

X "PITT, THE MYSTERIOUS!"
ROUSING TALE OF THE CHUMS OF ST. FRANK'S! X

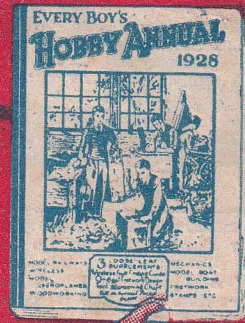
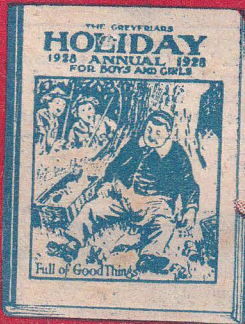
The POPULAR

Week Ending,
June 29th, 1928.
New Series, No. 4913

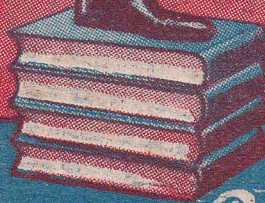
EVERY
TUESDAY.

2^d

BIRTHDAY GIFTS



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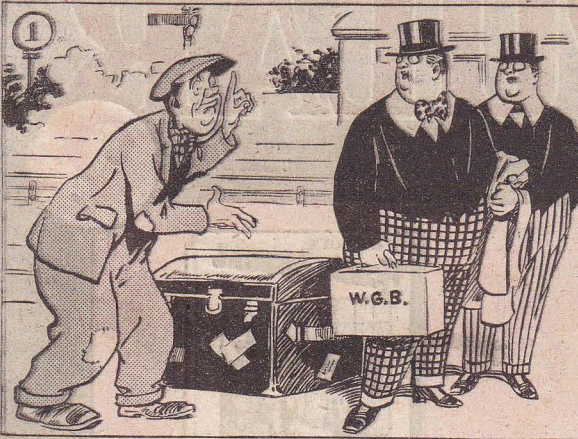
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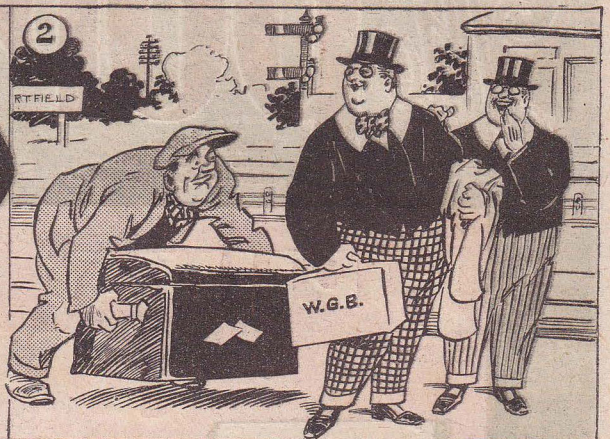
The BUNTER BROTHERS

Merry Mirthmakers.

THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T TAKE "NO" FOR AN ANSWER!



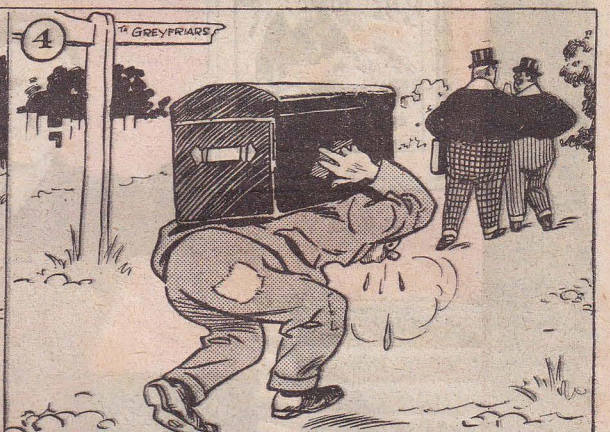
"Let me carry yer trunk, mister," said Jerry the odd-job laddie to Billy and Sammy Bunter. Those two worthies had just embarked on the slow-motion express at their little, old station. "Trunk?" said Billy. "Oh, I see, that trunk!" "Yus, do let me carry that there trunk," persisted the man.



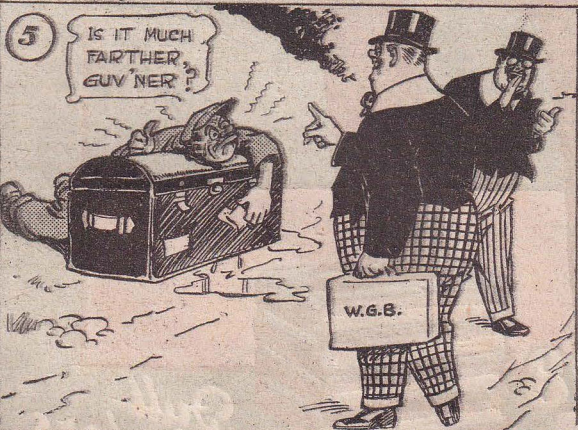
"Well, you can if you like," said Billy Bunter. "But I shouldn't if I were you." "Oh, you're thinking of the weight, eh?" grinned Jerry as he bent down and hoisted the hefty trunk. "Gee! This ain't 'eavy, bless yer." "But really, you know— Well please yourself!" said Bunter.



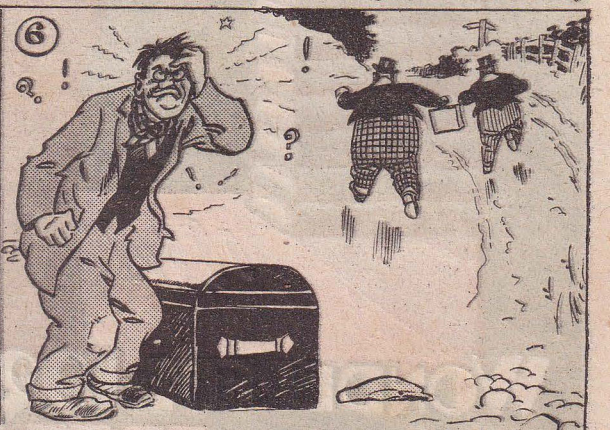
"Well, let's get going," said Billy, and he turned and left the station with Sammy. "Hope it ain't fur," muttered Jerry as he trudged along the road behind the Bunter Brothers to Greyfriars. "This 'ere is getting 'eavier and 'eavier."



One mile passed and the odd-job johnny began to bend almost double under the weight of that big, black trunk—and still the Bunter Brothers trotted along, chuckling loudly. "Wonder what them himps are eackling about," mused Jerry.



Crash! "Ow! Can't go another hinch!" groaned Jerry, and the trunk went with a crash to the ground. "Is it much farther, guv'ner?" "Ha, ha, ha! Miles!" chuckled Billy. "But really, I warned you not to come, didn't I—"



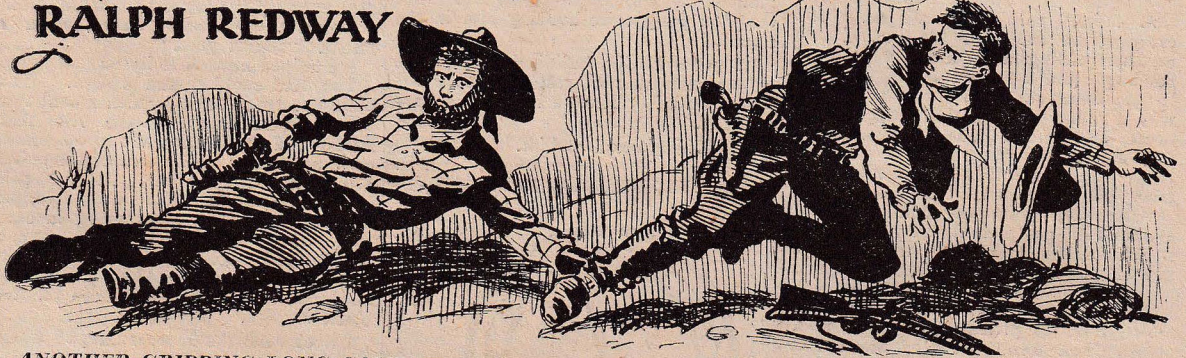
"Because, you see, that trunk isn't mine at all!" "Wha-a-a-at!" Then the trunk-carrier remembered Bunter's warning at the station, and he ground his teeth with rage. And Billy and Sammy, noting danger signals, beat a hasty retreat down the lane.

A GENEROUS ENEMY!

Men have been heard to say that they'd rather face a pair of tigers than the Rio Kid's guns. But the Kid has proved, on more than one occasion, that he can be as generous as he is dangerous to an enemy!

The RIO KID!

By RALPH REDWAY



ANOTHER GRIPPING LONG COMPLETE WESTERN TALE, FEATURING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.**A Meeting on the Trail!**

THE bandage across the Rio Kid's handsome face covered a deep gash from the knife-like edge of a yucca*. The black-muzzled mustang had stumbled with his foot in a gopher hole, and the Kid had hit the yucca before he knew it. It was not a serious hurt, neither was it very painful; but the Kid had stopped to bandage it, to keep off the pressing attentions of flies and mosquitoes.

The Kid grinned at his reflection in his little pocket-mirror when he had finished. The bandage left little of his sunburnt face to be seen, from his mouth to his dark, keen eyes. It reminded the Kid of old days in Texas, when on certain occasions he had swathed his face in his neck-scarf to hide his identity—occasions which had led to great activity on the part of Texan sheriffs.

Those days were not long past, but they were over and done with; the Rio Kid was finished with outlawry now, if only folks would let him.

He wondered whether they would, in the new country for which he was riding through the enveloping hills in the north of Arizona, north of the Great Canyon of the Colorado. Fortune often favoured the Kid—in many ways he seemed the spoiled child of fortune—yet he had never been able to set himself right with his fellow-men. Fortune always failed him there, somehow.

The Kid was riding for Nevada. He was done with Arizona and the gold country, and he did not fear pursuit—the Great Canyon lay behind him now, between him and the enemies he had left. He rode with a price on his head, but that was no new experience to the Kid; and the swiftness of the grey mustang, and the accuracy of his six-guns, guaranteed that the price would never be earned.

As for foes from his own country of Texas, the Kid never dreamed of them. He was hundreds of miles from the Lone Star State. In his dreams, in his lonely camps in the sierra, his fancy often traversed those long miles,

*A sub-tropical American flowering plant, with rigid lanceolate leaves.

THIS WEEK:**The Man from Texas!**

and brought vividly to him the shining waters of the Rio Frio, the wide-stretching grass-lands, the old bunkhouse at the Double Bar ranch, the cheery bunch of which he had once been a member. But no Texas sheriff was likely to ride so far in quest even of the Rio Kid; and the Kid had left no sign for a foe to follow on his devious wanderings westward.

And yet, though the wary Kid did not suspect it, it was from far-off Texas that danger was dogging him.

The Kid was riding along a deep, wide canyon in the afternoon sun, when he sighted the weary horseman ahead of him. The Kid's hand dropped mechanically to his gun. He was in a lonely country, and his destination, Horse-Thief, was still twenty-miles or more ahead of him. And at his last stopping-place the Kid had been told that the Judson gang were out on the trails.

The Judson gang, from what the Kid could learn, were horse-thieves and rustlers of cows, and there were six or seven of them—information which did not make the Kid hesitate to ride onward through the hills.

The Kid's way had been wild; but he had a true cowpuncher's hatred for a cow-thief, and he had no great desire to avoid the Judson gang, if they chanced to come in his way. But he was keenly on his guard, and on the alert at once at the sight of a rider.

The horseman ahead of him looked weary, and his horse was limping. Some tenderfoot who had lost his way in the trackless sierra, the Kid figured, at the second glance, and he smiled and released his gun. He gave the black-muzzled mustang a word, and changed his easy trot for a gallop, rapidly overhauling the man who rode ahead.

The stranger turned to look round at the clatter of hoofs on the rocky trail. The Kid saw a young man, scarcely older than himself, with a

dusty, tired face under the shadow of the Stetson hat. The stranger's hand was on the rifle at his saddle, and the Kid smiled and waved his hand.

"Leave it alone, stranger!" he called cheerily. "You don't want it."

The young man halted, watching the Kid as he rode up, and evidently on his guard. His rifle was ready; though it would not have been of much use to him had the Rio Kid been hunting trouble. A fraction of a second would have sufficed for the Kid's six-gun to leap from the holster, and the stranger would never have brought his rifle to bear. But the Kid was not hunting trouble; he was trying to leave trouble behind him, persistently as it dogged his steps. His only thought now was to help a stranger who was plainly on hard tack.

"You don't want that gun, stranger," grinned the Kid good-humouredly. "Leave it where it is. I guess it wouldn't help you none, even if you did want it, feller."

The stranger eyed him. His glance rested curiously on the bandage that almost hid the Kid's face.

"You been in trouble, too?" he asked.

"Only a scratch from a yucca, I guess," answered the Kid. "But I reckon you've been hitting trouble?"

"Sure!"

"You're from Texas?" asked the Kid, quick to detect the lazy drawl of the Texan in the stranger's voice, and his heart warmed to the man.

His longing for his own country was sometimes like an ache in the Kid's heart; and anything that recalled Texas to his mind was a passport to his good graces.

"Yep! How did you know?"

"I guess I had you spotted," smiled the Kid. "You're a long way from your country, stranger."

"I guess I'm looking for a man who's as far, or farther," answered the rider. "You from Texas?"

"You've said it."

"Lost here, same as me?"

The Kid chuckled.

"Not on your life," he answered. "I guess I figured out you was lost, and rode up to put you wise. Where you heading?"

"Red Rock. Fur from here?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Kid. "I guess you want to ride twenty-five thousand miles, that-a-way, to hit Red Rock."

"Oh, gophers! Meaning that I'm riding away from the shebang?"

"Sure! I left Red Rock behind me this morning," said the Kid. "You want to ride back twenty miles. You've got your back to it."

"I guess my cayuse won't do it—he's lame," said the stranger. "It's camping in the hills for me. I lost my way riding away from a gang of fire-bugs, and I reckon I was too glad to get clear, to worry any about the way I went. A bullet clipped my horse, and he fell lame. I figured you was one of the gang when I saw you riding up, with that rag across your face. They was all fixed like that."

"Rustlers," said the Kid. "Likely the Judson gang that they told me about at Red Rock. You was lucky to get clear." He looked at the stranger's weary horse, with the eye of one who had nothing to learn about horseflesh. "You want to give that cayuse a rest, feller. You won't hit Red Rock this side of sundown—or at all on that cayuse if you keep on. What's the matter with camping?"

The stranger's eyes searched the Kid, and the one-time puncher of the Double Bar laughed.

"Forget it, feller!" he said. "I ain't a rustler, and if I was I guess you wouldn't be sizing me up this minute—you'd be on the ground with a bullet through your cabeza. I guess I could put three pills through you before you could get that Winchester going. Look!"

Like magic a six-gun seemed to leap into the Kid's hand, levelled at the stranger from Texas.

The young man stared at him with bulging eyes.

"Gee! I never saw a man so sudden on the draw!" he exclaimed. "You sure know how to handle a gun!"

The Kid laughed, and slipped the six-gun back into its holster.

"Does that make it plain?" he asked.

"Sure!"

"Light down, then, and let me look at your cayuse's leg. I ain't in any hurry to get on to Horse-Thief, and I guess I'll camp here, and set you on the right trail at sun-up. Is it a cinch?"

"You're a white man," said the stranger; and he dismounted from his weary horse.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Man Who Trailed the Kid!

UNDER the westerling sun the Rio Kid picked a camp, where a tiny rivulet trickled down the rocky side of the canyon. He unshipped his slicker pack, fed and watered his horse, and shook out his bed-roll. Then he gave his attention to the stranger's horse. The hurt was slight, and the Kid doctored it with a skilled hand. The man from Texas sat on a boulder and watched him.

The Kid was humming the merry tune of a Mexican fandango, his face bright and cheery where the thick bandage allowed it to be seen. He was in a cheery mood. For days the Rio Kid had been riding a lonely trail, and it warmed his heart to find himself in company with the pilgrim who spoke in the soft drawl of his own country.

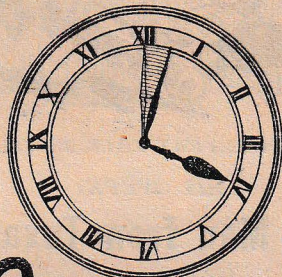
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The fellow was a stranger; nothing to him. But the Kid was always ready to help friend or stranger in distress; and he liked the young fellow's looks. And it was plain to the Kid, though not to his new acquaintance, that the Texan was not likely to get out of those barren hills alive without help.

If the Judson gang had thought him worth their while, they were not likely to loose up on him; and at that very moment it was more likely than not that the gang were hunting him in the sierra.

"I guess I'll be building a fire," the young man said at last stretching his weary limbs. "There's brushwood here a-plenty."

The Kid glanced at him.



**2 MINUTES
WITH A**

**THAT'S ALL YOU'LL WANT TO
FILL IN THE**

Registration Coupon

on page 18 of this issue.

**TAKE THE TIP—sign at once on
the DOTTED LINE!**

"Did you ride all the way from Texas to look for a grave in the north of Arizona?" he asked.

"Meaning?"

"Those fire-bugs you got away from won't be long in leavin' their cards, I reckon, if they see the smoke of a camp-fire," answered the Kid.

"Sure, I forgot that. It's cold flap-jacks for supper, then."

"I guess I've got bacon and beans a-plenty," said the Kid. "But we ain't starting nary fire; these hills are as full of thieves as a Mexican dog of fleas. We ain't asking for trouble."

"Sure!" assented the man from Texas.

The sun dipped behind the mountains, and darkness thickened in the canyon. Through the gloom came the faint musical murmur of the little rivulet dropping on its steep way down the rocks.

Sitting at ease with his back to a rock, the Kid ate his supper, and shared cheerily with the man from Texas. All

the while his sharp ears were keenly on the alert.

"I guess we might swap names," the man from Texas remarked. "Mine's Casey."

"Casey?" repeated the Kid.

The name had associations for him.

"Yep. And you—"

The Kid laughed.

"I guess I'm travelling under the name of Smith," he answered. "This is a country where a galoot sure doesn't always carry the name he started with."

"That's so," said Casey, with a laugh. "Smith goes."

He helped himself to bacon and beans.

The Kid nodded and smiled. This man was from Texas, which meant that he surely had heard of the Rio Kid. And the Kid did not want to send news of himself back to his own country—the arm of the law was long. And it would not have comforted the young stranger to know that he was camping in company with the Rio Kid, once an outlaw on the banks of the Rio Grande. The Kid was not so black as he had been painted; but he had been painted black enough.

"Ever rode the Frio country?" Casey asked.

"I've sure seen it," said the Kid.

"Then I reckon you've heard of the Rio Kid."

The Kid stared at Casey, and for a second his hand touched the walnut butt of a gun. For that second it seemed to him that he was known, and that this man from Texas meant trouble. But Casey's face was quite unconscious, and the Kid laughed.

"I've heard of him," he assented. "I guess there ain't a galoot in Texas that hasn't."

"You've said it. According to all accounts, the Rio Kid's cleared out of Texas."

"Sho!" said the Kid.

"They nearly got him when he was riding across the Staked Plain," said Casey. "But he has the demon's own luck that young fire-bug, and he gave them the slip and sure vanished. Some galoots say he went north into the sheep country, and some allow that he lit over the border into Mexico; but I figured it out from his trail that he was hitting for Arizona."

"You sure seem interested in the hombre," remarked the Kid.

"I sure am," said Casey. "He's the feller I'm hunting."

"You don't say?"

"I guess it's him or me for the great divide when I hit his trail," said Casey.

"That's why I'm in Arizona, hunting for the Rio Kid, and I reckon I'll raise his trail sooner or later."

The Kid looked at him, under drooping eyelids, curiously. The man from Texas was there hunting for the Rio Kid—hunting for the puncher who sat eating bacon and beans with him in the shadowy canyon. The situation struck the Kid as entertaining. But he was curious, too. He had a good memory for faces, and he was assured that he had never seen this pilgrim before, so his enmity was a little difficult to account for. True, the name was familiar—only too familiar.

"You got a feud with the Rio Kid?" he asked.

"Sure!"

"He's trod on your toes some time?"

"I've never seen him yet," said Casey. "But I got a good description of him, and a picture of him, that I got from the sheriff of Frio. I guess I shall know the galoot when I set eyes on him."

The Kid grinned under the bandage. It was that gash from the yucca thorn, and the bandage that covered it, that had prevented gunning when he first chanced upon this stranger. The Kid understood that now, and he was glad that his face was hidden. He did not want to have to shoot up the man from his own country, though he came as an enemy.

"You've never seen the galoot, but you're trailing him to shoot him up?" queried the Kid.

"It's a blood feud," said Casey. "If you know the Frio country in Texas, you may have heard of Two-Gun Casey."

"Sure; he was a gun-man," said the Kid.

Casey flinched a little.

"Well, I reckon he wasn't no saint," he admitted. "If the Kid had wiped him out in an even break, I guess I'd have sat tight and said nothing. But it was a gum-game, sabe, and Two-gun Casey was my uncle."

The Kid's eyes gleamed.

"I've heard a lot of talk about the Rio Kid," he remarked casually. "But I never heard that he shot any man except fair and square."

"So they say," assented Casey. "Perhaps you never heard the way Two-gun Casey went up?"

"If I did, I kinder disremember."

"He was after the Kid," said Casey. "Every man in the Frio country was after him more or less, if you come to that. The Kid got him, somehow, and roped him up at a camp fire, tied like a turkey, and gagged. He put his own hat on the man's head—and the Kid's Stetson was known all over Texas; he had a band of silver nuggets round it. The sheriff of Frio came on the camp, figured it out from that Stetson that it was the Rio Kid sitting there, and pumped him full of lead. That's the way Two-gun Casey went up."

The Kid nodded.

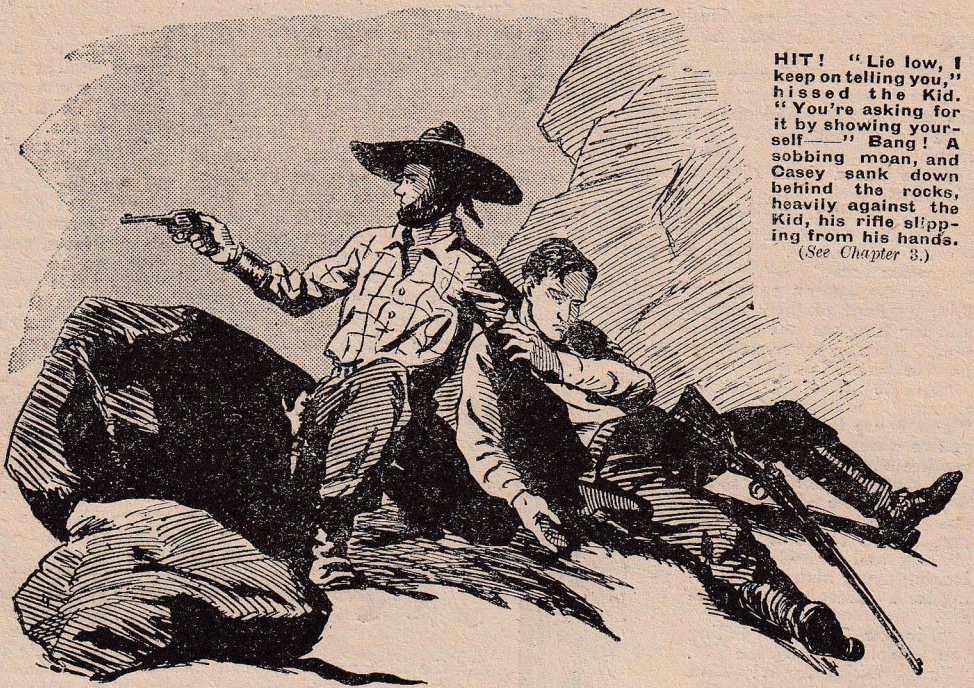
Well he remembered that incident in the chaparral, back in Texas, when the man he had saved from death had sought to sell him to the Frio sheriff, and had been left to the fate he had intended for the Kid.

The Kid had no regrets on that score; the gun-man had received his due, and no more than his due, from the intended victim of his treachery.

But the younger Casey was evidently a very different kind of man; and the Kid wanted no trouble with him if he could help it.

"You reckon the Rio Kid was to blame in that deal?" he asked.

"Sure," said Casey. "If he'd shot the man up in an even break, I guess I'd say nothing; but leaving him tied up to be pumped full of lead by the sheriff—I reckon I don't stand for that!" He set his lips. "I'm after the Kid, and I'll follow him across to California but what I'll get him. Say, have you



HIT! "Lie low, I keep on telling you," hissed the Kid. "You're asking for it by showing yourself—!" Bang! A sobbing moan, and Casey sank down behind the rocks, heavily against the Kid, his rifle slipping from his hands.

(See Chapter 3.)

seen a galoot in these parts wearing a Stetson with a band of silver nuggets?"

The Kid shook his head with a grin.

That adornment, by which the Kid had been known on the grasslands of Texas had been discarded when the Kid rode away from the Lone Star State to find a new life in a new country. The Kid was not likely to have left so easy a clue to possible pursuers.

"I reckon I'll get him, sooner or later," said Casey, rising from the boulder upon which he was seated and stretching his limbs. "The durned coyote can run as hard as he likes, but I'll sure get him!"

The Rio Kid's eyes glittered. It was upon his tongue, at that moment, to proclaim his identity, and draw his gun. But he checked the impulse. He had no fear of the avenger—the thought made him smile—but he had broken bread with the man from Texas, and that consideration kept his gun in his holster, so long as the Kid could leave it there. Not for a second did it cross Casey's mind that he was talking to the man he was hunting—that only the bandage hid from him the features he knew well from the Kid's picture.

"I guess we may as well turn in," said Casey.

"I reckon so," assented the Kid. "I'll sure put you on the right trail at sun-up, pardner. And we'll part friends."

"Sure!"

Casey stepped across to his bed-roll. As he did so the Kid made a sudden movement. He reached across and gripped the man from Texas by the ankle, and with a sudden jerk brought him down on the rocky ground.

"What the thunder—" panted Casey.

But he did not need to ask. A bullet struck the rocks, and dropped flattened, and the roar of a gun followed from the darkness.

"Holy smoke!" gasped the man from Texas.

The bullet had passed exactly where he had been standing; and only the Kid's prompt action had saved him from being shot through the heart.

"Cover!" breathed the Kid.

And he dropped out of sight among the boulders, his six-gun in his grip.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Fight in the Dark!

BANG, bang, bang, bang! From the darkness the shots rang fast, almost like one report, but the Kid's ears picked them out. Four rifles were blazing away at the camp among the boulders, and bullets crashed right and left.

The Kid lay low, in secure cover, unalarmed for himself. But he was not so sure of Casey. What sort of a fight the nephew of Two-gun Casey was likely to put up in these sudden circumstances the Kid did not know. He was obviously no gun-man such as Two-gun Casey had been, and the Kid doubted whether he was the man to keep his end up in a fight like this. In the darkness there were four savage foes, shooting to kill, and the darkness wrapped them as in a cloak.

In the camp it was dark, and the Kid guessed that the enemy had been guided by the sound of voices. The shot that Casey had so narrowly escaped had been well-aimed, yet the marksman could scarcely have seen him. Only a glimmer in the darkness had warned the Kid that the shot was coming, and given him time to save the Texan's life.

The Rio Kid lay, hardly breathing, every sense on the alert, his gun in his hand, ready for a rush of the Judson gang. There was a stirring close by him, and he whispered tensely:

"Keep close, Casey! I guess they'll be shootin' at a sound—"

"I guess I'm in cover," murmured Casey. "Say, feller, that was a close call; you pulled me over jest on time. I felt the wind of the bullet."

His voice was a faint whisper, but it was unshaken. The gun-man's nephew had pluck.

"Keep close!" breathed the Kid.

The Rio Kid moved a little, with infinite caution. Bullets, crashing on the rocks round him, and against the canyon wall behind him, came incessantly. The Kid, in the darkness,

watched for a flash, and fired when he spotted it, and dropped instantly into cover again.

A wild, hoarse yell answered his shot; a hoarse yell suddenly broken off in the middle. The Kid smiled grimly.

"I guess that galoot's got his!" he muttered.

There was a shout of rage from the blackness.

"Say, you 'uns," yelled a hoarse voice—"say, you pesky coyotes, that's Hank Judson you've got! We'll cut you to pieces for that!"

"It's the Judson gang!" grinned the Kid. "Four of them here, I reckon—and the king-pin has got his ticket for soup. Keep in cover, feller—they know how to shoot!"

"So do I, if I get a chance!" muttered Casey. "You figure that that galoot you've plugged has got his for keeps?"

"I sure do; he ain't saying anything more about it, no-how," said the Kid. "Lie low, feller; lie low!"

Casey had raised himself, looking along his rifle, watching for a chance to return the fire.

"Lie low, I keep on telling you, hombre!" hissed the Kid. "You're asking for it! That darned gun-barrel has got a shine on it—"

Bang!

A sobbing moan, and Casey sank down behind the rocks, heavily against the Rio Kid. His rifle clanged down. From the darkness came a yell; the marksman knew that he had found his billet.

"Oh, shucks!" muttered the Kid, in disgust.

There was a groan beside him.

"You've got it!" muttered the Kid.

"Yep!" murmured Casey.

"Where you got it?"

"Right shoulder."

"Bad?"

"Feels bad."

"You sure did ask for that, feller!" growled the Kid.

"You can't take chances with these pizen rustlers. Roll over to me, and I guess I'll fix you up with my neck-scarf."

There was no reply.

"You hear me shout?" muttered the Kid.

But Casey did not answer; and the Kid realized that he was either insensible or dead.

He gritted his teeth hard.

The man from Texas lay silent and inert—dead, for all the Kid knew to the contrary; severely wounded, at least. To tend him meant moving from cover, and such a move meant fearful peril, under the fire of three watchful, cunning rustlers. Yet if he still lived the Kid could not let him bleed to death. Bullets still dropped about him, and many of them dropped close. Alone, the Kid would have shifted his cover; the rustlers had the range too well to suit him. But he could not leave his companion—the man who had been hunting him for his life, and whose life now depended on the Kid.

Cautiously the Kid moved, sheathing his six-gun, taking the chance of a rush from the darkness finding him without a weapon in his hand. He groped over Casey, and his hand was wet with the blood that flowed from the wound.

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The Kid felt over the injury, bending over the insensible man; a faint moan came from Casey, and that was all. The Kid tore off his silken neck-scarf, and made shift to bind up the wound and stop the flow of blood. It was all that he could do, and he did it under terrible peril. He felt, rather than knew, that the Judson gang were creeping closer—only one rifle was cracking now, which told the experienced Kid that the other two of the gang were seeking to get to closer quarters, creeping like lynxes among the rocks. But he had to take the chance or let the Texan bleed to death; and he took it.

The clink of a pebble, an almost im-

Kid's keen ear its own story, and he wormed round the bush, and his six-gun touched a creeping form, and crashed out as it touched.

There was a groan, as a heavy figure slumped down in the black shadow of the mesquite.

"Three!" snarled the Kid.

Crack, crack, crack! The rifle was still ringing out at short intervals; the last man of the Judson gang was still firing, to cover the creeping advance of his associates, not knowing yet that they had been accounted for. The Rio Kid crept on, his eyes shining, and his teeth set. From the camp came the shrill squeal of a stricken horse. It was not the black-muzzled mustang—the Kid would have known his cry. And he knew, too, that his horse was in good cover. Casey's steed had been struck by the bullet, and the Kid heard the animal squeal, and squeal again, till the squeals were hushed in silence.

The Rio Kid crept on, winding like a snake among the rocks, well to the right of the man who was firing, cautious and patient as a panther. The man was keeping in good cover from the front; but he was not aware of the Kid's advance. Long minutes passed—the Kid was patient; but at last the flash of the rifle gave him his prey. The six-gun roared again, and the last of the Judson gang shrieked, and fell forward on his rifle.

The Kid leaped to his feet then.

The Judson gang were wiped out; a task that had long baffled a dozen Arizona sheriffs. The Kid stood watchful, waiting, listening; but there was no sound of other foes—if there were more to the Judson gang, they were not on the scene—four had been tracking the man from Texas in the desolate hills, and the Kid had accounted for four. He slipped fresh cartridges into his six-gun, sheathed it, and hurried back to where he had left Casey.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. The End of a Feud!

DAWN flushed up over the mountains, and the man from Texas, stirring uneasily in his blankets, opened his eyes. He stared round him dizzily.

"Keep still, pard!"

It was the Kid's cheery voice.

Casey stared at him.

"Where are they?"

"Who?"

"The Judson gang!"

The Kid grinned.

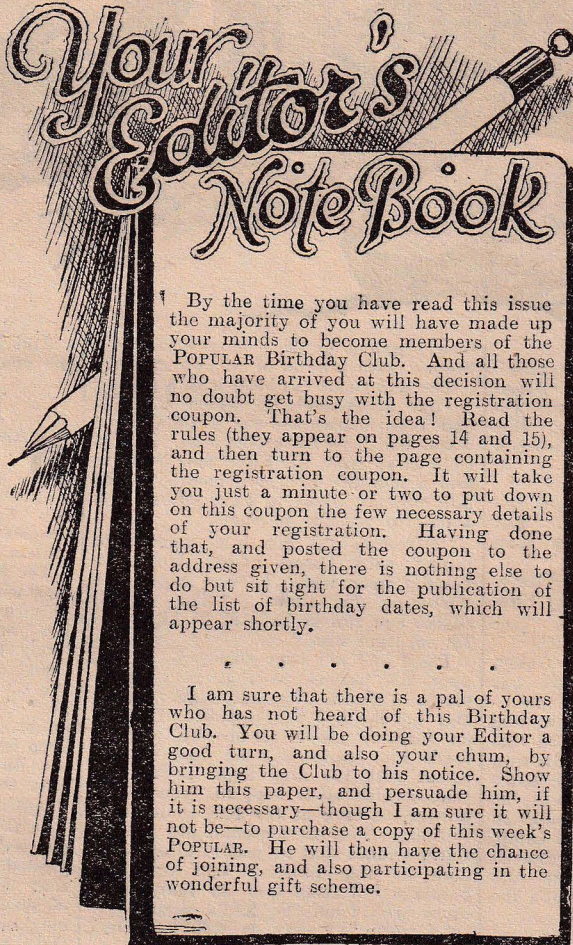
"Ask the turkey-buzzards," he answered carelessly. "I guess I shouldn't be sitting around so free and easy if they were still gunning after me."

"You wiped them out?"

"Just a few."

"Gee!" said Casey. "Look here, am I bad hurt? I see you've fixed up my shoulder, and it hurts something fierce. How about it?"

"I guess I got the lead out clean as a whistle," said the Kid. "You want to get to a bed and a doc; but you're



By the time you have read this issue the majority of you will have made up your minds to become members of the POPULAR Birthday Club. And all those who have arrived at this decision will no doubt get busy with the registration coupon. That's the idea! Read the rules (they appear on pages 14 and 15), and then turn to the page containing the registration coupon. It will take you just a minute or two to put down on this coupon the few necessary details of your registration. Having done that, and posted the coupon to the address given, there is nothing else to do but sit tight for the publication of the list of birthday dates, which will appear shortly.

I am sure that there is a pal of yours who has not heard of this Birthday Club. You will be doing your Editor a good turn, and also your chum, by bringing the Club to his notice. Show him this paper, and persuade him, if it is necessary—though I am sure it will not be—to purchase a copy of this week's POPULAR. He will then have the chance of joining, and also participating in the wonderful gift scheme.

perceptible sound, was enough for the Kid; his six-gun leaped to his hand.

Bang!

Within ten feet of him, a black, shadowy figure yelled and rolled over, and lay still. The Kid had not missed.

"Two!" muttered the Kid grimly.

Casey lay motionless, silent, his face glimmering white as chalk in the gloom. The Kid could do no more for him—no more, so long as he was still beset by watchful enemies. There was a gleam of blue flame in the eyes of the Rio Kid as he moved to deal with those enemies.

Leaving the insensible Texan, the Kid crept away among the boulders, cautious, silent as a cougar, worming his way, every sense on the alert. A rifle was still banging from a distance; but one man at least was seeking the Kid among the rocks—and now the Kid was seeking him in turn. The faint rustle of a dragging mesquite told the

blankets, opened his eyes. He stared round him dizzily.

all right. You'll be riding the trails again in a few weeks."

"A few weeks!" muttered Casey. "And where'll the Rio Kid be by that time? This is sure hard-luck!"

The Kid laughed, and fingered the bandage on his face.

"You figure on gunning after the Rio Kid when you get going?" he asked.

"Sure!"

Again the Kid laughed.

"You've saved my life, feller, twice over," said Casey earnestly. "I ain't forgetting a thing like that. I reckon you've got to save it again—I'll never get out of these hills without help." He glanced at the motionless body of his horse. "I'm on foot now, I reckon."

"Nope!" said the Kid. "I guess I'm putting you on my cayuse, to hit the trail for the nearest camp. I guess Red Rock is the nearest shebang where you can get a doctor. They say cow-punchers can't walk; but I reckon I've got to hoof it twenty miles alongside my critter. You'll sure have to hold on to the saddle."

"You're the whitest man I ever met," said Casey.

"Oh, shucks!" said the Kid laughing. In the rising sunlight, he fixed the wounded man in the saddle of the black-muzzled mustang. Casey was weak, and a little dizzy, but he was able to hold on and ride. The Kid walked beside the horse, as they moved down the canyon, back the way the boy puncher had ridden the previous day. A true cow-man hates to walk, and the Kid hated it as much as any other puncher; but he stepped out cheerily and briskly. Hours on rocky trails passed on leaden wings; the Kid was fatigued, though he did not show it; and the wounded man swayed in the saddle, and only the Kid's sinewy grip, time and again, kept him from falling.

The noonday sun was blazing down on the hills, when the Kid led the grey mustang at last into Red Rock, and the wounded Texan was carried into the shack hotel, and the camp doctor sent for.

Leaving Casey to the doc, the Kid strolled out into the camp.

When he came back to the shack hotel, he went to Casey's room and found the man from Texas looking pale, but evidently better. Casey gave him a rueful look.

"Doc says I'm fixed here for a week at least," he said. "I guess I owe it to you that I ain't fixed for keeps, feller. I guess I ain't grumbling, but it's sure hard luck."

The Kid nodded absently.

"You hitting the trail?" asked Casey. "Yep! Arizona ain't healthy for me," explained the Kid. "I've been mixed up in a rookus down in the Gila Mountains, and there are sure a lot of pilgrims gunning after me. It's me for Nevada and the cow country. I reckon you're fixed all O.K. here?"

"That's all right," Casey hesitated. "I'd sure like to know the name of the galoot that pulled me out of the claws of the Judson gang. You've let on you're travelling as Smith; but—"

THE FAMOUS COMPANION PAPERS!

—:—

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"I guess I'm going to tell you," said the Kid soberly, "and then, if you want, I'll tell you where to look for me in Nevada. I'm sure going to put you wise about the Rio Kid and Two-Gun Casey. I brought you into this camp wounded on my horse, and I'm telling you that the Rio Kid did the same thing for Two-Gun Casey, back in the Frio country in Texas. The Kid picked him up in the chaparral, badly hurt, and toted him to camp, and cared for him and brought him round."

"Shucks!" said Casey incredulously.

"Frozen truth," said the Kid quietly. "There had been trouble between them before, in a cattle camp on the Pecos. The Kid was ready to forget it, but your uncle wasn't. He was sure a bad hombre. He sold the Kid to the sheriff of Frio, and fixed it up for the sheriff to find the Kid sitting by his camp-fire, and rope him in or fill him with lead."

Casey's pale face grew paler, and his eyes fixed on the Kid with a curiously intent stare.

"That was the how of it," went on the Kid. "I'm giving you straight goods, pardner. The Kid was wise to the game; and he fixed up Two-Gun Casey, put his silver-nuggets on the galoot's head and left him to take his chance with the sheriff—same as he meant for the Kid. I reckon that was a fair break."

"I ain't believing it," muttered Casey. "I know he was a bad man, but he wasn't that pizen mean." His eyes gleamed at the Kid. "How do you know? Spill it!"

Slowly, quietly, the Kid unpeeled the bandage from his face.

Casey's eyes gleamed at him.

The handsome, sunburnt face, with the scratch of the yucca thorn across it, was revealed.

Casey panted.

"The Kid!" he breathed huskily. "The Rio Kid!"

"That very galoot!" said the Kid quietly. "The galoot you was gunning after, pardner, on account of a pizen

mean coyote who got just what he wanted from the sheriff of Frio."

Casey's hand groped along his belt.

"Forget it," said the Kid. "If you're still for trouble, I'll tell you where to pick me up in Nevada—when you're fit and well, and can handle a gun. You couldn't shoot now worth a Continental red cent."

Casey licked his dry lips.

"You've said it," he muttered. "And you're the Rio Kid—the fire-bug I've been trailing all the way across New Mexico—the outlaw that's wanted by half the sheriffs in Texas. And you've saved my life, and stood by me like a white man." He breathed hard. "Why, I reckon a word to the hombres in this camp would bring a crowd on your back—"

The Kid laughed.

"You ain't spilling that word!" he remarked.

"You'd shoot me up to stop me—"

"I guess I ain't shooting up a wounded man that can't handle a gun," said the Kid disdainfully. "Shout out all you want—I guess there ain't enough galoots in this camp to keep me from hitting the trail."

There was a long silence.

"I guess if your face hadn't been covered, there would have been shooting on sight, when I met you in the hills yesterday," said Casey, at last. "But— You're a white man, and I'm believing what you tell me."

He held out his hand.

The Rio Kid gripped it.

"I reckoned you was white," he said. "I'm sure glad you don't want to know where to look for me in Nevada."

Casey grinned faintly.

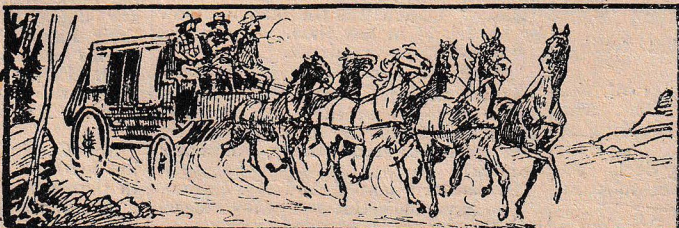
"I'm hitting the trail back to Texas when I get fixed for riding," he said. "And I reckon I shall forget to tell the galoots there that I met the Rio Kid in this country. You're a white man, Kid, and I'd sure be glad if you could ride back to Frio with me."

The Kid smiled and shook his head.

"I reckon it would be the long jump for me," he said. "When you get back to Frio, feller, don't believe all they tell you about the Rio Kid. He sure ain't the bad egg they make out along the Rio Grande."

The Kid's boots and spurs clattered out of the shack hotel, and he unhitched the black-muzzled mustang from the rail and mounted. From a window a hand waved him farewell—the hand of the man who had trailed him from Texas to hunt him for his life. The Rio Kid waved back cheerily as he rode down the street. The man from Texas, with a strange look on his face, watched the graceful rider, till he vanished in the folds of the hills; hitting the trail once more for Nevada and the camp of Horse-Thief.

(You'll meet this amazing Boy Outlaw, the Rio Kid, in another breathlessly thrilling tale of the roaring Wild West next week, entitled: "The Hired Man at Horse-Thief!")



THE

END

SENSATION AT ROOKWOOD!

Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth, persists in his accusation against Monsieur Gaston that the new French master is an impostor, and as a result finds himself in a painful situation!

The FRENCH MASTER'S TRIUMPH!

A ROUSING LONG COMPLETE STORY OF JIMMY SILVER & CO., OF ROOKWOOD.

BY OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Mr. Greely Goes It!

"GREELY'S going it!"
 "That ass, Greely!"
 "That fooling ass, Greely!"
 That was not a very respectful way of alluding to Mr. Horace Greely, the master of the Fifth Form at Rookwood.

But there was no doubt that, at the present time, Mr. Horace Greely was regarded, from end to end of Rookwood, as an ass. Fellows in his own Form, like Hansom and Talboys, agreed that Horace Greely was a fooling ass; and Jimmy Silver & Co. of the Fourth held even stronger opinions. Pompous Mr. Greely had always been lofty in his manners, somewhat dictatorial in his speech. But never, till now, had Rookwood suspected that he was so many kinds of an ass.

A crowd of fellows were converging towards Master's Common-room—the corridor outside that apartment was swarming. Jimmy Silver & Co. of the Fourth were there, and a good many of the Shell and the Fifth. Even some Sixth-Formers had come along, though generally the Sixth preserved an air of being far above the feelings that stirred common mortals.

It was tea-time—rather past tea-time—and the Rookwood masters generally had tea together in their Common-room. So most of the staff were there—Mr. Bohun and Mr. Wiggins and Mr. Flinders and Mr. Dalton and Monsieur Victor Gaston, the "new Froggy," who was taking the place of the absent French master.

Quite a cheery buzz of conversation had been going on, when Mr. Greely entered.

Possibly the conversation had been all the more cheery because Mr. Greely was not there. For there was no doubt that the Fifth Form master generally dominated the talk in Common-room, not to the satisfaction of his colleagues.

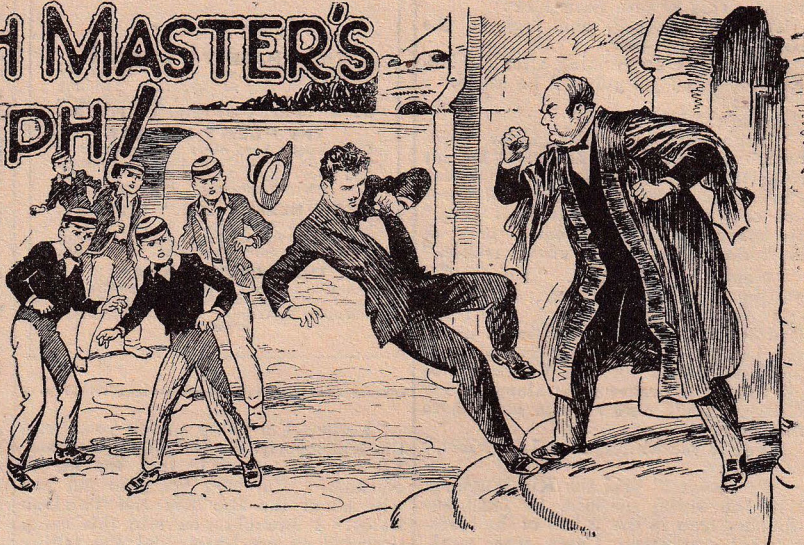
Mr. Greely's entrance was the signal for silence.

His expression showed that trouble was coming.

Mr. Richard Dalton, master of the Fourth, looked slightly impatient. Mr. Mooney frowned, and Mr. Wiggins looked painfully resigned.

Victor Gaston raised his dark eyebrows a little, but otherwise took no notice of Mr. Greely.

It was upon the young Frenchman



that Mr. Greely's stern, accusing eyes were fixed.

Victor Gaston did not seem to observe it. Not a muscle twitched in his handsome face.

"Gentlemen!" boomed Mr. Greely.

The whole Common-room looked at him then.

"Gentlemen!" Mr. Greely surveyed the Common-room with an eye like Mars, to threaten and command, as it were. "Kindly give me your attention for a few minutes."

"Really, sir!" said Mr. Bohun testily.

"Mr. Greely!" murmured pacific Mr. Mooney.

"I am bound to ask you for your attention," said Mr. Greely, in his most pompous manner. "A short time ago, when Monsieur Gaston came to this school to replace Monsieur Monceau, I made an accusation against him."

"You did, sir," said Mr. Dalton sharply, "and the Head very properly regarded that accusation as ridiculous."

"That accusation," said Mr. Greely firmly, "I repeat. I accuse this young man, Victor Gaston, of being a bank-robber, whom I saw tried and sentenced in Paris last year under the name of Felix Lacroix."

Victor Gaston shrugged his shoulders. His manner was mildly contemptuous. A slightly scornful smile hovered over his well-cut lips.

There was a buzz from the passage outside. The news that Mr. Greely was "going it" had spread fast and far. A sea of faces stared in at the open door.

Mr. Dalton rose to his feet, a gleam in his eyes.

Between Richard Dalton and the young French master a cordial friendship had grown up in the few weeks they had known one another. And "Dicky" Dalton was the man to stand by his friend at any time.

"Silence!" he exclaimed.

"What?" roared Mr. Greely, petrified.

In the passage, Jimmy Silver & Co. of the Fourth grinned at one another. Dicky Dalton was the man to deal with that pompous ass Greely, in their opinion.

"I repeat, silence," said Mr. Dalton.

"You have made this accusation before, Mr. Greely. It is regarded as ridiculous by all Rookwood, from the Head down-

ward. On your own showing, the man Lacroix was sent to prison last year for five years—obviously, he is in prison still. Even if he has escaped, as you fancy, it proves nothing against Victor Gaston, whose testimonials have been examined by the Head, and have satisfied the Head! You have no right, sir, to repeat this foolish accusation!"

Mr. Greely turned purple.

"I am not speaking idly, Mr. Dalton!" he roared. "Silence, young man! I have proof to offer! I raise the subject again because I have proof to offer—proof that has just come into my hands!"

"Impossible!"

Victor Gaston looked curiously at the Fifth Form master. There was a gleam in his eyes.

"Mais continuez, monsieur," he said.

"This proof—of what does it consist?"

"That is what I was about to state, when Mr. Dalton interrupted me," said Mr. Greely crushingly. "A boy—a junior of your Form, Mr. Dalton—went to Monsieur Gaston's room this afternoon—"

The French master started.

"This afternoon," repeated Mr. Greely. "The boy—Peele of the Fourth Form—admits that he went to the room intending to play a trick on the French master. Monsieur Gaston suddenly entered, and, to escape observation, Peele hid himself in the wardrobe."

"Well?" said Mr. Dalton contemptuously.

Victor Gaston did not speak; his eyes were fixed strangely on the Fifth Form master.

"From his place of concealment," resumed Mr. Greely, "Peele of the Fourth Form saw Monsieur Gaston open a locked trunk, and take from it a set of steel tools, all of them of polished steel, so far as Peele could see. From the beginning, gentleman, I never had any doubt that Victor Gaston, alias Felix Lacroix, had come here to carry on his nefarious business of a cracksmen. I suspected that he had come provided with the tools of his iniquitous trade. Now an eye-witness can prove it!"

Mr. Greely paused, not for a reply, but for breath. There was deep silence in the Common-room.

In the passage the buzz of voices had died away. Mr. Greely's positive statement had a startling effect on the crowd

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 Mossos!" 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—" stammered 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,

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 office, as it were, like a light frigate keeping company with a line of battleships.

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!"

THE POPULAR.—No. 491.

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—every 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 dumb-founded.

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—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 "footling" 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."

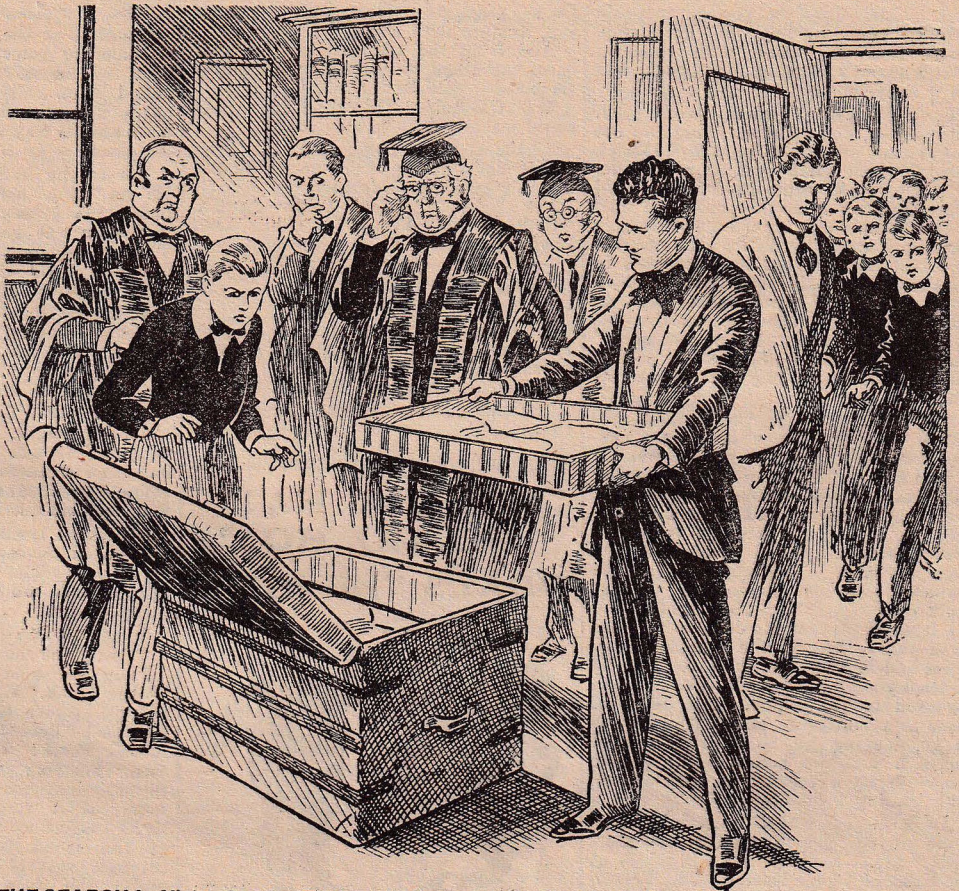
"You think so?" said Victor Gaston. "I hope so, at least. And no one else has ever distrusted you, excepting that wretched boy Peele. It was kind—it was noble of you to speak a word for that wretched boy!"

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 debonair 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

THE POPULAR.—No. 491.

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. THE POPULAR.—No. 491.

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.

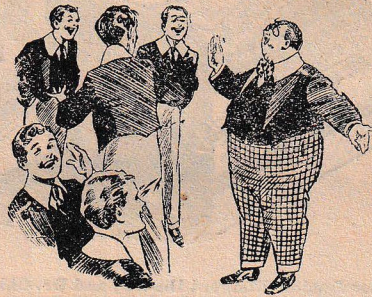
"Gaston" exclaimed Richard Dalton.

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

|||||

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

WHAT'S THE JOKE?



BILLY BUNTER, THE FAT OWL OF GREYFRIARS, IS THE JOKE—HE ALWAYS IS—HE'LL PROVIDE YOU WITH ANOTHER LONG LAUGH NEXT WEEK.

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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—"

Heedless 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 unvisited 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.

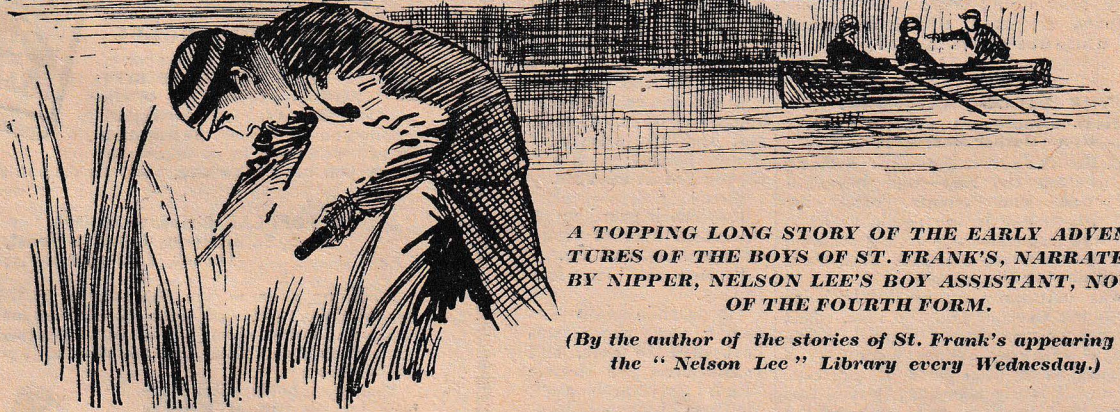
THE END.

(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!")

THE SERPENT AGAIN!

The mysterious actions of Reggie Pitt, the new boy, on the eve of the St. Frank's boat-race, give Nipper & Co. plenty of food for thought!

PITT THE MYSTERIOUS!



A TOPPING LONG STORY OF THE EARLY ADVENTURES OF THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S, NARRATED BY NIPPER, NELSON LEE'S BOY ASSISTANT, NOW OF THE FOURTH FORM.

(By the author of the stories of St. Frank's appearing in the "Nelson Lee" Library every Wednesday.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Practising for the Race—Christine and Co. are Gloomy—But Pitt Isn't!

TOM BURTON of the Remove nodded confidently. "Oh, Ancient House will win all right!" he declared. "Souse me! We can't lose messmates. It'll be a walk-over."

"Or, rather, a row-over," grinned Tommy Watson

We were discussing the Junior Boat-race, and, being members of the Ancient House, we naturally took it for granted that the Ancient House Eight would win.

And there were other reasons. For some little time past the rival eights had been practising on the River Stowe, which ran past the bottom of the St. Frank's playing fields. The Stowe was quite an important river in its way, and the course for the boat-race had been well chosen. It was the broad, straight stretch which reached from the school to the old stone bridge at Bell-ton. The bridge was the winning-post.

Being skipper of the Ancient House Remove, I was stroking the Ancient House boat. I had taken my men over the course many times within the last few days, and they were well-nigh perfect. According to all timing records we should beat the College House by a full length—easily. So there was every reason for us to be confident.

My crew was of the first quality. In addition to Burton, the other members were Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West, De Valerie, Farman, Owen major, and the Duke of Somerton, and Yakama was coxswain.

"But we mustn't be too confident," I said. "Christine has been keeping his men hard at it, and for all we know, he may be keeping things dark. When it comes to the actual race, we shall—"

"Win!" remarked Sir Montie placidly.

"No doubt about it at all," commented Watson. "The very look of Christine's face is enough. He looks worried, and the very mention of 'boat-race' is enough to send him into a bad

temper. Poor chap, he knows he's booked for a failure."

"Well, College House won last year, so he can't grumble," I remarked. "As a matter of fact, College House has won for three or four years in succession. It's time we had a look in."

"You weren't here last year, old boy," said Tregellis-West. "There's an amazin' difference in the Ancient House now. We've been beatin' the Monks in everythin'—we have, really. Christine is 'out-generalled, begad."

It was Sunday evening, and, having an hour to ourselves, Watson and Tregellis-West and I had gone for a walk—all dressed up to the nines, as Tommy put it. Strolling back, we had met Burton and De Valerie, and we were now chatting in the evening sunlight, against the hedge which divided the Triangle from Little Side.

Naturally, the conversation had turned upon the forthcoming boat-race, which would be rowed on the Wednesday. It was quite a separate affair, but decidedly important. The Senior Boat-race had taken place a fortnight before, and it had been a victory for the Ancient House. This was another reason why we were extra anxious to win.

During the St. Frank's Regatta there had been races of all descriptions, of course, but they were principally sculling contests and Form competitions. The annual boat-race was given a day to itself.

"We shall practise to-morrow," I said. "Wet or fine, we'll have an hour on the river. It's necessary to keep our form at its highest pitch. Christine will work his men like Trojans between now and Wednesday, and I shall do the same."

Sir Montie sighed. "It's a frightful bore, but I suppose I shall have to go through with it," he said resignedly. "You're such a beggar for keepin' our noses to the grindstone, Nipper, dear fellow."

While we were thus chatting, our rivals, Christine & Co., strolled forth to take the air.

On the College House steps they ran

into Reginald Pitt, the new junior in the Remove.

"I say!" he called. "Just a word!"

"Rats!"

"It's about the boat-race—"

"Oh, dry up!"

"What do you think of our chances?" asked Pitt. "I'm not in the eight, but I take an interest in House matters. I rather fancy we shall win on Wednesday."

"What you fancy won't make any difference to the race!" snapped Christine. "We shall lose! It's no good trying to think anything else. With Nipper and Burton in the rival boat we haven't got a dog's chance."

"Well, that's candid, anyhow," said Pitt. "And you won't win if you start the race with those ideas. Why don't you show some ginger? We've got to win—and, what's more, we're going to win!"

"I suppose you're a prophet?" said Yorke sarcastically. "I'm willing to bet a pound to a shilling that we do win!" said Pitt calmly. "I've got faith in my side, even if you haven't. What do you say? A quid to a shilling—"

"Go and eat coke!"

And Christine & Co., thoroughly disgusted, passed indoors.

Reginald Pitt, with a chuckle, strolled across the Triangle, and was apparently very pleased with himself. He knew well enough that the chums of Study Q would not take on any bet, whatever the odds.

Pitt's position was somewhat curious. The previous week he had boasted to Christine & Co. that he would make the College House soar above the Fossils. In short, he undertook to secure a great victory over the rival House. Christine had given him a week—which would expire on the following Thursday.

At present it seemed extremely doubtful as to whether Reginald Pitt would make good his boast. He had done nothing, and apparently meant to do nothing.

He seemed to be solely interested in the forthcoming boat-race, and was confident that the College House juniors

would win—in spite of Christine's own forebodings. And if anybody ought to know, Christine was the fellow, since he was the stroke of the College House boat.

Pitt's confidence, however, was so serene that he had even gone to the length of wagering a pound to a pound that his side would pull off the race. This bet had been made with Fullerton of the Third—a rascally young scamp in the College House.

Fullerton considered that his money was perfectly safe. But, somehow, Pitt's confidence was rather uncomfortable. Why was he so certain that the Monks' boat would win?

Perhaps Reginald Pitt knew something which the others didn't!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Handforth is Indignant—A Little Expedition—Rather Suspicious.

TUESDAY evening—the evening before the race—was somewhat dull and cloudy. But the barometer in the Ancient House lobby had been steadily rising all day, so there was every prospect of a clear half-holiday on the morrow.

I was extremely optimistic—both as regards the weather and the race. Just as it was getting dusk I came into the Triangle with my chums, having been indulging in a final hour of practice. This wasn't really necessary, but it was just as well to keep our form at the highest standard.

The Ancient House was more confident than ever now. Indeed, the result of the race was a foregone conclusion. We simply couldn't lose, for Christine and his men were miles below our form—and they knew it, too.

But they only admitted it amongst themselves. To all rival inquiries they darkly suggested that we should wait and see. They meant to do their best, of course, in order to make their defeat as small as possible, but they had no real hope.

Sir Montie and Tommy and I were all flushed and warm as we entered the Ancient House. After we had changed out of our shorts we adjourned to Study C for prep. One minute later the door opened violently, and we knew that Handforth was paying a visit. Church and McClure, his faithful chums, were with him. Some humorous fellows had frequently asked whether Handforth & Co. were fixed together by strings.

"I've been thinking," announced Handforth grimly.

"Rather a change, isn't it?" I asked.

"You don't seem to be any the worse for it, Handy. A bit pale, perhaps—"

"It's about the boat-race," said Handforth. "You seem to have overlooked the fact, Nipper, that I'm the best oarsman in the House—excepting yourself and Burton. I will say you can whack me, and so can the Bo'sun. As for the rest, my form is miles above 'em!"

I sighed.

"Didn't you mention all this to me yesterday?" I asked. "It's stale news, Handy—"

"You walked away when I was talking to you yesterday," said Handforth tartly. "I want to know if you are going to give me a place in the eight."

"I ate to refuse, Handy—"

"Oh, great pip!" gasped Tommy Watson. "Don't start those awful puns here, Nipper! Handforth's face is enough, without you adding to the misery we're suffering!"

"I give you one minute!" roared Handforth. "Am I going to be included in the crew, or not? That's a

plain question, and I want a plain answer. I'll not be put off!"

"I wouldn't dream of putting you off, Handy," I said soothingly. "I'm going to try something else. Instead of putting you off, we'll put you out. It'll save a lot of trouble, and it's quicker!"

Tommy Watson obligingly opened the door.

"You—you asses!" howled Handforth. "What the—Yaroooh!"

Handforth made his exit hurriedly, and sat down in the passage with a considerable amount of force. Church and McClure, with rare thoughtfulness, had slipped out in advance.

Slam!

Handforth gazed up at the closed door of Study C in a dazed fashion.

"Come on!" he said thickly.

He strode into his own study, which was next door to ours, and switched on the electric light. Church and McClure followed him. In Study C we grinned with appreciation. Indignation meetings of that sort, with Church and McClure as the audience, were frequent occurrences.

"I've been insulted!" said Handforth, with deadly calmness. "Study D's been insulted. We have got to wipe it out—and there's only one way of doing it!"

"Well, what about it?"

"What about it?" snorted Handforth. "We're going down to the river—now. We're going to practise—"

"It's nearly dark, you fathead!" yelled Church.

"What does that matter? It's just as easy to row in the dark as it is in the daylight," said Handforth grimly. "My idea is to get my form up to Nipper's. Then, when I show him what I can do in the morning, he'll be bound to give me a place in the boat!"

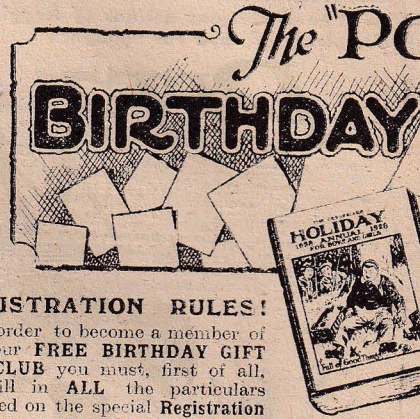
Church and McClure could only gasp. Handforth's ideas were always weird, but this was surely the limit. And the extraordinary part about it was that Handforth was in deadly earnest. To argue with him was an impossible task.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't go for a trip on the river," said McClure carelessly. "But you'd better be careful, Handy. Church and I are going to do our prep now, so—"

"You're coming with me!" snapped Handforth. "You miserable traitors! Do you mean to say that you'd desert me at a critical hour like this? Chuck those books aside and let's get down to the river. We can put in a full hour's practice. It won't take me long to beat Nipper's form!"

Handforth's long-suffering chums followed him wearily into the passage. They realised that the best thing to do was to get it over as quickly as possible.

"1928" ANNUALS AS B



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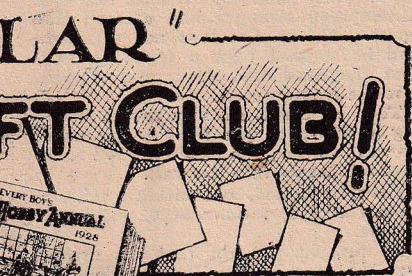
By the time they had crossed the Triangle and were well on their way to the boathouse Handforth's enthusiasm began to ooze away. It certainly was getting dark, and it would be difficult to handle a boat on the river. But Handforth would not have admitted his real feelings for worlds. His dignity prevented him from backing out now.

The boathouse was reached at last. The river was gloomy and cold-looking. The absurdity of the expedition occurred to Handforth now; but he persisted, with all his usual obstinacy.

A small, light boat was got out and placed on the river. Then the three juniors got into their places, and Handforth took the oars. Church and McClure knew well enough that their trip would be of the briefest duration. There was nothing like bitter experience; it was about the only thing which convinced the ram-headed Handforth.

All went smoothly for about seven minutes. Then Handforth began to get tired. This wasn't surprising, for he had been pulling with terrific energy.

Y GIFTS FOR READERS!



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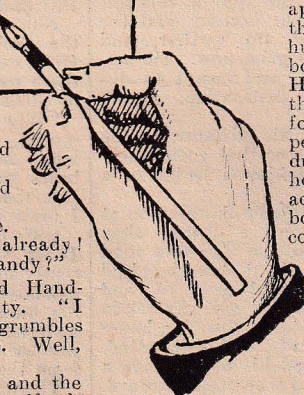
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to-day



He rested on his oars and breathed heavily.

"Not bad, eh?" he asked breathlessly.

"Splendid!" said McClure.

"Why, you've beaten Nipper already! Hadn't you better get back, Handy?"

"Oh, if you like!" snapped Handforth, glad of an opportunity. "I thought what it would be—grumbles from you chaps all the while. Well, you've forced me into it!"

Church and McClure grinned, and the rudder was put over, and Handforth pulled for all he was worth.

The journey back was accomplished with hardly a word being uttered.

It was just when the boathouse came within sight that a somewhat surprising incident occurred. Church was rowing. McClure was steering, and Handforth shivered. Their boat made but very little noise, and even that was drowned by the rustling of the leaves in the stiffish wind.

Suddenly a bright light streamed out quite near the bank against the

boathouse. It was so unexpected that McClure uttered a little gasp of astonishment. Church ceased rowing and stared round.

And there, bending over a thick clump of reeds, was Reginald Pitt! He appeared to be taking something out of the reeds, and almost at once he switched off the light and strode away. Handforth & Co. distinctly saw him break into a sharp trot as he went back towards St. Frank's.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said McClure. "That was Pitt! What the merry dickens was he up to?"

"I wonder what on earth he was doing—" began Church.

"Bother Pitt! Rats to Pitt! Let him go and eat coke!" snorted Handforth. "Do you think I care what that beastly Serpent does? He ain't in our House, anyhow!"

And, so far as Handforth was concerned, Reginald Pitt was completely disposed of. But Church and McClure could not help remembering the mysterious movements of the new College House junior.

And later on that incident was to be recalled.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Pitt's New Friends—Nelson Lee has an Adventure—A Mystery!

MEANWHILE, Reginald Pitt was striding rapidly across the playing fields towards St. Frank's.

He chuckled once or twice as he walked, and appeared to be in the best of good humours. The new boy of the College House was something of a novelty, for he had seemed perfectly at home during his very first hour; and his cheek, according to everybody who had encountered him, was truly colossal.

He reached the Triangle in the deep gloom and made straight over towards the bicycle shed. Before he reached the building, however, three forms loomed up from the direction of the Ancient House and barred his path.

"That you, Pitt?" came the inquiry.

"Hallo!" said Pitt calmly. "What's the trouble?"

The three figures were those of Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell—the leading Nuts of the Ancient House Remove. They had been watching Pitt's progress since his arrival at St. Frank's, and it struck them that he was a fellow of their own calibre.

"No trouble," said Fullwood. "We'd just like to have a word with you, that's all. I hear you're rather interested in the boat-race that's coming off to-morrow."

"Who told you that fairy-tale?" asked Bell.

"So you're not interested?" asked Bell.

"Not particularly. Why?"

"Well, I was talking with young Fullerton of your House, and he swore blind that you had bet him evens that the College House eight would win the race. One of Fullerton's lies, I suppose?"

Pitt shook his head.

"No; it's true enough," he said calmly. "Fullerton will get a quid of mine if my House loses. But I'm not worrying. In fact, I mean to bet you an even fiver that the Ancient House loses!"

Fullwood & Co. exchanged glances. "You're jokin'," remarked Gulliver.

"Not at all. I can be staunch to my own House, I suppose?" said Pitt smoothly. "You'll probably call me an ass, and all the rest of it, but I'm a fellow who sticks to an opinion. And I'm willing to back my opinion to any extent you like."

"I'll take that bet!" said Fullwood promptly. "A fiver. It'll come in handy at the end of the week! I suppose you've got enough tin to pay out?"

"Well, I'm good for ten quid, at least," replied Pitt.

"What price a bet with me, then?" asked Gulliver.

"How much?"

"Three quid."

"I'll take you on," said Pitt calmly.

"I'll have the odd two quid, unless you can make it more," said Bell eagerly. "Is it a go?"

Reginald Pitt chuckled.

"Money for nothing!" he exclaimed. "I'd like to make it a fiver all round, but my resources won't run to it, and I never make a bet without having the money in my pocket to pay out in case I lose. But I shan't lose, and if you like to risk—"

"No; we're satisfied," grinned Fullwood. "But, mind you, there'll be no backin' out after you've lost! If you try any of those games on, my son, we'll kick you until you can't stand."

And Fullwood & Co. walked off, intensely satisfied with the result of their transaction. They were frankly astounded. That Pitt should be willing to throw all his money away like that was extraordinary. For it would be throwing it away. Under no circumstances was it possible to believe that the College House would win. Fullwood & Co. set Pitt down as a reckless young ass.

"This means a fiver for me, three quid for you, Gully, and two quid for you, Bell," said Fullwood comfortably. "We shall be in funds this week, and no mistake!"

It was rather remarkable that Pitt at that very moment should be calculating that he would rake in the precise sum of ten pounds on the following afternoon after the race. His confidence in the success of his own House was unbounded. Yet there was no apparent reason for Pitt's optimism. To all appearances, it seemed as though he had deliberately thrown away all his available cash.

He chuckled as he fetched his bicycle out, and was soon riding away in the direction of Belliton. Barely five minutes later Nelson Lee came briskly

out of the Ancient House, attired in Norfolks.

The schoolmaster-detective went straight to the bicycle shed, took out his machine, and pedalled off.

On this occasion he was on his way to Bannington, with the intention of interviewing Inspector Jameson, of the Bannington police. There were a few questions which Lee was anxious to put. For the detective was keenly determined to investigate the affair of the forged currency notes.

An official from Scotland Yard had asked Nelson Lee to look into the matter. It was known that a great amount of false currency was being uttered from the neighbourhood of Bannington. The police had set many traps, but the crooks responsible were wary, and not a false note had been seen during the period of official investigation.

Yet Scotland Yard was quite sure that the culprits had not flown, and that they were still busy in the same district. Nelson Lee had consented to look into the matter, but he frankly confessed that there was a supreme difficulty in the way of commencing operations. For Lee had no starting-point, and to manufacture one for himself would be no light matter.

Luck, however, was to favour the gov'nor in a really sporting way.

I'll just describe how it came about.

Nelson Lee's object in going to Bannington was to see Inspector Jameson, as I said.

Inspector Jameson received him courteously and gave him all the information available—which practically amounted to nil. Lee had only put a few questions regarding certain shady residents of Bannington. All these gentlemen were proved to be above suspicion, of this particular charge, at all events.

It was quite dark when Lee commenced to ride home.

The lane from Bannington to Bellton was somewhat narrow in places, and there were several minor hills, and, at one point, a rather sharp corner.

Nelson Lee was coasting down the long slope to this corner, thinking of anything but cycling. The lane was deserted, so far as he could see—which wasn't far. He banked round the sharp curve gracefully, remaining strictly to the near side of the road, quite in accordance with highway rules.

Crash!

It was all over in two seconds. Before the gov'nor was fairly round he saw the bright light of a bicycle bang in front of him, moving at great speed. There wasn't time for him to shift, and the two bikes collided with really beautiful force.

It was the other fellow's fault entirely. He had been coming down the opposite hill, the sharp corner being at the bottom of the little valley, on the off-side of the road, which was quite wrong.

A collision was unavoidable. Nelson Lee picked himself up, rather shaken, but not even scratched. His bicycle lamp was still alight, although feebly flickering before finally expiring. And the shaft of light lay full upon a tied bundle of papers near the writhing man on the ground. At the first glance Nelson Lee saw that those papers were one-pound Treasury notes, and there were at least a hundred of them, all brand new.

"Confound you, sir!" raved the other man, making a quick movement and grabbing up the currency notes. "Confound you! A man cannot ride peace-

ably along a quiet country road now without being blundered into by an infernal noodle on a bicycle which he can't ride! I have a mind to prosecute you for damages!"

Nelson Lee's eyes gleamed.

"It is not my intention to quarrel with you," he said coldly. "You will oblige me, however, by curbing your insolent tongue! If you had the slightest rudiment of knowledge concerning the rule of the road, you would be well aware of the fact that all blame attaches to yourself!"

Further words would have been useless, so Lee applied a match to the fore and aft lamps on his machine, which was not much damaged, and quietly rode off. He was well aware of the fact that the stranger was standing quite still, gazing after him.

Lee rode to the top of the hill, but he had no intention of continuing his way to St. Frank's. An opportunity of this sort was far too good to be missed. The very instant he was hidden from the valley by a curve in the lane he jumped from his machine and extinguished both the lights. Then he silently pedalled back until he reached the brow of the hill. He knew that he was quite invisible against the heavy background of trees. The other man, of course, fondly believed that Nelson Lee had ridden completely away.

But the detective, wheeling silently to a handy tree against the bank, held himself there and waited. He could see right down the short hill. At the foot the ill-tempered cyclist was struggling with his lamps. One of them, at least, had gone wrong.

The delay was only brief, however. Within three minutes the stranger mounted his machine and disappeared round the bend. Nelson Lee allowed himself to glide forward.

His own bicycle was of the finest quality, and it was a perfectly noiseless machine. As both his lamps were out he was invisible in the now intense darkness. Even if the stranger suspected a trick he would never detect the attentions of such an experienced shadower as Nelson Lee.

But the man was evidently satisfied that no suspicions had been caused. He had just reached the top of the hill when Lee got to the bottom, and the detective pedalled up swiftly and smoothly. He was grim now. He suspected those notes, and meant to discover this man's destination, at all events.

He kept some little distance to the rear, and always saw that some background lay behind him—a hedge or a clump of trees.

The man did not enter Bannington at all, but turned down a narrow side-road which led into the Caistowe road farther on. After about three hundred yards Lee's quarry dismounted and quickly entered a large gateway set in between masses of tall trees. No house was visible to Lee, who had dismounted.

He silently pushed his bicycle into a deep, dry ditch, and then crept forward. This particular spot was very quiet, although actually within the town of Bannington itself. Just a little farther along the other road the street lamps commenced.

But here all was dark and silent. Reaching the gate, Nelson Lee peered between the bars, for it was a high one, and he saw a large, old-fashioned house with bay windows. One of the windows was closely curtained, but several rays of light showed through at the top. Upon the gate, Lee saw, was the name, "The Hermitage."

The sound of a door banging round the side was sufficient evidence that the ill-tempered stranger had entered the house. Nelson Lee was not satisfied, and he stepped back a few feet, saw that the coast was clear, and slipped into the front garden.

Then he edged his way round, keeping to the cover of a thick hedge, until he was in a position to see a small side-door set deeply into the wall.

Here he waited, and within a minute he saw a slight form emerge, pushing a bicycle.

At first he thought that the cyclist was the man he had been following, but this was not the case. The bicycle was different, too. Nelson Lee was quite certain that this newcomer was a boy, but it was too dark to see the boy's features.

The detective remained in the ditch for a full five minutes. He was not interested in the boy. And when he fished his bicycle out and started on the ride home he was very thoughtful.

He completed the journey fairly swiftly, being a rapid cyclist. And he was within the Triangle just in time to see Reginald Pitt emerging from the bicycle-shed.

The Removite was panting heavily and his sallow face was unusually flushed. Instantly Nelson Lee called to mind the boy who had left that dark old house in Bannington. Was there any connection here? The coincidence was certainly remarkable.

"Where have you been, Pitt?" asked Nelson Lee. "I am not your House-master, but you must be aware that the gates were locked up some little time ago!"

"Yes, sir," said Pitt. "I told Warren. He's going to report me to Mr. Stockdale, I believe. I've only been down to the village, sir."

Lee regarded the junior closely.

"Only to the village, Pitt?" he asked.

"That's all, sir."

"Very well; you may go."

Pitt walked off, and Nelson Lee wheeled his own bicycle into the shed and extinguished the lamps. Then he drew a small electric-torch from his pocket, and flashed the light upon the bicycle which Pitt had used. It was the property of another Removite, but Pitt had borrowed it.

Nelson Lee made no mistake about the machine, for the lamps were warm. His examination was quite brief, but there was a hard glint in his eyes when he turned towards the door.

"Why did Pitt lie to me?" he murmured, frowning. "Only to the village," he said. And yet the bicycle bears positive evidence that Pitt has just ridden from Bannington! Hm! I must remember this!"

Lee's deduction had been quite simple. There were distinct mud-splashes—recently made—upon Pitt's machine. The detective had noticed that the road on the outskirts of Bannington had been watered, that strip of surface having just been repaired. The road to Bellton from the school was dusty and dry.

There was nothing whatever to show that Reginald Pitt was the boy who had left the Hermitage, and Nelson Lee did not take that fact for granted. He just stored the affair away in his mind.

But what if it were so?

In what manner could Reginald Pitt be connected with the scoundrels who were uttering base currency?

THE END.

(Look out for another splendid long complete tale of Nipper & Co., of St. Frank's, entitled: "RUCTIONS ON THE RIVER!"—in next week's issue.)

THE CHEMIST'S MISTAKE!

A humorous short story dealing with the adventures of HERLOCK SHOLMES, the World's Worst Detective, recorded by his faithful friend, Dr. JOTSON.

NATURALLY, in a long and eventful career, my good friend, Mr. Herlock Sholmes, has had many and varied adventures.

To my own recollection, he has been asked to seek the missing link, track down pirates—of the wireless variety—"find the lady" at the special request of a gang of racing crooks, and go and eat coke.

Perhaps the strangest request ever put to him was by a little man with a walrus moustache, spectacles, elastic-sided boots on his feet, and beads of perspiration on his face, who accosted us one day in Shaker Street. He dashed up wringing his hands and calling on my famous friend by name.

"Mr. Sholmes! Mr. Sholmes! Stop, I beg of you! Something dreadful has happened! It was the boy's fault! I didn't know there were two bottles—even now he may be laughing himself to death! Find him!"

"My dear sir, calm yourself, I pray," admonished Sholmes gently. "Explain your trouble lucidly."

"It's like this," said the little man excitedly. "By an error, my dispenser put CHL 2U Volux 3T into the prescription instead of CHLL 2Q Volux 3T. Unaware of the mistake, I handed the customer the wrong bottle and— Is this quite clear?"

"As clear as pea-soup," replied Sholmes gently. "You are a chemist by trade, I should judge."

"Amazing!" I gasped, taken aback by my famous friend's perspicacity.

"Yes, I am a chemist, sir," said the little man. "My name is Nathan Dibble, and my shop is in the Marylebone Road. Unless this customer is found quickly, he will take the medicine and meet a horrible fate, and I shall be ruined. The drug which my dispenser put in the prescription by mistake is a poison which causes excessive laughing and choking before completing its deadly work."

"You know nothing of this customer?" rapped out Sholmes.

The chemist wrung his hands.

"Nothing. I have never seen him before. He was a little man with a sandy moustache, and wearing a blue uniform with a peaked cap. Possibly a tramway man."

"Obviously, this is a matter of life and death!" cried Herlock Sholmes. "I will take up the case at once. Return to your shop, Mr. Dibble, and possess your soul in patience. Jotson, hasten to your surgery and fill a hypodermic syringe with the antidote for CHL 2U Volux 3T. I will meet you here again in ten minutes."

When, ten minutes later, I returned to the spot with the hypo-

dermic syringe in my pocket, Sholmes greeted me with a joyful cry.

"Luck was with me, Jotson!" he said, hailing a taxi. "I telephoned the tramways, Post Office, and the Great Central Railway. A man answering exactly to the description of Dibble's customer is employed at Marylebone Station, and lives at No. 9, Primrose Street, Clerkenwell."

A minute later we were swiftly bowling eastward en route to Clerkenwell.

Stopping the taxi outside of the door of No. 9, Primrose Street, a mean thoroughfare, Sholmes leaped out of the cab. The door of the house was open, and our blood was almost frozen by a shrill shriek of laughter from inside the place.

We dashed pell-mell along the narrow passage. Outside the kitchen door a small boy was doubled up and squirming with laughter. His wild shrieks were only equalled by that of another voice raised within the kitchen itself.

With great presence of mind I promptly drew the hypodermic syringe from my pocket and jabbed it in the youngster's neck.

"Yoop!" he yelled.

"You idiot, Jotson!" cried Sholmes, as the youngster began to cry lustily. "You've got the wrong one!"

My idea had been that the boy had imbibed some of the poison intended for his father. But now I rushed into the kitchen.

Stooping by the window was a plump woman, her back towards us. Her feet were dancing frantically on the linoleum, and wild yells, resembling the laughter of a tortured hyena, rose from her throat.

Hurling Sholmes aside, I rushed up and jabbed the hypodermic needle in the back of the unfortunate sufferer.

"Ouch!" yelled the woman, giving vent to a wilder yell than ever. "Oh, my poor nose!"

At first I could not understand the reference to her nose, but then, to my horror, I discovered that her nasal organ was firmly wedged in the window, the cord of which had broken.

"Jotson, what have you done?" cried Herlock Sholmes. "How dare you stab that poor lady! Release her at once!"

After great difficulty Sholmes and I released the woman from her unfortunate predicament. Then I dived under the kitchen table, fearful of the results of my unlucky mistake.

But the lady immediately made a grab at the boy and cuffed his head soundly.

"You bad lad, Willie! I'll teach you to laugh at your poor old

muvver! Orter be ashamed o' yerself, yer did! Take that—and that!"

Explanations were forthcoming as soon as Sholmes had smoothed the lady's ruffled feelings and bandaged her bruised nose with some lint.

From what we were able to learn, the woman's husband, Jim Juggins by name, had brought home a bottle of medicine. But Jim Juggins had gone out again.

"What time did he go, and where?" snapped Sholmes.

"Dunno," replied the lady. "He's only bin gone these last ten minutes."

Sholmes glanced at his watch.

"Come, Jotson!"

Speedily we found ourselves out of the house and in the taxi. A powerful odour of fried fish wafted down Primrose Street.

"Where are we going, Sholmes?" I asked.

"To find Juggins," returned my friend. "It was just on half-past five when he left his home. Where should a man be going at that hour? It is but simple deduction, my dear Jotson. The licensed premises open then, and doubtless Juggins had in mind the Blue Bear at the corner."

The taxi-driver knew the Blue Bear. He stopped and we alighted.

Passing the "jug and bottle" department, Sholmes entered by the swing door just a little farther on.

"Madam," Sholmes said politely to the rosy-faced young lady behind the bar, "can you point out a customer named Jim Juggins to me?"

The girl looked at Sholmes suspiciously. Then, deciding that he wasn't a policeman or the inspector after the dog licence, she replied affably:

"Mister Juggins ain't here now. He's pushed off."

"Where did he go?" demanded Sholmes eagerly.

"He didn't say. But I heered him say somethin' to a pal about 'another at Ma's.' So I expect you'll find him down with Ma Murgatroyd who keeps the Nag and Knocker in the Clerkenwell Road."

Giving the intelligent girl a cigarette picture, Herlock Sholmes booted me through the swing door.

"We haven't a moment to lose, Jotson. At any moment this unfortunate Juggins person may take a dose of that deadly poison."

The taxi-driver knew the Nag and Knocker, and quickly landed us outside the place.

Entering, Sholmes glanced about him in search of the man with the sandy hair and the railway uniform. He was not to be seen. A word with Ma Murgatroyd, the buxom pro-



**THERE'S
THE
REGISTRATION
COUPON
TO SIGN,
CHUMS!**

priestress of this oasis in the Clerkenwell Road, elicited the fact that Jim Juggins, who was well known to her, had not been near the place.

We waited a few minutes, thinking the man might turn up, but he did not appear. During this time Sholmes' massive dome was wrinkled in perplexity. By the savage way he puffed at his great pipe and choked

lighted building, with a purple-and-gold clad attendant outside.

Sholmes borrowed a ten-shilling note from me, bought a couple of ninepenny tickets, and placed the change in his overcoat pocket.

"Now get that hypodermic ready, Jotson!" he whispered.

"I took the syringe from my pocket, ready for instant action, when the stout, purple-clad attendant pounced on me.

"Hi! No, you don't! You can't take that squirt inside. I've seen them little games afore!"

Annoyed, Herlock Sholmes blew a cloud of shag-smoke in the face of the impertinent fellow, who reeled dizzily to the bottom of the marble steps and lay gasping in the roadway.

Then, before the man had recovered, we hurried into the cinema.

The picture, "A Mother of Mars," had just started showing as we halted inside, blinking in the gloom.

As we stood there we became aware

It took a quarter of an hour to pacify Juggins. Apparently, he had not taken any of the medicine he had bought, and he accused me of having smashed the bottle in his pocket.

"But—but you were laughing," I said. "That is the first symptom of the poison you were given in mistake."

"Laughin'!" shouted Juggins. "Of course, I was laughin'! I hadn't got over a-laughin' at Harold Lloyd, who was on jest afore 'A Mother o' Mars' appeared."

Crestfallen, Sholmes and I made our way to the shop of the chemist who had sent us on our quest.

"Sorry, gentlemen," murmured Bibbles, after Sholmes had explained what had happened. "But I found that the right bottle was given to Mr. Juggins, after all. The other bottle fell off the counter and the contents scattered on the floor. The shop cat lapped up the poison and laughed itself to death."

REGISTRATION COUPON.

(Please write very plainly.)

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I declare that I am a reader of "THE POPULAR" and
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THIS COUPON IS ONLY AVAILABLE UNTIL JUNE 30th, 1928.

POPULAR.

JUNE 23rd, 1928.

the other customers with the potent fumes of shag, I knew my friend was striving to unravel the mystery of Juggins' strange non-appearance.

Suddenly he snatched up a copy of the "Clerkenwell Clarion" from a bench and began to peruse it feverishly.

"Eureka!" he cried, throwing the paper aside. "Now I understand why Jim Juggins hasn't shown up here!"

"Why?" I inquired wonderingly. "Because the young lady in the Blue Bear misunderstood the remark of Juggins that she overheard," said Sholmes, leading me outside. "He did not say 'Another at Ma's,' but 'A Mother of Mars.' See?"

"N-no."
"Well, 'A Mother of Mars' happens to be a dramatic film that is showing at present at the Dreamland Cinema farther down the Clerkenwell Road. Let us hasten there!"

Finding the Dreamland Cinema was an easy task. It was a brightly lit building.

of a series of wail, cackling laughs arising from a man in the last seat of the ninepennies. As assault and battery was being committed by the villain on the screen, there was nothing to laugh at.

"The first symptom of the fatal poison!" muttered Sholmes. "Come, Jotson! Have you the hypodermic ready?"

Egged on by my faithful friend, I dashed down the aisle, upsetting a lady usher and two chocolate sellers in my haste.

Grasping the unfortunate member of the audience, I dragged up his coat-sleeve and jabbed the needle into his arm. His laugh changed to a piercing yell.

"Yow-wow! Help! Call 'im orf!" Never shall I forget the scene that followed. Men jumped out of their seats and thumped me on the nose and in the ribs. An old lady poked her gamp into my ear. Then the burly attendant arrived and threw me and Sholmes and Jim Juggins down the marble steps into the Clerkenwell Road.

He stooped down and indicated the pathetic body of the defunct feline.

Taking the hypodermic needle from my pocket, Herlock Sholmes punctured the aggravating chemist in the back with a vicious jab and walked out of the shop.

THE END.

**GRAB
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THE FIRST
BOTTLE
OF INK—
and a pen
—It will**

**only take you a
minute or two
to fill in the
above Coupon.**



THE SLACKER AWAKES!

Lord Mauleverer of the Remove may be every kind of slacker. But when it comes to helping a "large dog" over a stile, Mauly can exert himself manfully!



Mauly's Strange Adventure!

FRANK RICHARDS.

(Author of the famous tales of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, appearing in the "Magnet" every Saturday.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Drawn Blank!

"MAULY!"
"Go away!"
"I say, Mauly, old man—"

"Oh dear!"
Lord Mauleverer's voice, as it came through the door of Study No. 12 in the Remove at Greyfriars sounded very tired.

The door, fortunately, was locked. Mauleverer had spotted Billy Bunter coming up the passage from the stairs, and, with great presence of mind, he had shut his study door and locked it.

It was the only defence against Bunter. When a fellow sported his oak, even Bunter could not get at him.

Bob Cherry, in a similar case, would probably have relied upon his boot. But Mauleverer was too easy-going for that. He hated kicking even Bunter. Besides, kicking anybody required exertion, and Mauly hated exertion. It seemed simpler to lock the door and wait patiently for Bunter to go away.

But Bunter was a stickler. He did not go away. He rapped at the door, then he banged at it, then he kicked it. Then he shouted through the keyhole:

"Mauly! Mauly! Wake up, Mauly!"

"Go away!"
"I've come up specially to see you, Mauly."

There was a feeble chuckle in the study.

"And I've locked my door specially to stop you, old bean."

"Oh, really, Mauly—"
"Go away! There's a good pig, go away!"

"You cheeky ass!"
"Good-bye!"

"There's a letter for you, Mauly—"

"Bow-wow!"
"There is really."

"Leave it in the rack."
"But I've brought it up specially for you."

"Shove it under the door, then!"
"Oh, really, Mauly, you might let a fellow in!"

There was a sound in the study. But it was not a sound of Mauly approaching the door. It was the sound of Lord Mauleverer's tired person sinking to repose upon a luxurious sofa.

"Mauly!"

"Oh, dear! Aren't you gone yet, Bunter?" came Lord Mauleverer's plaintive voice.

"I've got your letter here, you ass!"
"Go away!"

"You chump! It's in your uncle's hand—old Brooke, you know. Ten to one there's a remittance in it, Mauly! Shall I open it for you?"

"Go away!"
"All right, I'll open it, then!" said Bunter, apparently taking Mauly's tired murmur as an answer in the affirmative.

A fat thumb was inserted into the envelope, and it came open.

"I've opened it for you, Mauly."

"You fat rotter!"
"Didn't you ask me to?"

"No!"
"There doesn't seem to be any money in it, Mauly. I say, old Brooke is growing jolly mean."

"Br-r-r-r!"
"I'll read the letter out to you if you like, Mauly."

"You cheeky porpoise!"
"Right-ho! Here goes!" said Bunter, taking that also as an answer in the affirmative.

"Dear Herbert—"

"Shut up!"

"Dear Herbert,—My medical adviser insists that I shall go to Switzerland for a month, and that no correspondence shall be forwarded. Now, my dear boy, I have often spoken to you on the subject of your carelessness and extravagance with money. This will be an opportunity for you to prove that you are able to check this fault in your character. For the period of my absence I shall expect you to keep strictly within your allowance, which will be forwarded, as usual, by Messrs. Moosey, Vine & Moosey, Lincoln's Inn Fields.

"Your affectionate uncle."
"REGINALD BROOKE."

"I say, Mauly, that's rather rotten for you!" said Bunter. "No more tips from nunky, what?"

"Go away!"

"Jolly mean of him, I call it. But you can rely on me, old fellow. I'll lend you my next postal-order—when it comes."

There was a chuckle within.

"Blest if I can see anything to cackle at! I call that a friendly offer," said Bunter. "But, I say, Mauly, I'm rather

hard up this afternoon. Could you lend a fellow half-a-crown?"

"Yaas."

"Shove it under the door, then."

"Rats!"
"Look here, Mauly—"

"Go away!"
And then Billy Bunter rolled away in search of another victim, and his weary lordship was left to repose.

The Owl of the Remove drifted away to the tuckshop, where he found Skinner and Snoop, Stott and Fisher T. Fish enjoying ginger-beer. It was a hot afternoon, and Bunter could have enjoyed ginger-beer immensely. But there was none for Bunter. Mrs. Mimble knew him too well for "tick," and Bunter couldn't pay cash, for the excellent reason that a postal-order, long expected, had not yet arrived. Skinner, requested to stand him "just one," roared with laughter, as if this was the best joke he had heard during the whole term.

Bunter drifted out of the tuckshop again in a morose mood. There was nothing doing, and he was faced by the awful prospect of having nothing to eat or to drink between dinner and tea. A prospect like this was not to be faced so long as any avenue of escape opened.

Bunter rolled back to the School House, and looked for Lord Mauleverer again, as a sort of forlorn hope.

Evidently, if Bunter was to get anything from Mauly, it had to be got before the stony state supervened. This afternoon, probably, was his last chance. After that, one of Bunter's horns of plenty would have run dry.

Spurred on by this reflection, and spurred on still more by the sinking feeling which naturally followed a dinner only large enough for three, Billy Bunter rolled in quest of Lord Mauleverer in a determined mood. If that ass, Mauly, was still locked in his study—

But he wasn't. By an unhappy coincidence—unhappy for Mauly—his lordship was ambling out for a gentle walk in the quad just as Bunter arrived at the House. Mauly believed in taking exercise. He was going to walk right round the quad. After that he felt he would have earned a rest until tea-time.

"I say, Mauly—"

Visions of a gentle stroll departed from Mauleverer as Bunter bore down on him. His lordship broke into un-

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usual and rapid motion, and passed through the gates.

"Mauly, old chap—"

Lord Mauleverer accelerated.

"Mauly!" roared Bunter, as he rolled out in pursuit.

Bunter was getting out of breath. But Lord Mauleverer was his last chance, and he could not allow his last chance to disappear.

His lordship did not turn his head.

"Mauly, I've got your letter here, you know—the one I read to you."

Apparently Lord Mauleverer did not want his letter just then. He walked on swiftly.

Thud, thud, thud, came Bunter's plodding feet in pursuit. The Owl of the Remove was running now.

At the hill in Friardale Lane Bunter's breath gave out. From the top of the rise Lord Mauleverer glanced back and grinned. Bunter had come to a standstill, and was pumping in breath and shaking a fat fist.

With a gentle smile of satisfaction, Lord Mauleverer sauntered on at a leisurely pace.

"Beast!" groaned Bunter.

He was thirstier than ever after that hot run in the sunshine—even more thirsty than hungry. There was a rumble on the dusty road as the carrier's cart came along. A minute later Bunter was hanging on behind the cart.

Lord Mauleverer, sauntering peacefully under the shady trees by the lane, stepped on the grass beside the road as the cart rumbled past him. A fat figure dropped from behind the cart and joined Mauly.

"Oh, gad!" ejaculated his lordship.

Bunter nodded and smiled.

"You didn't hear me calling you, old chap," he said.

"Oh, dear!"

"I came after you to give you your letter, you know."

"Oh, thanks!"

Lord Mauleverer took the letter.

"Going on to the village?" asked Bunter. "I am."

"Then I'm not. I mean to say no."

"Which way are you going?"

"Any way you aren't."

Billy Bunter decided to take this remark as a joke.

Lord Mauleverer moved on dismally. Mauly excelled in polished politeness, and he felt that it was a handicap. Any other fellow at Greyfriars would have kicked Bunter. Lord Mauleverer still nourished a hope of shaking him off without kicking him.

"Nice afternoon for a stroll, Mauly."

"Yaas."

"What about dropping in at Uncle Clegg's?"

"Do."

"You come?"

"No."

"Well, lend me half-a-crown, old chap."

"Can't!"

"Now, look here, Mauly, as an old pal—"

"You read my letter," said Lord Mauleverer. "I've got to be careful with money. I'm cutting down expenses. You among them."

"Look here, you cheeky beast—"

"Good-bye!"

"Don't walk so fast, you rotter!"

Lord Mauleverer grinned and walked faster. He turned into Redclyffe Lane and walked faster still; but Bunter cut off the corner of a field and rejoined him. His hapless lordship seemed doomed to be haunted by Bunter that afternoon, and on a hot afternoon Bunter was a thing that no fellow could stand, in Mauly's opinion. He

broke into a sudden run, and vanished round another corner.

Running, especially in hot weather, was not in Mauly's line at all. It was a final desperate resource. Round the corner the lane was bordered by the wall of a garden surrounding a bungalow. It was a high wall; but, as it happened, a tree grew close to it, and Mauly, without stopping to think—had he stopped to think he would never have been capable of the exertion—grasped the tree and drew himself up into it. Beyond the high wall was a trim garden, untenanted. Reckless of all considerations but Bunter, Mauleverer dropped into the garden.

A minute later pounding footsteps had passed the outside of the high garden wall. They died away in the distance.

Lord Mauleverer grinned. Bunter had passed, unsuspecting. He might try back, perhaps; and for that reason, also because he was feeling completely exhausted by his efforts, Lord Mauleverer sat down in the grass, with his back to the garden wall, and rested.

The bungalow, a good distance away, was almost hidden by trees. The place had a deserted air. Mauleverer hoped that there was nobody at home; or, alternatively, as the lawyers say, that if somebody was at home, that somebody wouldn't mind him taking a rest in the garden. He was too fatigued, after his terrific exertions, to give the matter much thought. He just sat and rested, and smiled a little as he heard a distant voice howl:

"Mauly! I say, Mauly!"

The voice died away, and a gentle smile of happiness overspread Lord Mauleverer's face as he went to sleep.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Unpleasant for Mauly!

"P OOR fellow!"

A compassionate voice aroused Lord Mauleverer from his nap. He opened sleepy eyes, and blinked wearily.

A man was standing before him, looking down at him with a kindly expression of pity. He was a man of about forty, a rather handsome man, with round, brown eyes in which there lurked a peculiar light. He was dressed in ordinary, rather shabby clothes, but there was something in his look that betrayed the soldier of other times.

"Hallo!" said Lord Mauleverer, rather guiltily. He rose to his feet, and blinked at the stranger.

"I am truly sorry for you," said the gentleman, in a pleasant voice. "So young, too."

"Eh?"

"When did it come on?"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Are you likely to explode, do you think?"

This question was asked in a tone of solicitude. Lord Mauleverer stared blankly at the brown-eyed man. It required quite a shock to shake Lord Mauleverer out of his urbane equanimity. But he had received it now.

"Explode!" he repeated faintly.

"Yes. Perhaps I should warn you," said the gentleman thoughtfully, "that I, myself, may go off at any moment."

Lord Mauleverer felt a queer feeling down his spine. He cast a hopeless glance at the high brick wall. Outside, the tree had helped him up. Inside there was no tree. He was shut up in a high-walled garden with a lunatic, and there seemed nobody else at hand.

Mauly was no coward; but he had a horrid feeling all over him just then. There was something extremely alarming in lunacy at close quarters.

"Seeing you here," resumed the gentleman pleasantly, "I naturally supposed that you were in the same boat. Catch on?"

"Ah! Oh, yes!"

"And you are not?"

"Oh, nunno!"

"That's good!" said the gentleman, in a tone of satisfaction. "It is, of course, very unpleasant to be in such a state. One's best friends might be blown to pieces at any moment."

"Oh, gad!"

"Don't go," said the brown-eyed man, as Lord Mauleverer made a movement. "I see so few people now, that it is a pleasure to talk to someone. I am not allowed to go out of this garden. It is a painful restriction; but one must, of course, think of the public. A sudden explosion—you understand, would—"

"I—I understand!" faltered the unhappy Mauleverer.

"My name is Henry Harrington."

The gentleman paused.

"Mine's Mauleverer."

"I am happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Mauleverer," said Mr. Harrington, with a bow. "Pray do not think of going yet. Let us sit down on this seat, and I will tell you about it, if you are interested."

"Oh, yaas! Very!"

Earlier in the afternoon it had seemed to Lord Mauleverer that anything was better than the society of William George Bunter. He now realised that even Bunter would have been preferable to Mr. Harrington.

He sat down on the extreme end of the garden seat. But Mr. Harrington, evidently in a confidential mood, moved up close.

But for the peculiar dancing light in his eyes, and his amazing conversation, no one would have dreamed that the man was not in his right senses. Mauleverer felt a deep compassion for him, and hoped sincerely that he didn't have violent fits.

"It was the shells that did it," said Mauly's new acquaintance. "They used to come over so often, you know. Sometimes I felt that my nervous system would not stand it any longer. You see, I was rather old for soldiering. And I was always sensitive. It was rather a drastic change from concert-halls to battlefields—what?"

"I—I suppose so," said Mauly.

"But of course, a man must do what he can," said Mr. Harrington pleasantly.

"My trouble, however, was peculiar. I became gradually charged with explosive, till it reached such a point that a mere touch might have caused me to explode like a shell. A rare case, I think."

"Very rare, I should say!" gasped Mauleverer.

"It is an odd thing, but I never can remember how it finished out there," said Mr. Harrington. "There seems to be a kind of blank. I was in hospital for some time before I came home to my dear wife. She nursed me with the greatest devotion. It was a blow to me when her doctor ordered her into a nursing-home. But I guessed the reason. It was to place her out of the reach of the explosion when it came."

Lord Mauleverer's tender heart had a throb of pity. He could imagine the poor woman, worn down with watching and nursing, until she had broken down under the strain.

"Hurry!"

A voice called from the direction of the house.

The seat was half-hidden by lilac-

bushes, and Mauleverer could not see who called. Mr. Harrington rose at once.

"I am sorry I must leave you, my young friend," he said regretfully. "I suppose the doctor has come. I will not shake hands with you; it might cause a catastrophe which we should both regret."

With a polite bow, Mr. Harrington disappeared through the lilacs, as the voice from the house called again.

"Oh, gad!" murmured Lord Mauleverer.

He sat non-plussed.

Deep as was his compassion for the unhappy man, he could not help feeling glad that he was gone. He realised, too, that in the circumstances, his presence in the garden would cause annoyance, if it was discovered. But he could not venture out from behind the lilacs; someone was moving in the garden. He could only hope that he would remain unobserved until he had an opportunity of making his escape.

Footsteps approached the lilacs at last, and a murmur of voices. Through an opening, Lord Mauleverer recognised Dr. Pillbury, of Friardale. The doctor was pacing the garden-path slowly, in conversation with a buxom, but rather hard-featured woman.

"Just as usual, sir," she was saying, as they came into the range of Mauleverer's hearing.

"You are never nervous?"

"Oh no, sir! I can manage him well enough, and it never lasts long."

The doctor coughed.

"A sad case, Mrs. Biddulph."

"Yes sir."

There was a pause, and Mauleverer hoped they had passed on. But they had stopped.

"I don't know what's going to be done, sir," said the housekeeper. "I've managed as well as possible. But the rent is only paid up to the end of this month, and there's very little in hand. I've done my best. It's kind of you, sir, to attend him without expecting to be paid. But they're not all like that. The landlord will want his rent; or—"

The doctor sighed.

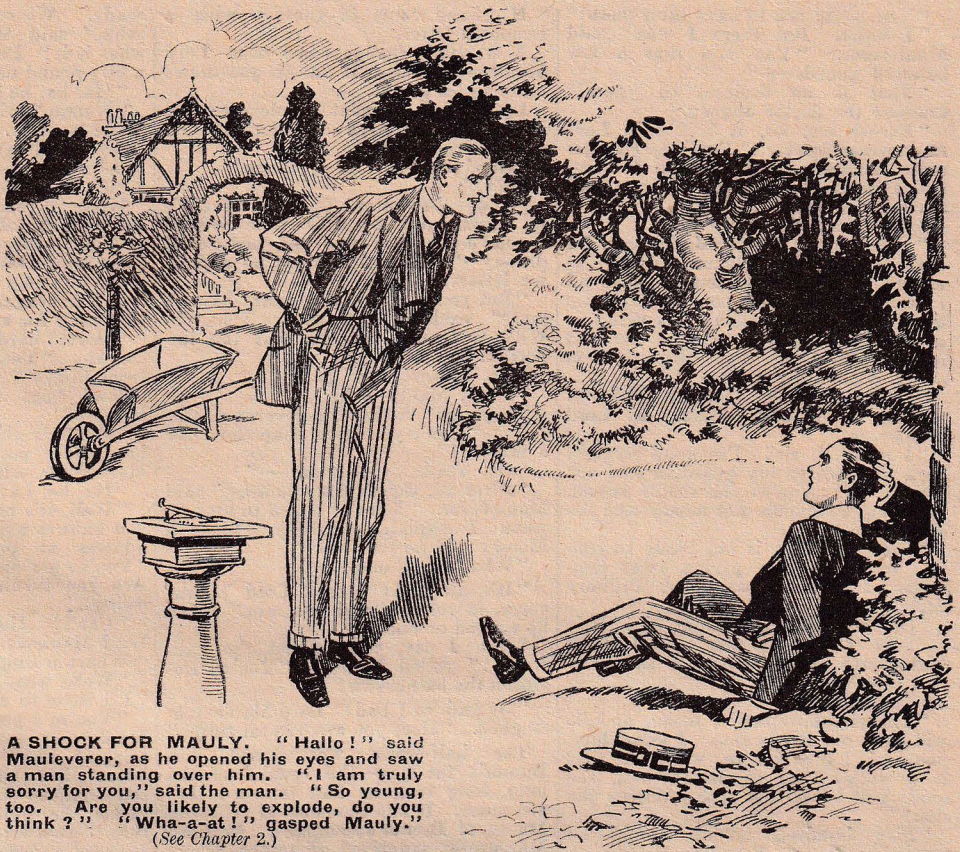
"If one were only a rich man, Mrs. Biddulph."

"The right folks isn't," said Mrs. Biddulph.

"I must see what can be done," said Dr. Pillbury, rubbing his hands together nervously. "If I could only take him in—but the children; and, of course, it's impossible. He requires constant care, too. Of course, there are the national institutions—" He paused.

"Poor Mr. Harrington!" said the housekeeper.

"A few hundred pounds!" murmured the doctor. "But a poor country doctor



A SHOCK FOR MAULY. "Hallo!" said Mauleverer, as he opened his eyes and saw a man standing over him. "I am truly sorry for you," said the man. "So young, too. Are you likely to explode, do you think?" "Wha-a-at!" gasped Mauly." (See Chapter 2.)

might as well wish for a few millions, I suppose. Well, well, we must see."

He drew a bunch of lilac towards him to smell it, and in doing so caught sight of Lord Mauleverer on the seat.

"Bless my soul!" Dr. Pillbury was the school doctor at Greyfriars, and knew most of the fellows by sight. "Mauleverer, what are you doing here?"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Mauly's Way!

LORD MAULEVERER jumped up, his face crimson. Dr. Pillbury was eyeing him sternly.

"I—I—" stammered his lordship, in confusion. Mrs. Biddulph gave him a grim, disapproving look.

"How did you get here?"

"I—I dropped over the wall," confessed Mauly. "It—it was to get away from a bothering chap—"

"You are trespassing here."

"I—I know, sir! Meant no harm."

"You are a young donkey, Mauleverer. I have a great mind to report this to your headmaster!" said Dr. Pillbury sternly. I shall see you off the premises at once. Come with me."

"Yes, sir," said Mauleverer meekly.

He followed the stout medical gentleman. Mrs. Biddulph—still grim and disapproving—produced a key and unlocked a high gate. Lord Mauleverer promptly placed himself outside it.

"I am very sorry, madam," he began. "I hope you will excuse— Oh gad!"

Slam!

The gate closed in Lord Mauleverer's face, almost on his noble nose. He backed away quickly with his apology cut in half, as it were.

Lord Mauleverer found himself in a path that led to the lane. He walked along to the lane, but there he lingered.

As he expected, Dr. Pillbury came away from the house soon afterwards.

The little doctor frowned as he sighted Mauleverer again.

"You still here!" he snapped. "I was waiting to see you, doctor."

"Nonsense!"

Dr. Pillbury walked on sharply towards the village. Lord Mauleverer, not to be rebuffed, walked by his side.

"I really must speak to you, sir," said Mauleverer. "I'm sorry I butted into that show as I did—only not sorry really—"

"What do you mean?"

"Because I want to help, sir."

"Eh?"

Dr. Pillbury blinked at the school-boy earl. Mauleverer coloured under his gaze.

"You see, sir, I saw the chap. He told me his name was Harrington—"

"Oh! You saw him?"

"Yaas. He's quite potty, isn't he?"

"Potty," said Dr. Pillbury, in a tone of grave rebuke, "is not the name of any complaint I have become acquainted with during the course of my practice as a medical man."

"I—I mean, a—a bit loose in the tiles—"

"What?"

"Gone in the crumpet, I mean!" gasped Mauleverer.

"Boy!"

"Well, I—I thought—"

"Mr. Harrington," said the doctor, "is one of the numerous sufferers from the war. What he is suffering from now is the result of severe shell-shock."

"I—I hope he'll recover some time, sir."

"It is possible."

"I never meant to listen, of course, sir," said Mauleverer. "But where I was I couldn't help hearing what you said to the nurse, or whatever she is—"

"You ought not to have been there!"
 "I know. But there I was," said Mauleverer. "You said that a few hundred pounds—"

"That is no business of yours!" snapped the doctor angrily.
 "Excuse me, sir, it is!" said Lord Mauleverer firmly. "You see, I've got more hundreds of quids than I want, and I'm goin' to shell out a few to see that chap through."

"Wha-a-a-at!"
 "You see, sir," said Mauleverer, "I shall be a giddy millionaire when I'm of age. My guardian lets me have all I want now. That poor chap is up against it, and he told me his wife's in a nursing-home. If a few hundred pounds would see them through, I'm going to hand it out. See?"

"Bless my soul!" said Dr. Pillbury, standing still, and blinking at Lord Mauleverer.

"I mean it, sir! I'm goin' straight back to write to my guardian and ask him for it. You're the man's friend, and you can handle the money and see him through."

"Your guardian is not likely to consent to a schoolboy giving away hundreds of pounds," said Dr. Pillbury dryly.

"Oh, you don't know him, sir! He's a jolly old sportsman," said Lord Mauleverer confidently. "I shall tell him the circus—"

"The what?"
 "The circumstances, I mean, and he will shell out like a shot. I know him, you see. I give you my word, sir, that in a week's time at the furthest, the quids will be on the spot. What's the sum?"

"Five hundred pounds would be ample," said Dr. Pillbury, staring at Lord Mauleverer. "Half that sum would relieve Harry's poor wife of all anxiety till her illness is over. But it is impossible, boy—quite impossible! Your kind impulse does you credit; but it is quite out of the question!"

"Rot! I—I mean, it's all plane sailin', doctor. You'll handle the money for them if I get it, won't you?"

"If!" said Dr. Pillbury grimly.
 "That settles it, sir! It's a go!"

And Lord Mauleverer raised his straw hat to Dr. Pillbury, and walked off towards Greyfriars. The good little doctor stood staring after him for several minutes blankly.

"Bless my soul!" he said at last.

He walked away to the village, with a thoughtful brow, but he was looking relieved. Amazing as Lord Mauleverer's proposition was—unusual, at least—his earnestness had impressed the medical gentleman.

Lord Mauleverer looked in very cheery spirits as he walked home to Greyfriars. When Billy Bunter, lurking near the school gates, joined him, Mauly did not even desire to kick him. He was feeling obliged to Bunter. But for Bunter he would never have trespassed in the bungalow garden, and would never have learned of that curiously distressful case, which could be so easily relieved from his superabundance of cash. Lord Mauleverer was feeling pleased with himself and things generally—even with Bunter.

"I say, Mauly—" murmured the Owl of the Remove.

"Well, old bean?" said Mauly genially.

"What about that half-crown?" asked Bunter, much relieved by his lordship's genially.

"Well, you've earned it, haven't you?" said Lord Mauleverer. And he felt in his pocket for half-a-crown.

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His hand came in contact with a crumpled letter.

A startling change came over Lord Mauleverer's face. It was his guardian's letter in his pocket.

Up to that moment Mauleverer had completely forgotten the letter. He remembered it now.

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated.
 "Eh?"

"That—that letter! Oh gad! Nunky's in Switzerland by this time"—Lord Mauleverer's face was the picture of dismay—"and—and he's left no address for letters!"

"But you've got half-a-crown, haven't you?" exclaimed Bunter. That, to William George Bunter, was the important point.

"Oh, bother!"
 "I say, Mauly—"

"Dry up!" roared Mauleverer wrathfully. "Can't you let a chap think for a minute?"

"Oh, really, you know—"

"After all, there's the solicitors," said Mauleverer. "They're bound to play up when I explain. Moosey, Vine & Moosey will do the trick!"

"What the thump—"

"It's all right!" said Lord Mauleverer, in relief—"right as rain!" And he walked on cheerily.

"But, I say, what about the half-crown?" yelled Bunter. "You've forgotten the half-crown!"

"By gad, so I had!" Lord Mauleverer laughed. "Here you are, old fat tulip!"

The half-crown was tossed into Bunter's fat paw—the reward of the long, long trail he had followed that afternoon. It had the effect of relieving Mauly of Bunter's company. As Lord Mauleverer sauntered on to the School House, Billy Bunter made a dive for the tuckshop, where he was soon consuming refreshments, liquid and solid, to the exact value of two shillings and sixpence.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Wanted: £500!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. came tramping into Study No. 1 in the Remove, ruddy and cheery from the cricket. Wharton and Nugent, the owners of the study, brought in parcels with them from the school shop. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were guests to tea. There was another guest already in the study. The elegant figure of Lord Mauleverer reclined in the armchair. Mauly was a welcome guest in any study, and the Famous Five greeted him cheerily.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Tea in two ticks, Mauly."

Lord Mauleverer rose gracefully.

"I haven't exactly come to tea, old bean," he remarked.

"Had your tea?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then you've come to tea," said Harry Wharton decidedly. "Sit down, Mauly."

"Thanks! But I really came here for some help in writin' a letter. That will do after tea, though. Puttin' off things saves a lot of worry."

"And causes a lot sometimes," said Harry. "Do you want to catch the post with the letter?"

"Yaas."

"Important?"

"Yaas."

"Well, don't you know that the collection will be taken before we've finished tea?"

"Yaas."

"Fathead! I'll help you with the letter while the other chaps get tea

ready. We can have a corner of the table," said Wharton. "Now, then, what is it? Dear uncle, I'm in want of a fifty-pound note by return of post—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Nunno," said Lord Mauleverer. "I'd better explain. No. You read this letter. It'll save the trouble of talkin'. Read it out aloud, in case I've forgotten what's in it. See?"

Wharton read out the letter from Sir Reginald Brooke. The Famous Five all grinned; they could not help that. They sympathised with Mauly; but they could not help grinning at the idea of that extravagant youth being on short allowance for a whole month.

"Horrid hard lines," said Bob, with a chuckle. "You'll have to borrow money from Fisher T. Fish, Mauly. He lends fellows bobs at threepence a week interest."

"Bunter's already offered to lend me his next postal-order," said Lord Mauleverer, with a smile.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's not a letter to your uncle you want to write, as you don't know his address at present," said Wharton. "You've got another uncle—Braithwait. Are you turning to him as a second string?"

"Can't! He's in Egypt," groaned Lord Mauleverer.

Wharton dipped a pen in the ink.

"Well, what's the game?" he asked. "I'll write to anybody you like."

"You're a good chap, Wharton," said Mauleverer earnestly. "You'd hardly imagine what a fag it is to write a letter. But this is rather a special job, too. Nunky bein' away, I've got to tackle the solicitors. But I feel sure they'll jib a bit when I ask them for five hundred pounds in a lump. Sort of feel they will, you know."

"Five hundred what!" roared Bob Cherry, looking round from the frying-pan, into which he was breaking eggs.

"Pounds," said Lord Mauleverer innocently.

"You want five hundred pounds?" asked Harry Wharton blankly.

"Yaas."

"Buying a motor-car to keep in the bike-shed?" asked Johnny Bull.

"No. I'm not buyin' anythin'."

"Standing a big spread in the Rag?" asked Nugent. "You could do that on less than five hundred quid—considerably less."

"Nunno. It's to give away."

"Give away!" shrieked the Famous Five.

"Yaas."

"You're thinking of giving away five hundred pounds?" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Yaas."

"Then you'd better think again," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "It's quite certain that your uncle's lawyer won't hand you five hundred pounds to give away."

"You can put your shirt on that!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Well, it's my own money, you know, when I come of age," said Lord Mauleverer.

"That's why you can't handle it till you come of age—so that you can't chuck it away, you ass. My hat! It looks to me that if you get hold of your money at twenty-one, you'll be as hard up as Bunter at twenty-two," said the captain of the Remove.

"Can't! Lots of it is entailed," said Lord Mauleverer cheerfully. "I dare say the rest will go. Why shouldn't it? I've read somewhere that it's patriotic to put money in circulation. Anyhow, I've got to have that five hundred; but I want to word the letter carefully, so as not to give the legal gent too much of a shock. Suppose we tell him that it's

for a patriotic purpose? That ought to touch his heart."

"Solicitors don't have hearts, fat-head."

"Oh gad! Suppose we tell him it's to help a lame dog over a stile?"

"He would be more likely to suggest drowning the dog," grinned Bob Cherry.

Lord Mauleverer looked worried and distressed.

"Well, you see, I've got to have the tin," he said. "That's the point we've got to start from. How would you word it, Wharton? You're an awfully clever chap. How would you get five hundred pounds off a lawyer?"

"The only way is to wait for him when he's going to the bank, and knock him on the head, I imagine."

"Oh, great Scott! I can't do that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't recommend that method," said the captain of the Remove, laughing. "But I fancy there isn't any other. Still, we might try telling him what you want the money for. Sir Reginald Brooke may have left him instructions to let you have anything that you actually need."

"But I can't tell him what it's for. I'm keepin' that dark."

"Oh, my hat!"

"But I've promised it," said Lord Mauleverer. "Surely that ought to be good enough. He wouldn't expect me to break a promise, would he?"

"He wouldn't expect you to keep it, if you've been idiot enough to promise somebody five hundred pounds," said Wharton. "You won't get five shillings out of Moosey, Vine & Moosey on those lines."

"Not five farthings, I imagine," grinned Johnny Bull.

"The forthcomefulness of the cash is not probable," remarked Hurree Singh, shaking his dusky head.

Lord Mauleverer gave a groan.

"Fancy a chap not bein' able to handle his own money when he wants it bad!" he said.

"Jolly good thing for you, I should say, if you go around promising people five hundred pounds at a time."

"It's a very special case, you know. I don't do it every day," said Lord Mauleverer.

"Ha, ha! I suppose not. But can't you tell us the circumstances?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Well, I can't mention names. A chap is up against it, awfully bad. I've weighed in to see him through. Forgot all about nunky bein' away, at the moment," said Lord Mauleverer ruefully. "But a promise is a promise. Besides, I want to do it, promise or no promise. It's up to me, as I've got the dabs. See?"

Wharton gnawed the handle of his pen. He was quite well acquainted with Mauleverer's easy-going ways, and the way in which he was plundered by unscrupulous persons. Lord Mauleverer was rich; but it was quite certain that, if he had not had unusual resources behind him, he would soon have been the poorest fellow at Greyfriars. He hated saying "No" so much, and found it so much easier to say "Yes," that it was not at all uncommon for him to be victimised. But, so far as Wharton could see, somebody was "milking" the millionaire to an unusual tune this time, or attempting to do so. Without knowing the circumstances, Wharton certainly would not have approved of parting with such a sum of money—had Mauly been able to do so.

But it was fairly certain that Mauly wouldn't be able to do so. Messrs. Moosey, Vine & Moosey were extremely unlikely to hand out the sum at his request. If the lawyers were satisfied,

however, it was not for Wharton to criticise, so he decided that he would do his best for Mauly in the way of letter-writing.

"The eggs are done!" suddenly announced Bob Cherry.

"Keep 'em warm," said Harry. "We've got to catch the post with this letter, or Mauly won't get his five hundred pounds to-morrow."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Harry Wharton concentrated his attention upon the composition of that exceedingly difficult letter. Orpheus, with his lute, drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek; but it was much more difficult for a letter from Study No. 1 in the Remove to draw five hundred pounds from a canny firm of solicitors in Lincoln's Inn Fields. The captain of the Remove resolved to do his best—but he did not feel hopeful.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Sad Case!

LORD MAULEVERER leaned back in the armchair and reposed while Wharton was busy with pen and ink. He had greater faith in Wharton's powers of composition than in his own; and he needed rest, too, after his uncommon exertions that afternoon. He was content to watch—Mauly always was content to watch anything. He preferred cricket to football, because it was so much more comfortable to watch it from a recumbent position in the grass.

"Well, how's this?" asked Wharton at last.

"Read it out, old bean."

The juniors all listened with interest as the captain of the Remove read the letter out:

"Dear Sir,—I hear from my uncle and guardian, Sir Reginald Brooke, that his medical adviser has ordered him to Switzerland, and that no correspondence is to be forwarded. In these circumstances, I am addressing you. I am in need of the sum of £500 for a very special purpose. I am assured that my uncle would let me have the money if he were here, and I take full responsibility if you will be kind enough to advance this sum.—Thanking you in anticipation, yours truly,

"MAULEVERER."

"Splendid!" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer. "Begad! How do you do these things, Wharton? You ought to be able to get a job in an office, by gad!"

"Well, that's the best I can do," said Harry. "It's no good expecting the money, old chap."

"Oh, rot! They're bound to send it," said Lord Mauleverer. "If they don't, I'll ask nunky, when he comes home, to sack the lot, and get some new solicitors."

"More likely to sack them if they do!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Bow-wow! Put it in an envelope, Wharton, if you've got one. Let's catch the post with it!"

"You've got to write it out first, ass. My fist won't do."

"Sure?" asked his lordship.

"Fathead!"

"Wouldn't it do if I just signed it?"

"Just about as good, I dare say—but you've got to write it, all the same. Here's the pen. Sit up!"

Lord Mauleverer suppressed a groan and sat up. But the memory of the shell-shocked man at the bungalow bucked him, and he made the necessary effort. Wharton's composition was copied out, word for word, duly signed and sealed, and Bob Cherry ran down to the letter-box with it.

"Caught the collection?" asked Lord Mauleverer, when Bob came back, in about a minute and a half.

"Yes."

"Oh, good! That's off my mind, then," said Lord Mauleverer, in relief. "They ought to get it in the morning. If they catch the return post, when shall I get their answer, Wharton?"

"Next morning."

"Well, after all, that would be soon enough. Might have telegraphed, though," said Lord Mauleverer. "I never thought of that. Still, perhaps they wouldn't have sent the money in a telegram."

"The perhapsfulness is terrific!" "I'm awfully obliged to you, Wharton!" said his lordship gratefully. "If ever I can do anything for you, just mention it. Somethin' I can do sitting down, if possible. Sorry I've been keepin' you fellows waitin' for your tea!"

"That's all right!" said Bob Cherry. "We've had the entertainment for nothing!"

"The entertainment?" repeated Lord Mauleverer.

"Yes. You're as good as a comic film, you know, if you only knew it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

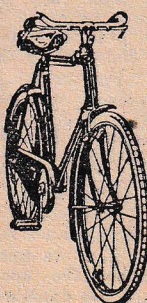
"Oh, gad!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Anyhow, I'm jolly glad it will be off my mind now."

And his lordship devoted himself to eggs and ham and tea. Conversation in Study No. 1 turned on cricket, a subject extremely interesting to Harry Wharton & Co. at that season of the year. On that subject his lordship did not enthuse, and after tea he took his leave, leaving cricket "jaw" still going strong in Study No. 1.

In the innocence of his heart Mauly imagined that the five hundred pounds was already as good as in his pockets; but then he hadn't taken into account the cautious and businesslike firm of Messrs. Moosey, Vine & Moosey. That promise of Mauly's was destined to cause him a lot of anxiety in the near future.

THE END.

(An unpleasant surprise awaits Mauly in next week's long complete tale of Greyfriars. You must not miss: "THE WORD OF A SLACKER!")



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ALL THROUGH BAGGY TRIMBLE!

There's a rift in the lute in Study No. 9—Ernest Levison is no longer on speaking terms with his chums—and all through Baggy Trimble, the mischief-maker!



Parted Chums!

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

(Author of the well-known stories of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's, appearing in the "Gem" every Wednesday.)



THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Shadow of Shame!

"FRANK!"

"Trot in, kid!"

"Welcome as the flowers in May!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Monty Lowther spoke with great heartiness, as Frank Levison, of the Third Form of St. Jim's, appeared in their study doorway.

Their heartiness was so great, in fact, that it even seemed a little forced.

The Terrible Three of the Shell evidently wanted Frank to understand that they were feeling very kind and cordial towards him. They wanted to leave no doubt upon that point.

Levison minor came very slowly into the study.

His face, usually one of the cheeriest in the Third, was pale and troubled.

The Terrible Three felt—and looked—uncomfortable. But they summoned up their most hospitable smiles.

"I want to speak to you fellows," Frank said.

"Go it!" murmured Tom Merry.

"About my major."

Still more uncomfortable looked the Terrible Three. Levison major was about the last subject they desired to discuss with Levison minor. Levison of the Fourth was in disgrace with his House; and the Shell fellows could not see that talking about it would improve the matter—especially with his young brother.

But Frank was obviously determined. "Are you fellows up against Ernest, like all the rest?" he asked.

"Hem!"

"Only a few days ago you were friendly enough," said Frank bitterly. "You were saying that Ernie won the match against Greyfriars—"

"That's so," said Tom, glad to find one topic, at least upon which he could say something in favour of Ernest Levison. "He played a wonderful game, and did more than any other chap to help us beat Greyfriars."

"Well, then—"

"But—"

"But what?"

"Nothing!"

"Put it plain!" said Frank bitterly.

"You're down on Ernie because of a rotten yarn Trimble has spread about him."

"It isn't that!" said Manners. "Nobody would take the word of Trimble of the Fourth."

"No fear!" said Lowther.

"Nobody else has anything to say against him, only Trimble!" persisted Frank.

"It isn't that," muttered Tom. "I'd rather not speak about it, Frank. Whatever we may think about your major, it doesn't apply to you. Nobody is likely to think you're tarred with the same brush."

Frank's face flamed crimson.

"Then you believe it all?" he burst out passionately.

Tom Merry shifted in his chair with great discomfort. He was sorry for Frank—sorry from the very bottom of his heart. He knew what a blow this was to the fag who almost idolised his elder brother. But it could not be helped. He could not pretend to think what he did not think, even for the unhappy fag's sake.

"Do you believe it?" demanded Frank.

"What's a fellow to believe?" demanded Tom, in his turn. "Don't be a young ass, Frank!"

"And you're going back on Ernest because of a slandering cad like Baggy Trimble!" said Frank Levison contemptuously.

"Nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Tom, beginning to lose patience a little.

"Trimble's only repeated what he heard from a Greyfriars fellow—"

"Bunter, of Greyfriars!" said Frank. "Another rotter, like Trimble himself!"

"Well, I don't think much of Billy Bunter, from what I've seen of him," admitted Tom Merry. "But he was at Greyfriars when Levison was in the Lower Fourth there, and I suppose he knows why your major left. Your major knows himself, I suppose, anyhow. If Bunter has told lies—"

"He has!"

"Well, then, all your brother has to do is to prove it, and everybody will be glad to believe him."

There was a short silence.

"You see, kid," said Manners kindly, "nobody was glad to hear this about your major. Everybody was sorry, and shocked. Everybody thought it was a rotten yarn that he would knock on the head at once. But he hasn't knocked it on the head."

"How could he?" muttered Frank. "He's denied it."

"Yes; we know he's denied that he robbed the headmaster of Greyfriars, and was expelled for it," said Manners. "But a mere denial isn't enough for an accusation like that. Trimble has offered to repeat his words before the Housemaster. All Levison has to do

is to go with him to Mr. Railton and

ask for an inquiry. Any other fellow would do it at once. He has a right for the truth to be known, and a word from the Greyfriars headmaster would be enough. I suppose you know that Dr. Locke, of Greyfriars, would tell the truth about it, if he were asked?"

"Of course!" muttered Frank.

"Let him be asked, then," said Manners. "Why doesn't Levison let the matter be referred to him? He knows, and would tell the truth."

Frank Levison stood silent.

"Ernie won't," he said at last. "He doesn't want to, I suppose."

Manners shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't want to shake your faith in your brother, kid," began Tom Merry.

"You couldn't!" said Frank disdainfully.

"All the better," said Tom, kindly and patiently. "But other fellows haven't your faith in him. How can they have? A fellow is accused of something rotten enough to make a fellow's flesh creep—stealing! He doesn't choose to take the easy and straightforward method of clearing himself. Dash it all, kid, what do you expect fellows to believe? Even Clive, his own chum, is against him. He won't speak to him now! That leaves only Cardew, who only half believes in him!"

Frank Levison turned and went to the door. He did not speak another word.

The chums of the Shell looked at one another in great discomfort. They knew why Frank had turned away without speaking.

He could not trust himself to speak, lest his voice should break, and he should begin to "blub."

The door closed behind Levison minor.

"Rotten!" growled Manners.

"Beastly!" said Tom Merry. "Dash it all! I like to see the poor kid keep faith in his brother. But—"

"But what a rotter his brother must be to bring this on him!" said Manners, knitting his brows. "Of course, it's true about Levison. If he could clear himself he would do so for Frank's sake, at least. He's fond of Frank."

"Of course he would!"

"Poor old Frank!"

And with that the uncomfortable subject dropped in Study No. 10 in the Shell.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Very Awkward Indeed!

GWEAT Scott!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that exclamation in tones of dismay. His noble face was full of consternation.

He had a letter in his hand, and it was evidently that letter which had caused his consternation. Blake and Herries and Digby, Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther had gathered round Gussy as he opened the letter. For they had seen the handwriting on the envelope, and recognised the hand of Ethel Cleveland—Gussy's cousin Ethel—and any epistle from cousin Ethel had an unfailing interest for the heroes of the School House.

"Anything up?" asked Tom Merry.
"Yaas, wathah!"
"Bad news?" exclaimed Blake.
"Fwightful!"
"Ethel isn't ill, is she?" exclaimed Dig.

"Not that I am awah of, Dig."
"Good! Isn't she coming, after all?"

"Yaas, she is comin'."
"Then what on earth's the row?" demanded Blake testily. "What are you looking like a boiled owl for?"

"I was not awah that I bore the wemotest weseblance to a boiled owl, Blake."

"Cough it up, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther. "What's the trouble?"

"It is weally feahful!" said Arthur Augustus. "Ethel is comin' down to-morrow aftahnoon—"

"Good!"
"Is that what you're grousing about?" demanded Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"
"Well, you're a nice, affectionate sort of cousin, I don't think!" commented Blake. "Ethel would be pleased to hear this."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Don't you worry about Ethel," said Tom Merry. "We'll look after Ethel for you, Gussy. I dare say Figgins of the New House will help."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Pway don't cackle, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, in great distress. "I weally do not know what is to be done. It's a fwightfully awkward posish. You see, Ethel has been stayin' with a fwien—"

"What about it, ass?"
"Her fwien is goin' on a visit to her aunt at Lexham, and—"

"Why shouldn't she?"
"There is no weason why she shouldn't, Blake, that I am awah of. In fact, I think it will probably be vewy nice for her aunt. But as she is passin' through Wayland she is goin' to call in at St. Jim's for an hour in the aftahnoon, and Ethel is comin' with her."

"Well?" said the juniors together.
"Then they are goin' on to Lexham togetah by twain," said Arthur Augustus. "You see how feahfully awkward it is."

"Blest if I do!" said Manners. "I suppose Ethel's friend doesn't bite, does she?"

"Eh? Of course not."
"If she's Ethel's friend I suppose she's quite nice?"

"Yaas, wathah! But it's fwightfully awkward," said the distressed swell of St. Jim's. "It is simply feahful, you know."

"How?" yelled Blake.
"I mean, considewin' the terms we are on with Levison."

"Levison?"
"Yaas, that uttah wottah Levison."

Arthur Augustus rubbed his noble nose reminiscently. "How can we have him to tea?"

"We can't!" said Blake.
"And we jolly well won't!" said Herries, with a grunt. "That doesn't matter, Ethel won't want to see him."

"Well, we were jolly friendly with Levison when Ethel was here before," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "But Ethel needn't be told anything. Everybody can't come to tea, anyhow. She won't be surprised not to see Levison. We weren't so awfully pally as all that."

"Of course not!" said Blake. "Gussy's simply talking out of the back of his neck."

"But Levison will have to come, somehow," said Arthur Augustus.
"What utter rot!"

"I tell you Ethel won't notice whether he's here or not!" roared Jack Blake.
"Pwobably not, Blake, but his sister is bound to notice."

The juniors jumped.
"His sister?"
"Yaas, Dowis, you know."

"Doris?" said Tom Merry & Co. blankly.

A light dawned upon their minds.
"Is it Doris Levison who's coming down with Ethel?" shrieked Blake.

"Yaas," said Arthur Augustus.
"My only summer chapeau!" said Tom Merry. "Doris now!"

"Of course, Gussy couldn't tell us that at first," said Blake. "He has to keep that for the finish!"

"Weally, Blake—"
"What on earth's going to be done?" said Monty Lowther. "If Doris Levison comes here she can't be allowed to know a word about—about what we've all learned of her brother. She can't know! I don't suppose she even knows he was expelled from Greyfriars, let alone what he was sacked for. I don't care what her brother is; she's a thumping nice girl—"

"Yaas, wathah!"
"I wouldn't let her get a hint of it for worlds," said Tom Merry hastily.

"But—"
"But how's it to be avoided?" said Blake.

"Goodness knows!"
"It is weally a fwightfully awkward posish," said Arthur Augustus distressfully. "Dowis would be feahfully hurt. She might cw." Arthur Augustus' noble face became more distressed than ever at the bare idea of tears in Doris Levison's pretty eyes.

"It's weally awful, you know. I would wathah swallow Levison, stealin' an' all, than make a gal cw."

"I—I suppose we can't make it up with Levison—for one occasion only?" murmured Manners.

"We can't touch Levison with a ten-foot pole!" growled Herries. "I know I'm not going to be civil to a thief!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"
"Goodness knows what's to be done!" said Tom Merry, with a worried brow. "Anything is better than hurting Doris' feelings."

"Yaas, wathah!"
"But—but—" Tom rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

It was a distressful problem for Tom Merry & Co. to solve. The trouble was that they simply couldn't solve it. Doris Levison was coming—in innocent unsuspectingness of what had happened at St. Jim's. Her last visit had shown her Ernest Levison on the most cordial terms with Tom Merry & Co. Now he was cut by ail the

House, excepting, perhaps, Cardew, turned down even by rotters like Racke and Crooke.

If Doris had been coming alone to see her brother, Tom Merry & Co. could have arranged engagements elsewhere for the occasion. But she was coming with cousin Ethel, so engagements elsewhere were out of the question.

The two girls, naturally, would be together during the visit. And it was scarcely feasible for Tom Merry & Co. to look after Ethel, and Levison to look after his sister, without speaking to one another. The rift in the lute would be apparent at once.

Doris would ask Ernest or Frank what the trouble was. She would learn the facts; they could scarcely be hidden. And then—

Somehow, anyhow, the knowledge of what her brother was had to be kept dark somehow. But how? That was the problem to which Tom Merry & Co. could find no answer.

And, with that worry on their minds, the chums of the School House could not help their feelings towards Levison growing more and more bitter. Even in the old days, when Levison of the Fourth had been the black sheep of his House, he had never been quite so obnoxious to Tom Merry & Co. Somehow Doris was to be spared. But every member of the Co. felt a deep and almost overpowering desire to lay violent hands on Levison of the Fourth, and give him the hiding of his life.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

"Old Levison Again!"

LEVISON of the Fourth, now the outcast of the school, had a thoughtful frown upon his face when he came into the Form-room the following morning.

He did not exchange a word or a glance with any other fellow in the Fourth.

Cardew glanced at him, but he was careful not to meet Cardew's eyes, and the dandy of the Fourth shrugged his shoulders.

It was not his ostracism that Levison was thinking about. He had hardened his heart on that subject; he seemed, indeed, to derive some sort of a dark, sulky satisfaction from his outcast position. But the thought of his sister Doris touched him more nearly.

He had expected that Doris would call at St. Jim's on her way to Lexham when the date was fixed for her visit to Aunt Catherine. He had not, of course, foreseen that she would do so in company with Ethel Cleveland. That was unexpected, and he had learned of it by the same post that brought Ethel's letter to Arthur Augustus.

He had had plenty of food for thought since then. He had only mentioned to Frank that Doris was coming, and cautioned him to say no word that would enlighten the girl as to the new state of affairs. Not that Frank needed the warning. He was not likely to utter a syllable to let Doris know that all the school believed her brother to be a thief, expelled from his old school for a despicable crime.

Mr. Lathom found serious fault with Levison in class that morning.

It transpired that he had done no preparation the previous evening; and, added to that, he was absent-minded, careless, and—as soon as he was found fault with—impertinent.

All the Fourth noted that he was the "old Levison" once more—cool, cynical, THE POPULAR.—No. 491.

reckless of consequences. Some of them surmised that his reform had been, after all, a cunning piece of camouflage, and that Levison had never really changed at heart; or that he had grown tired of decent ways, and was glad to drop back into his old manners and customs.

Of late, Mr. Lathom had found Levison an excellent pupil. He had great powers, if he chose to exert them—and of late he had chosen. Now he seemed to have dropped back all at once into his very worst ways.

After classes Levison left the Form-room with the rest—unconscious, apparently, of their existence, without a word or a glance for any of the Fourth.

Cardew, however, was not to be ignored. He joined Levison in the corridor with a cheery, smiling face, and walked by his side.

"You played the goat in the Form-room, old bean!" he remarked.

No answer.

"What on earth did you want to get Mr. Lathom's rag out for?"

Levison did not answer or look at him. He walked on, and Cardew, with a whimsical grin, walked with him. Sidney Clive made no motion towards his old chum. He was more than fed-up with Levison's new peculiar mood. But Cardew, somehow, was displaying a patience that few would have suspected him of possessing. He was seeing Levison as he had never seen him before—he was making acquaintance, as it were, with the "old Levison," and he found the "old Levison" distinctly interesting. This, he knew, was what Ernest Levison had been like in the older days, before Cardew had come to St. Jim's. And, strangely enough, he found himself more attracted to Levison now than he had ever been before, though perhaps it was not strange with a fellow of Cardew's erratic nature.

Cardew, with all his outward mask of nonchalant indifference, was as sensitive as any fellow at St. Jim's. But he was taking ruthless rebuffs from Levison with smiling patience.

"I understand that Miss Doris is comin' this afternoon, old bean," he said, as they went into the quadrangle.

"No business of yours, that I can see!" said Levison, breaking his grim silence at last.

"That's why I'm buttin' in. My little way, you know," said Cardew cheerily. "Won't it be rather awkward—considerin'?"

"Yes."

"Can I do anythin' to help?"

"No."

"Dear man!" said Cardew, as Levison, with that curt reply, turned and walked away from him.

He looked round for Tom Merry & Co. The Shell were not yet out, but he spotted Blake & Co. in the quad and bore down on them. They did not regard him very kindly—Blake and Herries and Dig, at all events. His persistent cordiality towards the barred junior irritated them. But Cardew seemed impervious to grim looks.

"There's going to be a giddy visitor this afternoon," he remarked casually.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Would you mind keeping all your conversation for Levison, Cardew?" asked Jack Blake.

"Do I bore you?" sighed Cardew.

"If you talk to that fellow you ought to keep clear of other fellows who don't care for thieves."

"Yes, rather!" said Herries.

"What's the good of arguin'?" said Cardew. "But about the giddy visitor. I suppose you agree with me that Miss Levison oughtn't to hear anythin' of this little trouble?"

"Of course. She won't hear anything from us," grunted Blake.

"Good! If you fellows find it possible to stoop a little off your high moral perch for one occasion only, you might try to keep Miss Doris from seein' that there is anythin' on."

"Yaas, certainly; but as Ethel is comin' with her—"

"What?" ejaculated Cardew.

"Cousin Ethel and Miss Dowis are comin' togethah. It is a fwightfully awkward posish."

"Great Scott!" Cardew drew a deep breath. "Then you fellows will have to take Levison up for this afternoon, at least."

"We can't!" said Blake.

Cardew's sleepy eyes woke up with a glitter.

"Are you goin' to let Doris Levison see her brother an' outcast?"

"It's his own fault!"

"It's not her fault!"

"I know that," said Blake savagely; "and we're bothered enough about it, without you chipping in, Cardew. What the dickens do you care, anyhow? You don't care for anything but your precious self."

"Right on the wicket, dear old bean! My best friend is named Ralph, and he's a chap I like immensely," said Cardew urbanely. "Still, there's such a thing as courtesy. You can't let Miss Doris see you scowlin' at her brother. You can't tell her the facts. If she's with Ethel, you can't help bein' with her, an' Levison will be with her. What a jolly party!"

"Oh, dry up!"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders, and walked away. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther came out of the School House, and there was a discussion between the Terrible Three and Study No. 6. But the problem remained unsolved when the juniors went in to dinner.

After dinner Cardew sought out Levison. He found his old chum with Levison minor in Study No. 9.

"When does your sister get here, Frank?" asked Cardew.

"Three o'clock, at Rylcombe," said the fag, without turning his head.

"That means changin' at Wayland Junction for the two-thirty local?"

"Yes."

"There'll be a crowd to meet the young ladies at Rylcombe, I suppose?" yawned Cardew.

"I suppose so!" muttered Frank. "Ernie, old man, something's got to be done."

Levison knitted his brows savagely. "We're going to the station to meet Doris," he said. "We must do that. We're bringing her on to the school."

"The other fellows will be there, to meet Ethel, and they will bring her to the school. Doris and Ethel will keep together, of course. We shall all be in the same party."

"Looks like it."

Ralph Reckness Cardew yawned, and set his tie straight before the glass. Then he looked round at the brothers with a smile.

"No good askin' you chaps to come for a motor-run this afternoon?" he inquired.

"No!" growled Levison.

"Can't," said Frank. "Thanks, all the same."

Cardew nodded, and strolled out of the study. In the passage he paused to glance at his watch. Then he strolled out of the School House. He smiled as he sighted Tom Merry & Co. in a group, with clouded faces. They did not heed Ralph Reckness Cardew as he sauntered away towards the gates.

It was an hour later that the Terrible Three, Study No. 6, and Figgins & Co. started, in a body, for the village. Levison and his minor came out of the gates at the same time, and followed the same direction. The two parties entered Rylcombe almost at the same moment—without a glance or a word from one to the other. They walked into the little railway-station, and made their way to the platform, to wait there for the local train to come in from Wayland Junction—the train that was to bear cousin Ethel and sister Doris.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Cardew Takes Control!

"WAYLAND JUNCTION!"
"Our station, Doris!"
"Yes, Ethel."

The two girls rose, as the train came to a halt at Wayland. Cousin Ethel glanced at her little wrist-watch.

"Half-past two! Plenty of time for the local," she said. "It doesn't leave for ten minutes."

"Lots of time," said Doris Levison cheerfully. "No need to see about the luggage—that goes right on to Lexham."

"Why——" began Ethel, in surprise.

She had glanced out of the carriage window, and was about to open the door, when it was opened from outside, and a handsome and very elegant junior holding the door with one hand, raised a shining silk hat with the other. It was Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

Ethel knew him well enough—Doris knew him better—as the very special chum of her brother Ernest—the chum who had stood by Ernest at a time when he needed friendship badly. Doris gave Cardew a very sweet smile. She was glad to see him.

"Allow me," said Cardew.

He gracefully assisted the two girls to alight. Ethel glanced along the platform, half-expecting to see cousin Arthur and his friends, as one St. Jim's fellow was there. But there were no further "Saints" in sight.

"Pray excuse my buttin' in like this," said Cardew politely.

"Arthur was to meet us at Rylcombe," said Ethel, a little puzzled. "We are taking the local train to there."

"Change in the programme," explained Cardew. "There's a car waitin' outside for you. You didn't really want the local, did you? Awfully slow train—stoppin' everywhere and moonin' you know."

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"Of course, a car is ever so much nicer than the slow local train," she answered. "But I wish Arthur would not be so extravagant."

"Arthur's not guilty this time," explained Cardew. "It's a friend's car, and lent for the occasion."

"Oh, I see!" said Ethel; though, as a matter of fact, she did not quite see.

Ralph Reckness Cardew walked the two girls along to the exit and out of the station.

A handsome car was waiting, with a chauffeur standing by it. He started the engine as Cardew appeared. Ethel cast a perplexed look round. It was kind of Cardew, perhaps, to come over to Wayland Junction to meet the travellers, and to save them from the rather slow run in the local train; but she naturally expected to see her own friends—at least, her cousin. But Cardew was evidently the only St. Jim's fellow on the spot.

He handed the girls into the car, and followed them in. The car started, the chauffeur apparently having had his instructions beforehand.

"Now we shan't be long, you know," remarked Cardew.

"Arthur did not come to Wayland with you?" asked the perplexed Ethel.

"No—couldn't. He was unable to come," said Cardew. "Such things will happen—fellow isn't quite his own master at school."

"Oh!" said Ethel.

She concluded that Arthur Augustus had been detained by his Form master. Cardew had not exactly said so; but she could scarcely draw any other conclusion.

"My brothers—" began Doris.

She was surprised that neither Ernest nor Frank had turned up, little dreaming that both of them were in utter ignorance of Cardew's exploit, and were still expecting to meet her at Rylcombe.

"They're expectin' you at the school, Miss Doris," said Cardew. "I hope I shan't bore you too much on the way. It isn't a very long run, so I have hopes."

"What nonsense!" said Doris, laughing. "Do you know, Ernest hasn't written to tell me the result of the Greyfriars match. How did it go?"

"How could it go, with Levison playin' for us?" smiled Cardew. "We beat the merry visitors, and Levison put in the winnin' catch."

"How good!" exclaimed Doris, in delight.

"And my cousin—" said Ethel.

"Covered himself with glory," said Cardew. "It was a great occasion. A very strenuous time for us all."

"You played, then?" asked Doris.

"N-no; I didn't play. I was watchin'," said Cardew. "But I was watchin' no end. And I had a ramble with Trimble, too—I found that rather more exhaustin' than cricket. But your brother looked as fresh as paint after practically winnin' the match for our side. Strenuous chap, Ernest. By the way, is it a fact that you are goin' on to Lexham this afternoon?"

"Why, of course," said Ethel, in surprise. "We have to catch the six o'clock train."

"Aunt Catherine is expecting us," explained Doris. "Ethel is going to stay with me till to-morrow."

"Is it very particular to catch that train?" asked Cardew.

"Very," said Doris. "Aunt Catherine would be alarmed if we were late. She doesn't quite like our making railway journeys by ourselves, anyway. I shouldn't dare to be a minute late. Besides, the trap will be at the station waiting for us at seven precisely."

"Then you won't have a very long stay at St. Jim's?"

"Well, it will be all the longer for saving time, using this car instead of the local train," said Doris, smiling. "There will be time for tea in the

study. I suppose Ernest is making preparations?"

"And Arthur," said Ethel, with a laugh. "But which study is it going to be—Arthur's study or Ernest's study?"

"I believe that point is unsettled as yet," said Cardew gravely.

The car ran on at a good speed. Cousin Ethel glanced once or twice from the window curiously.

"Can't be more than half a mile, surely!" said Ethel.

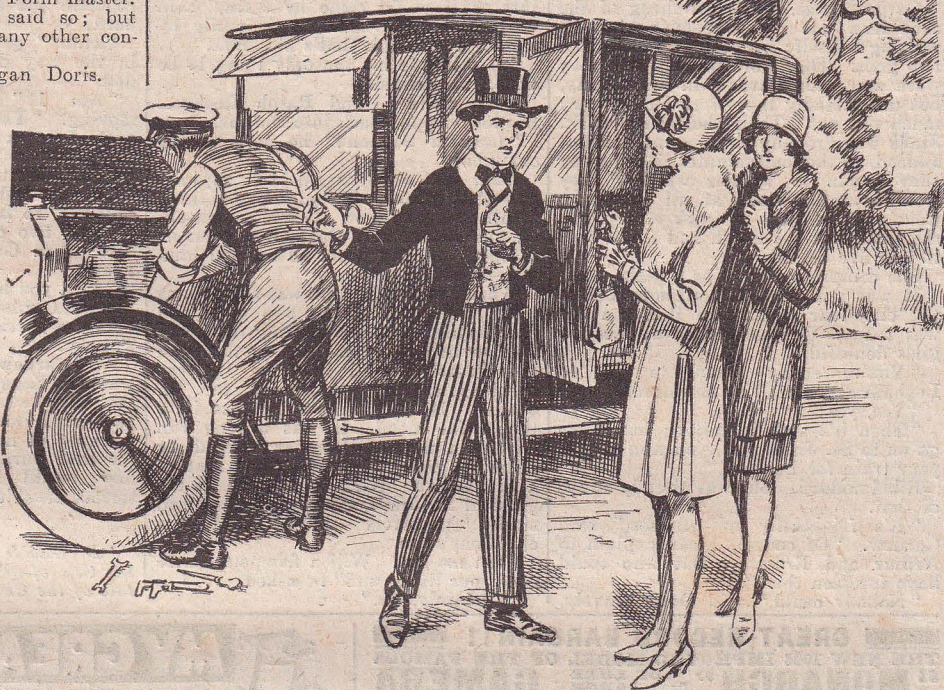
Cardew's eyes glimmered curiously for a moment.

"I'll ask the chauffeur!" he said.

He stepped out of the car. He was in talk with the chauffeur for some minutes, and then he came back to the door.

"I don't know how to apologise," he said.

"What is the matter?"



STRANDED! "I'm awfully sorry," said Cardew, as he helped the two girls out of the car. "But there appears to be something wrong with the engine. We shall be hung up here for some time!" (See Chapter 1.)

"Your driver knows the way, I suppose?" she said presently.

"Eh! I suppose so," said Cardew.

"I don't seem to recognise the road."

"Takin' a short cut, perhaps. Or the road may be up," said Cardew. "Jever calculate how much money the local councils spend on gettin' the roads up, and leavin' 'em up, with nice sharp stones lyin' arround for cyclists? Must be an enormous amount. By gad, though, we're gettin' along, aren't we?"

The car was covering the ground in great style. Wayland was far behind, and Wayland Wood was not to be seen. A dusty, white country road stretched ahead, with green fields on either side. Suddenly there was a heavy, jarring sound, and the car came to a halt, shaking. Cardew uttered an exclamation and put his head out of the window.

"What's the matter, Higden?"

"Nothing serious, I hope, sir," answered the chauffeur. "I'll tell you better in a minute."

"Buck up!" said Cardew. "We're rather pressed for time."

The chauffeur opened the bonnet and became deeply engrossed. Cardew watched him with an air of impatience.

"This is simply rotten!" he said.

"This car was supposed to save time! If we get hung up here—"

"Oh dear!" said Ethel, in dismay.

"How far are we from St. Jim's?" asked Doris. "If there is going to be much delay we had better walk."

"Somethin' gone wrong. I can't catch on to what," said Cardew. "But we shall be hung up for half an hour."

"We had better walk the rest!" said Cousin Ethel decidedly; and Doris Levison nodded assent.

"That isn't the worst," groaned Cardew. "I could kick myself! You'll never forgive me for bein' such an ass. How was I to guess that a man from the Wayland Garage would take the wrong road?"

"The wrong road!" exclaimed Ethel.

"That's what the champion ass has done!"

"And where are we now?" asked Doris, catching her breath.

"Eight miles out of Wayland—on the wrong side."

"Oh dear!"

The two girls looked utterly dismayed. Walking eight miles to Wayland and then another three to St. Jim's was not a feasible proposition. Cardew looked remorseful.

"All my fault!" he groaned. "It was my idea to have the car; Ernest and Arthur wouldn't have thought of it. They really had to let me have my way; and now I've fairly done it. I can't say how sorry I am. I'd like somebody to kick me!"

Cardew looked so utterly dismayed that the two girls, dismayed as they were themselves, could not help taking pity on him.

"Never mind!" said Doris as brightly as she could. "It can't be helped."

"We shall have to wait," said Ethel. "We can hardly walk the distance; indeed, it would be time to catch our train when we arrived if we did. It cannot be helped; we must be patient."

The two girls and Cardew waited, while the chauffeur, with the car drawn up to the roadside, busied himself with implements. He seemed to be working away very industriously; but when half an hour had elapsed and Cardew turned on him he shook his head.

"It's that magnet, sir," he said. "How long are you going to be?" "I'm doing my best, sir."

Cardew gave a helpless shrug of the shoulders. He did not seem to mind the waiting himself; his concern was for the two girls. They were patient, and they were sorry for Cardew in his dismay, but undoubtedly they were feeling very much put out. Their short time at St. Jim's was growing shorter and shorter. Indeed, as the long minutes ticked away they began to wonder whether they would see St. Jim's at all that day. Cousin Ethel gave a quick start when she looked at her watch and found that it was five o'clock.

She compressed her lips a little.

It was still another half-hour before the chauffeur announced that the car was ready. Cardew looked at the two girls doubtfully.

"You're really bound to get to Lexham at seven?" he murmured. "Yes, yes!"

"Then it's awfully rotten; but if we go on to St. Jim's now, you won't catch your train for Lexham."

Ethel nodded. She was already aware of that.

"It's frightfully unfortunate," said Cardew. "Of course, I can explain to Arthur and Ernest. But who could have foreseen this?"

"Nobody could," said Doris bravely.

"Don't blame yourself. But we shall have to go on to Lexham; we'd better drive back to Wayland now. You will tell Ernest and Frank how it happened."

"Of course! But it's rotten! Nothing else to be done, I suppose." Cardew looked at his watch. "By Jove, we shall hardly catch the train at Wayland, either! Better run on to Lexham in the car and make sure. Is it quite reliable now, Higden?"

"Perfectly, sir!" said the chauffeur, with the faintest ghost of a grin.

"We can get to Lexham Station, and you can get Aunt Catherine's trap there just as if you'd come by train," said Cardew. "We shall do it easily by seven. I—I think that's best now."

"It seems to me the only thing to be done," said Ethel.

Doris nodded, and Ralph Reckness Cardew stepped back into the car.

"Lexham Station!" he said to the chauffeur.

And the car buzzed off rapidly, smoothly, quite as if there were nothing at all wrong with it. It was a pleasant enough drive, and Cardew was entertaining company when he exerted himself—as he did now.

When Lexham Station was reached, at seven o'clock, and the two girls had been handed into the waiting trap, and Cardew had said good-bye, the dandy of the Fourth leaned back on the car cushions as Higden started for St. Jim's. He smiled, but he was in a thoughtful mood. It was a long run without a stop, and the car covered the miles in great style without a hint of a breakdown. When it stopped at the gates of St. Jim's, Cardew alighted and smiled pensively as he met the chauffeur's eye.

"Let me see! Will a five-pound note cover our little run?" he asked.

"Certainly, sir."

"Will there be any change?" "Yes, sir—"

"Will you oblige me by keepin' it, Higden? Good-evenin'."

"Good-evening, sir!"

Ralph Reckness Cardew sauntered in at the school gates.

"Just in time, Master Cardew!" said Taggles grimly, rattling his keys as he came down to the gates.

Cardew stopped and looked at the old porter.

"Dear old Taggles!" he said. "It's a pleasure to see you again. I'm awfully sorry to deprive you of the pleasure of reportin' me late, Taggles—I know it's hard."

"Huh!" grunted Taggles. "You're in the way of the gate, Master Cardew."

"Am I?" said Cardew, without moving. "Yes, I see I am. Have you ever been cruel only to be kind, Taggles?"

"Lor', Master Cardew!" "It's no end of a worry, Taggles. I'm expectin' to have my head punched by at least two or three fellows—Levison, first; then Gussy, and perhaps young Frank."

"Will you let me close this ere gate, Master Cardew?" asked Taggles.

"On reflection, I will let you close it, Taggles."

And Cardew walked on into the quad leaving Taggles blinking. He knew that there was trouble to come; but he had saved Doris from the bitter pain of learning of her brother's disgrace, and for that purpose Ralph Reckness Cardew would have faced much more serious trouble than awaited him now.

THE END.

"BARRED BY THE SCHOOL!" is the title of next Tuesday's topping long tale of the Chums of St. Jim's!

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