blackmailer had had no mercy on him; and he was to receive none.

"You—you goin' to leave me 'ere?" gasped Hawke. "I shall catch my death of cold in this 'ere freezing place!"

"That's your look-out!"

"I—I can't stop here. I'll have the law of you!"

The Bouncer burst into a laugh.

"I like that! I fancy the law won't help you very much, when you'll have to say you were blackmailing me! You see, that letter will be in my hands by that time, for you won't be out of this hole till you've handed it over!"

"I—I ain't got it."

"I'm prepared for that. I've got a fountain-pen and paper in my pocket. You're to write to your pal, and tell him to send that letter to me, to Friarade Post Office, to be called for. I won't risk having it sent to the school."

"And—and if I write that letter, you will let me go?" asked Jerry Hawke, with a cunning gleam in his eyes.

"Yes; when I have received that letter to Cobb, and seen it, and made sure that it is the genuine article, and destroyed it," said the Bouncer calmly. "Not before."

"I won't do it!" yelled Hawke.

The Bouncer picked up the electric lamp. "Very well; good-night!"

The rascal watched him with burning eyes as he went to the doorway. He was stepping through the narrow aperture when Hawke's courage failed him, and he called him back.

"'Old on, Master Smith! You don't really mean as 'ow you'll leave me 'ere a 'ole day and night, with nothin' but a bit o' bread to eat?"

"I do!"

"You're a 'eartless villain!" groaned Hawke. "That's wot you are—a 'eartless young villain! You ain't got no pity for a man wot's 'ad trouble. Look 'ere. I—I—I'll let you 'ave that letter for the ten quid you was talkin' about."

"Not a brown," said Vernon-Smith calmly.

"It's too late for that. You'll let me have that letter for nothing. It's mine, anyway. You've had four pounds from me, and if you had it left I'd take it away from you now. Now, for the last time. You've got to stay here until I get my letter, anyway. The longer you put it off, the longer you'll have to stay here. Yes or no?"

"You don't mean it!" faltered Jerry Hawke.

"Very well; I'll see you again on Monday." The Bouncer stepped through the narrow aperture into the passage, and the heavy stone creaked as he pushed it shut.

But that was too much for Jerry. He burst into a wild shriek.

"'Old on! Come back, come back! I'll do it—I'll do anything!"

The stone was almost shut. A thin streak of light came from the passage without. The ironed rascal yelled again and again in abject terror, fearful that, in spite of his surrender, the Bouncer meant to leave him there unheard. But the stone wall swung open again, and Vernon-Smith stepped into the cell once more.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Whip Hand.

VERNON SMITH looked down contemptuously at the white, scared face of the ironed rascal, Jerry Hawke was leaning back against the stone wall, gasping. Gone was now the truculent, bullying manner of the blackmailer. His face had lost the flush of strong drink, and was of a sickly, hideous pallor. The cold of the stone was already striking into his limbs, and colder terror was chilling his very heart.

His look was abject; but there was no pity in the Bounder's glance. He knew only too well that if he had relented towards the rascal and freed him, Jerry Hawke would have become his old self again immediately, and the fatal letter would be as far off as ever.

"You ain't leavin' me 'ere, Master Smith!" Jerry Hawke's voice was low and whining now, a strange contrast to his former bullying tones. "I tell you, I shall 'ave the 'orrors if I'm left 'ere in the dark!"

"You'll be let out as 'soon as I have my letter back, and not before," said the Bounder calmly. "Now, do you mean business? I've got no time to waste on you. I shall be late for calling-over, anyway!"

"You won't leave me 'ere?"

"Until I have my letter, yes. Write at once as I shall dictate to you, and I shall get my letter on Monday. Then I shall come here and let you loose—not before!"

"But I—I can't stay 'ere!" groaned Jerry Hawke. "I tell you, I shall 'ave the 'orrors! I—I can't stand it, Master Smith! Don't be 'ard on a poor chap!"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"It's not much worse than prison, and that's where you ought to be—you've earned it," he said. "It's your own look-out. If there's any quicker way of getting the letter, I'm ready to take it. Where is it?"

"It's at Lantham," groaned Hawke. "I—I couldn't trust it at the Cross Keys; Cobb was ratty about my gettin' 'old of it. It's in the 'ands of a pal of mine at Lantham!"

"His name?"

"Jimmy Doane," groaned the wretched man, the words seeming to be wrung from him. "He keeps the Peal o' Bells pub in Cross Street. Course, he don't know nothing about the letter. It's in a little box, wot he's minding for me, 'long of some other papers. I left it there when I was took to the stone jug, you see!"

"Will he give it up on a note from you?"

"I s'pose so."

"Very well; write the note, and I'll bike over there to-morrow morning," said Vernon-Smith. "If all goes well, I'll come straight back here and let you out."

"You let me out now if I give you the note," whined Jerry Hawke. "I tell you, I shall 'ave the 'orrors if I'm left 'ere in the dark!"

"I'll leave you the lamp," said the Bounder contemptuously. "After this you'd better turn honest, Jerry. You haven't nerve enough for a criminal!"

"It'll go out!" said Hawke, with a nervous look at the electric lamp.

"It lasts three hours. I have a couple of refills in my pocket, too. I'll leave them. I'll do the best I can for you, if you play straight." The Bounder took a fountain-pen and a pocket-book from his pocket. "Here you are!"

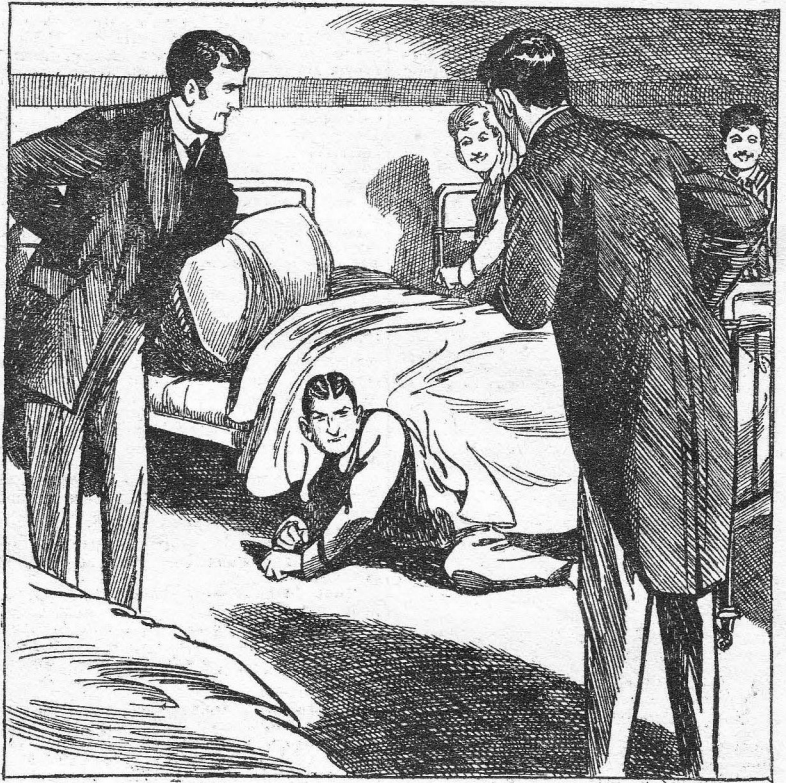
"I can't write with my 'ands like this 'ere."

"I'll let your right hand loose; but no tricks, mind. You've had this loaded stick on your napper once; you don't want it again."

"Straight as a die," mumbled Jerry Hawke; but his eyes were gleaming now.

The Bounder did not give him a chance for treachery, however. He knew the man he was dealing with. He took a whipcord from his pocket, and bound Jerry's left arm tightly to his side, and then unlocked the handcuffs. Hawke clenched the fist of his free hand, and Vernon-Smith grinned, and made a motion with the loaded stick. The rascal groaned, and gave up the momentary idea of resistance. He was helpless in the hands of the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith placed the pen in his hand, and opened the pocket-book. Jerry Hawke hesitated. It was a bitter pill to swallow. He had dreamed golden dreams, once the Bounder was fairly under his thumb. The horn of plenty had scarcely begun to flow,



OUT OF BED, BUT NOT OUT OF BOUNDS!—"Where is Vernon-Smith?" asked Mr. Quolch sternly. "Under the bed!" replied Harry Wharton. There was a chuckle, and the Bounder crawled out from under the bed. Loder gasped. The trick that had been played upon him dawned on the prefect's mind at last. (See Chapter 2.)

when the supply was to be cut off. Jerry Hawke felt that it was very hard upon a man who had only been a few days outside the "stone jug"; but there was no help for it.

In blackmailing the Bounder of Greyfriars, he had "woken up the wrong passenger," with a vengeance. Vernon-Smith was not the kind of fellow to be victimised by a rascal of Jerry Hawke's calibre.

The rascal wrote unwillingly, muttering oaths to himself as the pen glided over the paper:

"Dear Jimmy,—Plese and my box wot you're minding for me to the young gentleman wot will and you this ere. And oblige your old pal Jerry Hawke."

"There you are, 'ang yer!" he muttered. "Blowed if you ain't built to make a criminal yourself, Master Smith! Wot honest kid would ever have thought of a dodge like this 'ere? You'll end up in prison—that's wot you'll do!"

Now direct this 'envelope," said the Bounder, without heeding Mr. Hawke's prophecy.

Jerry Hawke scrawled on the envelope: "Jimmy Doane, Eskwire, Peal o' Bells, Lantham."

"And when I hand that to Doane, he'll give up the box?"

"Yes."

"Mind, if there is any hitch about it, you'll stay here till it's set right," said the Bounder grimly. "You don't get out of these irons till my letter is safe in my hands!"

"It's all right; he'll 'and the box hoyer as right as rain!" groaned Jerry Hawke. "Now, Master Smith, you let me hout now. I've done all you asked!"

"When I've got my letter, not before!"

The Bounder relocked the handcuffs, and untied the rascal's arm. He pushed the loaf and the bottle of water within reach of the prisoner with his foot.

"That's all. If this note is all right, I shall bring the box here to-morrow morning. Till then, you stay as you are. And you can be thankful it's no worse. After I've

got my letter, I could send you to prison for blackmail if I chose."

"You won't do that, Master Smith?" whined the wretched man.

All the truculence had been taken out of Jerry Hawke now.

"Not if this is square," said the Bounder. "Good-night!"

"Master Smith, I—'ere—don't go—'elp!"

Thud!

The stone door closed. The unhappy rascal was left, blinking at the steady glow of the electric lamp. Probably no rascal ever repented of his rascality so sincerely as Jerry Hawke did at that moment.

Without giving the imprisoned blackmailer another thought, Vernon-Smith wedged a stone into the secret door, so that it could by no possibility be opened, and hurried out of the vaults.

He was smiling as he came out into the dusk of the old Priory.

While Jerry Hawke was groaning over his hapless fate in the hidden cell, Vernon-Smith strode rapidly away, and reached the Friardale road. It was well past the hour for locking up the gates at Greyfriars, but he knew that the cricketers would be late back from St. Jude's. He walked on lightly towards the school, and, as he expected, before he reached Greyfriars he heard the rumble of the brake behind him on the road.

He stopped by the roadside, and waited for it.

The brake came dashing up in great style, and the sound of a chorus, roared out by the cricketers, showed that the Removites were in great spirits. Vernon-Smith stepped out into the road, and held up his hand.

"Hold on!"

"Hallo—hallo—hallo! It's Smithy! Stop, driver!"

The brake halted. The cricketers looked down at the Bounder in surprise.

"Jump in!" said Harry Wharton.

Vernon-Smith climbed into the brake, and it rolled on towards Greyfriars again.

"Didn't expect to see you," said Wharton. "I thought you were back at the school long ago!"

"I've been busy," said Vernon-Smith, with a laugh. "I knew you wouldn't leave St. Jude's till dark, so I timed myself to catch you here. If I go back with the team, it's all right, and no questions asked. How did the match go?"

"Didn't you hear us tootling?" grinned Bob Cherry. "We've won!"

"Good egg!"

"By ten runs," said Frank Nugent. "They played a good game. We had just time to finish before the light went. Inky took the last wicket only in time, didn't you, you black tulip?"

"It was a close thing," added Wharton. "We couldn't have done without you after all, Smithy. I don't think Micky would have made sixty against their bowling!"

"Faith, and ye're right!" remarked Micky Desmond. "A dozen would be nearer my mark. Sure, we owe the match to Smithy!"

"And your giddy engagement?" said Peter Todd, with a curious look at the Bounder. "Did your horse win?"

There was a chuckle from the cricketers. The Bounder joined in it.

"It wasn't anything of that kind," he said. "I had to see a man on business, that's all. I've seen him, and it's gone rippingly. Hallo! Here we are!"

The brake halted at the gates of Greyfriars. Bob Cherry rang a terrific peal on the bell. Gosing came grunting down to the gates to unlock them.

The team had leave to return late, as they had been playing at a distance, and, as the Bounder had rejoined them on the way home, there was no danger of questions being asked him as to his occupation that afternoon.

The brake drove away, and the Remove cricketers marched in, in great spirits. They had beaten St. Jude's, and they were joyful; but the most satisfied of all the crowd was Vernon-Smith. The shadow of the past was lifted from his path at last!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Light at Last!

HARRY WHARTON did not ask the Bounder any questions. He understood that all had gone well; and Vernon-Smith did not give him any information. Until the letter was safely in his hands, he intended to keep his own counsel.

On the morrow morning, after service, Vernon-Smith sought the captain of the Remove.

Sunday was a quiet day at Greyfriars, the leisure hours being spent mostly in "Sunday walks." Harry Wharton and Co. had intended to ramble along the cliffs, and as the Bounder joined them in the Close, Bob Cherry genially invited him to join them. But the Bounder shook his head.

"Sorry; I've got to go to Lantham," he said.

"Lantham!" said Bob. "That's a jolly good distance! You can't walk there!"

"No; I'm going on my bike. I want you to come with me, Wharton, if you will."

Wharton nodded.

"All right. You chaps don't mind?"

He walked away to the bike-shed with the Bounder. He was very silent as they took the machines out. The Bounder smiled slightly.

"I know you feel rather huffed at my not telling you how I've dealt with Jerry Hawke," he said abruptly.

Wharton coloured a little.

"Well—" he began.

"If I hadn't told you, it's because it was better to keep it dark till it was all over. You wouldn't have approved of my plan; and there was a certain amount of danger in it. It might have led to trouble. But now I've got the rascal fixed I intend to explain."

"I don't ask—" began Wharton.

"That's all right; you're entitled to know. Besides, it isn't finished yet; and I shall be glad of your company," said Vernon-Smith. "It's a ripping morning for a ride, too!"

THE POPULAR.—No. 237.

"But what are we going to Lantham for?"

"For my letter—that letter to Cobb."

"Is Hawke going to give it up, then?" asked Harry, in amazement.

"Yes. I've persuaded him."

"Good! I'll come with pleasure, then." It was a long ride to Lantham, but the juniors covered the ground quickly in the fresh summer morning. Vernon-Smith spoke hardly a word on the ride. Wharton did not ask questions; he knew that the Bounder intended to explain in his own way.

Lantham was reached at last, and Wharton looked surprised when the Bounder led the way into a low quarter of the town. He stopped at last outside a disreputable-looking public-house, and jumped off his machine. Wharton followed suit.

"Is Hawke here?" he asked.

"No; but the letter is. Wait outside for me. This place would get on your nerves," said Vernon-Smith, with a grin. "My nerves are a bit tougher, and I can stand it. I shan't be long."

Wharton remained holding the machines while the Bounder disappeared into the building. Ten minutes later Vernon-Smith came out of the Peal o' Bells with a small box under his arm.

Wharton glanced at it.

"It's Hawke's," said the Bounder, in a tone of explanation. "The letter's in it. Come on!"

"But Hawke—" said the puzzled Wharton.

"He gave me a note for the landlord of this place, who was minding the box for him. I persuaded him to give me the note."

"How on earth did you do that?"

"That's what I'm going to show you."

They rode out of Lantham again, Vernon-Smith keeping the box under one arm. As soon as they were well out of the town he halted. They dismounted, and the Bounder examined the box. It was locked; but the lock was a common one, and presented no difficulties. He picked up a heavy stone and crashed it on the lock, and the box burst open.

The interior was packed with various articles—dirty old papers, two or three articles of cheap jewellery. The Bounder examined the papers carefully one by one. Wharton watching him in silence.

"Eureka!"

It was an exclamation of triumph from the Bounder.

He held up the letter. Wharton looked at it. It was almost a facsimile of the letter Wharton had taken from Jerry Hawke in Friardale Wood, on the night he had met the rascal in the spinney. But it was written on the Bounder's own note-paper, and it was in his genuine hand.

"That's the right one?" asked Harry.

"That's it!"

"Good luck! Better burn it while you've got the chance."

"What-ho!"

Vernon-Smith struck a match and applied it to the letter. The paper crumpled up in the flame, and the Bounder watched it burn, till only a fragment remained between his finger and thumb. He threw down the last fragment, and applied another match to it till that vanished, too.

Then the Bounder drew a deep, deep breath.

"Clear at last!" he said. "Not a shred left! Clear at last! That makes me feel as if I could forgive Jerry Hawke."

"Well, he seems to have done the decent thing at last in letting you have it back," said Wharton, still perplexed.

Vernon-Smith laughed.

"Quite so."

"What about that box? You'll have to take it back."

"I'm going to take that to Jerry Hawke. Come on."

"Where now?"

"The old Friardale Priory."

"Are you meeting Hawke there?" asked Harry.

"Yes."

They rode on again. Friardale Wood was reached at last, and they left their machines on the footpath and walked into the ruins. There was no sign of anyone waiting for the Bounder there, and Harry Wharton was more and more

puzzled. He uttered an exclamation as the Bounder led the way into the vaults.

"He's not there?"

"Yes. Come on!"

Vernon-Smith had provided himself with an electric torch, and he turned on the light as they descended the steps. He removed the wedge, and threw open the stone door of the secret cell.

There was darkness within. The lamp had failed long ago. From the darkness came a gasp.

"That you, Master Smith?"

"Yes."

"Come and let me loose, for Heaven's sake! I can't stand this 'ere! I tell you I've 'ad the 'oly 'orrors!"

Vernon-Smith flashed the light upon Jerry Hawke. Harry Wharton gasped.

"Smithy, you—you've done this! You've kept that man here all night in irons!" The captain of the Remove could scarcely believe his eyes. "Smithy!"

"It was the only way," said Vernon-Smith calmly. "Jerry Hawke drove me to it, and he has himself to thank for it."

"Great Scott!"

"Let me loose!" whined Hawke. "I done all you asked. Let me loose Master Smith!"

The Bounder stooped and unlocked the irons. Jerry Hawke, who was shivering, and quite limp, rubbed his limbs and whined. The Bounder had his loaded stick in hand in case of trouble; but there was evidently no trouble to be looked for from the cowed ruffian.

"There's your box," said Vernon-Smith. "I've opened it to get my letter. The letter's burnt now. I've drawn your teeth, Jerry Hawke! And, now, you've blackmailed me, and I can prove it. You can prove nothing against me, but I can prove enough to send you back to prison, to stay there for a couple of years this time!"

"You give me your word, Master Smith that—"

"And I will keep it. But you've got to clear out of this neighbourhood. Let me set eyes on you once again, and I shall give information to the police, and you will get your deserts!" said the Bounder grimly.

Jerry Hawke shivered.

"I'm goin'," he said. "You won't ever set eyes on me ag'in. I don't want to 'ave notin' to do with you, Master Smith. You're a criminal—that's wot you are! You ain't got no consideration for a feller wot's 'ad trouble. You're worse nor me, by a long sight, you are. I got the cramp, I 'ave, and I've got a cold, and I—"

"And you'll have a thick ear, too, if you don't clear off at once!" interrupted Vernon-Smith.

Jerry Hawke took the hint, and vanished. The Bounder and Harry Wharton returned to their bicycles. They rode in silence towards Greyfriars. Vernon-Smith looked curiously at his companion, after a long silence.

"You know it all now," he said.

Wharton nodded.

"You blame me?"

"I—I don't know," Wharton hesitated.

"It—it was—was rather thick, you know. It might have got you into trouble. Of course, that rascal's mouth is closed, as you could bring a charge of blackmailing against him. But—but I'm glad you didn't tell me what you were going to do."

"That's the finish," said the Bounder. "I'm clear now. Nothing more can be brought up against me. The past is dead and done with."

"That's good, at all events."

And as they rode back to the school the Bounder's face was very cheerful. Before him now lay the straight path, easy to tread, no longer darkened and troubled by the shadow of the past.

THE END.

(Next week's story of the Greyfriars Chums is full of thrills and humorous incidents.)



An Amazing Swindle and Some Surprising Results!

CAPTAIN OR SLACKER?

What is the matter with Valentine Mornington? That is the question for which the Rookwood Chums cannot find an answer. Morny is fast falling back into his old ways, in spite of his chum's desperate attempt to head him off disaster and the road to ruin!

A MYSTERY AT ROOKWOOD!

Heading for Disaster!



A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of Jimmy Silver & Co., the Chums of Rookwood School.
By Owen Conquest.

THE FIRST CHAPTER
The Vials of Wrath.

"H E'S got to resign!" Arthur Edward Lovell spoke hotly.

Jimmy Silver was silent, with a rather troubled wrinkle in his brow; but Raby and Newcome nodded a hearty assent.

The Fistical Four were discussing Mornington of the Fourth, the new junior captain of Rookwood; or, rather, three of them were discussing him, and Jimmy Silver was listening patiently.

"If he don't resign," went on Lovell angrily, "he's got to get the sack!"

"And the sooner the better!" remarked Raby. "We don't want him to play the fool with any more of our matches!"

"What do you think, Jimmy?" demanded Lovell.

Jimmy Silver's wrinkle deepened, but he did not answer.

"He left us in the lurch over the Bagshot match yesterday," continued Arthur Edward Lovell, with deep indignation. "Walked off without a word of explanation, and simply cut the match! Is that the right thing for a cricket captain to do?"

"Hardly!" said Raby. "When he came in, and we tackled him, he told us to go and eat coke!" said Lovell, breathing hard. "That's all the explanation he's given! The Bagshot fellows were kept waiting, and finally we had to play without Morny, putting in another man at the last minute! And he's captain! I tell you Rookwood won't stand that sort of thing!"

"No fear!" "Morny was elected skipper in your place, Jimmy; and now you've only got to raise your finger to get the captaincy back again," said Lovell.

No answer. "Why don't you speak?" exclaimed the exasperated Lovell. "Don't you agree with what I'm saying, you dumb imbecile?"

"To some extent," he admitted. "Only to some extent!" snorted Lovell. "Yes. I'm not putting up against Morny. The fellows made the change of their own accord—"

"If you're going to sulk—"

"I'm not sulking, ass! But you can't put in a skipper one day, and drop him the next. Morny's a bit uncertain, but all the fellows knew that before they elected him. They took him with their eyes open. I'm as waxy as you can be about the match yesterday; it was simply rotten to cut it as he did. But I'm not starting a campaign against Mornington. I told him I'd back him up, and I'm going to do it. If he's booted out of the captaincy, I decline to have a hand in it!"

"Rot!"

"Rot or not, that's how I look at it, and that's what I'm sticking to," said Jimmy Silver. "If I put up against him, it would look as if I'd been on the watch to catch him tripping—"

"What does it matter how it looks if it isn't so?"

"Well, it does matter. If the fellows aren't satisfied with Morny as captain, they can drop him and find somebody else; but I'm not the man. Leave me out!"

"Look here—" roared Lovell.

"Jimmy—" began Raby.

"Mathead!" said Newcome.

Jimmy Silver strolled out of the end study, as the easiest way of putting an end to the discussion.

"Obstinate ass!" growled Lovell. "He means that, you know. Blessed if I haven't a jolly good mind to put up for skipper myself!"

"Well, you wouldn't be much good as skipper, old chap," remarked Raby, with friendly candour.

"Better than Morny, ass, anyhow!"

"Well, Morny isn't much good, the way he's turning out; but he's a jolly good skipper when the spirit moves him. Of course, we can't stand what he did yesterday. That's the limit!"

"There's something queer about it," said Newcome thoughtfully.

Lovell snorted.

"Erroll backs Morny up through thick and thin, because he's his chum!" he growled.

"Well, he was mistaken, anyway; for I met Morny loafing about in Coombe Wood while the match was on," said Newcome. "He seemed upset about something; but he was only loafing around. It's a bit too thick for a cricket captain to go loafing round and forgetting matches!"

"Never heard of such a thing! But, unless Jimmy backs up against him, I don't know that the fellows will turn him out. I suppose they'll get fed-up in the long run. Jimmy ought to take the lead and down him."

"He ought. But—"

"But he won't!" said Raby.

"Obstinate ass!"

"Morny's got to explain to the committee," said Newcome. "But he will pull through if Jimmy Silver doesn't take a hand against him. It's all very well to be loyal, but Jimmy pushes that too far."

"Much too far, the ass!"

"Anyhow, I'll jolly well tell Morny what I think of him!" growled Lovell. "Let's go and see him."

"Right-ho!"

Lovell and Co. left the end study, and proceeded along the Fourth Form passage to No. 4.

Arthur Edward Lovell opened the door of No. 4 by the simple process of jamming his boot against it with a crash.

He was in rather a war-like mood.

The door flew open, and Lovell marched into the study. But Valentine Mornington was not there. His study-mate, Erroll, looked up from a book in surprise.

"Hallo! Are you understudying a cyclone?" he asked.

Lovell glared round the study.

"Where's Morny?"

"Downstairs, I think," answered Erroll. "He had a paper he was going to put on the board."

"Oh!"

Lovell and Co. went downstairs, and they found Valentine Mornington standing before the notice-board in the hall. The three juniors glanced at the paper Morny had pinned up. It ran:

"BICYCLE FOR SALE.

Cost fifteen guineas. Ten pounds cash.—Apply Study No. 4, Fourth Form."

"My hat!" ejaculated Lovell. "Selling your bike, Mornington?"

"Yaas, if I can find a purchaser," he answered. "Like to take it on?"

"I've got a bike. And I haven't got ten pounds," answered Lovell. "Bother your bike, anyway! I was looking for you, Mornington!"

"Well, here I am!" said the junior captain of Rookwood coolly.

"About your playing the goat yesterday?" snorted Lovell.

"Yaas?"

"Is that what you call playing the game?" demanded Lovell.

"Not at all."

"Oh, you admit that!"

"Certainly!"

"Are you going to resign?"

"Oh, no!"

"You're sticking to the captaincy?"

"Yaas."

"Well, you'll be turned out!" said Mornington, with polite impertinence.

Kit Erroll to the Rescue of His Chum! See Next Week!

"No need to shout. All the county doesn't want to know."

"Why, you—you—"

"You can raise the matter in committee, if you like," said Mornington. "Let it rest at that, old top. Ta-ta!"

And Valentine Mornington strolled away, leaving Lovell in a state of almost speechless wrath.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Chance of a Lifetime.

"It's risky!" said Adolphus Smythe. Smythe of the Shell was reclining gracefully in a luxurious armchair in his study, and he made that remark through a cloud of cigarette-smoke.

Howard and Tracy, his chums and study-mates, were smoking cigarettes, too. The Giddy Goats of Rookwood were feeling no end doggish. The door had been carefully locked, however, before the cigarettes were lighted. Doggish as the nuts of Rookwood were, there was a certain amount of fear and trembling associated with their doggishness.

"I don't deny that it's risky," continued Adolphus. "But it's no end sportin'."

"But what's the game?" asked Tracy.

"Roulette!"

"Phew!"

"That swindling game they play at casinos on the Continent?" asked Howard.

"That's it."

"My hat! It's risky enough. Why it's against the law in England!"

"This old country is rather slow,"

yawned Adolphus Smythe. "I had a vac. in Switzerland once with my people, when I was a fag. I remember seein' the punters goin' in a casino there—a game of the same kind. I'd have tried my luck, but I couldn't do it under the pater's eye. This is really the chance of a lifetime."

Howard and Tracy looked a little uneasy, and Adolphus smiled a superior smile as he noted it.

Adolphus Smythe was a great sportsman—in any sport that was not of a manly character. He had no love for cricket or football, or for rowing or swimming; but a considerable amount of his pocket money went in backing "geegoes" strictly under the rose, of course.

"I got the tip from Joey Hook," he went on. "I was seein' him about a horse. He told me about this man Tickey Tapp."

"Ye gods! What a name!"

"I'd heard of him before," said Adolphus. "A chap at St. Jim's told me about him. He started his precious game near that school once, and got a lot of the fellows there. Made lots of money out of them, I've no doubt. Chap named Merry—you've heard of Tom Merry—took some friends there, and smashed up his game."

"Like his cheek!" said Tracy.

"Oh, yes, rather! But he did it. But I dare say Tickey Tapp made more than he lost. Well, the long and short of it is that Tickey Tapp has pitched his giddy tent near Rookwood, and he's open to receive custom. He's got one of those bungalows on the moor—not a mile from Coombe, just off the edge of Coombe Wood, you know. Quite a solitary spot—and the bobbies won't tumble to his game in a month of Sundays."

"The police?"

"You see, it's against the law, and the police mop up such places when they get to hear of them. But Tickey Tapp is wide—very wide! He won't get mopped in a hurry."

"You've been there?" asked Tracy.

"Not yet; but I'm goin'. I'm takin' you two fellows, if you'll come. Of course, it's risky, and it's got to be kept awfully dark. No good tellin' Peele, or Lattrey, or Gower. Can't trust such a secret with those Fourth Form kids. It's strictly among ourselves."

"But, I say—"

"Of course, the risk isn't really so great as long as we're careful," said Smythe. "And it's the chance of a lifetime. Just the same as goin' to Monte Carlo, you know."

"People don't generally bring any money away from Monte Carlo, I believe," remarked Howard.

"People don't generally have any sense or nerve," answered Adolphus sapiently.

THE POPULAR.—No. 237.

"I believe there's lots of money to be made at the game, if a fellow keeps his wits about him. As good as backin' horses, anyhow. You watch the run of the numbers, you know, and lay your money accordingly. I'm awfully keen to give it a trial."

"It's frightfully risky. It would mean bein' expelled from Rookwood, if the Head got to know."

"He won't get to know."

"Suppose the police raided the place while we were there?"

"They won't! But Hook tells me that there's a way out, if they did, and we should walk off safely enough."

There was silence in Smythe's study.

The thought of the roulette-wheel and the fortune that might be made upon it—perhaps, was a strong attraction to the three young rascals. But they could not help thinking of the risk.

"Any other Rookwood fellows go there?" asked Howard, at last.

"I asked Hook, and he said there were one or two," said Smythe. "He wouldn't give me their names, though. I've got a suspicion that some of the Sixth drop in there in the evenin'—fellows like Carthew and Prampton, I fancy. We're not to go in the evenin'." Tickey Tapp runs his games twice a day, afternoon and evenin'.

"We're booked for the afternoon."

"In case we see too much, I suppose?"

"Very likely."

There was another pause, Adolphus Smythe finished his cigarette.

"Of course, we shall have to be careful," he said. "We've got to be wary of the beaks. And Morny seems to have taken a leaf out of Jimmy Silver's book, now he's captain, and he's liable to interfere, if he knew. We won't go there in Etons. We can change our clobber, and nobody there will guess that we belong to Rookwood. It will be quite an adventure, by gad, you know."

"I—I suppose we might win something," murmured Tracy, with a greedy gleam in his eyes.

"I hope so."

"What time do we start?"

Adolphus Smythe looked at his big gold watch.

"Any time now," he said. "In fact, the sooner the better, now we've had tea. We shan't stay there long."

"I—I say, it might attract attention if we went out in other clobber."

Adolphus smiled his superior smile again.

"We don't," he said.

"But you were sayin'—"

"What's the matter with takin' our lounge clothes in a bag, and puttin' them on in the wood? We have to go through the wood to get to the bungalow."

"Oh, that's a good stunt!"

"You rely on me for stunts," said Smythe loftily. "I'm rather wide, I think. Now, are you fellows comin'?"

Howard and Tracy exchanged glances, and rose from their seats. There was no doubt that they were coming. The appeal of the green table was too strong to be resisted by Howard and Tracy.

Ten minutes later the nuts of the Shell strolled out of the School House, Smythe carrying a valise in his hand, Jimmy Silver and Co. were chatting on the steps, and they noted the valise.

"Hallo! Goin' off for the week-end?" asked Lovell.

Smythe smiled.

"Merely a little run to Monte Carlo," he answered.

"Eh?"

Smythe and Co. walked on, grinning, leaving Arthur Edward Lovell considerably mystified.

Valentine Mornington was heading for the gates, and he turned out into the road at the same time as the nuts of the Shell.

He glanced at them, but walked on, without speaking, towards Coombe.

"Walk a bit slowly," murmured Adolphus. "Let that cad get ahead. We don't want him to spot where we're goin'."

"What-ho!"

The Giddy Goats slacked down, and Mornington disappeared round a turning of the lane ahead.

He was out of sight when the nuts of the Shell came round the turning, much to their satisfaction.

There had been a time when Mornington

of the Fourth was a member of the select society of the Rookwood Goats; but that time was past, and especially since he had been elected junior captain, Morny had been heavily down on the "fast set" in the Lower School at Rookwood. He had been, as Adolphus complained, as much a beast as Jimmy Silver himself.

Smythe and Co. turned into the foot-path through the wood, and at a certain point left the path, and followed a scarcely-marked track that led through the wood towards the open heath.

The sight of a Rookwood cap ahead of them on the track startled them suddenly. They could only see the back of a head beneath the cap, but they knew that it was Mornington's.

"That cad again!" muttered Smythe.

"He's goin' to the heath I suppose. Bother him!"

"Slow down!" said Tracy.

The Shell fellows slowed down once more, and Mornington's head disappeared among the underwood. They changed clothes in a thicket and went on. It was some time before they came out on the open heath, where it was bordered by Coombe Wood.

At a short distance lay the wooden bungalow, one of several that had been erected on the heath for summer visitors. There was no other building in sight of this one, however. Mr. Tapp had judiciously chosen a very solitary spot for carrying on his precious game. Smythe and Co. were heading for the bungalow, when they spotted a Rookwood junior on the heath. It was Mornington again.

Morny was pacing to and fro, with his hands in his pockets, his eyes fixed on the ground. There was a deep wrinkle in his brow. He glanced up as Smythe and Co. stared at him, and gave a start. Then he strode quickly towards the nuts of the Shell.

"What are you doing here?"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Nipped in the Bud.

VALENTINE MORNINGTON rapped out the words sharply, with a glitter in his eyes.

Smythe and Co. stood silent, taken aback.

Morny's eyes scanned them.

The valise was still in Smythe's hand, but it was packed now with the Etons the juniors had worn when they quitted Rookwood. They were clad now in grey lounge clothes, and looked very different. And Morny was far too keen a fellow not to be aware that the change of clothes signified a good deal. Unless the Shell fellows were bound upon some extremely surreptitious expedition, they would certainly not have gone to the trouble of changing their clothes in the wood.

"What are you doing here?"

Mornington's tone was almost fierce.

Smythe pulled himself together, Tickey Tapp's bungalow was in sight, and he wondered uneasily whether the junior skipper guessed his destination. But he told himself that Morny could not possibly know anything about Tickey Tapp and his little game.

"Eh, what are you so jolly curious about, Morny?" yawned Smythe, affecting an ease he was far from feeling.

"Yes, what do you mean, you cheeky ass?" exclaimed Tracy. "I suppose we can take a stroll after lessons if we like?"

"I should think so," chimed in Howard.

Morny's eyes gleamed at them.

"You've changed your clothes since I saw you leaving Rookwood," he said.

"Can't we change our clobber if we like?"

"What have you done it for?"

"No bizney of yours!" said Smythe.

"Still, I don't mind tellin' you that we've put on some old clothes because we're goin' for a ramble on the heath, lookin' at the old quarries."

"Don't tell lies!"

"Wha-at?"

"Do you think you can take me in with a silly yarn like that?" snapped Mornington contemptuously.

Smythe flushed.

"Well, don't ask questions!" he said savagely. "Then you'll get no lies told you, you cheeky, interferin' cad!"

Morny raised his hand.

"You'll go back to Rookwood!" he said. "We jolly well shan't!" exclaimed Smythe hotly. "Who the merry dickens are you to give us orders?" "I'm junior captain of Rookwood," said Mornington quietly. "I've dropped on you fellows before for playing the goat. Do you think I don't know why you're here?"

"No, you don't!" "You're goin' to Heath Bungalow!" Smythe jumped. "Wha-a-at do you know about Heath Bungalow, hang you?" he ejaculated. "Well, I know somethin'," said Mornington grimly. "I know that your book-maker friend Joey Hook goes there, for one thing!"

"I don't know anythin' about it if he does!" "You're goin' there to gamble!" "I-I—"

"Oh, don't spin me any more yarns!" snapped Mornington. "I know as much about it as you could tell me!"

"And how do you know, hang you?" said Smythe between his teeth. "Never mind that. Perhaps I've been keepin' my eyes open to prevent silly fools from playin' the goat and gettin' themselves sacked from the school. That's my bizney, as junior captain, you know. You're goin' back to Rookwood at once, all three of you!"

The nuts of Rookwood looked at Mornington as if they could eat him.

This was rather a "facer" at the beginning of their sportive expedition.

"You interferin' cad—!" began Tracy. "That's enough! Are you goin' back?"

"No!" howled Smythe.

"Then you'll be reported to the captain of the school!" said Mornington. "It's my duty to stop you, an' I'm goin' to do it. If you don't go back at once you'll be called upon to explain to Bulkeley—after I've told him all I know about that bungalow!"

Smythe and Co. stood rooted to the ground.

They exchanged glances, and then turned back towards the wood.

There was no help for it.

Mornington, if he knew the character of the place they were intending to visit, was certainly doing his duty as junior captain in keeping them away from it. He was acting as Jimmy Silver would have acted in his place had he still been junior captain; and there was no possibility of resistance. The bare thought of being brought before Bulkeley of the Sixth for inquiry made the nuts feel cold all over.

With bitter looks and deep bitterness in their hearts, they turned back to the wood, and entered the trees. If they had any hope of dodging Mornington and re-visiting the spot, it was soon knocked on the head, for Morn followed them to see them through the wood.

Smythe and Co. looked savagely back at him.

"The cad's watching us!" muttered Tracy.

"Another time!" murmured Smythe.

"Oh, I'll make that meddlin' cad pay for this somehow!"

"You can change your clobber here," said Mornington.

Without a word, but with black looks, Smythe and Co. changed back into their Etons.

Then they resumed their way.

Valentine Mornington followed them until they crossed the stile into Coombe Lane. Then he turned and went back into the wood, and disappeared.

With feelings almost too deep for words, Smythe & Co. tramped back to Rookwood School.

"How did the cad know?" muttered Smythe again and again. "How did he know anythin' about Tickey Tapp and his game? He never sees Joey Hook now, that I know of. Hook can't have told him."

"Well, he does know, an' he knows Rookwood fellows go there!" growled Tracy. "He's on the watch there for them, that's plain enough."

"Hang him!"

"We'll go another time, when that cad isn't spyin' round!" said Howard.

And the disconsolate nuts tramped into Rookwood. Lovell caught sight of them as they crossed the quadrangle.

"Hallo! You're soon back from Monte Carlo!" called out Arthur Edward.

"Oh, rats!" grunted Smythe.

Kit Erroll met them as they entered the schoolhouse. He stopped to speak.

"Been out of gates?" he asked.

"Yes," growled Smythe.

"Seen anything of Morny? He seems to have gone out."

"Hang Morny!"

With that polite reply, Smythe and Co. went on, leaving Erroll surprised.

Morny's chum walked down to the gates and looked into the road, and then strolled in the quadrangle with a thoughtful brow. It was not the first time, of late, that Valentine Mornington had gone out without a word to his best chum; and without a word of explanation when he returned. And Erroll's uneasiness for his chum was deep and increasing.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Trouble for Morny.

JIMMY SILVER had much food for thought during the next few days.

He gave a good deal of thought to Mornington; though he did not often speak to him.

The affair of the Bagshot match had blown over. The resentment of the Rookwood juniors had been deep; not only because he had treated the whole matter without a word of explanation, but because he had treated the whole matter with flippant disdain when taxed with his conduct. If Jimmy Silver had chosen to make the least effort, he could, without question, have recaptured the position he had lost. His chums urged him to do so; Arthur Edward Lovell being especially emphatic on the subject. And a good many fellows were of Lovell's opinion.

But Jimmy had marked out the course he intended to follow, and followed it.

The Lower School had chosen their captain, and Jimmy Silver had promised to support him. And Jimmy held to that.

Unless Mornington resigned, Jimmy had

no intention of accepting the captaincy, even if it were offered to him. He made it very plain that if there was another election he would not stand as candidate.

The Modern fellows were in favour of another election, in the hope that their leader, Tommy Dodd, would get in. For that very reason the Classicals were opposed to it, unless Jimmy would stand; Jimmy Silver being the only Classical candidate who could hope to beat the Moderns and to beat Morny's supporters at the same time.

As Jimmy Silver distinctly refused to move in the matter, the subject dropped after a day or two.

Jimmy felt that he was acting rightly; that he was bound to give Mornington every chance of "making good."

But he was rather exercised in his mind on the subject.

There could be no doubt that the new junior skipper was losing his keenness. He did not turn up regularly for practice as of old, he did not take his former interest in the affairs of the Fourth Form, or of the Lower School generally. He had begun a campaign against the manners and customs of the Giddy Goats; but that had dropped, and Peele and Co., of the Fourth, went their own shady way without any interference from Morny.

The junior captain was, in fact, slacking down all round. Bulkeley of the Sixth, who had a fatherly eye to keep on the juniors and their affairs, more than once gave Mornington a very expressive look, when he came across him loafing in the quad or about the passages. But as yet Bulkeley had not seen fit to interfere.

It was pretty clear to all the juniors interested in the matter, that Mornington had some interest at heart that he did not communicate to the other fellows; that his thoughts were set on matters not connected with cricket or the school at all.

His frequent absences from the school after lessons and on half-holidays, and the



ORDERED BACK BY THEIR SKIPPER!—Mornington raised his hand. "You'll go back to Rookwood!" he said. "I'm junior captain, and I'm going to stop you fellows going to Heath Bungalow to play the giddy goat!" "We jolly well shan't go back!" cried Smythe, hotly. (See Chapter 3.)

secrecy that attended them, were a pretty plain proof of that.

And Jimmy could not help wondering whether the dandy of the Fourth was falling into his old ways again.

Jimmy Silver was not exactly friendly with Mornington; but he had a regard for him, since Morny's reform; and he was very seriously sorry to think of him going on the shady path again, which could only lead him to trouble, and probably to disgrace and disaster. But Morny was not the kind of fellow who could be advised or remonstrated with.

Moreover, if his own chum failed to influence him, it was not likely that Jimmy Silver would succeed in doing so.

So Jimmy held his peace; but he was troubled. With Morny in this peculiar mood, Jimmy was worried about cricket prospects, and he could not help seeing that Morny was not giving much thought to cricket, if any. On Saturday, there was a House match between Moderns and Classicals, and Jimmy wondered whether Morny would even take the trouble to be present at it. He felt that this state of affairs could not last.

On Saturday morning, Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, was very sharp with Mornington in class. Morny had omitted his prep the evening before—as he had done a good many times lately.

Mr. Bootles had no idea whatever of Morny's preoccupations; his view was that junior schoolboys were at Rookwood to learn—rather a natural view for a Form-master to take. And that especial morning he gave Mornington a very severe lecture on slackness and carelessness.

Mornington listened with the eyes of all the class upon him, some of the Fourth Formers grinning. His cheeks were a little flushed, and there was a sullen expression on his handsome face.

"The report your uncle will receive at the end of term," Mr. Bootles wound up, "will be very unfavourable indeed, Mornington, if you do not mend your ways."

"I don't care!"

"What!"

Mr. Bootles almost jumped as he heard that disrespectful reply. He came closer to the desk, his eyes gleaming over his spectacles.

The kind little gentleman was not often angry, but he was very angry now. Erroll gave his chum an anxious look; Morny's eyes were fixed sullenly on his desk.

"Mornington!" said Mr. Bootles, with ponderous indignation. "You inform me that you do not care what report of your conduct is given to Sir Rupert Staacpoole at the end of the term."

"Well, I don't!"

"Is that dutiful, Mornington?"

Grunt!

"Well, Mornington, if you do not care, I am afraid you must be made to care," said Mr. Bootles sternly. "I have attempted to appeal to your better feelings. I have failed. Mornington, you will be detained this afternoon, and you will do the work you have neglected under my supervision."

Mornington gave a start. His manner changed at once.

"Oh, sir! I—I—"

"Enough!" said Mr. Bootles majestically. Valentine Mornington sat in dismay. The juniors supposed that he was thinking of the afternoon's cricket match; but Jimmy Silver had his doubts on that point.

When the Fourth Form were dismissed that morning, the junior captain paused on his way out, and after a moment or two of hesitation, he approached Mr. Bootles' desk. His manner was very submissive now.

"Well, Mornington?" said Mr. Bootles severely.

"I—I am sorry, sir, that I answered you as I did this morning."

"I am glad that."

"If you would kindly let me off detention this afternoon, sir—"

"I am glad, Mornington, that you have repented of your impertinence," said Mr. Bootles. "That, however, does not alter the fact that you have neglected your work, and that it must be done. I am afraid, Mornington that I cannot excuse you."

"But, sir—"

THE POPULAR.—No. 237.

"That will do!" said Mr. Bootles, in a tone of finality.

And Valentine Mornington, with a black brow, followed the rest of the juniors from the Form-room.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Given a Chance.

"AND that's our skipper!" Arthur Edward Lovell made that remark in contemptuous and rather loud tones in the corridor as Morny came out.

Mornington gave him a dark look. Lovell went on, unheeding:

"Detained now! And we're playing the Moderns this afternoon! Detained because he hasn't done his prep. Why hasn't he done his prep like any other fellow?"

"He was out till calling-over last evening!" said Tubby Muffin. "I say, Morny, where did you go?"

"There was plenty of time after calling-over!" said Lovell. "Other fellows find time to do their prep. Why can't Morny?"

"Mind your own business, Lovell!" snapped Mornington savagely.

Lovell gave him a glare.

"This is my business, and every other fellow's!" he retorted. "If you're skipper you ought to be in the match this afternoon. If you're not in the match you oughtn't to be skipper. And if Jimmy Silver had the sense of a born idiot, he would boost you out of the job you're not fit for."

"Oh, cheese it, old chap!" said Jimmy Silver.

"You know you could do it!" roared Lovell. "Why don't you do it, then?"

"Bow-wow!"

"Not that it makes much difference whether Morny's detained or not," continued Lovell hotly. "He might go out for a walk and forget the match, if he wasn't detained. That's his style as captain!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Mornington.

"Perhaps you'd like to shut me up?" suggested Arthur Edward Lovell aggressively.

Mornington clenched his hands.

Lovell followed his example, and there would certainly have been trouble if Jimmy Silver had not intervened, and dragged Lovell away almost by main force. Erroll slipped his arm through Morny's, and led him into the quad.

"What are you chippin' in for?" growled Mornington, though he allowed his chum to lead him away. "It would do that cheeky fool good to have his mouth shut up for him."

"No good fighting with Lovell, Morny."

"Well, I suppose not; but I feel jolly well inclined to fight him, all the same. Confound his cheek!"

Erroll did not reply, and Mornington jerked his arm away, and gave him a sullen look.

"You agree with him, I dare say?" he sneered.

"Well, you ought to have been careful Morny, not to get detained when there's a match on."

"How could I help old Bootles getting his rag out?"

"By doing your prep yesterday," answered Erroll quietly.

"I had other things to think of."

"You can't expect Mr. Bootles to look at it like that."

"Oh, hang Bootles!" said Mornington irritably.

"And what other things, after all, had you to think of?" exclaimed Erroll, speaking warmly for once. "You didn't come into the study at all last evening. I don't see how you could be so very busy mooching about the passages."

"I was thinkin'."

"Of what?"

"Lots of things," answered Mornington sourly. "How to raise the wind was one thing. I'm hard up."

"But you've just sold your bike."

"That thief Leggett gave me only seven quid for it, and it's gone!"

Erroll compressed his lips.

"Better not let the fellows hear you say that you've spent seven pounds in one week, Morny!" he said, in a low voice.

"And why not?" snapped Morny.

"They may begin to make surmises about what you've spent it on."

"That's my business!"

"It's not mine, I suppose," said Erroll, with a sigh. "I'm sorry to see you like this, Morny. But about this afternoon? I dare say Mr. Bootles will let you off, if it's put to him that there's a match on. He doesn't know about that, and he's a kind-hearted man."

"I shall cut detention, anyhow!"

"You can't, and play cricket in sight of Mr. Bootles' window. You would be fetched in by a prefect. But I think Mr. Bootles will let you off if it's put to him. I'll speak to Jimmy Silver if you like, and we'll try."

Mornington opened his lips to speak, but closed them again. There was rather a peculiar glimmer in his eyes as he looked at Erroll.

"You'd like us to try?" asked Erroll.

Mornington nodded.

"Then I'll speak to Jimmy."

And Erroll proceeded to look for Jimmy Silver, leaving Mornington mooching under the beeches by himself in a sulky mood.

Erroll found the Fistical Four in the quad, three of them talking wrathfully on the subject of Morny, Jimmy Silver silent and thoughtful. Kit Erroll explained his idea, and Jimmy nodded assent.

"I dare say Bootles will see reason," he assented. "We'll tackle him after dinner, and we may get Morny off. We certainly want him in the match with Tommy Dodd's crowd."

And after dinner Jimmy and Erroll proceeded together to Mr. Bootles' study.

They found the Fourth Form master in a good temper, under the ameliorating influence of a good dinner. He gave them a gracious glance.

"If you please, sir—" began Jimmy.

"You may proceed, Silver."

"It's about Morny, sir—I mean Mornington."

Mr. Bootles frowned.

"We're playing a cricket-match this afternoon, sir," said Erroll hastily. "Morny is captaining our side against the Moderns."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Bootles drily.

"If you'd be kind enough to let him off detention, sir—"

"H'm!"

"Otherwise it may mean the loss of the match to us, sir," said Erroll meekly. "It means a lot to us, sir."

Mr. Bootles coughed.

"Mornington has been very remiss lately," he said. "He seems, indeed, to be returning to his old ways, when he was the most troublesome boy in my Form. However, I do not wish his punishment to fall upon others. You may tell him that I give him another chance."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" said Erroll gratefully.

"You may tell him, Erroll, that he is excused from detention this afternoon, only on condition that he displays more industry next week," said Mr. Bootles. "If he keeps on as before I shall find it necessary to use very severe measures."

"Yes, sir," faltered Erroll.

The two juniors left Mr. Bootles' study, and Erroll went at once in search of his chum. He found Mornington under the beeches, with a sullen brow.

"It's all right, Morny!" said Erroll cheerfully.

"I'm let off detention?"

"Yes."

"Oh, good! Many thanks."

"It's on condition that you buck up next week, and stick to your work a bit better, old chap."

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"Next week can take care of itself," he said carelessly. "I'm off for this afternoon, so that's all right!"

"Stumps are pitched at half-past two," said Erroll, rather abruptly. "We may as well get along to the ground."

"No hurry! I'll see you later."

And Mornington lounged away to the School House, and Erroll, with rather a grim look, was left alone.

Heading Down the Road to Ruin! "Saved From Himself!"—Next Week!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
The Downward Path.

"SILVER!"

"Hallo, Morny!"

Jimmy Silver had come out of the schoolhouse in flannels, with his bat under his arm. He was looking very cheerful, as he was feeling. Mr. Bootles had let Mornington off, so that matter was settled satisfactorily, and Jimmy hoped that he would put a little heart into the House match.

Jimmy greeted Morny quite cordially. "Ready for the match, what?" said Mornington.

"Quite ready!"

"I'm goin' to ask you a favour."

"Want me to make a century against the Moderns?" asked Jimmy Silver, with a smile. "Or are you going to ask for the hat trick?"

"I want you to captain the side."

Jimmy started.

"What on earth for? You're playing!"

"As it happens, I'm not!"

Jimmy Silver's lips set.

"Look here, Mornington, this won't do," he said quietly. "Erroll and I went to Mr. Bootles and begged you off—to play cricket. Bootles let you off on the understanding that you were playing."

"I can't help that. I've got an engagement—"

"You had the engagement, I suppose, before I went to Mr. Bootles?"

"Well, yes."

"Then you ought to have told me before I went to him!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver angrily. "You've put me into the position of spoofing him. He only let you off detention to play cricket!"

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"I wasn't askin' you for a sermon," he said. "The question is, will you take my place and captain the side? You can easily find another man."

"I can do it easily enough, of course. I captained the side against Bagshot, as you were not there. But if I'm to captain the eleven, I don't see why you were so keen to shove yourself in as junior skipper."

"There are lots of things you don't see," answered Mornington coolly.

Jimmy drew a deep breath.

"Look here, Morny, this is beginning to look a bit too fishy," he said, "I'm beginning to think that you're at your old games again!"

"You're at liberty to think anything you please. It's a free country!"

"If you are playing the goat again, and dropping into the Bird in Hand to play billiards with the sharpers there, when you ought to be playing cricket—"

"I'm not!"

"Well, I take your word, of course; but it looks fishy, and the sooner you stop it the better!"

"Thanks! Now, to come back to the point, are you goin' to captain the side, or shall I ask Conroy?"

Jimmy Silver paused.

"Will you tell me what your engagement is?" he asked.

"No."

"It's one that won't bear the light, I'm afraid, Morny."

"So kind of you to take an interest in my doin's," said Mornington, with a yawn. "Does it concern you in any way?"

"It does! If you're really playing the giddy goat, like Smythe and Peele and that crowd, you're not fit to be junior captain of Rookwood, and you know it! And if I believed it, I'd take measures to put you out of the job fast enough!"

"You think you could do it?" sneered Mornington.

"I know I could."

"Well, we're wanderin' from the point. Are you goin' to captain the side against the Moderns?"

"No; not unless you explain candidly why you can't play this afternoon!"

"Then I'll ask Conroy."

Mornington turned on his heel and walked away. It was evident that he did not intend to offer any explanation.

Jimmy Silver joined his chums, on their way to Little Side, with a frowning brow.

"Wherefore that giddy scowl?" asked Baby. "Not been rowing with Morny?"

"No; but he's not playing this afternoon.

Conroy's going to captain us!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

Arthur Edward Lovell gave a loud snort.

"This is getting rich!" he said. "Is he ever going to play cricket again? Why can't he resign, and have done with it?"

Conroy came on the ground with his chums—Pons and Van Ryn. All three of the Colonials were playing in the Classical team. Conroy had cheerfully taken on the captaincy for the occasion, but there was a buzz of surprise amongst the Classical cricketers when they knew. Kit Erroll looked dismayed.

"Isn't Morny playing, then?" he exclaimed.

"No—some important engagement, he told me," answered the Australian junior carelessly. "I'm putting in Rawson. We shall lick the Moderns all right."

"Not in your lifetime!" grinned Tommy Dodd, as he came along with his merry men.

"Hallo! Where are you off to, Erroll?" called out Conroy.

Erroll glanced back.

"I'm going to speak to Morny—I'll be back in a jiffy!"

"Well, back up, then; we're going to start."

Kit Erroll hurried off the cricket-field. He ran down to the gates, and spotted the dandy of the Fourth just starting towards Coombe.

"Morny!" called out Erroll.

Valentine Mornington looked round.

His brow darkened at the sight of Erroll; and he quickened his pace. But the next moment he stopped, as his chum came running after him in the road.

"Well, what it is?" asked Mornington curtly. "You ought to be on the cricket-ground!"

"I know that; I'm afraid I'm keeping the fellows waiting—"

"Well, don't keep them waiting any longer."

"Where are you going, Morny?"

"What does it matter?"

"Won't you come back with me?" asked Erroll in a low, earnest voice.

"Morny, old man, I'm not a fool—I've seen things, though I haven't told you so. I know what you're going to do; that list of numbers I saw in the study was enough for me."

"I didn't know you were so well up in roulette—a stodgy old fogey like you, Erroll!"

"I've had some experiences you haven't had, Morny," answered Erroll quietly. "My past isn't quite the same as yours; and I've seen things I should have been the better for not seeing, Morny, old chap, you're playing the fool, and you know it. You're cricket captain, and your place is in the field with us. Come back!"

"Too late; I've asked Conroy—"

"I'll stand out and give you my place, then—"

Mornington burst into a laugh.

"Many thanks; but I've got an engagement. Hallo! There's Jimmy Silver looking for you."

"Erroll!" shouted Jimmy Silver from the gates. "Conroy wants to know whether you're playing or not."

"Yes, yes—"

"Then come along, you ass!"

"Cut along, old chap!" said Mornington. "I'll see you later. My dear chap, I've raised five quids, and it's burnin' a hole in my pocket. You shouldn't have chummed with me, old scout. I warned you, you know. Go and play cricket, while I—"

He broke off abruptly. "Good-bye!"

"Morny!" said Erroll miserably.

Mornington strode on.

Erroll stood looking after him for a moment or two, in doubt; then, as Jimmy Silver called to him again, he hurried to the cricket-ground with Jimmy Silver. His face was full of trouble—and Jimmy Silver's of anger.

Mornington strode on, with a knitted brow.

THE END.

(There will be another topping tale of Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood School in next week's extra special issue, entitled "Saved from Himself!" and is one of the finest stories Owen Conquest has written.)

A WORD WITH YOUR EDITOR!

THREE HUNDRED POUNDS!

In case any reader of the "Popular" has had the rare bad luck to miss last week's copy of the famous Tuesday paper, I will draw attention again to the immensely attractive Cricket Competition. The really big sum of £300 is being given away in prizes to the clever forecasters who show their address in figuring out County form, etc. Read up the particulars, and then put on your best thinking cricket-caps. After that send in the result of your cogitations, along with all the necessary coupons. It is easy work altogether, and there are substantial sums to be won.

"LORD FISH OF GREYFRIARS!"

This is a big surprise. You would never have thought that the cute fellow from the land of the Stars and Stripes would blossom out as a lord. Fisher Tarleton Fish, as we all know, is the fellow who has never been had! At least, he says this, and we have to take his word for it, especially as his lordship has clapped a noble handle to his name. One likes Fish. He is so delightfully cocksure and so briny. Then he has ideas in generous profusion. Make sure of next week's "Popular," and read all about the business.

"THE SHERIFF'S TRAP!"

Down Cedar Creek way those determined ruffians of the Flour Bag Gang are terrorising everybody. These rustlers are always ready for battle, but they are more eager still to drive off cattle which belong to other folks. Nothing is safe from their depredations. The sheriff is a capable officer of the law, and he sets things in motion, but his tactics would never have succeeded had it not been for the good service rendered by Frank Richards & Co. The yarn next week goes with a rush of excitement.

"SAVED FROM HIMSELF!"

Rookwood supplies the third grand school yarn in next Tuesday's issue of the "Popular." It deals with the strange actions of Val Mornington, who appears to be heading for disaster. He carries on like a ship which has lost the steersman. I believe there are heaps of fellows who will understand and sympathise with Mornington in this unlucky phase of irresponsibility. It is the sort of thing which utterly misleads most onlookers, but in Mornington's special case the spell of odd behaviour does not deceive a staunch chum like Kit Erroll. Everything looks pitchy black against Mornington, but Kit stands by. He is the true pal. The wind up is about as effective a bit of writing as Owen Conquest has ever given us.

"THE MIDNIGHT MYSTERY!"

St. Jim's is represented next week by a thriller. A bulgy wallet full of banknotes vanishes. After that there are further strange occurrences. Portable property takes to itself wings and flies away. You realise all through that a particularly smart purloiner of other people's goods is busy in the dark. But who is the thief? That is the question!

A "FUTURE" NUMBER.

A "special" supplement is due next week. The "Future" issue of Bunter's jolly little weekly appears on Tuesday, right as rain. It is another of the Owl's bright little wheezes.

"THE LEAGUE OF SEVEN!"

We get something more than the gage of battle in the serial next week. Monmouth has crossed the Rubicon, as it were. His valiant little army is at grips at last with the drilled legions of King James.

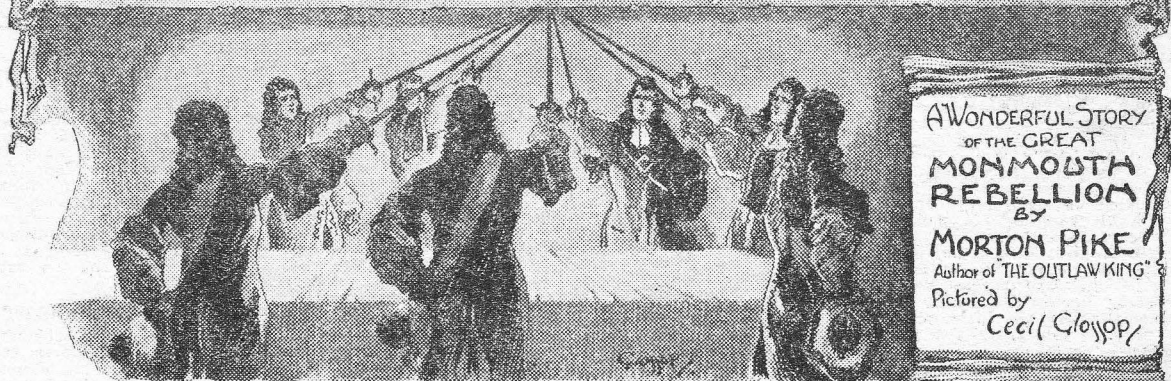
YOUR EDITOR.

THE POPULAR.—No. 237.

THE LANDING OF THE DUKE OF MONMOUTH!

Three mysterious ships sailed up to the little fishing village of Lyme, and when a strange banner was planted upon the cliff-tops it marked the beginning of the most amazing series of battles in the history of England, when Monmouth made a great bid for the throne!

THE LEAGUE OF SEVEN!



WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

DICK TREVOR, nephew of Sir Anthony Trevor, who has come to London to seek his fortune, is walking through the city, visiting the places of interest, when he comes across a purse lying in the gutter. He picks it up, and, turning a corner in a road, is just in time to see a man running for his life down the street, and behind him he sees a crowd of yelling town-folk bearing down upon him. They see the purse in Dick's hand, and at once take him to be the thief they are pursuing. Dick realises his peril, and thinking discretion the better part of valour, turns and flees from the mob. He comes to a large house near the river, and finding the door open, slips into the dark passage beyond. Suddenly out of the darkness a hand clutches his wrist, and he finds himself confronted by the mysterious gentleman he had the day before rescued from the clutches of two highwaymen, whilst on his way to London. Captain Harry Lavender hears Dick's story, then, taking him by the hand, leads him through the house into a room at the back. On the way they had passed through a long chamber, in which were gathered several mysterious-looking men. Afterwards Dick learns from Lavender they are conspirators, members of a league, plotting against the throne of King James II., for the Duke of Monmouth. Lavender is the leader of the strange company.

Almost immediately upon Dick's arrival, the house is raided by the King's Guard. But, through secret passages, the League manage to escape, young Trevor with them, to another hiding-place, the Red Dog Inn. Sir Anthony Trevor, Dick's uncle, has betrayed the conspirators to King James. Fortunately for the League, the secret passage through which they escape is unknown to the traitor, and they are able to ride away unmolested. By various routes they gain a new hiding-place, where they stay in hiding. Meanwhile, Dick, who is with them, is made a member of the League, and they decide to call themselves the "League of Seven." A day or so later an express messenger arrives with the news that Monmouth has landed at Lyme, and an order to join the duke at once. The League set out for Lyme.

(Now read on.)

Two rogues plot to overthrow the new member of the League—News from Lyme—Sir Anthony Trevor sets out for Whitehall, with many misgivings, to see the King!

SIR ANTHONY TREVOR was not the type of man to rise early from his bed, but this particular morning, on the eve of a certain great event, he was up betimes, anxious at heart, and still weary of limb.

The room was in disorder—a hat tossed here, a cloak there. His sword hung on a chair back; his wig had been flung on to the table, upsetting a flask of strong waters, which lay in a pool, and had dripped over on to the Oriental rug, darkening its colour.

It was a red room. The curtains were red, the bed-hangings were red. Red velvet upholstery covered the furniture, and the grip of the sword on the chair back was of scarlet leather, bound with gold wire—a sign that its owner had belonged to the League.

Sir Anthony Trevor rang a silver bell and rang it violently. Before he had taken six angry strides down the apartment, a serving-man entered timidly.

"Has Colonel Burke not arrived, then?" said the baronet, turning round, with his hands behind his back.

"Not yet, Sir Anthony."

"But my message—'twas surely delivered an hour ago?"

"I carried it myself to the colonel's lodging," replied the serving-man. "And the colonel's words were, that as soon as he had been shaved he would attend you, Sir Anthony."

"Shaved, quotha! And I am to wait until the dog makes a toilet as long as a fine lady's!" muttered the traitor. "Tis for this that I pay him heaven knows how many crowns a month! Ten of the clock, and the rogue not yet shaved!"

The serving-man, after lingering a moment, and Sir Anthony saying no more, withdrew, and closed the door very quietly behind him.

He had not removed his fingers from the handle before his master called him back.

"Bring me a dish of chocolate, and send again to the kennel of this fine gentleman who is not yet shaved, bidding him hither to me, even though he be but in his shirt!"

A heavy tread resounded on the stairs without, and the serving-man threw the door wide open with an air of relief.

A huge figure entered, with great stamping of heel and jingle of spur, and Sir Anthony's wrath instantly gave place to a faint smile, accompanied by a slight increase of his natural pallor.

"Welcome, colonel!" said he, as the serving-man vanished. "Forgive me if I sent for you somewhat earlier than usual, but events demanded it."

"Sorr," exclaimed the newcomer, in a terrific voice, and a powerful Irish brogue, "I am ever at your service!"

Colonel Mike Burke stood six feet in his stockings, and his girth was in proportion to his height. He was clad in a suit of blue cloth, cut in a military fashion, a neckcloth of Mechlin lace, and fine ruffles at his wrists.

His square cuffs were embroidered with silver, and turned well back to show the lawn sleeve of his shirt, and enormous riding-boots reached above his knees. His rapier was a good four inches longer than anybody else's, and the wildest of fencers were wary of crossing swords with the colonel.

His face, square-jawed and large, like the rest of him, was purple from heavy drinking overnight, and a fiery-red peruke matched well with the fierce moustache that stood out like chevaux-de-frise from his short upper lip.

The deep-set eyes were neither grey nor green, yet somewhere between the two, and a livid scar extended from his high cheekbone, down over his chin, and finished somewhere on his bull throat—a relic of a former brawl.

Such was the colonel—where he obtained his rank nobody knew, nor did any dare to ask—a terrible, swaggering, blustering bully, of a type that flourished exceedingly in those lawless days, always ready to sell their swords to the highest bidder.

The serving-man placed a flask on the table, and laid Sir Anthony's chocolate before him.

"And now, sorr," cried Colonel Mike Burke, "what would you have with me?"

He flung himself on to a luxurious couch, and looked at Sir Anthony with his eyes half closed.

"The plot is discovered, and the rest are fled," said Sir Anthony gravely.

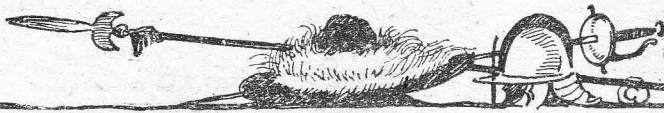
The colonel sat upright with a bound, and whistled. But the whistle gave place next moment to a crafty smile.

"Meaning, by your lave, Sorr Anthony, that 'twas yourself discovered ut to his Majesty?"

Sir Anthony paled visibly, and nodded.

"Tell me," said the colonel, settling himself back upon the cushions. "Begin at the beginning, and let me have the whole story."

Pacing up and down the chamber, his fingers knotted behind him, the traitor gave



an outline of the happenings of the previous forty-eight hours, the bully's wide mouth expanded into a contemptuous smile as the tale proceeded.

When he reached that point where Dick Trevor had pinned his uncle against the stable-door, Mike Burke's eye flashed with a bright gleam, and he interrupted his patron.

"Is the body found?" he cried.

"What body?"

"What body? Why the young spalpeen's, av course. You passed your blade through his carcass in a twinkling, the rogue!"

"No, there was no time," said Sir Anthony, with quivering lips and a slight hesitation, that was not lost upon his listener.

"Mother av Moses!" exclaimed the colonel. "There was always time enough for me to kill the man that dared to lay his paw upon me!" And he poured out another goblet of strong waters.

"You do not understand, colonel," said Sir Anthony quickly. "T'would not have done. He is my nephew, and tongues wag loosely in these days. I left that business for you. Do you understand?"

The colonel put down the half-raised glass. "Now you talk like a man!" he thundered, laughing heartily. "Where is this whelp? He must not be left to brag of the thing."

"Hush! Not so loud!" implored the baronet, looking anxiously at the door. "He has joined the League, and no doubt has fled with them."

Colonel Mike stared blankly at his employer, and emptied the goblet at a draught.

"Sorr Anthony Trevor," said he, "this is a most serious complicashun. Saving your honour's presence, you're the clumsiest conspirator I ever knew! Why won't you consult me in matters av this kind, instid av lavin me to clear up all the dirty work when it's too late? I, Mike Burke, who was mixed up with the plots against the Lord Protector, and the Rye House business, an' every attempt that's been made since the Restoration!"

"All of which failed," said Sir Anthony drily.

"Ha! I grant ut! I won't deny ut! But why did they fail?" cried the colonel, smiting the table. "Because the fools thought they knew best, and wouldn't take the advice of a man who was a grandfather to all av them in the matter av plots."

Sir Anthony fidgeted impatiently.

"Well, to come to the present point," he said, "My nephew must die. What do you advise, colonel?"

"First catch your hare, and then cook him!" said the bravo calmly. "We'll just find my gentleman, and then—lave ut to me, unless you'd like any particular end for him?"

Sir Anthony caught his breath and shivered a little.

"He must die!" he muttered. "He already knows too much, and he suspects more."

"He dies! That matter's done with," said the colonel, waving the subject away with his great hand. "And now, sorr, how stand you with the King?"

The traitor's brow gloomed blackly at this question, and the colonel instantly understood, without a word from his thin lips.

"Ha! The mine fired and the garrison escaped!" said he. "And the King will not soon forgive him who brought the warning too late. I know James well—hard as a stone, cruel as a tiger—a bad man to offend. And, by my sword, Sir Anthony, I'm thinking you'll be out of favour over this business!"

Sir Anthony evidently thought so, too, for he took several strides up and down the room, his face very white and troubled.

For a whole day he had stayed within doors, uncertain what course to take, expecting, and yet half dreading, a summons from the King. But no summons came. And now, on the second morning after that great traitor-hunt—which morning, to be historically precise, was that of the 12th day of June, 1685—Sir Anthony Trevor found himself in a somewhat awkward position.

To gain an earldom he had artfully wormed himself into the secrets of the League—betrayed them to his Majesty—and though every precaution had been taken to seize them he had been ignorant of the secret passage, with the result that every man had escaped.

And there was another serious menace to Sir Anthony's prospects—his nephew, Dick Trevor.

Had the baronet kept his promise, and obtained Master Dick an ensigncy in one of King James' regiments, he had never been mixed up with the conspiracy. And Sir Anthony ground his teeth as he thought of what might have been, and of what actually was.

He turned suddenly to the colonel, who was enjoying his patron's discomfiture, and the strong waters.

"Burke," said he, "there must be no delay in this matter of my nephew. You know the signal of this band of fools?"

"Bedad, I know ut!" said the colonel, winking. "'A merry morning,' and 'A merry moon to-night,' and all the rest av ut. Trust me for that! And I know something else—very important to the success of this little matter."

"Which is?"

"That my pockets are empty, sorr," said the colonel cunningly.

Sir Anthony flung a little bag upon the table, and the colonel instantly pouched it.

"I am obliged to ye, Sorr Anthony. And I will now search out a clue to Master Richard's whereabouts," he said, rising to his feet.

As he spoke there was an outcry in the street below. People running, a party of Lifeguards going past at a quick trot, and a murmur of many voices, taking up some news that spread rapidly.

They went to the window and flung it open. An officer was riding by, and Sir Anthony called to him.

"Ha!" cried the horseman, placing his gloved hand to his mouth, and shouting up: "Strange tidings, Tony! Monmouth has landed at Lyme, in Dorset. Get you to Whitehall, where you will see the messengers but newly arrived!"

Sir Anthony and the colonel exchanged a look of astonishment, and the colonel grasped the baronet's shoulder.

"Go to the king without delay and offer him your sword," he said, in a meaning voice. "I'm for Dorset within the hour."

And the ruffian strode away with great thunder of iron-shod heels.

The Duke of Monmouth lands in the West—King James at Whitehall—Mike Burke sets out after Dick Trevor.

ON the morning of June 11th, three ships, flying no flag, made their appearance off the little fishing town of Lyme Regis.

Beyond the fact that they were Dutchmen, nothing could be made of them, and by

reason of their lying in the offing for several hours, they began to attract the attention of the inhabitants, and to arouse the suspicions of the Excise officers.

The chief of the Customs, after vain attempts to fathom the strangers' business, put off in a small boat to get a nearer view; but it was seventeen days before the poor man regained his liberty, being promptly carried below decks, and kept close prisoner.

Those were times when every strange craft was regarded with a dubious eye. Dutch rovers, French privateers, bold smugglers. And worthy Master Gregory Alford, the Mayor of Lyme, thought it behoved him to get his horse saddled, in readiness for any eventuality.

Presently the vessels began to beat up for the town, and before long they cast anchor not far from the old stone pier, called the Cobb, and lowered seven boats full of armed men which pulled in shore.

The mayor did not wait long. The sunshine showed him the glitter of bright musket-barrels, and, putting his toe in his stirrup, he galloped away for Honiton, from whence, after sending an express to London, he continued at midnight to Exeter, to warn the Duke of Albermarle that an invasion was in progress.

Meanwhile the boats reached shore, and a band of gentlemen and soldiers sprang out, knelt upon the beach to return thanks for a safe voyage, and straightway unfurled a dark-green banner, on which the wondering townsfolk read, in letters of gold, the legend, "Fear nothing but God."

In one of the boats sat a tall, handsome man, dressed in purple. And, seeing that he must needs get wet in the foam of the waves, a young naval officer among the spectators advanced and offered him his knee to step upon.

"A thousand thanks, sir!" said the tall man, accepting the courtesy. "I trust we may prevail upon you to go with us."

"No, your Grace," was the reply. "for I have taken oath to serve King James." Such was the landing of James Scott, Duke of Monmouth, favourite son of his late Majesty King Charles II.; and, with the green banner fluttering before them, the little party filed up the cliffs, out of gunshot from the fort, and sought the market-place, where a proclamation was read, calling upon all loyal men to join the new King James.

In earlier days the handsome duke had been immensely popular in the West, and his address was received with cheers and loud shouts of "Long live King Monmouth!"

THE PLOTTERS!



Sir Anthony frowned at the burly colonel. "My nephew knows too much!" he muttered. "Unless he is got rid of the whole conspiracy will get to the ears of the king. He must die—and that is where you come in!" "He dies! The matter is settled!" said the colonel. (See this page.)



THE DUKE OF MONMOUTH.

It may be as well to state here that men did not enjoy the liberty of conscience then that is one of our finest boasts to-day, and that James II. owed his fall to a mistaken wish to compel his subjects to worship as he did.

On the other hand, the Duke of Monmouth, by no means irreproachable in private life, set himself forward as the Protestant champion, as being the best card to play against his uncle, the terms Catholic and Protestant being used very much as we hear party cries at election time—and too often with little more significance—by either side.

Amid great cheering and waving of hats the duke and his officers took up their quarters at the George Inn.

At midnight, after obtaining all the information they could, two valiant Customs officers, Anthony Thorold and Samuel Bassell, mounted upon one horse and evading the pickets, rode away to Crewkerne, and thence to the king, to whom they brought the eventful news.

Sir Anthony Trevor passed them in the antechamber, after their examination by the council, weary with their long ride, the centre of a throng of lords and gentlemen, all eager to hear the news from their lips.

There was wild excitement in Whitehall. Scarlet-clad pages and great officers of the Court ran hither and thither. Curtains were drawn aside, and peers of the realm

went hastily in or out, their perukes awry, and anxiety on their faces.

In the courtyard below the Lifeguard was mustering, and a mob of eager citizens besieged the gateway.

Full thirty gentlemen of sorts awaited audience, taking snuff the while, and turning their eyes to the doorway every time the hangings were withdrawn.

Sir Anthony Trevor had come late, yet his was the first name called by the usher.

"Sir Anthony Trevor, his Majesty desires your attendance!" cried the usher.

Whereat all the other gentlemen scowled at the baronet and exchanged glances.

The traitor passed into the corridor. A few paces led him to a high doorway which was opened ceremoniously, and, entering, he found himself in the presence of the King. James II. stood beside a richly-carved fireplace, clad in a suit of brown velvet.

His heavy features were more animated than usual, and he dictated some words to the Earl of Sunderland, who sat at a table. James ceased as Sir Anthony entered, and my lord looked up, with a quill pen in his hand.

Sir Anthony's heart beat violently, for the next few minutes meant much to him.

"I give your Majesty good-morrow," he said, bowing low. "I have heard but now of this attempt against your Majesty's throne, and hasten to lay my sword and service at your feet."

"I think you are in error, Sir Anthony Trevor," said the King drily. "You had knowledge that the attempt would be made—"

"And warned you, sire."

"True, but too late."

"The fault was not mine, sire, since I swear they were all in the house, and could not have known of their danger."

The King opened a little drawer in the cabinet, and held something forth in his hand.

"How comes it that your purse was found upon the table when my guards entered? Explain this mystery, Sir Anthony Trevor," said James, in a cold voice. "You will not deny it, surely? The arms and monogram are yours."

Sir Anthony became scarlet, and then deathly pale.

"No, sire; 'tis mine," he said stoutly enough, since in this he was right. "Twas stolen from me, and, though the press was hot after the thief, he escaped. How it came into that house I know not, upon my honour!"

"Let that pass," said the king, understanding in his heart that the man before him was speaking truth. "I would question you more closely upon this list of traitors who have slipped through our fingers, though they shall not escape entirely. My lord of Sunderland, you have the paper."

The earl handed it to the king.

James ran through the list of names,

casting his keen eye from time to time upon the man before him.

"None of these gentlemen are of great account, having few brains and less wit to use them. You have omitted the chief conspirators, Sir Anthony Trevor!" And his voice grew harsh and stern. "What of my lords of Macclesfield and Devonshire? Where are they?"

"Upon my soul, I know not, seeing they had no part in the conspiracy!"

"Nor the Earl of Stamford?"

"I have never seen him, sire."

"Nor," interposed Sunderland—"nor Paget nor Delamere?"

"Your lordship is better informed than myself," said Sir Anthony, frowning, and drawing himself up.

"Strange!" muttered James, gazing meaningly at his Minister. "Yet these are the men who have most favoured my misguided nephew!"

There was a short pause, during which the baronet maintained a steady front, and James looked him through to the very soul. "Give me that paper that awaits my signature," he said to the earl.

And, as Sunderland laid it before him, he dipped a pen in the ink-horn.

Sir Anthony expected it to be a warrant consigning him to the Tower, but its actual nature astonished him far more.

"I own, Sir Anthony, that I had suspected you of some double-dealing," said James.

"I ask your pardon. You one time craved a favour at our hands, though for some reason you have not pressed it since."

"Twas that a young relative of yours should hold commission in our forces; and here, under our Royal sign-manual, we appoint your nephew, Richard Trevor, cornet in Lord Churchill's Regiment. You will give him good counsel of loyalty to us, I doubt not; and until these unhappy troubles are over we would that you should remain near our person, as in a short time some of these wretched men will be captured and brought to trial, and we shall need your testimony against them."

James scrawled his signature on the vellum, handed it to Sir Anthony, and inclined his head to intimate that the audience was at an end.

Stammering some incoherent words of thanks, the traitor withdrew; and John Churchill, afterwards Duke of Marlborough, entered the Royal presence.

"Curse him—curse the whelp!" hissed Sir Anthony, between his set teeth. "'Tis a plot of Sunderland's to disgrace me! Now, if Dick be taken in arms, being a king's officer, the fortunes of Trevor are shattered! Ten thousand are the reasons that he should die at the hands of the rogue Burke!"

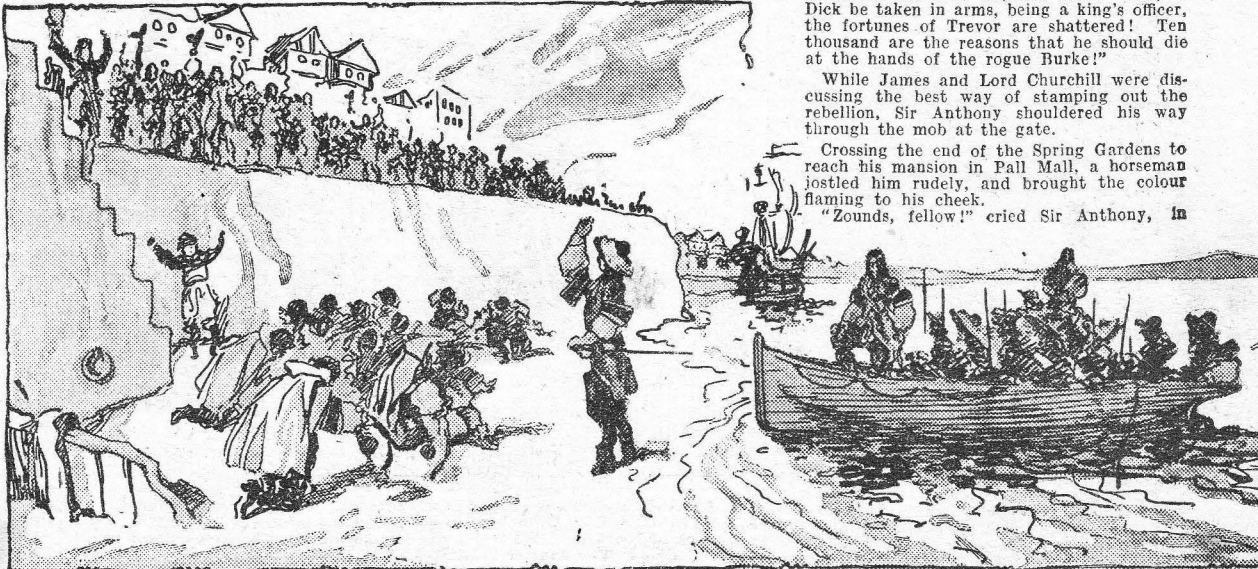
While James and Lord Churchill were discussing the best way of stamping out the rebellion, Sir Anthony shouldered his way through the mob at the gate.

Crossing the end of the Spring Gardens to reach his mansion in Pall Mall, a horseman jostled him rudely, and brought the colour flaming to his cheek.

"Zounds, fellow!" cried Sir Anthony, in



"News, Tony reining up, at Lyme!"



The three vessels dropped anchor outside the little village of Lyme, and several boats, filled with soldiers, were rowed to the shore morning air. A cheer of welcome to the man who had come to make a bold bid for the Throne of England—

high wrath. "Must I carve a lesson on thy scurvy hide?"

"As you please, sorr!" said the man, bending down with a broad grin.

"Odds blood! 'Tis not you, colonel?" exclaimed the baronet, starting back.

"Then who may ut be?" laughed Mike Burke, though he took care to sink his great voice to a cautious whisper.

No longer the swaggering, red-haired, fiery man that had breakfasted off strong waters barely an hour before, the baronet saw before him a soberly-clad individual in Quaker garb, with lank, black hair covering his cheeks, the scar concealed by a beard, and the formidable rapier no longer upon the brawny thigh.

"'Tis well," he said, mastering his astonishment, and catching Burke by the sleeve. "If you value my future favour, ride as if the Fiend were upon your croup. Should my nephew be seen in the company of Monmouth all is lost. He must die at all risk. And he has a day's start of you already!"

Colonel Burke said nothing in reply, but understood much, and, with a motion of his head, the sober-looking Quaker gentleman trotted quietly out of sight.

The Mysterious Man of the Inn!

WHEN the little band of conspirators set forth on their ride to join the duke at Lyme Regis they had not only many leagues to travel, but it was necessary to proceed with care.

Armed bodies were apt to rouse suspicion on the highways in those times, and there were various obstacles to be avoided, in the nature of lords-lieutenant of counties and local militia, which they well knew would be speedily mustered to march upon the invaders.

Hence, although they made good progress, they were careful not to arouse distrust, and set tongues wagging, so that their course was, of necessity, somewhat circuitous, to the wasting of valuable time.

It was whilst passing through

resumed their journey, and then some distance out of their proper road.

Several times they missed the way, and saw no signs of their companions; and at nightfall, coming upon a lonely hamlet with a solitary inn, the horses being sadly in need of rest, they agreed to rein up, and, staying a few hours, to resume their route when the moon should be risen, or, at latest, with the first streak of dawn.

"Can we have a night's lodging, landlord?" said Dick, entering the sanded parlour where a traveller sat at his supper.

The landlord scratched his head, and looked puzzled.

"I have but two rooms, sir—an attic where there is one weary man already asleep, and a room that this gentleman has but now bespoken. There are two beds in the attic, though, an your honour would care to—"

"Friend," interrupted the traveller, his mouth seemingly full of viands, "thou art welcome to share my couch, and thy servant can find his resting-place above."

The traveller was apparently a Quaker gentleman, for he wore his hat, and his clothes were very plain and of a drab colour.

"I thank you, sir," replied Dick, bowing to the stranger; "yet would I not put you to inconvenience. We will take the bed in the attic, landlord. And now give us to eat when we have stabled our horses."

The Quaker said nothing, but went on with his supper in silence.

His eyes never left Dick, and when the two lads had gone to look to their mags, a curious, evil smile passed across the traveller's face, and he pulled his broad-brimmed hat still lower over his brows.

When they returned to the inn parlour the traveller had betaken himself in a distant corner, and sat perusing a small volume, which seemed to afford him considerable edification, since he paid no further heed to the boys, who, after eating as oily hungry horsemen can, called for a candle, and retired to their sleeping chamber.

"'Tis a poor place to put your honour," said the landlord, who lighted them up the narrow staircase, "but 'tis the best I can offer you."

"As for that," said Dick, smiling, "if we sleep as soundly as this poor fellow here, we shall rest content enough." And he held the candle over the truckle-bed in the corner, where a young man lay on his back snoring gently, his brown hair all disordered upon the coarse pillow.

When the landlord had descended the stairs again they looked round the attic.

It was a warm summer night, and the air was hot, the sun having poured upon tiles that formed ceiling and roof in one, spying a ladder leading to a trap-door, mounted, lifted the trap, and inhaled fresh air.

There was no bolt on the door, so, for caution's sake, Ned placed the heavy, bottomed chair against it.



CAPTAIN HARRY LAVENDER.

"I shall lie down as I am," said Dick. "We must proceed in a few hours." And he removed his sword and belt, leaving the weapon, by mistake, at the foot of the traveller's bed, which was but a stride from their own, and drawing his feet out of the heavy riding-boots.

In five minutes the two lads were sleeping soundly, side by side, and soon the moon began to filter through on to the stranger's cot.

Ned awoke with a start and sat up. His quick ears had caught the sound of horse-hoofs without.

A moment's listening told him that it was only one animal, so, slipping from the bed, he stole up the ladder to the open trap in the roof and looked out.

The Quaker gentleman was tying his steed to a ring outside the stable door, evidently about to take his departure, and Ned came down again, satisfied in his mind.

He dozed, and sank into a troubled slumber, from which he was once more awakened, this time by an indefinable sense of dread. Everything was intensely still, and the moonlight at the farther end of the attic showed him that morning had not yet come.

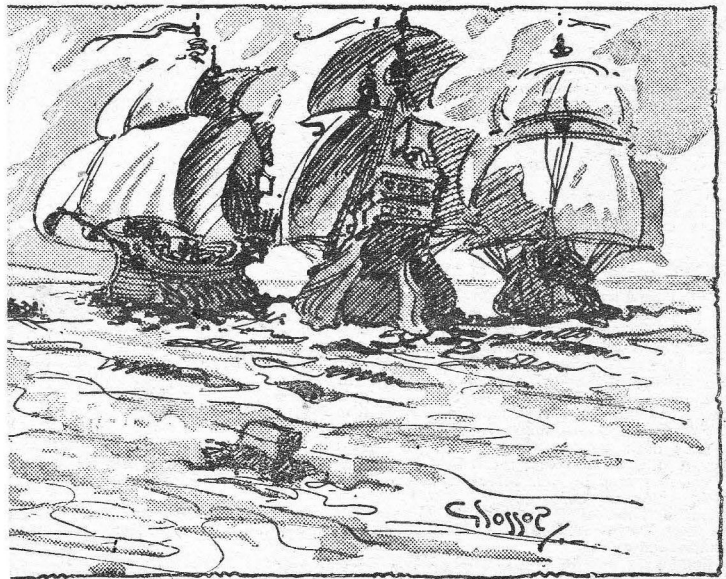
He rubbed his eyes, and looked about the room, oppressed by the feeling that something was happening, and he finally lay watching the door.



ried the rider, Duke has landed page 13.



om out Duke of



an, and as he leapt lightly on to the sandy shore a terrific cheer rent the tie force, ready to fight to the very last for the cause.

Sleep crept over him once more; his eyelids quivered and drooped.
 "Tis nothing!" he thought to himself. But the next moment he was wide awake.
 Then came a faint creak from the chair before him. A powerful, hairy hand passed into the room and pushed the obstacle noiselessly aside, and the door began to open towards him, inch by inch!

How a mysterious man made a mistake in the dark, and two travellers came to the duke's quarters at Lyme.

NED POUCH gave a sharp snore—one of those sudden nasal notes that betoken the sleeper to be upon the point of waking. The door of the attic closed quickly, with a faint shiver of the crazy woodwork, and Ned laid his hand on Dick Trevor's.

There was an answering pressure of the strong fingers. Dick was awake.

"Did you see that, Master Richard?" whispered Ned.

"I've seen and heard everything for the last ten minutes," whispered Dick, in reply. "Your restlessness roused me. What do you make of it? I thought the landlord an honest man."

"And I, too. 'Tis the Quaker-looking traveller," said Ned. "He has saddled his horse already. I watched him from the top of the ladder there."

Dick's hand gave him a warning squeeze. "I doubt me he is a spy of the King's," he whispered. "Either that, or his object is to rob us. Let us mount the ladder, and watch him from the roof. You go up first, while I secure my pistols."

Ned Pouch drew a long, loud sigh.

It produced exactly the result he had thought—another shiver of the door planks. And, smiling gleefully to himself, the lad

slipped noiselessly from the bed and stole to the ladder.

Dick Trevor meanwhile placed one of his long horse-pistols in the breast of his coat, and, holding the other in his hand, slid on to his feet without a sound, and followed his companion.

The end of the attic in which their bed stood was wrapped in complete darkness. The moon, filtering through the dormer window, showed only the truckle of the other traveller, and one broad beam lay athwart the bed's foot, glinting coldly on the polished guard of Dick's rapier, reared against it.

"Why, that is my sword!" he whispered. "I knew not that I had placed it there. See! The door is now ajar. Move not so much as a mouse might, lest he looks up here!"

"Yet will he see naught if he does," murmured Ned. "The moon is behind the chimney-stack, and we are in blackness."

They lay on the slope of the roof, their chins resting on the edge of the trap, and, inch by inch, they saw the attic door open, until it stood wide enough to admit a man's body.

A thousand terrible thoughts coursed through Dick's brain, and once he glanced over his shoulder, half expecting to see King James' troopers in the yard beneath.

The next moment a man's head showed round the edge of the door. It was the Quaker gentleman who had so generously offered half his couch. How devoutly thankful was Dick, now that he had refused it!

The man was listening. He seemed in no hurry to enter, and they could see his profile clearly against the moonbeam—a heavy, determined face, with an ugly nose, very thick in the bridge.

He cast one glance towards the dark end of the attic, and then looked a long time

at the rapier, which was not two strides from his hand.

"Ah!" thought Dick. "These are very troublous days, and perchance he does but wish to take stock of us before he goes upon his way."

The mysterious intruder now showed his shoulder and his knee beyond the door, and he bent forward into the silence of the chamber, but still hesitating.

The next moment he had stepped forward, and stood, a great black outline against the moonshine, this time gazing keenly into the darkness, as though suspicious.

No sound but the gentle snoring of the tired man in the truckle-bed could be heard; and, apparently satisfied, the intruder turned towards the sleeper.

All the while his right hand had been thrust within the breast of his coat. Now he withdrew it suddenly, leaned over the pallet, and smote a terrific blow full upon the unconscious occupant.

A choking cry gurgled out for an instant, the rapier fell to the floor with a loud ring, and the Quaker was at the door in one gigantic stride.

Dick, more from impulse than any exact idea what he was doing, fired at him, and a most un-Quakerlike curse mingled with the report.

"Just Heaven!" cried the young conspirator. "This is murder! Quick, Ned! He must not escape!"

But the scoundrel, hit or not, was flying down the winding staircase with a noise like thunder, and the lads were both of them in their stocking feet.

As they slid down the ladder into the attic they heard a greater crash, and knew that the man, meeting the terrified landlord rushing forth from his bed, had overturned him, and continued his flight.

The outer door of the inn banged to



GREAT COMPETITION FOR CRICKET LOVERS!

FIRST PRIZE £100. SECOND PRIZE £50. THIRD PRIZE £30.
 AND 120 PRIZES OF £1 EACH.

CAN YOU FORECAST HOW THE COUNTIES ARE GOING TO FINISH UP?

WE offer the above splendid prizes to the reader who is clever enough to send us a list showing exactly in what order the seventeen first-class County Cricket Clubs will stand at the end of the season.

For your guidance we publish the order in which each of the clubs stood last year, which was as follows:

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Yorkshire. | 9. Sussex. |
| 2. Nottinghamshire. | 10. Somerset. |
| 3. Surrey. | 11. Derbyshire. |
| 4. Kent. | 12. Warwickshire. |
| 5. Lancashire. | 13. Gloucestershire. |
| 6. Hampshire. | 14. Leicestershire. |
| 7. Middlesex. | 15. Northamptonshire. |
| 8. Essex. | 16. Glamorgan. |
| 17. Worcestershire. | |

What you have to do is to fill in on the coupon on this page your forecast of the order in which the counties will finish up. To the reader who does this correctly we shall award a prize of £100, and the other prizes in the order of the correctness of the forecasts.

In the case of ties any or all of the prizes will be added together and divided, but the full amount of £300 will be awarded.

All forecasts must be submitted on coupons taken from this journal, or from one of the other publications taking part in this contest.

You may send as many coupon forecasts as you like. They must all be addressed to "Cricket Competition," Gough House, Gough Square, E.C. 4, and must reach that address not later than Thursday, August 16th.

You may send in your forecasts at once if you like, but none will be considered after August 16th.

The decision of the Editor in all matters concerning this competition must be accepted as final and binding, and entries will only be admitted on that understanding.

Employees of the proprietors of this journal are not eligible to compete. This competition is run in conjunction with "Football Favourite," "Sports Budget," "Magnet," "Young Britain," "Champion," "Boys' Realm," "Boys' Friend," "Pluck," "Union Jack," "Rocket," "Nelson Lee Library," "Boys' Cinema," and "Gem," and readers of these journals are invited to compete.

violently. The rasp of a bolt told them that it had been locked on the outside, and ere they were beside the bed a horse galloped out of the yard, and they understood that further effort would be useless.

With the pistol still in his hand, Dick approached the pallet, dreading the sight that must present itself to his eyes. But a cry of astonishment burst from his lips as the occupant sat up suddenly into the moonlight.

His face was whiter than the coarse sheet that covered him, and his expression for a moment was one of extreme terror; but at Dick's first words it changed to a strange smile, and the outstretched hands clasped in an attitude of prayer.

"Whoever you may be, sir," said Dick, "you have come as nigh to death this night as any man may reasonably hope to do, and yet find himself in this world, after all."

"Ah, my friend," replied the stranger, holding something forth, with a smile of singular happiness, "never do I sleep without the Word of God resting upon my heart! See! The weapon has pierced it through, but it has saved me!"

It was a leather-covered Bible, worn by travel and constant use, and sticking in it, driven home with terrific force, was a black-bitted knife.

Dick Trevor took the Book, and examined it for a moment in silence.

"I have heard how a watch may turn a bullet, for mine own father's life was so saved at Naseby fight," he said, at length. "But you are bleeding, sir. The point has come through."

"Tis nothing," replied the young man, pressing his hand upon his shirt, from which some red drops were oozing. "Yet know I not any living being that beareth me a grudge. 'Tis all a mystery, which perhaps you can explain, young gentleman. Have you an enemy who, peradventure, hath fallen into error in the darkness?"

Dick Trevor started, and looked at Ned, as if hoping to gather some clue from him. But Ned's face betrayed naught but wonderment as he turned the little volume over and over, and examined the knife.

"I have no enemy," said Dick slowly. And then there came a strange thought into his brain, which he kept to himself, turning hot and cold at the bare idea that Sir Anthony could have had hand in the matter.

The next moment he dismissed it as impossible, since the supposed Quaker was already at the inn when they arrived, and they had lighted upon it by the merest chance.

Nor did the black wig which they found on the staircase help them, save to show that the man had been disguised.

"'Twas robbery, sure enough!" said the terrified landlord, who had been badly bruised in the fray. "The rogue has fled without paying his reckoning. What with Monmouths and robbers, we live in strange days! And the man did eat supper enough for four honest men."

There was no more sleep that night for anyone, and they sat round a miserable candle, discussing the strange adventure, until the breaking dawn sent them on their way in quest of adventures stranger still.

"My name is Martin Hart, a poor Anabaptist, and a persecuted man," said the traveller, when the two lads saddled their horses. "I shall never forget that I owe my life in great part to you, sir, and if I can ever serve you 'twill be my greatest happiness. May I, too, know your name?"

"Names nowadays are best left alone, Master Hart," said Dick, in a low tone. "Repay me by forgetting this meeting, and you will render me a service, though, truth to say, you owe me nothing."

The young man nodded quickly, well understanding that Dick Trevor had need for concealment; and, with a smile of farewell, Dick Trevor and his companion rode away.

As they drew nearer to the West they saw everywhere some sign of the disturbance.

Solitary cottages were closely shuttered, and their owners probably scanning them with anxious eyes from the fields near by. Some villages seemed wholly deserted, while

BEFORE KING JAMES II.



Sir Anthony Trevor's heart beat violently as he came forward. "I give your Majesty good-morrow," he said, bowing low. "I have heard but now of this attempt against your Majesty's throne, and hasten to lay my sword and service at your feet." (See page 14.)

in others the gallop of their steeds brought a crowd into the street, and the anvils ceased to clang until they had gone past.

They noted how busy the anvils were, and remarked on it. Later on they knew why, when they saw the forest of scythe-blades mounted on poles, with which the rabble of misguided yokels were armed.

Sometimes they fell in with parties of the Red Militia Regiment, of Dorset, and gave them a wide berth.

At length, dusty and worn by their long ride, they saw the little town of Lyme Regis, overlooking the blue waters of the Channel, and the afternoon sun shining on its slate roofs.

"Come along, Ned!" cried Dick, touching Beauty lightly with the spur, only to find himself suddenly thrown back upon her croup, as she reared straight up in the air and struck with her forefeet at a man who had tried to seize her bridle.

"Hold!" cried the man sternly, presenting a pistol. "Whence come you, and for whom

are you? Quick—the word, or my fellows shall make short work of you both!"

Dick got the mare down upon all-fours with some difficulty, and laughed merrily, in spite of the line of wild-looking men which had stretched itself right across the lane as if by magic.

"We are for Monmouth!" he said, laying his hand on his sword, nevertheless. "As for 'word,' we know it not, being but now from London. Yet you should surely know me, sir!" And he dropped his voice. "Is there a moon to-night?"

"Zounds, Master Trevor, a merry moon to-night," said the man, who was none other than Captain Daventry. "Right glad am I to see you once more, and right glad will Harry Lavender be! He can scarce attend to his duties for thought of you, and sends every hour to my picquet for news."

"How go matters yonder?" said Dick, nodding his head in the direction of the town, as he and Daventry shook hands warmly. "What force has the duke brought?"

"The duke!" replied Captain Daventry, laughing. "No duke, an' you please. He has been proclaimed 'King James II.' in the market-place, and, by my soul, he hath a better front than James of Whitehall; but as for force, eighty men were all that landed from the ships, though we are enlisting rapidly on the Church Cliff, and last night the muster had reached a thousand footmen and one hundred and fifty cavaliers."

"Then will we seek out Captain Lavender forthwith, and enrol under the new banner!" cried Dick. "I have nothing to lose and everything to gain, and so, hurrah for the new King!"

The line of wild-looking men fell back to open the way, cheering loudly as Dick waved his hat, and, with Ned Pouch at his heels, rode full gallop down the lane to Lyme.

The town was almost deserted, the people having gone to the cliff to witness the enlisting; but from most of the windows there hung streamers, or green boughs, and what few people they met shouted welcome, knowing that these must be a brace of gay volunteers, since the picquet had passed them through.

(Tell all your pals that next week's long instalment of our stupendous new romantic serial is the READ GOODS, and is crammed full of amazing situations and daring deeds.)

THE POPULAR.—No. 237.



The Greatest Story of Schoolboy Adventure Ever Written

THE BULLIES OF THE "BOMBAY CASTLE"

You can start NOW to read the stunning new adventures of Dick Dorrington & Co. of the famous School Ship "Bombay Castle." This great yarn is just packed with mystery, fun, and adventure. Ask your newsagent for

The BOYS' FRIEND

Now on Sale. Buy Your Copy TO-DAY.

The Amazing Duel in the Garden! See

Next Week!

SPECIAL "IMPOT" NUMBER!



BILLY BUNTER'S WEEKLY

Edited By W.G. Bunter (Greyfriars)

Assisted by Sammy Bunter of Greyfriars, Baggy Trimble and Fatty Wyna of St. Jim's, and Tubby Muffin of Rookwood.

Supplement No. 135.

Week Ending August 4th, 1923.

IN YOUR EDITOR'S DEN!

By BILLY BUNTER

MY DEAR READERS.—I ought to be quite a dab at fishing, bekwase my Form master generously gave me 100 "lines" the other day. But he didn't spare the rod!

I should like to meet the merchant who first invented impots. Of all the crool and callus inventions, surely that is the limit! I'll bet it was a Form master who first thought of such a dastordly punishment; and if only I could find him, he would "go through the hoop," like a performing puppy.

Can you think of anything more trajkck than to sit in a stuffy Form-room on a hot day writing out lines from Virjil, or Thew-siddy-dees, or some other ancient scribe? It is galling; it is maddening; it is tantlerising!

I'd much rather have a licking than an impot. A licking only lasts a minnit at the most; but an impot is a weeri-some bizziness. It's a case of scribble, scribble, scribble, till you get writer's cramp all down your legs.

There is nothing to make you larf in this issew—unless you like gloating over other people's misfortunes. Old Quelchy has just given me another 100 lines. That's not a larfing matter, is it? Gird yourself with sackcloth and ashes, kind readers, and bemeone my sorry fate!

Impot or no impot, however, my WEEKLY is coming out as usual. Nothing short of an earthquake shall ever interfere with is reggular publication.

I have struck a trajkck note this week, but it's only right that I should give you a glimpse of the serious side of life occasionally. The corse of school life never did run smooth, and it never will until the hateful and, Hunnish sistem of awarding impots is abollicated!

Yours sinseerly,
YOUR EDITOR.

THE POPULAR.—No. 237.



Lines or Lickings?

Which Do You Prefer?

**BOB CHERRY:**

A licking is over in a flash. A heavy impot sometimes takes a week to write, and it interferes with a fellow's leisure and pleasure. Obviously, then, lickings are preferable to lines. I'd rather have one minute's anguish than one week's hard labour!

HURREE SINGH:

I would rather have the lickfulness than the linefulness, because the quickfulness of the lickfulness is a great point in its esteemed favour, and makes it the lesser of two evils. The lickfulness with the stickfulness makes very little impression on my dusky hide; but the slow and wearisome linefulness nearly drives me out of my mindfulness. By the way, the honoured Quelchy sahib has already given me five hundred of the linefulness, so I must commence-fully make a start to begin!

ALONZO TODD:

Line-writing is one of my keenest pleasures. It inspires me with noble thoughts, and it improves my calligraphy. I could write lines from the classics all day, and be the happiest soul alive. But the cane! Oh, how I dread it! I have a very tender epidermis, if you know what that means, and a severe application of the cane causes dreadful weals. Personally, I would rather write five thousand lines than receive one cut with the cane!

BILLY BUNTER:

A bold, brave fellow like me can always take a licking with Spartan forty-chewed. But I hate impots like the plag. Whenever Quelchy gives me a hundred lines, I always implore him to give me a good, hard licking instead.

By kompressing my lips and stealing my nerves against the ordeal, I can always bear up under a licking. But I konfess that a stiff imposition makes me curl up!

DICK PENFOLD:

I don't like lickings, I don't like lines. I don't like gatings, I don't like fines. In fact, I consider the way they punish Is hateful, horrible, harsh, and Hunnish!

Result of Hampshire Picture-Puzzle Competition!

In this competition one competitor sent in a correct solution. The First Prize of £5 has therefore been awarded to:

FRED BUMPUS,
73, Leigham Court Drive,
Leigh-on-Sea.

The Second Prize of £2 10s. has been divided among the following four competitors, whose solutions contained one error each:

W. Kemp, 33a, Headstone Road, Harrow-on-the-Hill; Norah Bumpus, 73, Leigham Court Drive, Leigh-on-Sea; Ronald Kirkham, 48, Kenilworth Road, Seacombe, Cheshire; Mrs. H. L. Bumpus, 73, Leigham Court Drive, Leigh-on-Sea.

Sixteen competitors, with two errors each, divide the ten prizes of 5s. each. The names and addresses of these prizewinners can be obtained on application at this office.

SOLUTION.

Hampshire was at one time regarded as the cradle of cricket. For many years the county's cricket was under a cloud, but during late years the club has done wonderfully well. Her chief players to-day include the Hon. Lionel Tennyson, a grandson of the poet, and Mead, the fine left-hand bat.

[Supplement I.]

A "Future" Number Next Week—Full of Fun and Laughter!



By Harry Noble of The Shell at St. Jim's.)

AUBREY RACKE was snowed under with impositions.

Mr. Railton set the ball rolling by giving him five hundred lines for insolence. Then Kildare of the Sixth dropped on him for the same offence, and gave him a hundred lines. Shortly afterwards, Darrell administered a further hundred for sliding down the banisters.

All this happened on the same day—a Monday.

"I was born on a Monday," said Racke; "and it's my unlucky day. Everything goes wrong on Mondays."

"How many lines have you managed to collect to-day?" asked Crooke.

"Oh, seven hundred!" said Racke indifferently.

"My hat!"

"I won't make a start on 'em yet," said Racke, "because I'm bound to get another dose to-morrow. I'll wait till it gets up to a thousand."

Racke didn't have to wait long. Next morning he overslept, and Kildare came into the dorm and found him in bed long after rising-bell.

"Take a hundred lines, you lazy young rascal!" said the captain of St. Jim's.

"That makes eight hundred," murmured Racke, as he heaved himself out of bed. "I shall bring it up to a thousand before brekker!"

And he did.

Rushden of the Sixth pounced upon him for bullying Manners minor in the quad and gave him two hundred lines. This made the total a thousand.

"When are you going to start writing them?" inquired Crooke.

"Not to-day," said Racke. "I feel too jolly lazy!"

"But there will be the dickens of a row if you don't get them done—"

"Oh, I'll get the dashed things done!" said Racke.

But he appeared to be in no hurry. The day passed without Racke putting pen to paper.

On the third day—Wednesday—there was a bombshell for Racke. He happened to cheek Knox of the Sixth, and Knox was so furious that he gave him a thousand lines.

"Make it a billion!" said Racke. "I've got a thousand to do already!"

"Well, this will make it two thousand!" growled Knox. "And you'd better get all your lines written by Saturday, or there will be ructions!"

Aubrey Racke was faced with a formidable task. Two thousand lines take some writing. They can't be dashed off in five minutes. I once had five hundred to do, and they took me a day and the best part of a night, and gave me writer's cramp in the process. But Racke had four times that amount

to do. How could he possibly get through?

Aubrey didn't seem to worry. On Wednesday afternoon he biked over to Wayland. An idea had occurred to him.

In the window of the newsagent's shop in the High Street appeared several advertisements. This was a quick way of advertising, for one didn't have to wait till the paper was published. There was advertisements for domestic servants, furnished apartments, bicycles, lap-dogs, and all manner of things.

Racke went into the shop and scribbled an advertisement, asking the newsagent to display it in the window. It ran as follows:

"Six clerks wanted at once, for temporary job.—Apply to AUBREY RACKE, Shell Form, St. Jim's."

Racke had conceived the notion of employing a band of clerks to write his



The next morning, Aubrey Racke overslept, and Kildare came into the dormitory and found him in bed. "Take a hundred lines, you lazy rascal!" he said.

lines for him. There were several unemployed clerks in Wayland, and half a dozen of them would make short work of Racke's impositions. True, the handwriting might be recognised as not being Racke's; but this was a risk that Aubrey had to take.

That evening Racke's study was besieged by applicants for the job. He selected six of them, and set them to work, splitting up the lines between them.

The clerks did their work so swiftly, being skilled penmen, that the whole of the lines were completed in one evening.

Racke paid his helpers five shillings apiece for their services. Being one of the wealthiest fellows in the Shell, he could easily afford to do this.

Crooke, who knew nothing of Racke's

ruse, strolled into the study just before bedtime.

"Started the lines yet, old man?" he asked.

Racke grinned.

"I've finished them," he said.

"What!"

Racke explained what he had done, and Crooke chuckled.

"Cute wheeze, that!" he said.

"But I shouldn't hand the lines in yet, if I were you, or Railton and the others will marvel at your getting them done so quickly, and they'll be suspicious. Leave it till Friday."

Racke followed this advice; and it was not until Friday that he handed in his lines. He took a thousand to Knox's study, and Knox accepted them without investigating the handwriting. Then he took two hundred to Kildare, two hundred to Rushden, and a hundred to Darrell. In each case the seniors accepted the lines without comment.

Aubrey chuckled to himself in great glee.

"That was a toppin' wheeze of mine!" he murmured. "It saved me quite a lot of time an' trouble!"

He still had five hundred lines left to take to Mr. Railton.

The Housemaster was not so easily deceived as the seniors had been. He glanced at the lines, then he looked searchingly at Racke.

"Who wrote these lines, Racke?" he demanded.

"I did, sir, of course!"

"You are lying!" said Mr. Railton sternly.

"Really, sir—"

"Do you insist that these lines are in your handwriting?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Railton frowned, and picked up a cane.

"Unfortunately for you, Racke," he said, "I happened to be passing the newsagent's shop in Wayland on Wednesday evening, and I saw your advertisement in the window."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"I will trouble you to hold out your hand," said the Housemaster.

The next moment wild yells floated through the corridors of the School House, and Monty Lowther likened the affair to pig-killing.

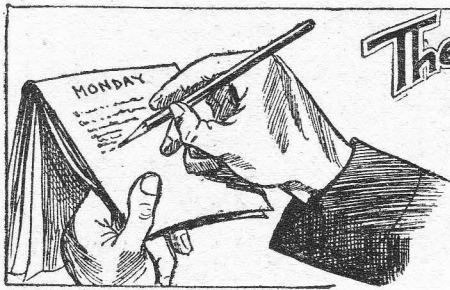
Racke's ruse had not proved such a grand success, after all.

(To my mind, Racke of St. Jim's is a silly chump. I could have thought of a wheeze worth two of that. A brainy fellow like me could have riggled out of the difficulty with ease; but then they're a brainless set of beggars at St. Jim's.—Ed.)

THE POPULAR.—No. 237.

[Supplement II.]

Another Short Story by Tom Brown Next Week!



The Diary of a Lead Pencil!

Contributed By
TEDDY GRACE.

MONDAY.

After residing for six months on the bookstall at Coombe Station, I was purchased to-day by Tubby Muffin, of Rookwood. Tubby was rather struck with my appearance. "How much is this pencil?" he inquired of the bookstall clerk. "Threepence, sir," was the reply. "It's got 'H.B.' marked on it," said Tubby. "What does that mean?" "Happy bargain, sir," said the clerk with a grin. Tubby slipped me into his pocket, where I found myself with many strange companions, including a slab of toffee, a piece of string, a penknife, and a pocketbook. I didn't like the penknife a bit. I felt that it had designs on me. And my fears were justified, for when Tubby Muffin reached Rookwood he used the knife to sharpen me. Oh, the agony and pain!

TUESDAY.

I was busily employed all day in writing articles for "Billy Bunter's Weekly." Tubby Muffin handled me none too gently, and my point broke at least half a dozen times. "Oh, what a dud pencil!" growled Tubby. If only I had a tongue, I would have told him that I was quite all right when carefully handled, but that I could not stand ill-usage.

WEDNESDAY.

I am sick and tired of being sharpened. Tubby Muffin has pointed me at least ten times to-day, and I have dwindled down to half my original size. I am wasting away to a shadow, and it doesn't look as if I shall enjoy many more days of existence. I am doing crowds of work for my owner, and he seems to be fairly pleased with me now. But he looked at me wistfully this evening and said: "How I wish you were an indelible! I've got a hundred lines to write for Bulkeley, and he won't take them in ordinary black lead!"

THURSDAY.

I was borrowed by Jimmy Silver, who kept me behind his ear most of the time. It was a terribly precarious position, and every moment I was afraid I might fall and break my point. Presently a tragedy occurred. Jimmy Silver jumped up suddenly and I was sent flying from my perch into the fire. The flames started licking me, and I might have been totally destroyed, had not Jimmy rescued me with the tongs. As it is, I am burnt to a mere stump.

FRIDAY.

Tubby Muffin met Jimmy Silver in the passage. "Where's that pencil I lent you?" he demanded. Jimmy produced me with a shamefaced air. "I'm sorry it's nearly all gone, Tubby," he said.

THE POPULAR.—No. 237.

said, "but it met with an accident." Tubby Muffin stared at me aghast. "Why, it's a mere stump!" he exclaimed. "You'll have to buy me another, Silver." Jimmy promised to do so.

SATURDAY.

I expect you have often wondered what happens to lead pencils when they are no longer fit for service. Well, I'll tell you what happened to me. I was sold to a fag in the Third, who used me as long as there was enough of me to clutch between his thumb and forefinger. He then threw me away, and I am rotting in the ground underneath one of the elm-trees in the quad. A sorry fate, in sooth!

THE SONG OF THE SWOT!

BY DICK BROOKE
(of St. Jim's.)

With fingers aching and cramped,
With eyelids weary and weak,
And a lump of ice on his brow,
A fellow sat studying Greek.
Scratch! Scratch! Scratch!
Went his pen, with many a blot;
And still in a voice of dolorous pitch
He sang the song of the swot!

The midnight chimes rang out
From the clock in the old school tower;
But still he sat and pushed his pen
With plenty of driving-power.
Scratch! Scratch! Scratch!
He was nearly off his dot;
But still in a voice both loud and shrill
He sang the song of the swot!

His temples were on fire,
And his hands were far from cool;
But he worked away industriously
In the hushed and silent school.
Scratch! Scratch! Scratch!
His fountain-pen faltered not;
And now, in a voice that grew more faint,
He sang the song of the swot!

His hair stood up on end,
And a gleam was in his eyes;
"By luck and pluck," he gamely cried,
"I'll win the Founders' Prize!
For the rivals in the field
I do not care a jot."
And still in a drowsy, droning voice
He sang the song of the swot!

Next morn, they found him there
In a state of dire collapse;
And Monty Lowther promptly said,
"To the sanny with him, chaps!"
The body was borne away,
Brain fever he had got;
Yet still in faint and feeble tones,
He sang the song of the swot!

A WAIST OF TIME!

By Sammy Bunter.

THE other day I got Twigg's goat. Do not dedooce from this, dear reader, that I stole an animal belonging to Mr. Twigg. I mean that I got his back up. I brought my white rabbit into the Form-room, and it skuttled all over the place and delayed the start of morning lessons for $\frac{1}{2}$ an hour.

"Is this your rabbit, Bunter miner?" demanded Mr. Twigg.

Being a very truthful fellow I answered in the infirmative.

"You will take a thousand lines for bringing the beast into the Form-room!" thundered Twigg.

"Oh, crumbs!"

"And you will hand in the lines to me by Saterdag evening!"

I made a rye face.

A thousand lines to write by Saterdag evening—and it was already Friday afternoon!

It meant that I should have to sacrifice the whole of Saterdag. Instead of knocking up a sentry on the cricket field I should have to sit in a stuffy Form-room grinding out lines as hard as I could go.

The other fellows were very simper-thetick. But, like Rachel of old, I morned, and refused to be komforted.

When Saterdag dorned the sun shone down in all its splendor. It always does when I have to stay indoors and write an impot!

All day long I slogged away at my thousand lines. I couldn't even stop to have my meals, because I was afraid I should get a licking if I didn't hand them in—the lines, not the meals—by the evening.

At last my long task was completed. I rose to my feet with a sigh of relief. I had worn out twenty pen-knibbs, and used a duzen sheets of blotting-paper, and about a barrel of blew-black ink.

It was eight o'clock in the evening, and I had been on the go all day. It was with a weary step that I rolled along to Twigg's studdy. I staggered into the apartment, and gasped in faint and feeble tones:

"My impot, sir!"

"Eh? What impot?" asked Twigg, looking very serprized.

"Why, sir, you gave me a thousand lines yesterday!" I said.

"Dear me, yes! I had clean forgotten!"

After that amazing confession from Twigg I nearly kollapsed. I needn't have written a single line and Twigg wouldn't have been any the wiser! I had waisted a whole day writing an impot that my Form-master had forgotten! What an unlucky mortle I am!

COMING SHORTLY.

THE
HOLIDAY ANNUAL

[Supplement III.]

In FIFTY YEARS' TIME—Tubby Muffin's Impression of the Future!

HUNTING FOR THE RUSTLERS!

Looking for rustlers in the Thompson Valley is a very dangerous occupation, but neither Dicky Bird, of Hillcrest, or Frank Richards & Co., of Cedar Creek, are stopped by any thoughts of peril. They go in quest of the notorious FLOUR-BAG GANG.

THE RIVAL BACKWOODS SCHOOLS AGAIN!

DICKY BIRD'S CAPTURE!

**THE FIRST CHAPTER.****The Ambuscade.**

"HOLD on!" Bob Lawless pulled in his horse.

It was Saturday, which was a whole holiday at Cedar Creek School, and Frank Richards & Co. were free for the day. The three chums were riding along a rough track on the hillside north of Thompson town, when Bob suddenly drew rein.

Frank Richards and Vere Beauclerc followed his example, glancing at the rancher's son inquiringly.

Shading his eyes with his big Stetson hat, Bob Lawless sat motionless in the saddle, staring intently down the hillside.

A good distance below the trail to Thompson wound round the foot of the hill, with the river on the other side.

The hillside was dotted with clumps of pine and birch, and great patches of spruce blackened with the frost.

So far as Frank and Beauclerc could see, they were alone on the wild hillside, and nothing living stirred amid the patches of wood and thicket.

But it was evident that something had caught the keen eyes of the Canadian school-boy.

For a full minute Bob sat quite still, looking intently towards the lower trail, his eyes keen and his brows knitted.

"I guess that's queer!" he said at last.

"What on earth's up?" asked Frank Richards, puzzled. "I can't see anything excepting the trail and the river. Have you spotted a grizzly?"

"Nope. Franky, my son, you've been long enough in Canada to have learned to use your eyes."

"I'm using them, fathead!"

"Not with much result, then!" grinned Bob. "You can see the Thompson trail, I suppose?"

"Nothing new in that!"

"Your mistake—something quite new," answered Bob. "There's two galoots in ambush beside the trail."

"What?"

Frank and Beauclerc stared hard in the direction Bob pointed out with his riding-whip.

They could see nothing but the hoof-marked trail winding among the clumps of timber and thickets and big boulders.

"Guess again, Bob!" said Frank incredulously.

"I confess I don't see any sign of them," remarked Vere Beauclerc.

"Look again, then," said Bob. "Can't you see the bird circling over that patch of birch and fir?"

"Yes."

"Something's disturbed it, and made it luzz up, I guess."

"Might be a lynx, or even a squirrel," observed Frank Richards.

Bob laughed.

"Do lynxes and squirrels wear Stetson hats?" he asked.

"Eh? I suppose not."

"Well, if you fix your peepers on the right spot, you'll see the crowns of the hats just under where the bird is wheeling, close by the tall fir on the edge of the trail."

Frank whistled.

Now that his attention was directed to the spot, he could barely make out the tops of two broad-rimmed hats, the wearers of which were buried from sight in the thicket.

From the position of the two hats, however, it was clear that the wearers were crouched in cover beside the trail, which they were watching.

"My hat!" murmured Beauclerc. "That looks queer, and no mistake! Why are they watching the trail?"

"That's what I want to know," said Bob Lawless. "It's three o'clock now."

He glanced up at the sky as he made that statement; his timekeeper was the sun glimmering over the mountain ranges.

"About three! It's about time for the post-wagon—any time between two and four the post-wagon comes along on Saturday afternoon to Thompson from the upper camps. Those galoots are watching for the post-wagon."

"Phew!"

"I suppose they can't be watching for anything else?" remarked Beauclerc.

"Now, when two galoots take cover in the timber, and watch a lonely trail for the post-wagon, I guess I want to know why," said Bob Lawless. "And I kinder remember that last week we heard of road-agents getting busy in this section—the Flour-bag Gang."

"Oh!"

"There were two men, with their faces covered up with flour-bags, that robbed a rancher on the Cedar Camp trail," said Bob; "and it looks powerful-like to me that those two galoots are watching now for the post-wagon. I guess it's likely."

Frank Richards nodded.

The two Stetson hats, barely seen at the distance down the hillside, were not moving.

Why should the two wearers be crouched in cover there, watching the trail, unless for an ill motive?

"The road-agents, of course!" said Frank, with a deep breath.

"You see, from the point they get a wide view," said Bob. "At that point on the trail they can see a mile towards Thompson, and a mile the other way, north. They can see that the trail's clear both ways if they pile on the post wagon when it comes along. And I guess there's usually

a lot of dust in that wagon from the claims on the upper range. It might be worth a thousand dollars or two to them if they bag it. I guess we've dropped on the Flour-bag Gang right at work!"

Frank and Beauclerc nodded.

There seemed no other explanation of the ambush by the trail, and their hearts beat faster at the thought of being so near—unsuspected—to the road-agents watching for their prey.

"And," continued Bob thoughtfully, "I guess we're not letting them rip. There's two of them, and three of us. And we know they're there, and they don't know we're here. Are you fellows game?"

"Game as pie!" said Frank. "But—"

"We've got to chip in," said Bob.

"And if there's shooting—"

"There won't be if we handle them well," said Bob. "We know enough woodcraft to take them by surprise from behind. We've got to prevent the post-wagon being robbed. And there's another reason. I guess it will be one up for Cedar Creek School if we rope in the Flour-bag Gang. I've heard that some of the fellows at Hillcrest School have been talking about doing it."

"What rot!"

"Well, Dicky Bird is a hefty galoot," said Bob. "It would be like him to take a hand in the game; and he might have some luck. And if he did the Hillcrest fellows would crow no end. I guess we're not going to lose the chance of showing that Cedar Creek is the real goods."

"Well, we're game," said Beauclerc. "But they're sure to be armed, and they will shoot, that's a cert, if they get a chance. What's the programme?"

Bob Lawless slipped from his horse.

"Tie up your critters here," he said, "and follow me. Don't make a sound. I reckon you know how to move without wakening all the valley, and how to keep in cover. We've got to get close behind those galoots before they hear us, and nail them before they can use their guns. It's risky, of course."

Frank Richards drew a deep breath.

Bob Lawless' project was not only risky; it was deadly dangerous.

Yet there was an excellent chance of success.

The two in ambush evidently did not suspect that they were observed from the higher hillside, for the Stetson hats remained motionless in the thicket.

With sufficient caution the ambushed pair could be taken by surprise from behind, and once upon them, the heavy butts of the riding-whips would bring them to order if they resisted.

But, in case of failure, there would be

THE POPULAR.—No. 237.

There's Thrills and Spills in Next Week's Splendid Backwoods Yarn!

shooting at close quarters, for the Flour-bag Gang were desperate men.

But the chums of Cedar Creek had roughed it too long in the Canadian West to hesitate at danger.

The horses were tethered in the wood, and Frank Richards & Co., began to descend the hillside cautiously towards the lower trail.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Slight Surprise.

BOB LAWLESS led the way as the chums of Cedar Creek plunged into the thickets on the wild hillside.

He trod with great caution, making no sound—not even a twig snapped as he made his way through the thickets.

Frank and Beauclerc imitated his caution. Bob paused, and held up his hand suddenly.

In the thicket ahead of them, on the very border of the trail, there was the sound of a slight movement.

It was followed by another sound—a yawn.

It sounded as if the watchers of the trail were growing tired of their vigil.

Bob made his comrades a sign of caution, and trod warily on, his riding-whip gripped in his hand, the butt ready for use.

Frank and Beauclerc followed.

Not the slightest sound was made now, for they were almost near enough to hear the breathing of the pair crouched by the trail.

Through the bushes glimpses could be had of muddy riding-boots, and the butt of a rifle.

Only a thin screen of thicket separated them now from the ambushed pair, who were still watching the trail without dreaming of turning their heads.

Bob set his teeth.

It was time!

He could see little of the two forms screened within a few feet of him, but quite enough to guide him.

He signed to his comrade and made a sudden spring.

Like a leaping lynx, the lithe Canadian schoolboy crashed through the thicket and landed upon the back of one of the crouching figures.

There was a startled cry, and the figure went plunging forward, with Bob kneeling on his back.

The other was springing up when Frank and Beauclerc landed on him together, and he crashed face downwards, with the two schoolboys on him.

The ambushed pair had been taken utterly by surprise.

They wriggled under the gripping knees on their backs, and the two rifles that had fallen from their hands were useless.

"Give in!" rapped out Bob Lawless. "Give in, my pippins, and take it quiet, if you don't want your heads caved in at the back! We've got you!"

"Yaroor!"

"You can yell as much as you like," said Bob. "But I've got the butt of my riding-whip here to cave in your skull if you try any tricks! We've got you, my merry rustlers!"

"Bob Lawless!"

"Hallo! You know my name—eh?"

"You silly ass!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Gerrup! I'm Dicky Bird, you thumping idiot!"

"What?"

Bob Lawless recognised the voice now. He jumped off his prisoner as if the latter's back had suddenly become red-hot to his knees.

The prisoner rolled over in the herbage, and disclosed a red and furious face.

Bob Lawless blinked at him, petrified.

For the face was that of Richard Bird of Hillcrest School, and certainly not that of a road-agent disguised under a flour-bag.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Frank Richards. "And who's this?"

"This" uttered a howl of wrath.

"Gerroff my back, you jay! You're s-squashing me! I'm Blumpy, you thumping idiot!"

"Oh!"

"Well, my hat!" murmured Beauclerc.

The second prisoner was released, and the two rose to their feet, panting for breath, and evidently furious.

THE POPULAR.—No. 237.

"You silly jays!" howled Dicky Bird.

"What do you mean by creeping on galoots from behind, and jumping on them?"

"You fairly startled me out of my skin!" gasped Blumpy. "Blest if I didn't think the road-agents were on us for a minute!"

"What were you in cover for, watching the trail?" demanded Bob Lawless indignantly. "We spotted you from up the hill, and thought you were the Flour-bag Gang watching for the post-wagon."

"What?" yelled Dicky Bird.

"The Flour-bag Gang—us?" roared Blumpy.

"Well, what were we to think?" demanded Frank Richards. "What silly game were you playing, anyway?"

"You—you—you crass idiots!" panted Dicky Bird. "We're watching for the post-wagon—"

"And why?"

"Because we're after the road-agents, you fatheads!" snorted Dicky Bird. "We can watch the whole trail both ways from this point, and if the road-agents lay for the post-wagon, we're going to chip in! That's why we've brought our rifles. And you—you—Oh, you idiots!"

Frank Richards & Co. stared at the two Hillcrest fellows blankly.

The surprise had been a complete success; but the capture was not a glorious one. Certainly the Cedar Creek chums could not march off Dicky Bird and Billy Blumpy to the sheriff at Thompson, to be laid by the heels in the calaboose.

Dicky Bird was wriggling painfully; Bob Lawless' knee in the small of his back had not been gently applied.

But his face broke into a grin at last.

The comic side of the affair dawned on him—as it had already dawned on the chums of Cedar Creek.

"I've a jolly good mind to take you out into the trail, and mop it up with you!" he said. "But you can't help being funny, I guess. Ha, ha, ha!"

"So you took us for road-agents? We look like road-agents, I guess! Ha, ha, ha!"

"We only saw the tops of your hats!" grunted Bob.

They understood now.

Dicky Bird and Blumpy were making use of their holiday to look for the Flour-bag Gang, with a good chance of success if the road-agents happened to work that trail that afternoon.

That was why they had been posted so carefully in cover, watching the trail when the post-wagon was due.

Bob Lawless' cheeks reddened.

Frank blushed, and Beauclerc burst into a laugh.

"Is everybody who wears a Stetson hat a road-agent, then?"

"Look here—"

"By gum! We must tell the fellows this at Hillcrest!" grinned Dicky Bird.

"It will tickle them to death! By the way, where are you going?"

"White Pine!" growled Bob.

"Better turn round, and ride down to Kamloops."

"Why?"

"You can get a train there for a lunatic asylum!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blumpy.

The chums of Cedar Creek looked at the Hillcrest fellows and looked at one another.

They turned and tramped back the way they had come.

They were sorely tempted to fall on the Hillcrest chums and smite them hip and thigh.

But they refrained and went their own way.

The chuckling of Dicky Bird and Blumpy followed them through the firs and birches as they went back to their horses.

They did not speak a word as they returned to their steeds.

On the upper trail they mounted in silence, and rode on their way over the hill to White Pine.

"I—I say, that was a bad break!" said Bob Lawless, at last. "I don't see that we were to blame for taking them for— for the road-agents."

"Don't say 'we,' old chap," grinned Frank Richards. "It was your discovery, you know. We're not claiming any of the credit, are we, Cherub?"

"No fear!" chuckled Beauclerc.

Bob's flush deepened.

"Well, it was a bad break," he said.

"We shall hear no end about this. It will be a standing joke at Hillcrest, and the Cedar Creek chaps will soon hear of it, and chip us to death."

"Can't be helped," said Frank. "Next time we meet the Flour-bag Gang we'll give them a wide berth. They may turn out to be Cedar Creek chaps next time."

"Oh, rats!" growled Bob.

And the chums rode on, Bob Lawless with a crimson face, and his comrades smiling.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bob Thinks it Out.

"C AUGHT 'em?"

Chunky Todgers asked that question on Monday morning, when Frank Richards & Co. arrived at school.

Chunky's fat face was wreathed in a broad grin.

"Caught whom?" asked Frank Richards, in surprise.

"The road-agents!" chuckled Chunky Todgers.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from half a dozen of the Cedar Creek fellows.

Bob Lawless gave a grunt.

"So you've heard all about it?" he said.

"Ha, ha! I met Dicky Bird at the Mission yesterday," grinned Chunky. "I heard that you chaps captured him on Saturday."

"And Billy Blumpy!" grinned Tom Lawrence.

"Taking them for the Flour-bag Gang!" roared Eben Hacke. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why didn't you take them to the sheriff?" asked Chunky Todgers, merrily. "It seems that you took them for the road-agents. Well, why didn't you run them in?"

"There's a reward out for the Flour-bag Gang, too," remarked Hopkins. "If you could have proved it against them you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" snapped Frank Richards.

The three chums walked in, rather ruffled.

It was evident that the story of their unlucky adventure was all over Cedar Creek, and that there was going to be plenty of chipping on the subject.

During morning lessons they detected a good many smiles round them, and they knew what their schoolfellows were thinking of.

When they strolled out of Cedar Creek after lessons, Chunky Todgers called after them:

"Hadn't you better take a gun, Franky? You might meet those road-agents, you know, and they might'n turn out to be Dicky Bird and Billy Blumpy."

And there was a howl of laughter.

The Co. walked on with red faces.

"Bob, old chap, you're an awful ass!" said Frank.

"Well, I suppose it was my fault," admitted Bob Lawless. "Still, I don't see that I was to blame. It looked like an ambush, didn't it?"

"And we look like a set of asses!" said Frank.

"Nothing new for you, at least, old fellow."

"Why, you duffer—"

"Order!" said Beauclerc, laughing. "No good ragging about it. The fellows will chortle over it till they get something new to think of. We ought to go for Dicky Bird and down him, somehow."

"I guess I was thinking of that," said Bob Lawless. "After all, those chumps are playing the jay. Fancy the Hillcrest chaps being duffers enough to think they can rope in the Flour-bag Gang!"

"Like their cheek!" agreed Frank.

Bob wrinkled his brows.

"They were after the road-agents on Saturday when we dropped on them," he said. "I haven't heard any news of the galoots being caught, though."

"We're not likely to, I think."

"Nope; I reckon Dicky Bird won't have any luck," said Bob. "But I wonder—"

He broke off, thinking.

"Well, what's the wheeze—or stunt, as you call it?" asked Frank. "I can see you've got something in your noddle."

"I have," said Bob. "Let's get the gees out and ride over to Hillcrest. I want to see Dicky Bird."

"Not much use slogging with them, Bob."

"I'm not thinking of slogging with them, fathead. I want to see Dicky."

"Oh, all right!"
The chums led out their horses, receiving several inquiries as they did so as to whether they were going on the trail of the road-agents.

They did not heed the inquiries, however.

The three chums mounted, and rode away to Hillerest School.

Hillerest was in sight when they met Dicky Bird, Blumpy and Fisher on the trail, going towards Thompson.

The Hillerest fellows grinned at the sight of them.

"Not guilty, my lord!" was Dicky Bird's first remark. "You will have to look farther for the Flour-bag Gang."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Fisher and Blumpy.

"Oh, give us a rest!" said Bob Lawless crossly. "You don't seem to have bagged the galoots you were after, Bird."

Dicky Bird shook his head.

"No luck," he said. "They didn't try for the post-wagon on Saturday. I hear in Thompson that Poker Pete's suspected of being one of the gang, and he seems to have cleared out of the town. I believe they'll be heard of again, though, and we're not letting up on them."

"You won't look for them again?"

"I guess we shall!" answered Dicky Bird emphatically. "I guess we're going to put in every holiday on the trails looking for them! And I guess we shall happen on them sooner or later."

"And then you'll light out, as if you've been sent for!" grinned Bob.

Dicky Bird sniffed.

"You'll see!" he answered.

"You're really going to try and tackle the Flour-bag, then?"

"Yep! And I guess you'd better keep off the grass. We don't want you jumping on our backs again."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, we might take a hand, and run down the road-agents ourselves, you know," remarked Bob.

"Oh, draw it mild! It's our stunt, isn't it?" exclaimed Dicky Bird warmly. "That's just like you Cedar Creek galoots; you can't think of anything for yourselves. You keep off the grass, and leave the job to pilgrims who know a road-agent from a schoolboy!"

"Well, fair's fair," said Bob, unheeding the chuckle that followed Dicky Bird's remark. "We'll leave you your ground, of course. If you're sticking to the north trail—"

"Oh, you can wander around on the other trails if you like!" said Dicky Bird disdainfully. "You won't catch anything but a cold in the head, I'll bet you. Leave us alone on the north trail. Sooner or later those galoots will try to rope in the post-wagon from the ranges, with the miners' dust aboard, and then we shall chip in."

"It's not a bad idea," said Bob Lawless. "Look here, Dicky Bird, if you chaps are going to watch the north trail, same as before, next Saturday—"

"We are!"

"Then if we start hunting the Flour-bag Gang we'll leave that trap to you. That's fair play."

"I guess so," assented Dicky Bird. "My advice to you is to keep off the grass. You might get your heads punched next time you jump on the wrong galoots."

"Rats!"

Bob Lawless' eyes were shining as he rode away with his chums.

He burst into a chuckle several times as the trio trotted back to Cedar Creek.

He was smiling at the dinner-table, and still smiling when the chums came out after dinner.

"Well, what's it all about, Bob?" demanded Frank Richards. "What's giving you a pain in the brain? I can see there's something."

"Well," said Bob, "we're hearing no end of it because we—well, if you like—because I took Dicky Bird for a road-agent—"

"And we're likely to hear a lot more," agreed Frank. "The fellows don't seem to be getting tired of the subject."

"But suppose it happened again, the other way round—"

"Eh?"

"And Dicky Bird took me for a road-agent—"

"He wouldn't! He's not such an ass!"

"Well, that's the stunt!" said Bob coolly. "I shall have to stick some paint on my horse, and I shall have to get a flour-bag—"

"What?" yelled Frank.

"And next Saturday I guess the laugh's going to be on the other side," said Bob Lawless. "I've seen Dicky Bird—that's why I saw him—and found out that he will be on the watch in the same place next Saturday."

"My hat! But—"

"And that's the stunt," said Bob. "If it works, the fellows will have something else to cackle about."

And Bob proceeded to explain the details of the scheme that had formed in his active brain. And his chums listened, astonished at first, but in a very short time as keen on the stunt as Bob himself was.

**THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Hands Up!**

"I GUESS we shan't be jumped on this time," remarked Dicky Bird.

It was the following Saturday.

Dicky Bird & Co. had left their horses in the timber and taken up their station under the tall fir by the Thompson trail.

There were three of them this time—Dicky himself and Blumpy and Fisher.

The three schoolboys were very keen on their self-imposed task.

That it was risky they well knew; but they cared little for the risk. "Nerves" did not trouble the hardy lads of the Canadian West.

What they thought of chiefly was the triumph over the rival school if Hillerest fellows succeeded in ridding the valley of the gang of road-agents.

And Dicky Bird's plan was really good.

If the road-agents were still lurking in the valley, it was probable that sooner or later they would make an attempt upon the post-wagon, which every Saturday

brought down the miners' dust and nuggets from the claims in the upper ranges.

Under the tall fir the chums of Hillerest had a wide view of the trail in both directions, themselves safely concealed.

They had brought their rifles with them, and, once they had a "bead" on the road-agents in the open trail, resistance was not likely.

However desperate the ruffians might be, they were not likely to argue the point with levelled rifles and steady fingers on the triggers.

Dicky Bird had a well-known reputation in the valley as a crack shot.

The three schoolboys settled down in the thicket close by the tall fir, as Frank Richards & Co. had found them a week before.

There, completely screened from sight, they watched the trail.

The length of their watching was likely to be uncertain, for the post-wagon was seldom "on time," and it might have come rumbling along at any hour up to night-fall.

But Dicky Bird & Co. were patient.

It was a lonely trail, and during an hour or more only one traveller passed—Injun Dick of Thompson, jogging by on a bony mule.

After the Redskin had passed, the trail lay silent and deserted for nearly another hour.

Then Dicky Bird pricked up his ears at the sound of hoof-strokes.

A horseman had ridden out of the timber a good distance down the trail, towards Thompson.

He halted in the trail, and the three ambushed schoolboys could not see him yet, but they could hear the jingle of the bridle.

After a pause the rider came along in the direction of the ambush.

Three pairs of keen eyes were fastened on the trail, ready to fix on him as soon as the intervening boulders allowed him to be seen.

As he came into sight Dicky Bird drew a quick breath.

For the horseman wore a flour-bag over



Dicky Bird gazed at the captured road agent, stupefied. "B-b-bob Lawless!" he stammered. "What does this mean, Lawless?" demanded the sheriff fiercely. (See Chapter 5.)

his face, and not a hint of his features was to be seen.

Dicky's eyes gleamed.

He made a sign to his chums, and grasped his rifle silently.

Slowly the horseman came on.

He was wrapped in a long coat, with the collar turned up against the wind, which hid him and gave him a bulky appearance.

The flour-bag concealed his face, and over it was a Stetson hat.

In the sack there were slits cut for the eyes and the mouth.

The horseman halted again, almost directly opposite the ambush.

There he backed his horse into the thickets.

The three chums felt their hearts thump.

The flour-bagged ruffian had evidently chosen the very same spot as themselves for watching the trail and waylaying the post-wagon.

He kept his face towards the trail as he backed his steed into the bushes.

It was a brown horse, with white fetlocks, and patches of white on the body, which, as it came closer, the schoolboys could see were of paint.

That was proof enough of the man's character, if the flour-bag was not sufficient. For why should an honest man take the trouble to disguise his horse?

The rider stopped in the thicket within six feet of the ambushed trio.

He seemed utterly unconscious of their presence there.

Dicky Bird & Co. exchanged glances of triumph.

They had hoped and half-expected to drop on the road-agents sooner or later, but they had never looked for such luck as this.

The masked ruffian had fairly delivered himself into their hands now.

His rifle was slung on his back, and certainly he would have no time to unslung it. And he was alone—one against three!

Dicky rose silently to his feet.

Blumpy and Fisher followed his example, their hands almost trembling on their rifles in their excitement.

A twig or two cracked, but the waiting horseman seemed too intent on the trail beyond the thicket to heed the faint sound.

Steading their nerves, Dicky Bird & Co. put their rifles to their shoulders, the barrels directed at the masked man.

Then Dicky Bird broke the silence.

"Hands up!"

The horseman started. His hands went up at once.

He raised them obediently above his head, perhaps guessing that he was covered when that command was given.

The three schoolboys pushed nearer through the bushes, still keeping the horseman covered.

"I guess we've got you, my man!" said Dicky Bird jubilantly. "Keep your hands up! It's that or a bullet!"

The horseman's eyes gleamed at him through the slits in the flour-bag.

"Take his rifle, Blumpy," said Dicky Bird. "Mind, my man, you'll be drilled on the spot if you put your paws down!"

"I guess you've got me, colonel!" said the masked man, in a thick, husky voice.

"This lets me out, I reckon!"

"I reckon it does!" grinned Dicky Bird. Blumpy unslung the rifle from the man's back, and looked to his belt for other weapons; but no other weapons were there.

"Take a turn of the trail-ropes round his arms," directed Dicky Bird. "I guess they'll be pleased to see him in Thompson's!"

"You're not taking me to the sheriff?" exclaimed the masked man huskily.

"You bet!"

"Pard, you let me off! I guess I—"

"We're not letting you off, I guess," chuckled Dicky Bird. "But these rifles will be let off if you stir a finger."

"I reckon I know when it's a cinch," answered the masked man.

"Put your paws through this," said Blumpy, holding up the looped end of a trail-ropes.

The man seemed to hesitate for a moment; but Dicky Bird and Fisher had him covered, and Dicky made a threatening motion with his rifle.

"Get a move on!" snapped Dicky.

Without a word the horseman passed

his hands through the noose, and Blumpy drew it tight about his wrists, and knotted it.

"Now tie him to the saddle," said Dicky.

The trail-ropes were wound round the horseman, and in a few minutes he was knotted to his own saddle.

He was a helpless prisoner now.

"Now, I guess, we'll have a squint at his face," remarked Dicky Bird.

That was not so easy, however, for the flour-bag was fastened with a strong cord round the horseman's neck.

Dicky made a slit in it with his knife, and a part of the horseman's face was revealed.

It was swarthy, almost black, in hue, and there was a big, thick, red beard and rugged moustache.

"My word! What a beauty!" grinned Dicky. "Bring him along! The sooner we get him to Thompson the better; his pard's may be hanging around."

Blumpy fetched out the horses, and the chums of Hillcrest mounted, Dicky Bird taking the masked man's reins and leading him.

In great feather the road-agent hunters started at a gallop for Thompson, their prisoner galloping in their midst.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Not a Triumph.

"MY hat! Here they come!"

Frank Richards and Vere Beauclerc were trotting in a leisurely way on the trail outside Thompson, when Dicky Bird & Co. came in sight, with the masked man a prisoner in their midst.

"What have you got there?" shouted Frank.

"Only one of the Flour-bag Gang!" answered Dicky Bird, with a lofty and rather assumed indifference.

"Gammon!" said Frank incredulously. "Look at him!" said Blumpy. "We roped him in on the trail, where he was lying in wait for the post-wagon from the range. We're taking him to the sheriff."

"Well, my hat!" said Frank. "We'll come along."

"I guess this rather lays over anything that Cedar Creek can do!" chuckled Fisher.

"I guess it does!" agreed Frank, rather unexpectedly. "It will be a bit of a surprise for the sheriff."

The schoolboys rode on together, with the bound and silent prisoner in their midst.

There were foul exclamations as they rode up Main Street in Thompson, as the tell-tale flour-bag was recognised.

Questions were shouted on all sides, and the victorious Hillcrest fellows shouted back jubilant answers. A crowd followed the cortege.

By the time Dicky Bird & Co. halted outside the sheriff's house in Main Street half Thompson was gathered round.

The roar of the crowd brought Mr. Henderson out on his piazza.

"What the thunder—" ejaculated the sheriff.

"Road-agent, sir!" chortled Dicky Bird. "One of the Flour-bag Gang! We've roped him in and brought him to you, Mr. Henderson."

"Waal, carry me home to die!" gasped the sheriff.

He descended the steps of the piazza. Round the riders the crowd surged close in great excitement—miners and ranchmen and lumbermen, and a good many boys of Hillcrest and Cedar Creek Schools, who were in town that afternoon.

"I guess Bob Lawless ought to be here to see this!" called out Chunky Todgers to Frank Richards. "Where's Bob to-day?"

"He's not far off," answered Frank.

"I can't see him about."

"You'll see him soon, Chunky," said Vere Beauclerc, with a laugh.

Sheriff Henderson, still amazed, but evidently very pleased, had stepped up to the prisoner.

"We'll have a look at the galoot, and I guess we may know him," he remarked; "and then the calaboose."

He cut through the trail-ropes that fastened the prisoner, and dragged off, first, the big greatcoat that gave him so bulky a look.

Then there were exclamations of amazement on all sides.

For when the coat was removed it could be seen that the horseman was not the powerful ruffian the Thompson folk had expected to see.

He was little more than a boy—if anything more, certainly a very young man—from his size.

The sheriff whistled.

"I guess you started this game early, my fine fellow," he remarked. "I guess you'll be stopped early, too."

The sheriff cut the cord that fastened the flour-bag round the horseman's neck, and, pitching off the hat, drew the bag off over the man's head.

The face that was disclosed was almost black, thickly bearded, and extremely villainous-looking.

"What a beauty!" grinned Fisher.

"Who are you?" demanded the sheriff, staring at the man. "I guess I've never seen you before—and you've got your face disguised, too."

"I shouldn't wonder if that beard would come off," remarked Dicky Bird.

That was soon put to the test.

The sheriff grasped the beard and jerked it.

It came off in his hand, with the moustaches along with it.

There was a shout of amazement.

For the removal of those hirsute adornments disclosed quite a shapely and boyish mouth and chin, sunburnt, but fresh and healthy, and strangely contrasting with the blackened hue of the upper features.

"Why, what—what—" spluttered the sheriff. "It's a boy—a kid!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Frank Richards, unable any longer to control his merriment. "I can tell you his name, sheriff."

"You know him, Richards?"

"Yes, rather! So do you. Here's the rag, Bob."

Frank Richards pushed his horse forward, taking a wet rag from his saddle.

He rubbed it over the swarthy face of the horseman.

All the make-up did not come off, but a good deal of it did—quite enough for the "road-agent" to be recognised.

Dicky Bird gazed at him, stupefied.

"B-b-b-b-bob Lawless!" he stammered.

"Bob Lawless!" yelled Chunky Todgers.

"What does this mean, young Lawless?" thundered the sheriff.

"No harm, sheriff. Dicky Bird was looking for a flour-bag road-agent, so I found him one. Only a joke, sir."

Mr. Henderson gave a loud snort, and strode back into his house.

He did not seem to have a keen appreciation for Bob Lawless' little joke on the Hillcrest fellows.

But from the rest of the crowd there rose a terrific yell of laughter.

"Are you claiming the reward, Dicky Bird?" howled Chunky Todgers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not putting me in the calaboose, Dicky?" asked Bob Lawless, grinning at the petrified leader of Hillcrest. "Are you going to let me off, after bringing me here like this? Hadn't you better call on the crowd to lynch me?"

"You—you—you jay! You—you pesky funny idiot! Oh, gum!"

"Not the only jay present, I guess!" chuckled Bob. "If you're done with me, I'll mosey on. Gentlemen, the entertainment is over; but perhaps next Saturday Dicky Bird will capture another road-agent!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd broke, grinning and chuckling. Dicky Bird, Fisher and Blumpy looked at one another with sickly looks, and wheeled their horses.

Bob Lawless shouted to them as they rode away.

"You haven't claimed the reward yet, Dicky!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Hillcrest fellows did not answer, but rode the faster.

They were anxious to get out of view, to hide their blushes and their diminished heads.

A shout of laughter followed them as they vanished.

"I guess," remarked Bob Lawless, "that this puts the lid on Hillcrest for a bit."

"Ha, ha! I think it does."

And Bob Lawless was right—it did!

THE END.

(You must turn to page 11, and see all about next week's grand programme.)

Tom Merry suppressed a groan as he saw it. He knew what was coming. "I have been trying to impress Gore on the all-important subject of Education," he commenced. "But, alas and alack, he is to eaten up with selfish motives that I fear I have wasted my time. A great scheme to better the lot of the unfortunate lower classes is detailed by a learned professor in this book. It behoves all of us to help people less fortunate than ourselves, does it not?"

"Ahem! Of course," agreed Tom Merry politely.

"I am glad to see, Tom Merry, that you appreciate that point," said Skimpole. "Perhaps you will give me some assistance. I am determined to do my bit for the great cause. For a start I am going to devote my energies to the poor unfortunates of Rylcombe. Under my guidance they will receive a mental training to equip them for responsible positions in this world. Not being overburdened with this world's goods and chattels myself, I intend to raise a subscription from the unselfish fellows in this school. And I count on you, my dear fellow, to head the list. What can I put you down for?"

"A bob!"

"Ahem! That is rather a small amount," said Skimpole dubiously, "but all is grist that comes to the mill."

"You want to try your skill on that silly ass—I mean, that good-hearted chap, Gussy. He ought to be a great help to you," volunteered Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove! How dare you refer to me as a silly ass, Lowthah!"

"Talk of angels—" uttered Manners, as the door opened to admit the immaculate presence of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Weally, Mannahs!"

"Now then, Skimpole, don't let an opportunity like this pass you by," grinned Lowther. "Gussy would make a top-hole Educationalist."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah!" remarked the Swell of St. Jim's, treating the humorous Lowther to a freezing stare. "I fail to see the cause of your remark."

"You'll soon see, old scout," chuckled Tom Merry. "Excuse us, Skimmy—just remembered that Kildare wanted to see us. You and Gussy talk over Professor Balmcrumpet's great scheme."

"But I say, Tom Mewwy!"

But Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther had gone. And the great Arthur Augustus was left alone with Herbert Skimpole and his wonderful plan to assist the lower classes of Rylcombe, who, according to the learned professor, were fast sinking into a state of mental and physical degeneracy.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Six "Unfortunates"!

"**W**EALLY, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, at length, as the ardent Skimpole concluded the outline of his scheme. "But where do I come in? Besides, I have a vewy natural distrust of Socialism."

"That, my dear D'Arcy," purred Skimpole, "is because you are ignorant upon such matters. You have been brought up in the lap of idle luxury. That is not your fault," he hastily added.

"No, I suppose not, deah boy," muttered D'Arcy.

"What I intend to do," went on Skimpole, "is to collect half a dozen or so of the worst characters in the neighbourhood, bring them up to the school, fit them out in some decent clothes, feed them, and then commence my course of mental and physical treatment as prescribed by the learned professor."

"Bai Jove! That's wathah a tall ordah, isn't it, deah boy?"

"Not at all. I want you, my dear fellow, to superintend the matter of clothing. Now, that is in your line, D'Arcy. Nobody knows more about clobber than yourself. Then, again, you could be very useful in teaching them manners, etiquette, deportment. Think how useful you would be to these poor fellows, who know not the difference between a top-hat and a top-boot."

"Bai Jove!" murmured the Swell of St. Jim's. "Are the members of the poorer classes so ignorant as all that, deah boy?"

"All that, and more," declared Skimpole.

emphatically. "Listen to what Professor Balmcrumpet has to say upon the subject."

But the good-natured Gussy had no intention of wasting two or three hours in listening to the vapourings of the learned gentleman. Even his politeness jibbed at that.

"I should be delighted, deah boy. Bai Jove! Pway excuse me, Skimmy, but I have just remembered that Kildare wishes to see me at seven o'clock."

And Arthur Augustus backed towards the door.

Skimpole looked a trifle crestfallen.

"I'm sorry you are going, D'Arcy," he said. "But I can count on your assistance, I trust? And any old clothes that you have no further use for you will contribute to this worthy cause?"

"Yaas, deah boy; any old thing."

And Arthur Augustus was gone.

Herbert Skimpole gathered up the massive volume by Professor Balmcrumpet, wondering a little why it was that Kildare wanted to see so many persons that he himself wanted to see, at once. Not for one moment did he suspect Tom Merry & Co., and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of having taken the "skipper's" name in vain for the purpose of giving the learned professor and his works a miss.

Giving Study No. 9 a wide berth, the amateur crank entered the Common-room, and was buried in the massive volume until Kildare came in and announced that it was bed-time.

The following morning Skimpole continued his task of "raising the wind" for his great scheme. Quite a number of the juniors subscribed—the general idea being that a half-dozen or so of really disreputable characters at St. Jim's, under Skimpole's supervision, would be worth seeing.

By lunch-time Skimpole had collected quite an assortment of disused clothes—of all sizes and in various stages of decay. That they were originally made to fit the average schoolboy, and that they were now intended to fit grown men the enthusiastic Skimpole quite overlooked.

Study No. 9 now looked like a regular second-hand clothes shop. Gore, who had at first loudly declared his intention of "clearing out the whole lot," was persuaded to give Skimpole his head.

Quite a crowd of hilarious juniors congregated at the gates to give Skimpole a send-off in his mission of reforming the "degenerates" of Rylcombe. The amateur Socialist felt quite pleased with himself as he strolled down Rylcombe Lane, pencil and notebook in hand. When Skimpole set his mind upon a thing, he usually entered into it heart and soul. For the good of Socialism, and for one of its most ardent—not forgetting to mention its most long-winded—exponent, Professor Balmcrumpet, Skimpole was determined to take notes on the different characters with whom he met.

Entering the lowest quarters of Rylcombe, the St. Jim's junior wended his way to a certain house of refreshment of low repute, outside which a brawl between two or three "toughs" was well in progress.

Pencil and notebook in hand, Skimpole elbowed his way through the crowd which had gathered and critically surveyed the combatants over the rims of his large spectacles. Here, indeed, was material, absolutely in a raw state, so to speak, for him to commence upon.

"My dear fellows," began Skimpole, pushing himself directly in the line of fire. "Pray cease this hooliganism, and listen to the words of wisdom from this book by Professor Balmcrumpet."

"Haw, haw!"

"Jumping crackers!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Remarks and exclamations greeted Skimpole's brief announcement. Hostilities ceased on the moment, and everyone in the crowd turned to view the newcomer.

"There are far worthier ways of passing away an idle hour than indulging in a low and brutal assault upon your fellow-men," went on the St. Jim's junior, in no wise abashed by the ferocious glances turned in his direction.

"Oh, my giddy Aunt Sally!" ejaculated a tall, burly fellow, with a bleary eye that threatened every moment to go on strike, as it were, owing to a painful contact with a gauged fist. "Carry me 'ome, Bill!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"I have come down amongst you,"

resumed Skimpole, with a beaming smile, "to save you from yourselves."

"Stow it!"

"Op orf, younker, afore I biff yer!" growled the tall fellow. "Now then, George," he added, turning to an equally tough-looking customer, "you 'ad the horridity to contrerdie 'a statement of mine. Are yer goin' to apologise?"

"George's" answer came in a flashing right swing, which took the tall fellow full in the eye.

"That's me apology, 'Arry!" he roared. Immediately a wild and whirling fight was in progress, members of the crowd taking sides with each of the original combatants.

And in the midst of it all was Herbert Skimpole—pencil and notebook in hand.

"My dear fellows," he said, "I am shocked—Yow! Yaroo!"

A whirling fist caught the St. Jim's junior under the chin, and he crashed to the pavement amongst a heap of plunging feet.

"Oh, dear! Grough! Wow! My dear fellow, would you mind taking your foot out of my stomach!" gasped the unfortunate Skimpole.

The request caused a laugh amongst the crowd, and once again the fight came to an end. Two rough-looking men assisted the wounded amateur Socialist to his feet.

"Thank you!" gasped Skimpole politely.

"Just wait a moment whilst I jot down my impression in my notebook."

The crowd gaped in astonishment as Herbert Skimpole, very dishevelled, scribbled away in his book.

"Well, 'e takes the bloomin' cake, don't he, mates?" murmured "'Arry" admiringly.

"That 'e do!"

"As I said before, it is my intention to give you fellows a helping hand," said Skimpole, at length. "Funds do not permit of my taking more than six of you under my wing at present. In the near future, however, I hope to be able to give the whole crowd of you a course of training on the lines suggested by Professor Balmcrumpet."

"Professor who?" demanded George, his mouth agape.

"Professor Balmcrumpet, my dear fellow," returned Skimpole. "One of the biggest disciples of Education and Socialism in the world."

"Socialism!" echoed George. "Are you a Socialist, young 'un?"

Skimpole beamed.

"The great cause knows no humbler nor more enthusiastic supporter than myself," he declared modestly.

"Great pip!"

The crowd gazed at Herbert Skimpole as if he might have been some new specimen to the Zoological Gardens. Visions of something for nothing floated before the minds of not a few amongst the crowd, and there looked like being keen competition to be included in the selected six which were to start off Professor Balmcrumpet's great scheme under the guidance of Herbert Skimpole.

Thus it fell out that when the St. Jim's junior detailed the various subjects to be studied, mentioning that food and clothes would be found, considerably more than the required six came forward.

"I'm sorry," said Skimpole sorrowfully, entering the number of eager applicants in his book, "that I cannot take you all. I will leave it for you to decide as to who shall accompany me."

It did not take long to decide. The six roughest and strongest members of the crowd unanimously elected themselves as "willing to give the stunt a trial."

And five minutes later the chosen six were loping along after Herbert Skimpole, the raucous shouts and cheers of the crowd left behind, floating after them as they entered the Rylcombe Lane.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Dismal Failure!

"**G**REAT Scott!"

Tom Merry made the ejaculation as, accompanied by Monty Lowther and Manners, he halted in the gateway of St. Jim's and pointed along the lane.

A strange procession greeted the eyes of the Terrible Three.

With Skimpole at the head of them, six

disreputable-looking toughs lounged their way towards the school.

"My hat!" exclaimed Manners and Lother in unison.
 "Better tell the chaps," grinned Tom Merry; "this will be worth seeing. Skimpole is always trying some hare-brained 'ism'. This looks like the limit!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three hastened towards the School House and broke the news to all the juniors they saw. By the time Skimpole and his "degenerate characters" entered the gates, half the Fourth and the Shell were there to greet them.

An ironical cheer went up as the party passed in. Then "George," who was close on the heels of Skimpole, caught sight of the immaculate figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Shell.

"Jumping Jiminy!" he guffawed.
 "Look, mates—look at that glass-eyed waller a-starin' at us!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the remaining members of the party.

"Bai Jove!" muttered the Swell of St. Jim's, subjecting the toughs to a penetrating scrutiny through his shining monocle.
 "What a disreputable-looking gang, Skimmay, deah boy."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the juniors.
 Skimpole took Arthur Augustus by the arm and marched him along at the head of the procession.

"Now, my dear fellow," said the amateur Educationalist, "you see the state the men of England have fallen into—all through lack of education. With your help, however, we shall soon make little gentlemen of them."

The party entered the Shell quarters, a grinning crowd of juniors bringing up the rear. Skimpole pushed open the door of Study No. 9.

"Come in, my dear fellows," he invited.
 The "dear fellows" entered.

A good supply of tuck had been ordered from the tuckshop by Skimpole, and the table presented a very inviting aspect. When the degenerates were invited to "set to," they lost no time in obeying. And if their table manners left something to be desired, their appetites did not. In less than ten minutes the table was cleared of all its good things, and the six unfortunates of Rylcombe leaned back in their chairs, in various attitudes, well satisfied with the first course of their instruction.

"And now, my dear fellows," beamed Herbert Skimpole, "we will proceed to make use of the clothes which have been placed at our disposal by various members of St. Jim's."

The unfortunates eyed the heap of Etons and dented toppers with amusement. If there were any more feeds to come such as they had demolished they were quite prepared to humour Skimpole in the matter of clothes. Accordingly they each selected a suit of clothes and a silk hat, discarded their old attire, and, under the supervision of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, donned garments which were, in each case, several sizes too small for them.

The Swell of St. Jim's eyed the nondescript collection of humanity with a sharp glance of disapproval.

"Bai Jove, Skimmay!" he remarked.
 "You seem to have overlooked the fact that this clobber was originally made for boys."

"So I have," confessed Skimpole. "Never mind, D'Arcy; they will do for the time being."

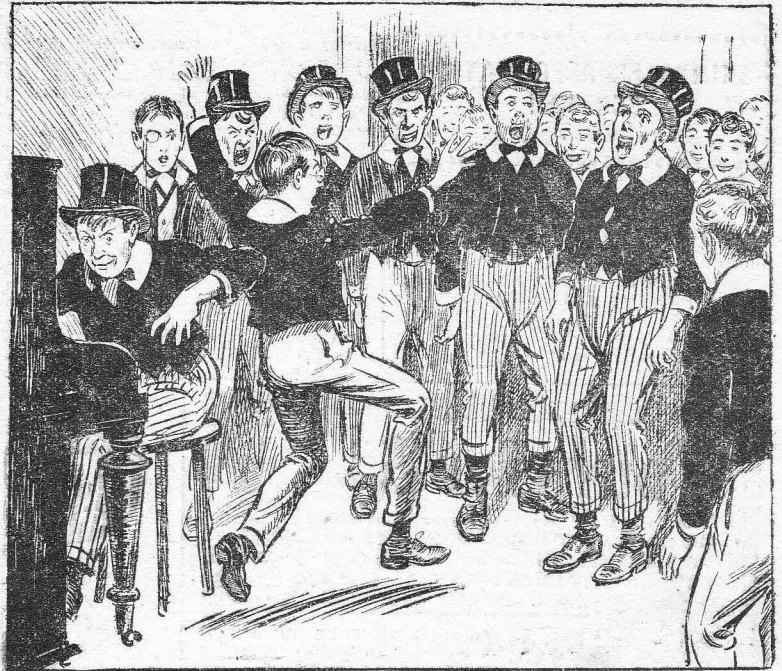
In twenty minutes the six unfortunates were fully dressed—so far as the schoolboy garments would permit—and when Skimpole, at the head of them, marched into the Shell passage, en route for the Rag, the juniors who had gathered outside sent up a terrific roar of welcome.

"Here they come!"
 "Oh, my giddy aunt!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus joined Skimpole at the head of the procession, and the six villagers of Rylcombe, all clad in Etons and toppers set off at rakish angles, mimicked the dignified stunt of the Swell of St. Jim's, to the accompaniment of roars of laughter.

"Go it, Gussy," yelled Gore encouragingly.
 "Give 'em lessons in deportment."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

The whole party arrived in the Rag.
 "This is a bloomin' go, an' no mistake!" chuckled George, with a sidelong wink at



THE "REFORM SCHEME" IN FULL PROGRESS!—The six lined up under Skimpole's directions, and were soon putting their beef into the musical training. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Old Railton will come along if this noise goes on!" (See Chapter 3.)

his mates. "Blessed if I can see where the Socialism part of the bizney comes in. Looks to me like a bloomin' joke. If that's the caper, I guess we can show that bloke in the specs and that nut in the window-pane as 'ow we can joke, too."

"Ear, 'ear!" murmured his comrades.
 "Now, my dear fellows," said Skimpole, coming to a halt and facing his "subjects," "we are about to commence a course of mental training. For a start, we spend five minutes on tests of memory, and—"

"Ere, I say, boss," broke in George.
 "Can't you leave the mental trainin' out for a while. Wot about some music? Yer told us as 'ow we were going to be destructed in music. Our Bill, 'ere, is 'ot stuff on the pianner. Let 'im give us a toon!"

"Ear, 'ear!" declared the rest of the party unanimsly.

"Dear me," murmured Skimpole, blinking.
 "Well—er—perhaps we could start the course with music. Of course, it's not in keeping with the scheme as laid down by Professor Balmycrumpet—"

"Blow 'im!"
 "What did you say, my dear fellow?" inquired Skimpole of George.

"Oh, I was only—er—saying what a foine chap that perfesser was."

"Ahem! Then—er—er—Bill, would you mind taking a seat at the piano?"
 "Suttin'ly, guv'ner!" responded Bill.
 "What toon would yer like?"

"Tune," gently corrected Skimpole, "not toon."

"Oh, well, 'ave it yer own way, boss," growled Bill. And without further ado he began to drum the ivories.

The juniors crowded into the Rag, laughing at the top of their voices.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Manners.
 "The course of instruction has started. But what a din!"

The musician was thumping out a well-worn music-hall ditty, and his companions—perhaps in an endeavour to convince Skimpole that they had already attained a high standard in music, began to bellow the refrain in about three different keys. It was in vain that Skimpole called for order; the six unfortunates were out to enjoy themselves.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the juniors.
 "Go it, Bill!"

"Give 'em a tenor solo, Gussy!"
 "Weally, deah boys!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

In five minutes the uproar in the Rag was appalling. Skimpole's six pupils were putting their beef into the musical training, and the pianist, so far as noise and complete disregard of time and tune went, was by far the superior.

"Old Railton will come along on the scene if this noise goes on," chuckled Tom Merry. "Great pip, I've never heard such a row!"

"Stop!" bawled Skimpole, dancing up and down like a dervish. "My dear fellows—Yowp!"

In his anxiety to stop the pianist from continuing his efforts, the amateur Educationalist shook Bill by the shoulder. Without stopping his playing, Bill promptly gave the St. Jim's junior a shove, with the result that Skimpole descended to the floor with a crash.

"Yow-wow-groough!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Try again, Skimmay!"
 "Boys!"

The command echoed out above the prevailing din, and the juniors immediately became silent as they saw the awe-inspiring figure of Mr. Railton standing in the doorway of the Rag, with an incredulous expression upon his keen features.

"Bless my soul!" he spluttered, hardly able to believe his ears and eyes. "What does this mean? Who are these—er—persons in schoolboy attire? Stop! Cease that unseemly noise this moment! Do you hear?"

The musical six suddenly became silent; they fairly wilted under the stern glance of the Housemaster and began to edge towards the window. Skimpole, who, by this time, had picked himself up from the floor, hastened to explain, much to the amusement of the juniors, and more to the amazement of Mr. Railton.

"Bless my soul!" muttered the master, when Skimpole had explained his great scheme to assist the lower classes. "You are an utterly stupid and ridiculous boy, Skimpole. See those—er—ahem!—people off the school premises at once! Do you hear?"

"But, sir," pleaded Skimpole, "they have only just started their course of instruction."

