

of fellows who heard it. Most of them liked the "new Froggy"—all of them regarded Mr. Horace Greely as a footling ass. But, in spite of themselves, they were impressed by what sounded like a plain statement of fact.

"Is Peele prepared to repeat this story to the headmaster?" asked Mr. Bohun, breaking the painful silence.

"He is quite prepared to do so."

"If it should prove false, he will be expelled from Rookwood, I should hope."

"He knows the risk he takes, sir!" boomed Mr. Greely. "I place implicit faith in his statement. Openly, I accuse Monsieur Gaston! Let him say that this is false, and let him open his trunk in the presence of the headmaster! Let him do so without paying a previous visit to his room. If the burglarious implements are not found in his trunk, I will withdraw my words, and apologise to Monsieur Gaston!"

Mr. Greely paused again.

All eyes were fixed on the French master. It was a dramatic moment.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Calling in the Head!

JIMMY SILVER, in the doorway, looked anxiously across at Victor Gaston.

In spite of himself, Jimmy was very worried.

He liked and admired the young Frenchman, as nearly all Rookwood did. A few slackers and black sheep, like Cyril Peele, disliked him, but that was rather a testimonial in his favour.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had "backed up" Victor Gaston, in their own way, ever since his arrival at Rookwood; they had been emphatically down on Peele & Co. for making capital out of Mr. Greely's accusation. Their faith in the Frenchman was great—all the more so because Richard Dalton had become his intimate friend. Anyone whom "Dicky" Dalton liked had a passport to the esteem of the Rookwood Fourth.

Yet Jimmy Silver was troubled now. He had not lost the strange changes of expression in the French master's face as Mr. Greely unfolded his new accusation. Master of himself as he was, the colour had fluctuated in Victor Gaston's cheeks. And Jimmy could not help remembering the strange incident often dwelt upon by Peele—how Victor Gaston had inexplicably got out of a room after Peele had locked the door on him on the outside.

The incident had never been explained. Only Peele explained it on the assumption that "Felix Lacroix" would know how to pick locks.

The silence in the Common-room was long, and it grew painful. Monsieur Gaston did not speak; but his face was calm. Richard Dalton glanced at him, with nothing like doubt in his look.

"You deny this absurd story, of course, Gaston," said the Fourth Form master, as the Frenchman did not speak.

Victor Gaston smiled faintly.

"I should not be likely to admit it," he said.

"Quite so. It is absolutely your own choice whether you accede to the demand that Mr. Greely makes. Refuse it, and no one here will feel the slightest doubt of you."

There was a faint murmur.

Richard Dalton was speaking from his own loyal heart, which never entertained a doubt of the man he had made his friend. But such complete faith

was not general in the Common-room. Mr. Mooney, the master of the Shell, weighed in rather tartly:

"You are not advising Monsieur Gaston for his good, Mr. Dalton. My opinion is that he should throw open his trunk to immediate investigation, and thus prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that the boy Peele has lied!"

"Undoubtedly!" said Mr. Wiggins.

"Mon ami, these gentlemen are right," said Victor Gaston. "Naturally, I should refuse this insulting investigation—but always afterwards there might be some doubt."

"Not on my part," said Richard Dalton.

"But there are others, and I do not desire that anyone should doubt me. Let the Head be called, and let us go to my room, and Dr. Chisholm himself shall open the trunk."

Mr. Greely caught his breath.

There was a buzz in the passage. This acceptance of the Fifth Form master's challenge was more than sufficient to restore confidence, shaken for a moment.

"Bravo, Froggy!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Good old Mossoo!" shouted Mornington.

"You—you mean this!" exclaimed Mr. Greely, obviously very much taken aback.

"Mais certainement, monsieur!" answered Victor Gaston, with a slight expression of scorn.

"I make it a stipulation that Monsieur Gaston does not enter his room until he is accompanied by the headmaster!" exclaimed Mr. Greely.

"C'est entendu—I agree!"

"I think that will settle the matter, Mr. Greely," said Richard Dalton. "Remain here, if you wish, and keep Monsieur Gaston under your own observation; I will call the Head."

"Very good, sir!" said Mr. Greely pompously.

He sat down at the table.

Mr. Dalton left the Common-room, making his way through the buzzing crowd in the corridor, with a frowning face.

Round the Common-room door the crowd grew thicker and thicker. The excitement was intense.

"Greely looks a bit sick!" murmured Raby. "He didn't expect Froggy to take him on like that."

"Peele has been pulling his leg!" remarked Newcome.

Arthur Edward Lovell snorted.

"He ought to have more sense than to believe Peele. Of course, it's all whoopers from beginning to end; but Greely would jump at anything to prove his silly fairy-tale about Froggy."

Jimmy Silver looked thoughtful.

"It's queer," he said. "If there's nothing in it, Peele will get a Head's flogging, at least; he may be bunked from Rookwood. He must know that—he's no fool!"

"You don't believe there's anything in it, Jimmy?" exclaimed Putty of the Fourth.

Jimmy Silver shook his head decidedly.

"No, I can't! But it's queer that a cunning, sharp fellow like Peele should put his foot in it like this! That beats me!"

"It beats me, too," said Valentine Mornington. "He must have fancied he saw what he says, somehow. But it's queer."

"Hallo, here he is!"

"Peele, you cad—"

"Peele, you rotter—"

"Peele, you Hun—"

Cyril Peele stared round him with a scowl of dogged defiance. The whole

crowd of juniors were down on him now; but Cyril Peele was expecting his vindication to come. He knew what he had seen in the French master's room; others might doubt as long as they liked, but Peele of the Fourth had the evidence of his own eyes.

"Wait and see!" he sneered.

"You've told that footling ass Greely—" began Rawson.

"I've told Mr. Greely what I saw," said Peele coolly. "The man's a cracksmen, and he's got a cracksmen's outfit locked up in the trunk in his room. My belief is that he came here to rob the Head's safe—"

"You cheeky rotter!" roared Lovell.

"Bump him!"

"Hands off!" yelled Peele, as the excited juniors closed round him. "I tell you, I— Yoop! Ah! Help! Yarooooop!"

"Bump, bump, bump!"

"Look out Cave! The Beak!" shouted Oswald along the passage.

Dr. Chisholm, the Head of Rookwood, had turned the corner with Mr. Dalton. At the sight of the Head the juniors dropped Peele, and fairly bolted. They vanished in a tumultuous mob at the other end of the passage, leaving Cyril Peele sprawling on the floor and roaring.

"What is all this?" exclaimed the Head in a deep voice.

Peele sat up.

"Ow! Groogh! Mooooooh!" he mumbled.

"Go!"

Peele scrambled up and went. Dr. Chisholm rustled into Master's Common-room with Mr. Dalton at his side. His severe brow was knitted. All the masters rose respectfully as he entered.

"Sir—" began Mr. Greely.

Dr. Chisholm checked him with a wave of his hand.

"Mr. Dalton has acquainted me with your amazing statement, Mr. Greely. I attach no importance to it whatever."

"Sir! I—I—" stuttered Mr. Greely.

Another commanding gesture from the Head.

"I told you before, Mr. Greely, that I had the very best recommendations with Monsieur Victor Gaston. He is a known man in his profession. That he ever bore the name of Felix Lacroix I do not credit for one moment, I blame myself for having yielded so far as to make inquiries concerning this man Lacroix. I have now been informed, Mr. Greely, that the bank-robber, Felix Lacroix, escaped from prison a few weeks after he had received his sentence."

"Did I not say so?" exclaimed Mr. Greely.

"You did. And I have this to tell you, Mr. Greely, that the circumstance that a bank-robber named Lacroix has escaped from prison does not in the slightest degree shake my faith in Victor Gaston."

"Sir!"

"There is no connection between the two, save a fancied resemblance seen by no one but yourself," said the Head.

"Now, sir, I shall investigate this further accusation you have made. Your statement that Victor Gaston is Felix Lacroix is, I am certain, unfounded; but it is an accusation that he cannot actually disprove, as he has no means of producing a bank-robber who is now in hiding from the French police. But this latest accusation, sir, can be put to the test. I will examine the trunk you speak of in Monsieur Gaston's room. It shall be opened to the view of the whole staff of this school. And unless the criminal implements to which you have alluded, sir, are found there,

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I shall expect you to resign your position at Rookwood."

There was a hush.

Mr. Greely set his plump lips hard. "I submit, sir," he said. "I do not fear the test. I have done my duty, and if I am to suffer for it I am prepared!"

There was a touch of dignity in the portly Fifth Form master as he spoke. Dr. Chisholm bowed coldly.

"We will, then, proceed to Monsieur Gaston's room at once—with Monsieur Gaston's permission," he added courteously, turning to the French master.

"Certainly, sir," said Victor Gaston.

"You will call Peele of the Fourth, Mr. Dalton. He had better be present, as this accusation rests on his statement."

"Very well, sir!"

And Dr. Chisholm turned, and rustled in great dignity from the Common-room.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Put to the Proof!

"WHAT a giddy procession!" remarked Valentine Mornington of the Classical Fourth. "Like a giddy circus!"

Some of the fellows grinned.

Morny's description was a little irreverent, considering the great importance of the personages composing the procession. Certainly it bore no resemblance whatever to a circus procession.

First went the Head, lofty, grave, commanding, dignified. After him went Mr. Dalton and Victor Gaston, side by side. After them the rest of the Rookwood staff, in twos. Peele cruised in the offing, as it were, like a light frigate keeping company with a line of battle-ships.

Stately and dignified, the Head arrived at the door of Victor Gaston's room. The French master opened it, and stood gracefully aside for his numerous visitors to enter. Fortunately, the apartments in the Rookwood School House were spacious. Otherwise the French master might have had some difficulty in accommodating so many visitors all at once.

After the staff had marched in the corridor outside was swarmed with fellows of all Forms. Nobody wanted to miss this show. Serious, indeed solemn, as the proceedings were, irreverent fags actually looked upon them as a show—indeed, some of them described the proceedings as a "shindy."

All eyes in the room were on Victor Gaston now.

Mr. Greely gazed at him in wonder and perplexity. His belief was complete that the man was a criminal playing a part at the school. He was absolutely convinced of the truth of Peele's statements. Peele was fairly well known to be untruthful, but his earnestness in making his report to Mr. Greely had not been possible to doubt. And if he was speaking falsely he was facing the "sack." Pardon for such a statement, if unfounded, was impossible.

Peele simply could not have risked it, much as he detested Victor Gaston. So Mr. Greely was sure of his ground. Yet the coolness and self-possession of the French master amazed and disquieted him. How could the man be so cool, so self-possessed, with conviction at hand?

"Where is the trunk?"

It was the Head's deep voice.

"Here, sir!"

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Victor Gaston pointed to the large metal-bound trunk.

"One moment!" interposed Mr. Greely. "Let us make sure that this is the trunk in question. Peele!"

"That is the trunk, sir!" faltered Peele.

Peele was uneasy now. He knew what he had seen; he could believe his eyes. Yet the Frenchman's coolness confounded him, as it confounded Mr. Greely.

"Monsieur Gaston, will you be kind enough to unlock that trunk?" said the Head.

"Certainly, sir."

Victor Gaston produced a bunch of keys. From the keys he selected one, and inserted it in the patent lock of the trunk.

The lid was raised.

Round the big trunk stood the Rookwood staff, and they all looked into it. They saw a tray packed with shirts and similar articles. The Head made a slight gesture. Shirts and collars and neckties were useful, and, indeed, indispensable articles. But they seemed to introduce an element of the ridiculous into these grave proceedings.

Victor Gaston lifted out the tray.

The interior of the mysterious trunk was revealed.

From that interior Peele had seen the Frenchman lift the leather bag containing the set of steel implements. He had seen that, unless he had been dreaming, while he crouched hidden in the wardrobe, watching the man. Yet what did the icy coolness of the Frenchman mean? He could not have got rid of the tell-tale implements. Peele knew that he had not been to the room since the time he had been watched there.

Peele began to wonder dazedly whether he had, after all, been the victim of a delusion. Certainly it began to look like it.

The Head, with a touch of disdainful impatience in his face glanced into the trunk. He saw a number of articles of clothing, neatly folded, a bundle of French newspapers, and two or three other articles, but the space was mostly empty.

"I am ashamed to trouble you, Monsieur Gaston," said the Head; "but, since we are here, perhaps you will empty the trunk."

"Sans doute, monsieur."

Quietly, sedately, Victor Gaston lifted the articles from the trunk and laid them aside.

Cyril Peele's brain swam. He could see the bottom of the trunk now—everyone present could see it. There was no sign of the leather case he had described to Mr. Greely—no sign of the set of steel implements.

Was he dreaming—had he been dreaming? His brain was in a whirl.

Mr. Greely stared into the trunk with a fixed stare. His belief had been complete, unshaken. But he had to trust the evidence of his eyes. The mysterious trunk was empty, and nothing of a criminal nature, nothing of a suspicious nature, had been revealed. The trunk was as harmless as any other master's trunk at Rookwood School.

Dr. Chisholm's grave face grew graver and grimmer. His eyes fixed themselves on Horace Greely, with an almost terrifying expression. There was a long silence, broken at last by the Head's deep voice.

"Well, Mr. Greely?"

The Fifth Form master did not speak. He could not. He was simply dumbfounded.

Mr. Dalton spoke quietly.

"I am afraid that you have allowed

an unscrupulous boy to deceive you with an absurd story, Mr. Greely," he said.

At that moment the Fourth Form master quite pitied the unhappy Mr. Greely.

All Horace Greely's pompous importance had left him now. He stood limp, dismayed, crushed.

"It is clear," said the Head, "that Mr. Greely has been deceived. That is no excuse, however, for his conduct in renewing his absurd accusation against a gentleman whom we all respect." He bowed to Monsieur Gaston. "Mr. Greely, you see for yourself, I presume, that your statements are absolutely unfounded."

Mr. Greely choked.

"I—I—it would appear so," he articulated.

"You withdraw your accusation?"

"I—I—"

"A plain answer, sir!" snapped the Head.

"I—I am bound to do so!" gasped Mr. Greely. "I—I have been deceived. I—I have certainly been misled."

"You owe Monsieur Gaston an apology."

Mr. Greely almost squirmed.

"I—I apologise!" he stammered.

"Do not distress yourself, monsieur," said Victor Gaston. "You have done me an injustice. But I am assured that your motives were good; it is only that you have made a mistake. Let it be forgotten."

"Monsieur Gaston is generous," said the Head. "But such incidents as these cannot be allowed to recur at Rookwood. Mr. Greely, you know the consequences of your action."

The Fifth Form master raised his head.

"I know, sir! I resign my position in this school. I am ready to leave Rookwood. I have done my duty—at least what I conceived to be my duty. If I must suffer for it, I do not complain."

And Mr. Greely, with that, walked out of the room. The crowd in the passage respectfully made room for him to pass. That Mr. Greely was a "fooling" ass, that he had made a ghastly mistake, all the school believed. But he was down now—down and out—and there was not a murmur as he went.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Broken Link!

CYRIL PEELE stood with his knees knocking together.

The Head's glance turned on him, and that glance almost froze Peele's marrow.

His turn had come!

Unless he had been under some strange delusion, some mysterious aberration of the senses, he had seen what he had told Mr. Greely that he had seen. Yet the trunk stood empty before him, and he was convicted in all eyes as a reckless slanderer and deceiver. Deceiver he was, by nature. He had never scrupled to deceive when deceit served his turn. And it is the fate of liars never to be believed when they are telling the truth.

"Peele!"

The wretched junior made a faint sound.

"Peele! You have told Mr. Greely a falsehood, a wicked slander of a master in this school!"

"I—I— No, sir!" groaned Peele. "I saw—I mean, I—I thought I saw what—"

"Silence! You have not a good reputation in your Form, Peele; you are known to be habitually untruthful. But this example of your falsity passes all

bounds. Such a boy cannot be suffered to remain at Rookwood. Peele, you are expelled from this school!"

Peele's miserable glance turned on Mr. Dalton. The Fourth Form master was distressed and troubled.

"I cannot speak a word for you, Peele," he said. "You have acted recklessly, wickedly. You must take the just consequences."

Victor Gaston glanced at the boy, and there was a strange expression on his face.

"May I speak, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly, Monsieur Gaston," said the Head graciously.

"This boy, sir—it is on my account that you are sending him away from the school. This is very distressing to me, sir. He has injured me, but I forgive him freely. Might I beg of you, sir, to take a more lenient view?"

There was a long pause.

"Very well," said the Head at last. "It is due to you, Monsieur Gaston, to be vindicated by the severest possible punishment of your reckless accuser. At your personal request, however, I will rescind that punishment. Peele shall be flogged. Peele, go to my study and remain there till I come."

Peele limped from the room.

Jimmy Silver & Co. allowed him to pass in silence. He had escaped expulsion from Rookwood, but he was booked for a flogging; and a flogging was enough for him, without any demonstration from the juniors. Slowly, wretchedly, Cyril Peele limped down the stairs.

In Monsieur Gaston's room there was something like an ovation for the French master.

The Head spoke gracious words and shook hands with him before he went. The other masters followed his example. Richard Dalton remained after the others had gone.

"I am rather glad that this has occurred, Gaston," said the Fourth Form master. "It has been a painful incident, but it has finally cleared you from any possible suspicion. Even Mr. Greely must now recognise his mistake."

"You think so?" said Victor Gaston.

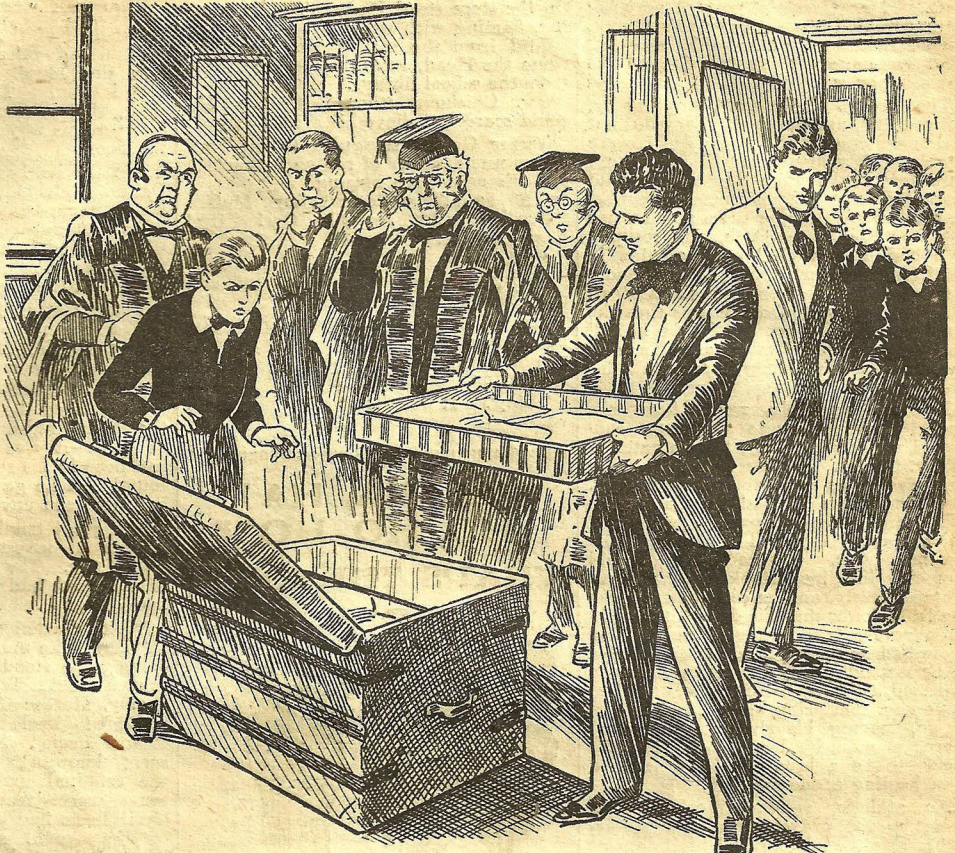
"I hope so, at least. And no one else has ever distrusted you, excepting that wretched boy Peele. It was kind—it was noble of you to speak a word for that wretched boy!"

Gaston smiled slightly.

"Why should he suffer?" he said.

"He has injured you—slandered you most wickedly!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton warmly. "He deserved to be expelled."

"I should be sorry if he suffered on



THE SEARCH! Victor Gaston lifted out the tray and Dr. Chisholm glanced into the trunk. He saw a number of articles of clothing, a bundle of French newspapers, and one or two other things, but the space was mostly empty. "I am ashamed to trouble you, monsieur," said the Head. "But since we are here, perhaps you will empty the trunk." "Certainly," said Gaston. (See Chapter 3).

my account, all the same," said Victor Gaston. "As for the flogging, that does not matter; it will instruct him not to play the spy. Right or wrong, it is base to play the spy."

He smiled again.

"And you, Dalton, you never lost faith in me?"

"I never had a moment's doubt," said Richard Dalton.

"You have not known me long, but you have become my very good friend, mon vieux," said Gaston. He looked earnestly at the young Form master. "Richard, mon ami, you shall never have reason to repent of your faith in me. If in the past I have been guilty of errors, in the future at least I shall never be unworthy of your friendship."

"I do not think your errors can have been very great, old fellow," said Richard Dalton, smiling. "And we shall always be friends, I hope."

When Richard Dalton had followed the rest, Victor Gaston closed the door and quietly turned the key in the lock.

Then he came back to the empty trunk, and stood looking into it, standing for several minutes motionless, with a dark and gloomy expression on his handsome face. Strange thoughts were working in his mind.

He stirred at last and bent over the trunk.

His hand groped over the bottom of the trunk and touched a hidden spring. A secret lid rose, revealing that the trunk had a false bottom, with a narrow cavity beneath. From that cavity the Frenchman drew a leather case. He closed the lid again.

His brow darker than ever, he stood

with the leather case in his hand, opening it, and staring gloomily at the array of bright steel implements it contained.

He closed the case at last, and thrust it into an inner pocket under his coat.

Then he quitted the room.

The gloomy expression was gone from his face, his look was careless and debonaire as usual, as he strolled down the big staircase and out into the quadrangle.

Richard Dalton was at his study window; but the Frenchman did not appear to observe him. He walked down to the gates. Apparently he did not want company in his walk.

Darkness had fallen when the French master returned to Rookwood. And no one in the school was likely to guess that in deep dusk by the river he had plunged that tell-tale case of implements into deep water—to sink into thick mud at the bottom, and to remain for ever hidden. Whatever his motive, the link had been broken between Victor Gaston, French master, and Felix Lacroix, hunted by the French police.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Man who Repented!

"POOR old Pompey!" murmured Hanson of the Fifth.

Talboys and Lumsden grinned.

Pompey, otherwise Mr. Horace Greely, the master of the Fifth Form, stood in the doorway, looking out into the dusky quadrangle, where the summer stars glimmered on the trees and walks, and a faint, red glow still lingered in the

west. Mr. Greely's portly, majestic form occupied the doorway, his plump, purple face was dark with thought. That summer's evening Mr. Greely was not a happy man.

The three Fifth-Formers, strolling by, noticed him, and grinned. They did not feel or understand the tragedy of Horace Greely. They knew that he was to go. In a few weeks' time Rookwood would know Horace Greely no more. He was, in fact, simply staying till a new master was appointed to the Fifth. His resignation had been offered and accepted in the French master's room that afternoon, after the strange scene there. And all the Fifth thought about it was that the pompous ass had got it "in the neck," and they wondered what sort of a merchant would come along later to take his place.

No one, probably, would have suspected that there was sentiment concealed under the portly, purple exterior of Mr. Greely. But there was. Leaving Rookwood was a terrible blow to him. For long years he had been a master there, and with his powerful voice and portly personality had dominated the Common-room. Indeed, he could scarcely imagine Rookwood without Horace Greely, and he did not entertain the least doubt that his departure would be a severe loss to the school. Long years had he passed in the classic shades of Rookwood—many more years had he expected to pass there. His dismissal came as a shattering blow. And he was to go, leaving his rival firmly rooted there, a man he believed—a man he knew—to be a breaker of the laws—a man leading a double life!

An athletic, rather graceful figure came up the gravel path in the starlight. Mr. Greely knitted his brows at the sight of Victor Gaston. The French master was returning from his long ramble.

Victor Gaston came up the steps. Mr. Greely was in the middle of the big doorway, and he did not stir. He fixed his eyes upon the Frenchman.

"Bon soir, monsieur!" said Victor Gaston politely.

To Mr. Greely's mind it seemed that the young man was mocking him. In the cool, smiling face he thought that he read an ironical triumph. It was too much. A surge of wrath came up in Mr. Greely's breast. For the moment he saw red. He forgot where he was. He forgot that he was a senior Form master, he forgot the dignity of his position, he forgot everything but his bitter detestation of this man, who had beaten him all along the line, and who was to be left in triumphant possession of the field of battle. He was to go, and this man—this villain whom he had striven in vain to unmask—was to remain. And he was cool, smiling, ironical—at least, it seemed so to Mr. Greely's enraged eyes. The Fifth Form master raised his arm and struck with all his force at the handsome face before him.

"Mon Dieu!"

The Frenchman was taken quite by surprise. His arm flew up, and he partly warded the blow, but it took effect, and sent him crashing down the steps.

There was a shout.

"Greely's going it!" yelled Tubby Muffin along the passage. "He's knocked down Froggy!"

"My hat!"

"Phew!"

There was a rush to the spot. Seniors and juniors, prefects and fags, crowded up, amazed, in consternation.

At the bottom of the steps Victor Gaston sprawled, dazed and breathless.

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On the steps stood Horace Greely, panting, flaming with wrath.

And from the starlight of the quad came the Head, returning to the House from the school library.

Dr. Chisholm stopped dead. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

Victor Gaston struggled to his feet. There was a smear of red on his mouth, and his eyes were blazing.

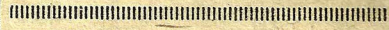
"A fight!" yelled Tubby Muffin. "Greely and Froggy! Ow! Ow! Leggo my ear!"

"Silence!" said Mr. Dalton, compressing Tubby's ear for a moment, and then hurrying to the doorway.

Mr. Greely stood panting. The Frenchman had his foot on the steps to mount, his hands clenched.

"Gaston" exclaimed Richard Dalton.

"Stop!" It was the Head's thunderous voice.



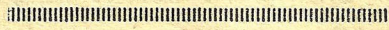
**"HA, HA, HA!
HO, HO, HO!"**

WHAT'S THE JOKE?



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Mr. Greely spun round towards the Head. At the sight of him all his wrath evaporated. He realised what he had done. The purple face of the Fifth Form master grew white.

"Sir—" he stammered.

"Control yourself, Monsieur Gaston," said the Head icily. "I have seen what occurred. This is no place for a display of fisticuffs. I command you to keep the peace."

Victor Gaston breathed hard.

"I am at your orders, sir," he said quietly. And indeed, after the first moment or two of intense anger, there was something like compassion in the glance he gave Mr. Greely.

Richard Dalton slipped his arm through his friend's.

"Come!" he whispered.

He led Gaston away. The Head's thunderous frown was fixed upon the unhappy Fifth Form master.

"Mr. Greely, you have strangely forgotten yourself. It was my intention to allow you to remain here till a new master was appointed to the Fifth. After this outrageous display that is, of course, impossible. I request you, Mr. Greely, to leave Rookwood by an early train in the morning."

"Sir, I—"

Headless of the Fifth Form master's stammering voice, Dr. Chisholm swept into the house. Mr. Greely glanced round him. The white in his face changed to crimson. With faltering steps he made his way to his study and closed the door.

Not till he had disappeared did Mr. Dalton allow his friend to enter the house. In passages and studies excited discussion was going on, and all Rookwood agreed that Mr. Greely's amazing action was the limit—the very outside edge, as Mornington put it.

Victor Gaston left Mr. Dalton in the hall and went up to his room. He was taking the Fourth Form master's sage advice to keep out of Mr. Greely's way for the rest of that evening.

He entered the room and switched on the electric light. He had been long out of gates—it was some hours since he had been in his room. But as he glanced round him he gave a start. The room had not been revisited in his absence.

The great trunk, which had been the subject of investigation that day, lay on its side. The strong wooden bottom of the trunk had been hacked open with many a gash.

Victor Gaston stood and stared at it. "Ceil!" he murmured.

Long he stood there looking at the broken trunk. Who had done this? His enemy, Horace Greely? That was impossible! Peele? Yes, he knew that it was Peele! Knowing what he had seen, knowing, after reflection, that the criminal tools must be hidden in some secret receptacle in the trunk, Cyril Peele had done this. The bottom of the trunk, smashed in, revealed, through several openings, the space under the false bottom inside. It revealed the space, and nothing more. The searcher had been disappointed, after all.

Victor Gaston breathed deep and hard.

Repentance had come to the man who had sinned, and it had just come in time to save him.

The cracksman's tools, dropped an hour ago into the river, buried in mud under flowing water, were gone—for ever. The man who had sunk to crime, and who had repented and resolved upon a brighter future, had broken that link with his past, and that resolve had saved him. For had the tools been still in the hidden place in the trunk this would have revealed them, and the discovery of them would have justified Peele in what he had done, and proved beyond doubt the guilt of the man he had accused. As it was, Peele had discovered nothing.

"Mon Dieu!" muttered Victor Gaston. "Is it an omen? Is there pardon for the past, and honour and self-respect for the future? May Felix Lacroix vanish for ever from the knowledge of men and Victor Gaston take his place, an honourable man among men of honour? Is this a warning to me that the straight path is the path of safety?"

It seemed so—he believed so. But at the back of his mind, like a troubling shadow, lingered the thought that Nemesis lies always in wait for the evildoer, and that somehow, somewhere, the price of the past had to be paid.

THE END.

(Monsieur Gaston figures very prominently again in next week's topping long complete story of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood. Look out for: "THE MAN WHO BETRAYED HIMSELF!")