

BIRTHDAY Gifts FOR 'POPULAR' READERS!

The POPULAR

Complete Story Weekly

Week Ending
April 13th,
1929.
New Series.
No. 533.

2^d EVERY TUESDAY.



*Rookwood's
Sensational
Raffle.*

THERE ARE 4 SCHOOL YARNS INSIDE BOYS!

HANDSOME FREE GIFTS for members of the Birthday Club! Are you a member?



RULES AND REGULATIONS.

In order to become a member of our **FREE BIRTHDAY GIFT CLUB** you must, first of all, fill in **ALL** the particulars required on the special **REGISTRATION COUPON** printed below. When you have done this, post the coupon to:

The Editor,
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5, Carmelite Street,
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Then watch carefully the list of birthday dates, which are published in this paper week by week. Should the date of **YOUR BIRTH** be the same as one of the published dates, you will be able to claim one of the splendid gifts in the list printed above. You can choose your own present!

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READERS OVERSEAS.

All Overseas readers are eligible to participate in our Free Birthday Gift Club, as special time extensions are allowed in the case of readers living elsewhere than in the British Isles.

This week's list of birthday dates, and special claims coupon, appear on page 7.

REGISTRATION COUPON.

BIRTHDAY GIFTS.

(Please write very plainly.)

Name Date of Birth: Day Month Year

Full Address

I declare that I am a reader of "THE POPULAR" and and purchase BOTH THESE PAPERS regularly from my newsagent. I have carefully read the rules of your Birthday Club Scheme, and I agree to abide by them in every particular. Will you please enrol me as a member of your **FREE BIRTHDAY GIFT CLUB**.

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THIS COUPON IS ONLY AVAILABLE UNTIL APRIL 20th, 1929.

POPULAR.

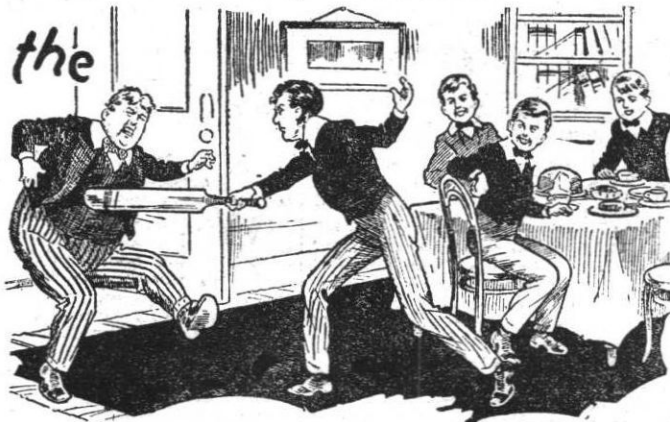
APRIL 13th, 1929.

RAISING THE WIND!

Tubby Muffin, the fat and fatuous Fourth-Former, is always on the look-out for an opportunity of raising the wind. He gets the chance this week, and proceeds to create quite a sensation among his Form-fellows!

TRICKING the FOURTH!

OWEN CONQUEST



A ROLLICKING LONG COMPLETE TALE OF JIMMY SILVER & CO., THE MERRY CHUMS OF ROOKWOOD

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Going Cheap!

"CRICKET—"

"Eh?"

"Cricket will be coming along soon," said Tubby

Muffin.

Reginald Muffin, of the Classical Fourth, had rolled into the end study, interrupting prep there, apparently to give Jimmy Silver & Co. that piece of gratuitous information.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome looked up from Virgil, and Arthur Edward Lovell detached his attention for a moment from crossword puzzles. They stared at Reginald Muffin.

"Did you come here to tell us that?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes. You see—"

"Of all the silly owls!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell. "Do you think we don't know cricket's coming along, Muffin? Are you wandering in your mind? Go and wander in the passage instead."

"Give a fellow a chance to speak," urged Reginald Muffin. "Cricket will be coming along soon. I was thinking—"

"Draw it mild!"

"I was thinking—"

"What with?"

"I was thinking!" roared Tubby Muffin, "that you fellows would like a handsome new cricket bat, as cricket will be coming along soon."

"Well, my hat! Have you come here to offer us a new bat?" ejaculated Jimmy Silver, quite astonished.

"Yes!"

"Trot it out," said Raby. "I'll take it off your hands."

"I haven't got it at the moment."

"I thought not!" grinned Raby. "What on earth are you trying to pull our legs for in this fatheaded way, Muffin?"

"But I'm getting it. My pater is sending me a handsome new cricket bat—a first-class two-guinea bat," said Muffin impressively. "It's the best bat you've ever seen—a real corker. Now, you fellows are keen on games—I'm a bit more intellectual myself—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And the fact is, I'm not specially keen on that bat," said Muffin. "So I thought of passing it on to you fellows, if you'd like it."

"Well, that beats it!" exclaimed Lovell in great surprise.

The Fistical Four stared at Muffin. That generous offer took them quite by surprise. Reginald Muffin was not celebrated in the Rookwood Fourth for generosity—quite the reverse, in fact.

If Muffin ever offered any fellow anything, that fellow's natural query was, "What's the matter with it?" So the offer of a handsome new two-guinea cricket bat was simply astounding to the end study.

"I mean it," said Muffin. "I don't care about the thing, and I'm offering it to you. Honest Injun!"

"For nothing?" exclaimed Lovell.

"Well, practically nothing."

"Oh! Only practically? I thought there was a catch somewhere," said Lovell. "What is practically nothing?"

"A shilling!"

"A shilling for a two-guinea cricket bat?" said Jimmy Silver, eyeing Muffin.

"A shilling each, you know."

"That's four bob," said Lovell.

"Four bob for a two-guinea bat?"

"Honest Injun!" asserted Muffin.

"Look here, if you don't like the bat when you see it you can have your bobs back, see? Can't say any fairer than that. A splendid bat. The very best bat stocked by Potters, at Latcham. Cost twenty-five shillings hard cash."

"They let you have a two-guinea bat for twenty-five shillings?"

"I mean it cost two guineas hard cash!"

"Does your pater do his shopping at Latcham?" asked Raby. "He doesn't live within sixty miles of Latcham."

"I—I mean—"

"Do you mean anything, or are you just talking out of the back of your neck?" inquired Lovell.

"I mean, my pater sent the order to Potters, at Latcham, to deliver the bat here," explained Muffin. "He told them to send their very best, see? My pater's rolling in money, as you know."

"Then he ought to send you some to settle up the half-crown you owe me from last term."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is it a go?" asked Muffin. "Just a bob each, that's little enough for a chance of bagging that ripping cricket bat. I've got tickets here."

"Tickets!" repeated Jimmy Silver & Co., with one voice.

"Yes. Here they are."

Reginald Muffin drew from his pocket a wad of tickets, evidently cut from impot paper. He detached four of them and threw them on the study table.

"What on earth are you driving at?" asked Raby. "If you're selling that bat for four shillings, what are the tickets for?"

"Oh, draw it mild, you know!" said Muffin warmly. "I hope you don't expect to get a three-guinea bat for four measly bobs? It's a raffle!"

"A—a—a raffle?"

"Of course! And I'm offering you fellows first chance. Tickets a bob each, and the draw to take place in my study next Saturday, see? A bob isn't much to pay for a chance at a three-guinea cricket bat."

"Price gone up since your pater ordered it?" asked Lovell. "It was a two-guinea bat to start with, then a twenty-five shilling bat, and now it's three guineas."

"I—I mean—"

"I know what you mean," assented Lovell, rising to his feet. "You mean to spoof this study out of four bob. There isn't any bat, and there isn't going to be any bat, and you think you can diddle this study with a yarn that wouldn't take in Cuffy of Manders' House. But I've got a bat here—a five bob, and—"

Lovell did not say any more; he let his actions speak for him.

With one hand he picked up the five bob, with the other he grasped Reginald Muffin by the collar.

Whack!

"Oh!" roared Muffin.

Whack!

"Leggo!" yelled Muffin. "I tell you it's honest Injun; The bat will be here to-morrow—"

Whack!

"Yaroooh! It's really a raffle, and—"

Whack!

"Whooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin tore himself away and flew out of the end study. Lovell chuckled and returned to crossword puzzles; his comrades chuckled and returned to prep. On the study table lay the four numbered tickets, representing Tubby Muffin's latest remarkable stunt for raising the wind. Muffin did not come back for them. Whether they were worth anything or not, whether there really was a handsome new cricket bat or not, might be doubtful; but there was no doubt about the five bob, and Tubby Muffin remained at a safe distance from the end study.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

No Takers!

"IT'S come!"

Reginald Muffin made that announcement to a group of Classical Fourth fellows in "Quarter" the following morning.

"It's come!" repeated Muffin, as no one seemed to heed his remark. "Do you hear, Jimmy? It's come!"

"Has it?" said Jimmy.

"Yes; it's in my study now."

"Go and look after it, then, whatever

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It is," said the captain of the Fourth. "Stay with it."
 "It's the bat!" hooted Tubby.
 "What bat?"
 "My splendid new cricket bat—the one I'm going to raffle."
 "Trot it out here, then," said Mornington.
 "Oh, all right."

Apparently the Classical juniors did not want the trouble of mounting the stairs to Tubby's study to see the wonderful new bat. Indeed, they were not likely to believe in the existence of the bat at all until they saw it.

So they were rather surprised when Tubby Muffin came back with a cricket bat under his arm.

It was quite a handsome bat.

Jimmy Silver knew all about cricket bats, and he saw at a glance that the bat had not cost three guineas, or even two; but it was exactly the twenty-five shilling bat sold at Potters in Latham, and it was a possession of which any junior cricketer might have been proud. "Well, my hat!" said Jimmy. "It's really a bat! Whose is it, Tubby?"
 "Mine!" yelled Tubby.

"You don't mean to say you were telling the truth in the study last night, Tubby?" exclaimed Lovell.

"Yes you ass!"

"How did it happen, then?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you chaps—look at this bat!" said Tubby Muffin. "Have you ever seen a splendid bat like this?"

"Lots of times," said Lovell; "and better, too. But it's a good bat. Too heavy for you, though. You should have told your pater—"

"Oh, that's all right. I'm not keeping this bat," said Tubby. "It would suit any of you fellows. I want you to have it. I'm selling tickets for the raffle at a shilling each. That's cheap."

"Rats!"

"You see, if I sell twenty-five tickets I don't lose anything," said Muffin. "But I'm risking it. How many tickets will you take, Jimmy?"

"Nix."

"How many will you take, Lovell?"

"Same as Jimmy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin sniffed and rolled away with his bat. He tried Cyril Peele of the Fourth, but in vain.

After class, Tubby Muffin hawked his tickets up and down the Classical Fourth, but found no takers.

Some of the cricketing fellows liked the idea of possessing that bat; but they were not taken with the idea of a raffle.

Some had objections to it from its resemblance to a gamble; others were not at all sure that a raffle conducted by Reginald Muffin would be conducted on lines quite above suspicion; others were influenced by the great probability that Mr. Dalton would frown upon the scheme if he heard of it. And fellows with a turn for calculation pointed out that if Tubby sold twenty-five tickets for the raffle, a fellow had one chance in twenty-five of bagging the prize—which was not good enough for any fellow with his wits about him. Twenty-four fellows would pay a shilling each for nothing, which they had no desire to do.

It transpired, also, that Tubby's sheaf of tickets had numbers up to fifty, and the fat junior had not apparently set himself any limit. With unlimited tickets, a fellow's chance was next door to nil.

So Reginald Muffin, to his great chagrin, did not sell a single ticket; THE POPULAR.—No. 533.

and his face was frowning—most other faces wearing smiles.

The Classical fellows, in fact, were interested in Tubby's latest wheeze, rather as a joke than anything else—a joke on Tubby.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Leggett to the Rescue!

"W HAT luck?"
 Albert Leggett, of the Modern Fourth asked Muffin that question the next day.

Muffin's wheeze was well known by this time all through the Lower School. Moderns and Classics, Fourth Form and Shell, had heard about it, and chuckled over it.

Not a single ticket had been sold, though Muffin had gone to the length of offering quite a large number of fellows to "wangle" the raffle in their favour if they would only take a few tickets off his fat hands.

Muffin considered this rather astute. The effect produced, however, was quite the reverse of the effect intended.

Fellows who did not want to be bothered with a raffle at all were not likely to bother about it when they learned that it was to be "wangled."

To Muffin's surprise and chagrin, this masterly move on his part put the lid on, so to speak, and on all sides he was assured that no Rookwood fellow would touch his raffle with a barge-pole.

Leggett, of the Modern Fourth, did not need to ask Muffin what luck he had had. Muffin's lugubrious face showed plainly enough that he had had no luck at all.

"Rotten!" said the fat Classical lugubriously. "I say, Leggett, old man, you take a ticket, and set an example."

"How many have you sold?"

"Oh, a few dozen."

Habit was too strong for Reginald Muffin. It really seemed that he could not tell the truth if he tried. Not that it was on record that he ever had tried!

"Oh, if you've sold a few dozen, not much chance of a fellow bagging the bat," said Leggett, shrugging his shoulders.

"I—I mean, I haven't sold any."

Leggett laughed.

"I know you haven't, you fat ass! You've practically told all the fellows it's a swindle. Serve you jolly well right. But, look here, I think I might take a ticket."

Tubby's fat hand went into his pocket.

"When's the raffle coming off?" asked Leggett, eyeing the fat junior curiously. "This evening, in my study," said Tubby. "It's simply got to be settled before to-morrow—"

"Why to-morrow, specially?"

"To-morrow's Saturday," explained Muffin.

"Well, what difference does that make?" asked Leggett, staring at the fat Classical.

"I—I mean," Muffin stammered, "I—I happen to want the money to-morrow. I say, Leggett, how many tickets will you take?"

"Let's have it clear first," said Leggett. Leggett, of the Modern Fourth, was a businesslike youth, quite as unscrupulous as Tubby Muffin, and a good deal brighter. "First of all, you can't sell a swamp of tickets—a fellow wants a run for his money. If you arrange to put only sold numbers in the draw, it will be fair play."

Tubby considered this.

"You see, a fellow's not going to take

the chance of drawing a number out of hundreds of blanks," explained Leggett. "All very well for you, but you would need awful mugs to buy tickets on those lines. Put it in writing that only sold tickets will count in the raffle, and you may get a look-in."

"I—I suppose there's something in that," said Tubby reluctantly. "Well, if that's a go, I'll take a ticket."

"It's a go!" said Tubby promptly. Tubby would have agreed to anything to handle a shilling for one of his squares of impot paper. It was morning break or "quarter," and Tubby was keen to drop in at the tuckshop before third lesson. And Tubby was in his usual stony state; none of the vast wealth of the Muffin family had found its way to Rookwood yet.

"Here you are, Leggett! Sure you won't take two?"

"Enough's as good as a feast," said Leggett, "and before you touch my shilling you've got to put it in black-and-white. You're rather a downy bird, old Muffin, but you'll have to get up very early in the morning to annex my bobs for nothing."

"Look here, Leggett—"

"Oh, come to business!" said Leggett impatiently. "Put up a notice, as I've told you, in the Fourth Form passage, so that you can't back out of it afterwards, and then you can talk to me."

Leggett strolled away.

"I say, Leggett, old chap—"

The Modern junior walked off without turning his head.

Muffin grunted.

Even Leggett's shilling was not to be forthcoming in time for light refreshments before third lesson.

However, his advice was good, and Muffin proceeded to act upon it. It dawned upon even his fat and fatuous brain that a raffle in which all the chances were carefully weighted against the participators was not likely to catch on.

Jimmy Silver & Co., chatting by the window in the Classical Fourth passage a little later, were interested to see Reginald Muffin sticking up a paper on the passage wall. A remnant of common sense deterred Reginald from putting it on the notice-board, where it might have been observed by masters and prefects.

"Hallo! What's this game?" asked Lovell.

Muffin blinked round at the Fistical Four.

"Read for yourselves!" he said, with dignity. "You fellows have been saying that my raffle is a catch and a swindle."

"Not much doubt about that, after what you've said yourself, you fat duffer!" said Raby.

"Well, look at that!" said Tubby Muffin loftily.

Jimmy Silver & Co. read the notice, written in Tubby's sprawling hand, and grinned. It ran:

"NOTIS! MUFFIN'S GRATE RAFFLE!

The prize to be won is a first-class splendid cricket bat, wich may be sene any time in No. 2 Study.

The winning number will be pooled out of a Hat in No. 2 Study on Friday evening at ate o'clock. Onley the numbers on tickets soaled and pade for will be included in the draw.

NO BLANK! SPESHUL NOTIS! NO BLANK!

Sined,
 REGINALD ADOLPHUS MUFFIN."



SETTLEMENT WANTED: "Am I to collect the money or take back the bat?" demanded the gentleman from Potters. Lovell's grasp closed on his new bat. The expression on Tubby Muffin's face grew positively anguished. Only too well he knew that if the gentleman from Potters did not receive either the bat or the money he would proceed directly to the Head. (See Chapter 5.)

"I think you fellows will admit that that's fair and above-board!" said Reginald Muffin, in a very dignified way, "and any chap you like can make the draw, if you don't trust me."

"Fair enough on those lines," said Jimmy Silver, with a nod.

"I've asked Gunner to draw the number," said Muffin. "I suppose you can trust Gunner?"

"Certainly! He's a born idiot, but as straight as a die," said Jimmy. "But you may as well chuck it, Muffin. Can't you see that your giddy raffle is a chicken that won't fight? Forget it!"

"I've sold a ticket already."

"So there's one silly ass at Rookwood, anyhow," remarked Lovell. "Who's the victim?"

"Leggett, of Manders' House."

Jimmy Silver looked surprised.

"Well, Leggett's about the last chap I should have expected to be taken in by rot of this kind," he said. "Leggett's jolly deep, and jolly wide. Mean to say he's paid up?"

"He's going to, as soon as he's seen this notice up," said Tubby. "Here he comes."

Albert Leggett came along the passage. The Fistical Four eyed him curiously as he read the notice, and then handed over a shilling to Reginald Muffin, and received a numbered ticket in exchange.

"So you're going in, Leggett?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Why not?" said Leggett.

"Mug's game," said Lovell; "and I always thought you were more rogue than mug, old bean!"

"Thanks!" sneered Leggett.

Tubby Muffin, with a beaming face, was scudding down the passage to the stairs, with Leggett's shilling in his hand. There was just time to scud

across to the school shop before third lesson, and expend that shilling in refreshments liquid and solid.

Leggett, with a look of dislike at the Fistical Four, walked away, his raffle ticket in his pocket.

There was a grin on his face as he walked back to Manders' House.

Most of the Rookwood juniors agreed with Lovell that the raffle was a "mug's" game; yet Leggett, reputed the sharpest fellow in the Lower School, had taken a ticket when all the other fellows held off. But Albert Leggett knew what he was about—as he usually did.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Lovell Butts In!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL was in the end study when the Co. came in to tea, wearing a thoughtful expression.

"I've been thinking about that fat idiot's silly raffle," he remarked, as the Co. sat down to tea.

"Eh?"

"Look at it!" said Lovell. "We know Muffin can't sell his raffle tickets—nobody will touch them."

"I know that!"

"He's sold one—to Leggett. Well, then, at that rate there will be only one number in the draw, and Leggett will hold it. It's an absolutely safe thing for Leggett; and he bags the cricket bat for a shilling."

Jimmy Silver stared.

"Well, my hat!" he exclaimed. "That's jolly deep of Leggett! Of course, he waited to see that the thing was a frost. Tubby's methods would have made it a frost, even if the fellows had been keen on silly raffles."

Raby chuckled.

"Muffin doesn't seem to see it," he remarked. "He was quite bucked by Leggett taking a ticket."

"It's rather thick," said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "But Muffin oughtn't to be holding raffles at all; and he's got to take his chance. If he sells only one ticket, the bat goes to the holder of that ticket. He hasn't made it a condition that a number of them have to be sold."

"Well, I admit Muffin's a tick; but he's not such a tick as Leggett," argued Lovell. "And Leggett's a Manders' man, and I don't see letting a Manders' man diddle a School House man."

"Something in that," agreed Newcome. "Still, I don't see how we can butt in."

"You wouldn't," said Lovell politely. "I can, though. I'm not gone on raffles, but I'll go into this raffle to keep that tick Leggett from bagging a twenty-five bob bat for a shilling."

"But we're down on it," said Raby. "Oh, rot!"

"Why, you yourself said that this study ought to be down on it, and set an example."

"Well, perhaps I did; but that was before I knew Leggett was laying dodges to bag Muffin's bat for nothing. I'm not seeing a School House man diddled by an unwashed tick from Manders'. I'm going to buy a ticket myself, and I think my friends ought to back me up," said Arthur Edward Lovell warmly.

"Oh, anything for a quiet life," said Jimmy Silver. "Pass the cake, anyhow. Let's finish tea before we rescue Muffin from the Manders' man."

Arthur Edward Lovell had his way. After tea, the Fistical Four walked down the Fourth Form passage to

Study No. 2 and looked in. They found Tubby Muffin there, sad and lugubrious. "Sold a lot of tickets yet?" grinned Raby.

"Only one," said Muffin mournfully. "I say, you chaps might take a few off a fellow's hands. I say, I haven't had my tea; and Putty and Higgs and Jones minor are teeing out, and there's nothing in the study cupboard, and—"

"And so the poor dog had none!" said Jimmy Silver sympathetically.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"We want a ticket each," said Lovell. Tubby Muffin brightened up wonderfully. Four shillings meant quite a decent tea in the study; and the absence of his study-mates was all to the good.

"Here you are!" he said eagerly. "Mind, we're down on the silly rot," said Lovell magisterially. "I don't approve of raffles. We're doing this to save you from being diddled by a man from Manders'. Can't you see that, in the conditions, if you sell only that one ticket to Leggett, he will get the bat for a shilling?"

Tubby Muffin stared.

"Well, if a lot of the fellows take tickets, it will be all right," he said brightly. "You four, to begin with, and—"

"Here you are, image!"

Four numbered tickets were handed over in exchange for an equal number of shillings. Jimmy Silver & Co. were not quite satisfied with their participation in Muffin's raffle; but there was satisfaction in the thought of defeating Albert Leggett's little game. Leggett, having assured himself that the raffle was a hopeless frost, with no takers except his honourable self, counted upon the prize as a certainty, and certainly did not count upon a turn of the tide so late in the day.

It was quite pleasant to think of the expression that would adorn Leggett's sharp face when he found a number of fellows in Muffin's study that evening for the draw.

Arthur Edward Lovell was so keen on it that he turned himself into a sort of commercial traveller for Muffin's raffle, and fairly hawked Muffin's tickets up and down the passage.

"You see, it's to put a stopper on a Modern cad!" Lovell explained in all the studies. "I'm down on raffles; but this is special. Do you want a Modern tick to diddle a School House man?"

Nobody did.

The result was that Tubby Muffin received quite a number of calls as he sat in Study No. 2 consuming tuck to the exact value of four shillings.

Mornington dropped in—apparently not having asked his chum Erroll's opinion this time—and then Townsend and Topham, and Oswald and Conroy, and several more fellows.

No less a sum than twenty-nine shillings was taken by Reginald Muffin; and as the bat was certainly not worth more than twenty-five, this was good business.

It was no wonder that Tubby beamed. He was still beaming joyously when the fellows came into the study before eight, to be ready for the draw. Study No. 2 was crammed with grinning Classics when Leggett arrived from Manders' House.

He glanced round, evidently not suspecting, for the moment, the true state of affairs.

"Hallo, you've got an audience, Muffin!" he remarked.

Muffin chuckled.

"Ready for the draw?" asked Gunner of the Fourth, with a grin.

"Ready, ay, ready!" chuckled Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Leggett looked still more surprised. So far, he could not see where the joke came in.

"No need for a crowd like this that I can see," he remarked. "As you fellows are not in the draw—"

"But we are!" said Jimmy Silver.

"We is!" grinned Raby.

"The jolly whole family!" chuckled Mornington. "Altogether, there will be—how many numbers in the draw, Muffin?"

"Thirty-four," said Muffin.

"What!" ejaculated Leggett.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell.

Leggett's face was worth watching, as Lovell had said it would be.

"That's right," said Tubby cheerfully. "One I sold to Leggett, four to you fellows, and twenty-nine since. That's thirty-four."

"Leggett's got one chance in thirty-four," remarked Mornington. "Looks to me as if the bat will stay on the Classical side, whoever bags it."

"Just a few!" chuckled Lovell.

Leggett breathed hard.

"Well, let's get on to business!" grinned Gunner.

"Go it!"

The ceremony of the draw did not take long.

Thirty-four numbers were shaken up in the hat, and then Gunner groped in it and drew out one slip of paper.

He held it up for inspection.

"Number two! Who's got Number two?"

Leggett muttered something under his breath. His ticket was numbered one. There was a chuckle from Arthur Edward Lovell, and he held up his ticket.

"Adsum!" he said.

"You, old fellow!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Little me!" chortled Lovell.

"You bag the bat, then," said Gunner.

"And I think I deserve it," said Lovell complacently. "But for me, that Modern tick would have bagged it."

"Hear, hear!"

Leggett scowled and slipped out of the study. With a scowling face, he walked home to Manders' House.

The cricket bat was duly handed over to the winner of the raffle, and the crowd in Study No. 2 broke up.

In Study No. 2 Tubby Muffin's fat face was beaming with contentment. The unusual sum of twenty-nine shillings was in his possession. He could not move without a sound of rattling and clinking cash.

The raffle had been a distinct success—owing to Lovell! A good deal more than the value of the bat had been captured by the fat Classical, and his thoughts were running on more and more raffles. It was a happy and contented Muffin who rolled up to the dormitory that night with the Classical Fourth.

The following morning Tubby Muffin was still in a state that could only be described as happy and glorious.

He beamed at breakfast; and after breakfast he cut across to the school shop for a further snack, to fortify himself for lessons.

As a rule, when Tubby was in funds, his funds made a rapid transit across Sergeant Kettle's counter. On the present occasion Tubby exercised heroic self-denial, and expended only the moderate sum of four shillings. Perhaps the fact that he had only just breakfasted helped him to resist temptation. Twenty-five shillings still jingled in his pocket when he rolled into the Form-room.

First and second lesson passed, and the juniors turned out for "Quarter"—by which time Tubby Muffin was hungry again. He was always hungry in quarter—and out of it, for that matter. With twenty-five shillings in his pocket, it was rather surprising that Reginald Muffin did not make a "bee-line" for the sergeant's little shop behind the beeches. For some reason Reginald was exercising an unusual self-control. But, as if unconsciously, his footsteps drew him nearer and nearer to the school shop.

For five minutes Tubby Muffin hung about the door of Sergeant Kettle's little shop, like a fat Peri at the gates of Paradise.

Obviously he was torn by an intense inward struggle.

Fellows who noticed him there expected, now that he was in funds, that he would roll into the shop and feed himself fairly up to his fat chin. What they naturally expected, happened at last.

Tubby Muffin rolled in.

He started with a single jam-tart, with a determination to end with it also. But the jam-tart was gone in a second or so and it was followed almost unconsciously by another. Almost before he knew what he was doing, Tubby Muffin had bolted nine or ten tarts, and was washing them down with ginger-pop in a few minutes.

After that Tubby seemed to throw discretion to the winds; perhaps on the principle that it was as well to be hung for a sheep as for a lamb.

He gave orders right and left, and only the bell for third lesson interrupted the spread.

He rolled back to the School House, shiny and sticky, and breathing hard—with nine of his precious shillings still jingling in his pocket. The rest of them had ceased to jingle, in Sergeant Kettle's till.

Tubby Muffin was very thoughtful during third lesson. Some worry seemed to be on his fat mind, and Mr. Dalton had to call him to order several times. But lines, and even a rap from a pointer, seemed to make no impression on Tubby—with that mysterious worry on his fat mind.

At dinner he was quite lugubrious, not looking at all like a fellow who had lately secured a handsome profit in a raffle.

After dinner, as Saturday was a half-holiday, the juniors were free; and Tubby Muffin's footsteps led him, as usual, to the shop behind the beeches. This time he hesitated, but his hesitation was brief. He rolled in, and when he emerged, not a single shilling remained in his pocket.

How the inner Muffin dealt with the supplies Tubby had crammed in was a mystery; but if he was good at nothing else, Tubby had always been at least a hefty trencherman.

About tea-time he drifted along the Fourth Form passage to the end study. Jimmy Silver & Co. had come in from games practice and were sitting down to tea when Reginald Muffin blinked in on them.

Lovell held up a hand.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Lovell's Reward!

ALBERT LEGGETT looked surprised as he came into Study No. 2—wedged in, rather. There was not much room to move in the room now.

"No more raffles!" he said.
 "I—I'm not raffing anything, you know," said Tubby. "The—the fact is, I—I—I agree with what you fellows said the other day—I—I don't approve of raffles."

"Eh? How's that?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"If—if you like, Lovell, we'll—we'll call it off."

"Call it off?" repeated Lovell.

"Yes. I'd—I'd really like to have that bat—"

Arthur Edward Lovell's face was a picture. He rose without a word and picked up the famous bat from a corner of the study. Tubby's face grew hopeful as Lovell came towards him with the bat in his hands.

"Thanks, old man! I— Yaroooh!"

Lovell did not hand over the bat—he lunged with it. The lunge caught Reginald Muffin on his well-filled waistcoat—too well-filled. There was a roar of anguish, and Reginald Muffin faded away down the Fourth Form passage. Lovell returned to the tea-table with a very grim face; perhaps repenting him that he had butted in to rescue Muffin from the wiles even of an "unwashed tick" from Manders' House.

A little later there was a tap at the door.

It opened to reveal the fat, scared face of Reginald Muffin.

"You fat villain, get out!" roared Lovell.

"Shush!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"There's somebody—"

"Oh!"

Lovell coloured as he caught sight of a gentleman, with a silk hat in his hand, behind Muffin.

The man was a stranger to the end study, and they wondered what he could possibly want. However, they rose politely to their feet.

"It—it's here, sir!" gasped Muffin, in an expiring voice.

"Very good. You are sure you have decided not to keep the bat?"

"Oh, quite!" gasped Muffin, "I—I meant to, but—but— I—I say, Lovell, he—he—he's come for the—the—the—the bat!"

"What?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"The—the—the cricket bat, you know!" gasped Muffin.

"The cricket bat?" repeated Lovell dazedly. "Who's this chap, anyhow?"

"I represent Potters," explained the gentleman with the silk hat. "Master Muffin ordered a cricket bat from us on Wednesday afternoon."

"Not—not this bat?" gasped Lovell.

"Yes; that appears to be the bat," assented the gentleman from Potters, glancing at Lovell's new possession.

"But—but this bat was sent to Muffin by his father!"

"It could scarcely have been," said the gentleman from Potters. "Master Muffin ordered it himself on Wednesday, and it

was duly delivered here, payment to be made this week. As we have not heard from Master Muffin, I have called to collect this small account."

"Oh!" gasped the Fistical Four.

"Of course, Master Muffin is entitled to return the bat if it proves unsuitable, and no doubt he will call at our extensive show-rooms and select another," said the gentleman from Potters; "but I regret that I am unable to leave the bat here unless payment is made, as we never run accounts—neither would Dr. Chisholm allow it. If you have decided, Master Muffin, that you do not wish to keep this bat, I will take it away with me."

Lovell gasped.

"You jolly well won't! Muffin raffled this bat!"

"Eh?"

"And I won it—"
 "Well, upon my word! Of course, I have nothing to do with this," said the gentleman from Potters. "If payment is made for the bat, Master Muffin may raffle it, or do anything else he pleases with it. If the bat remains here, I must collect the amount of twenty-five shillings."

"Pay up, you fat villain!" hooted Lovell. "You can pay up easily enough."

"I—I was going to!" groaned Tubby Muffin.

"Well, go ahead and do it!"

(Continued on page 28.)

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Claim one of our topping gifts if you were born on any of the dates published below!

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APRIL 13th.

THE END OF THE REBELLION!

The Triumph of The Rebels!

Cheers for the St. Jim's Rebels! They've 'stuck it out, through thick and thin. They've stood by Tom Merry with true British grit. They've withstood the attacks of their formidable enemy. And NOW they reap their reward!



By Martin Clifford.

Author of the well-known tales of TOM MERRY & CO. OF ST. JIM'S appearing in the "Gem" every Wednesday!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Majesty of the Law!

"BOBBY!"

"What?"

"It's a jolly old bobby!" said Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove!"

There was a rush to the windows on the second floor of the School House at St. Jim's.

Monty Lowther had been looking out, and he had sighted the new arrival—an imposing figure in official uniform, just coming in at the school gates.

Most of the St. Jim's juniors knew that gentleman by sight. It was Inspector Skeat, of Wayland town.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "What's the Head's little game, you fellows—spwingin' a jolly old peelah on us?"

Tom Merry smiled.

For weeks the barring-out at St. Jim's had gone on, and the rebels were still unconquered, if not yet victorious.

They had been driven, after an exciting combat, from the ground of the School House, and then from the first floor—and downstairs Mr. Railton's men were in possession. But the staircases to the dormitory floor were barricaded, and the Head was still barred out—the rebellion going as strong as ever. And Tom Merry did not think that the sight of Inspector Skeat's official uniform would make any difference.

If Dr. Holmes had sent for Mr. Skeat, in the belief that that gentleman would be able to awe the schoolboy rebels into submission, Dr. Holmes was making a considerable mistake.

The School House upper windows were crowded with grinning faces. Tom

Merry & Co. were quite ready for the official gentleman if he chipped in.

The rebels' position, though reduced in extent, was as strong as ever—indeed, stronger, for the upper staircases were narrower and more easily blocked and defended. And almost every article of furniture in the upper rooms had been stacked on the barricades.

"The fact is, we've beaten the jolly old Head!" remarked Jack Blake.

"He's at his wits' end now."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's really time he sent a flag of truce and begged for terms," remarked Manners.

"What a jolly beginnin' for the new term!" said Cardew of the Fourth. "When the Fifth and Sixth come back they'll find it rather excitin'."

"There goes Railton!" said Levison.

From the windows the juniors had a view of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, who met the Wayland inspector near the gates.

The two gentlemen stood in talk for some minutes, both of them glancing towards the besieged School House. Then they walked towards the New House together, and Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, met them in the doorway of that House.

Tom Merry glanced round at his comrades.

"You fellows can see what the game is," he said. "They're going to try to scare us with a giddy policeman."

"I guess they won't scare us worth a cent!" remarked Kit Wildrake, the Canadian junior.

"Wathah not," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy emphatically. "I shall certainly refuse to take any notice of Mr. Skeat!"

"It's the Head's last card," said

Monty Lowther; "and the dear old gent will find that it isn't a trump."

"I'm blessed if I quite know how the matter stands from the point of view of the law," observed Tom Merry. "But I suppose we have the right to treat Mr. Skeat as a trespasser if he butts in here."

"We'll chance it, anyhow!" said Clive.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Here he comes!" sang out Wally of the Third.

Mr. Skeat reappeared from the New House, and came across the quadrangle with slow and stately steps.

A number of Mr. Railton's men were on the School House steps—Sergeant Stuckey, Private Brown, and several more of the old soldiers who had been enlisted for the difficult task of dealing with the St. Jim's rebels.

They saluted Mr. Skeat as he came up, and the inspector returned the greeting with portly dignity.

Then he entered the School House, and disappeared for the moment from the view of the juniors at the windows above.

There was a rush of Tom Merry & Co. to the landing at the head of the barricaded stairs.

The landing swarmed with juniors, in a cheery and rather excited mood. So far from being scared by the majesty of the law, they seemed to be looking forward to an encounter with the majestic Mr. Skeat.

"Ere, you young sweeps!" yelled Private Brown up the staircase. "Ere's a visitor for you!"

"Trot him along!" called back Blake. "We're ready for him!"

Inspector Skeat was coming up the lower stairs with slow and stately steps.

He came along the corridor to the upper staircase, and stopped at the foot of it, staring at the stack of furniture piled irregularly between wall and banisters. "Well, my word!" murmured the inspector.

Inspector Skeat had heard a good deal of the barring-out—it was much discussed in the neighbourhood of the school. But the reality of it surprised him. He stared up the staircase, over the barricade, to the row of grinning faces at the top.

"My word!" he repeated. "Comin' up, old bean?" called out Cardew.

"Eh! I want Tom Merry," answered the inspector. "Where is he?"

"Adsum!" called out Tom.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come down here, Master Merry," said the inspector. "I can't crawl upstairs over all that stuff!"

"Bai Jove! What a nerve!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Does the awful ass weally think you will go down, Tom Mewwy?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"What do you want me for?" he asked. "Going to arrest me?"

The inspector grinned. "No, I've nothing to do with this affair," he said. "Dr. Holmes has not asked me to interfere, and it would be outside the scope of my duties, in any case. I am here to speak to you on the subject of the robbery. It now appears that you may not have had a hand in it, and I have every hope of getting hold of the right man."

There was a roar from the schoolboy rebels. "Hurrah!"

Tom Merry's face was bright.

He had hoped that, somehow or other, his innocence would come to light—that the Head would realise that a terrible mistake had been made. It had seemed to him impossible that, innocent of wrongdoing, he should continue to lie under the shadow of a black suspicion. And it looked now as if his hopes might be realised.

"All right, you can climb up," said Tom Merry.

And, in a minute or two the inspector had clambered over the barricade into the rebels' stronghold. The juniors surrounded him with a buzz of interest.

"Now, Master Merry, I will tell you how the matter stands," began the inspector, when he had regained his breath. "Dr. Holmes sent for me, as you know, when the robbery took place, and asked my opinion. I had to tell him that, in my opinion, Mr. Ratcliff's study in the New House was entered, and his desk broken open, by an unskilled hand—that it was no genuine cracksman who had done the job. That certainly was the case. And there the matter ended, so far as I was concerned. Now I want to hear your version."

"The Head knows it," said Tom. "I can tell you in a few words. I missed Manners from the dormitory that night, and went out to look for him. Manners was wild with Mr. Ratcliff for smashing his camera, and I thought he had gone to play a trick on Ratty—I mean, Mr. Ratcliff. I found Mr. Ratcliff's study window open, and heard somebody moving inside. I thought it was Manners, and went in for him."

Mr. Skeat listened attentively. "And where was Manners?" he asked.

"It turned out that the silly ass was in the dark-room downstairs in this House, tinkering at his blessed camera," said Tom ruefully. "Of course, I couldn't guess that."

"You're a bit of an ass, old chap!" said Manners.

"Fathead!"

Inspector Skeat raised his hand.

"You young gentlemen can exchange compliments after I am gone," he suggested. "My time is of some value."

"Sorry!" said Manners. "Carry on."

"What happened after you entered Mr. Ratcliff's study, Master Merry?"

"Somebody was there, in the dark," said Tom. "He collared me suddenly, and pitched me over, and then I knew it wasn't Manners. I heard some coins drop on the floor. The man—whatever he was—bolted out of the window and scooted."

"You could not see him?"

"Only a sort of flitting shadow for a moment."

"Then you could give me no description of him?" asked Mr. Skeat.

"I'm sorry—none."

"And then—"

"The House was alarmed by the row I made tumbling over the furniture," said Tom. "I cleared off, and got back to the School House. The next day it all came out, and I was accused of the robbery."

"Utah wot, you know!" commented Arthur Augustus.

"Then I was expelled," said Tom. "They didn't believe there had been a man in the study at all; and I must say it looked a good bit as if I had been romancing. Only I think that the Head, knowing me, ought to have taken my word, and oughtn't to have thought me a thief."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"None of the fellows believed it against me," said Tom. "They all stood by me, like real bricks, and we've barred out the Head ever since."

"It seems that Mr. Ratcliff had fifty pounds in gold locked up in his desk," said Mr. Skeat.

"Yes."

"This was known to you?"

"Naturally. It was a point against me, but there was nothing in it. All the school knew about it," said Tom. "A New House fellow had seen Mr. Ratcliff counting the money one day. It was the talk of the school at one time, and fellows were down on Ratty for hoarding gold."

Mr. Skeat smiled.

"It was not a patriotic action," he said. "However, Mr. Ratcliff doubtless knows his own business best. It seems, from what I have been told, that some of the sovereigns were picked up afterwards on the floor of the study, but that forty-six were missing."

"That is so."

"And supposed to be in your possession?"

Tom Merry flushed.

"Supposed to be," he assented very quietly.

"Something has happened since then," said Mr. Skeat. "Your schoolfellow, Kerr—he is not here now?"

"No. He went out with Figgins and some more fellows to get in supplies of grub. They were bagged, and sent home."

The inspector nodded.

"Master Kerr called on me in Wayland on that day," he said. "He informed me that he and his friends had fallen in with a disreputable, drunken character on the footpath in the wood. There was trouble, and in the tussle the man dropped some gold coins. Golden sovereigns being extremely rare, it occurred to Kerr that the ruffian must have stolen them, and that probably they were Mr. Ratcliff's sovereigns."

"Good old Kerr!" said Tom. "I think

it's very likely. The kind of man you describe wouldn't be likely to have a lot of money of his own, and certainly not in gold."

"Quite so. Master Kerr was able to give me a very complete description of the man," continued the inspector. "I have succeeded in tracing him. The description is that of a man known as Gadgett, a loafer who haunts the Black Bird in Wayland. I have ascertained that this man has been in possession of considerable sums of money lately, and that he has spent a great deal in drink at the Black Bird—in sovereigns."

"Oh!" said Tom.

"Naturally, it was a good deal remarked upon in the public-house," said the inspector. "It is very uncommon for a drunken waster to pay for his drinks in gold."

"I should think so!" said Tom, with a smile.

"I have further ascertained that this man Gadgett was employed by Taggles, the school porter here, for a couple of days last December, to saw logs," said Mr. Skeat. "He was asking for work, and Taggles gave him that job. On this occasion he may have spied about the school, with a view to committing a robbery. He had already been in prison several times for larceny."

"Likely enough!" said Blake.

"On that occasion he may have heard of Mr. Ratcliff's hoard," went on the inspector. "It was probably known to Taggles, as you say it was the talk of the school at one time—and Mr. Taggles is a very chatty old gentleman, I believe."

"Very!" said Tom, smiling.

"That would account for Gadgett's knowledge of the money and where to look for it," said the inspector. "A warrant has been issued for Gadgett's arrest—"

"Oh, good!"

"It's clear that the gold did not come honestly into his hands, whether it was Mr. Ratcliff's or not," said Mr. Skeat. "He will be charged in any case—and it seems very probable that the theft took place in the New House at this school."

"Bai Jove! You weally beat Sherlock Holmes, Mr. Skeat!" said Arthur Augustus admiringly.

The inspector smiled.

"Unfortunately, now that the matter has been investigated, and the warrant issued, Gadgett has disappeared from his usual haunts. But it is fairly certain that he is still in the neighbourhood—and he is being searched for," said the inspector. "I expect to hear news of his arrest at any moment. There is every hope, Master Merry, that your innocence may be proved."

"That's jolly good news, sir!"

"Huwwah!"

"I should have been glad to have a description of the man you saw," said Mr. Skeat, rising. "But if you cannot give it, it cannot be helped. I fancy, however, that something may be done with finger-prints. Mr. Ratcliff's desk was turned out, and something handled by the thief may give us a clue that will not be neglected. At all events, if Gadgett is the guilty party, his guilt will be brought home to him. You need have no manner of doubt about that."

"I am suah we can leave that in your hands with ewery confidence, sir," said Arthur Augustus.

"You may!" said Mr. Skeat, with a smile. "Now, I will leave you young rascals."

And Mr. Skeat, with an activity surprising in so portly a gentleman—

clambered over the stacked furniture again and picked his way down the staircase. Private Brown gave him a helping hand at the foot of the stairs. "Ain't running them in sir?" asked Mr. Brown.

"No," said Mr. Skeat. "Well, I ain't grumbling. This 'ere job suits me, and I don't care how long it goes on," said Mr. Brown confidentially. "Ten bob a day and all found ain't to be sneezed at in these 'ard times, what?"

The inspector agreed that it wasn't, and went his way. Private Brown winked up the staircase at the schoolboy rebels.

"Coming for you soon!" he announced. "We're going to have you out of that before long."

"Come now, old bean!" said Cardew. "I've got a bucket of water and ink and soot here, and you're welcome to it on your napper!"

The prospect did not seem to tempt Private Brown. He lighted a cigarette and turned away—and for the present at least the rebels of St. Jim's were left to their own devices.

Tom Merry & Co. were in cheerier spirits than ever now. They were prepared to hold the fort indefinitely—to carry on all through the new term if necessary, rather than surrender. But it looked now as if the silver lining were showing through the cloud, and that Tom Merry's fight for his honour was to end in triumph.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Cornered!

"A T it again!" grunted Sergeant Stuckey. The sergeant's voice sounded cross.

It was late in the evening, and the winter darkness brooded over St. Jim's, broken only by the glimmer here and there of a star.

Sergeant Stuckey was making his rounds, with Privates Brown and Green, in the dusky old quadrangle.

A very careful watch was kept every night to prevent a "sortie" on the part of the schoolboy rebels. A few nights before Blake of the Fourth and his comrades had succeeded in getting a "convoy" of provisions into the besieged School House, thus giving the garrison a new lease of life, as it were. If all else failed, the Head hoped to see the rebels reduced to surrender by want of food; but Blake's success had at least deferred that consummation which was so devoutly to be wished. And ever since the watch had been doubly vigilant, and at all hours of the night sentries walked their rounds in the precincts of the school, to watch for and cut off any stragglers from the garrison.

It was the sound of scrambling at the school wall that caught the keen ear of the sergeant, and convinced him that the rebels were "at it again," as he expressed it.

At a spot where the school wall bordered the road, Mr. Stuckey had caught a sound of running feet outside, and paused to listen.

The running feet stopped at the wall, and there was a sound of scrambling in the darkness.

The sergeant smiled grimly. "One of them young rips," he murmured. "This way; he'll drop fairly into our 'ands."

And the trio approached the wall quietly, grinning in the darkness, pre-

pared to catch the venturesome junior as he dropped on the inner side.

Thud!

A figure dropped from the wall, not precisely into their hands, but on the sergeant's foot. A heavy boot ground on Sergeant Stuckey's favourite corn, and he gave a howl of anguish.

There was a startled, muttered curse in the gloom, startling enough to the old soldiers, who supposed that they had a schoolboy to deal with. But the next moment they realised that the shadowy intruder was far from being a schoolboy.

Private Brown clutched him, and held him fast, and an aroma of rum and tobacco was breathed over Mr. Brown.

"Who the thunder—" ejaculated Mr. Brown.

"Let me go, 'ang yer!" came a panting voice, and the man in the private's grasp struggled desperately.

Private Brown grinned, and tightened his grip.

"Show a light 'ere, sergeant," he said. "This 'ere ain't one of them young rips. Some blooming tramp dodging in to pinch something!"

Sergeant Stuckey turned on the light of his electric torch. It gleamed on a purple-coloured, stubby visage, narrow, foxy eyes, one of them with a cast in it. The three old soldiers stared at their capture in grim disgust. He was not pleasant either to look at or to touch.

"Now, who are you, and what's your game 'ere, my man?" demanded the sergeant gruffly.

"I—I'm doing no harm!" gasped the ruffian. "I—I jest dodged in over the wall, because—because—"

"Because you thought there was chickens to steal?" asked Private Brown humorously. "We'll take you to Mr. Raiton, anyhow."

"I—I tell you some blokes are after me!"

"That's enough! Bring him along."

"'Old on!" said Mr. Brown. "Sounds as if his yarn might be true. There's somebody running along the road outside."

Sharp footsteps were ringing on the frosty road, and there was a calling voice, in excited tones. The footsteps passed, and then returned, and finally stopped.

Private Brown, leaving the prisoner to his comrades, clambered up the wall, and looked over into the road. Three or four figures could be seen there, shadowy in the gloom.

"He's dodged us!" came an angry voice. "Has he cut across the fields?"

"Cut across the wall, more like!" It was Inspector Skeat's voice. "Look! His track's in the mud up to this point. "Could he have dodged into the school grounds, sir?"

"Any port in a storm, I fancy. We were close behind, and Johnson was in front, heading him off. I fancy he climbed the wall. Why—" The inspector uttered a sharp exclamation, as he detected Private Brown's shadowy form on top of the wall. "There he is!"

"Who are you?" snapped Mr. Skeat.

"Jack Brown, once in the Loamshire Regiment, now a blinking bricklayer!" answered Mr. Brown cheerily. "If you've got a job laying bricks, old nut, I'll undertake to lay them as fast as a turkey can lay eggs."

"Oh! You're one of Mr. Raiton's men," said the inspector. "Did you see anybody dodge over the school wall a few minutes ago, Brown?"

"Old man, you've come to the right

shop!" assured Mr. Brown. "We've got him tight, if you want him. What's he done?"

"You've got him! Good! Keep him till I get in!" exclaimed the inspector joyfully; and he rushed away to the school gates with the constables.

Private Brown dropped on the inner side of the wall.

"Peelers," he said. "They're arter this cove; seemed to want him bad. Your number's up, old codger!"

There was a savage curse from Mr. Gadget; apparently his customary solace in time of trouble.

"Look 'ere!" he panted. "Let me go! Give a bloke a chance! I'll stand you three quid each!"

"Stow the gab!" said the sergeant. "Bring him along!"

Mr. Gadget, vainly pleading and promising golden sovereigns, was hustled away through the elms.

Inspector Skeat and his men had got in at the gates by this time, and were coming along the drive. At the sight of the police helmets in the gloom, Jem Gadget made a furious effort, and tore himself loose.

"'Old him!" yelled Private Brown. "Arter him!" roared the sergeant.

The hunted man made a desperate leap out of reach, and ran for it. There was a shout from Inspector Skeat.

"After him! Don't let him get away!"

The constables and the inspector, the sergeant and his men rushed in pursuit. Two or three of Mr. Raiton's men, who were on sentry-go in the grounds, closed in from various directions.

Once, twice the hapless Mr. Gadget was headed off, and the pursuers closed in on him, penning him in against the wide facade of the School House. Inspector Skeat's grip was almost on his shoulder, when Gadget made a spring up the School House steps and rushed into the house.

He could scarcely have hoped for any avenue of escape that way; but it was neck or nothing now—his escape was cut off in all directions. He dashed into the House, panting and cursing, and after him swarmed the pursuers—sure of him now.

At the foot of the staircase he stopped and saw the stairs barred before him. The juniors stared down at him in amazement.

He was a stranger to them—though had Figgins & Co. been there they would have recognised the man as the ruffian they had encountered on the footpath in Wayland Wood.

On the lower stairs there were hurried trampling footsteps in chase. Sergeant Stuckey and all his men were entering into the pursuit of the fleeing thief with great gusto—a good deal like a crowd of merry schoolboys.

The desperate man had dodged up the stairs, perhaps in the hope of finding some hiding-place, or of escaping from a window and eluding his pursuers. But the chase was close behind, and he had no time.

He was about to dash up the upper staircase, when he discovered that it was blocked with stacked furniture—probably a very surprising sight to Mr. Jem Gadget.

He stopped, panting, and the rushing footsteps behind came along the corridor, and there were more shouts.

"Collar him!"

With a snarl, the hunted man sprang upon the barricaded stairs, clambering desperately up.

There was little hope for him, or none; but the grasping hand of the

sergeant was only a few feet away, and the alternative was immediate capture.

"Who the deuce is the fellow?" asked Cardew. "Are we lettin' him come up here?"

"Oh, let him come!" said Tom. "He can't do any harm—but collar him as soon as he gets over, till we find out who he is and what he wants. It might be a dodge of the enemy."

Gadgett clambered desperately up; and the sergeant started clambering after him, followed by Private Brown. But the juniors chipped in at that. Missiles whizzed down the staircase, over Gadgett's head, and smote Mr. Stuckey and Mr. Brown right and left. They roared with wrath.

"Stop that!" yelled the sergeant.

"Back out, old top!" called out Monty Lowther. "You're not coming up here."

The sergeant and Mr. Brown scrambled back. In the excitement of the chase they had forgotten, for the moment, the barring-out.

Jem Gadgett had almost reached the landing, clambering on with desperate hurry.

"Stop that man!" panted the sergeant. "Do you 'ear me? He's a thief with the police arter him."

"Bai Jove!"

"Not a little dodge of yours to get through—what?" chuckled Blake.

"No!" howled the sergeant. "Stop him! Hold him!"

"We'll hold him fast enough, anyhow," said Tom Merry. "But you fellows keep your distance, or look out for squalls."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Gadgett, breathless, rolled over the barricade on to the landing. At once half a dozen hands fastened on him.

Tom Merry & Co. did not know in the least what to make of the strange affair; but they were prepared to secure the fugitive till they learned more. His looks alone showed sufficiently that he was a man who would bear watching.

"Hold on, old bean!" said Cardew genially, as he grasped the man's rough collar. "We've got you."

"Let go!" panted Gadgett.

"Wats, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "You are weequiahed to give an account of yourself."

"What do you want here," demanded Tom Merry.

"Who are you, and where did you spring from?" asked Levison of the Fourth.

Gadgett stood panting, in the hold of the juniors. The pursuers were gathering now at the bottom of the staircase.

"You let me go!" panted Gadgett.

"Let me out of one of them winders, and I'll beat them yet. I'll make it worth your while."

"Bai Jove! How can you make it worth our while, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

"I'll stand you a quid each."

"Gweat Scot!"

"Let me go, and I'll shell out!" panted Gadgett. "I've got the dibs—I'll hand you a quid—a golden quid—each of you! I've got the money."

Tom Merry gave a jump.

"You've got the money—sovereigns!" he ejaculated.

"Yes—yes—let me go—"

"Hold him!" panted Tom. "I think I catch on now—this must be the man Gadgett—"

"Oh, my hat!" said Blake. "And he's dodged in here to get away? Here, of all places! Great pip!"

"Mind he doesn't get away—"

"What ho!"

And with a very firm grip on Mr. Gadgett, the juniors crowded round the fugitive from justice.



AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR!
Gadgett clambered desperately over the barricaded staircase, with the sergeant and his men close on his heels. The rebels stared down in amazement at the scene. "Stop that man!" panted the sergeant. "He's a thief, with the police arter him!" (See Chapter 2.)

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Light at Last!

INSPECTOR SKEAT stood staring up the staircase, anxious and exasperated. The garrison on the landing did not intend to allow anyone to come up the stairs, even the inspector. They had no intention of allowing the position to be rushed, for any reason whatever. But the inspector's face cleared when Tom Merry looked over the barricade at last, and the tousled head of Jem Gadgett showed there also.

"Got him, Mr. Skeat!" called out Tom.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed the inspector, in great relief.

"Is it the man you told us about?"

"That's the man. Mind he doesn't get loose!" said the inspector anxiously. "I've got a warrant for him here, and he's given us no end of trouble."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not likely to let him get loose!" he said. "He's been offering us golden sovereigns to let him go—Mr. Ratcliff's sovereigns, I suppose."

"I'm coming up!" called out the inspector, and he started clambering up the barricade, eager to get his official

hands—and handcuffs—on the elusive Mr. Gadgett.

"Right-ho!" called back Tom Merry. "You can come up, Mr. Skeat, and welcome. Nobody else, though. We can't take risks!"

"Wathah not!"

Inspector Skeat came up alone, the constables waiting at the foot of the stairs, with Sergeant Stuckey and his crowd. By this time Mr. Railton had arrived on the scene, and Private Brown explained to him what was happening. The Housemaster listened in astonishment, but very evident satisfaction.

"Merry!" he called out.

"Yes, sir?"

"I desire to see this man. I will ascend," said Mr. Railton. "I will give you my word to retire when the man is taken away."

"Right-ho, sir!" said Tom Merry at once. "We know we can trust you, sir."

Mr. Railton followed the inspector up the stairs—a rather difficult task over the stacked furniture. He dropped on the landing beside the breathless inspector. Jem Gadgett eyed Mr. Skeat with surly animosity; but his struggles were over; a dozen pairs of hands were

grasping him, and he was quite helpless.

Mr. Skeat jerked the handcuffs from his pocket.

"Wrists!" he said laconically.

Click!

"Well, you've got me, old covey!" said Mr. Gadgett. "I've given you a run for your money, any'ow!"

"You have!" assented the inspector. "You might as well have let me take you into custody at the Black Bird three days ago, Jem. But here you are at last!"

"Ere I am," said Gadgett coolly. "And now I'd like to know the blooming charge!"

"Your old game, Jem—larceny!" said Mr. Skeat cheerily. "You've got to account for a sum of money in gold, now in your possession. What's left after the amount you've spent at the Black Bird?" The inspector ran his nimble fingers through the ruffian's pockets. "Nine—ten—twelve sovereigns. Is that all that's left out of the forty-six, Jem?"

Gadgett burst into a hoarse laugh.

"Ow you know there was forty-six beats me!" he said. "That's all that's left, any'ow, Mr. Skeat, and, as it turns out, I wish it wasn't left, blow me! I never knowed you was on the case. Ain't I been looking in the papers, and never a word was said about the robbery at this 'ere school, and I reckoned it had blowed over somehow. Don't you worry, Mr. Skeat. I know I'm booked for three months'ard, and I'm ready!"

"I'm bound to warn you——" began Mr. Skeat.

Gadgett laughed again.

"Stow it!" he said. "I ain't no mug. I know it's a clear case. The beak ain't going to believe that I've saved up a pocketful of sovereigns, I suppose, out of my wages, is he?"

The inspector grinned.

"Probably not!" he assented.

Mr. Railton fixed his eyes on the man.

"You confess, then, that you committed the robbery at this school a few weeks ago, Gadgett?" he said.

Gadgett stared at him and grinned.

"Course I do!" he answered. "Can't it be proved as easy as wink? I'm not the man to give the magistrates a lot of trouble—not when the game's up. Comes 'arder on a man."

"I think you may clear the stairs now, Merry," said Mr. Railton. "This man's confession clears up the whole trouble."

"Looks like it, sir!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

The juniors looked to Tom Merry for orders. Tom nodded. It was clear now that the long trouble at St. Jim's was at an end. Tom Merry's innocence was clear as the sun at noon, the barring-out was over. The St. Jim's rebels set to work clearing the stairs of the barricade to allow a passage for the inspector and his handcuffed prisoner.

Inspector Skeat marched the man down at last, and departed with his prisoner and the constables. Mr. Railton hurried away to the New House to acquaint the Head with the startling turn affairs had taken. And Tom Merry & Co. rejoiced—though from Wally of the Third were heard some regrets that the barring-out was not to continue through the new term.

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THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Burying the Hatchet!

"THE Head!"
"Heah comes the Head, deah boys!"

Cardew sighed.

"Then it's all over?" he said. "No more giddy barring-out! Latin and maths next term, instead of giving Housemasters the kybosh! I don't call that a change for the better."

"Rotten!" said Wally of the Third.

The stately figure of Dr. Holmes appeared at the foot of the staircase. He picked his way upward, among the fragments of damaged furniture that still cumbered the staircase. The juniors stood silent as he came. Exactly what the Head had to say they did not know; and a few reckless fellows like Cardew hoped, perhaps, that reconciliation was not the order of the day. But Tom Merry and the great majority sincerely hoped that the trouble was at an end.

A dozen candles burned on the landing, and a bike lamp or two. Dr. Holmes stepped on the landing, his face grave. The juniors waited for him to speak.

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir!" said Tom respectfully.

"Mr. Railton has acquainted me with what has taken place. It now appears to be established, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that you were innocent of what was laid to your charge."

"Yaas, wathah, sir!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Your story of what happened that unfortunate night turns out to be perfectly true and correct," said the Head, with some emotion in his voice. "Merry, I can scarcely blame myself for having condemned you, on such overwhelming evidence. But I will say that I am thankful that your school-fellows had such immense faith in you."

"Oh, sir!" said Tom.

"Your innocence is, of course, fully established now," said the Head. "I am afraid you have been greatly wronged, my boy. I am sorry."

There was a pause.

"I'm glad the truth's come out at last, sir," said Tom quietly. "And, in the circumstances, I hope you will forgive us for having taken the law into our own hands."

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"I can scarcely do otherwise," he said. "The proceedings of yourself and your friends have been very lawless. But I cannot lose sight of the fact that this rebellion has saved me from having committed what proves to be a great injustice. I need hardly say that your sentence of expulsion from the school is now rescinded."

"Thank you, sir."

"You will remain," said the Head, "and I am glad of it. Of the rebellion nothing more will be said, and no punishment will be administered—on condition, of course, that order is restored at once."

"That's all we want, sir!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"To-morrow morning, then," said Dr. Holmes, "you will all disperse to your homes for the remaining days of the vacation. You will return to St. Jim's for the new term, Merry, in the ordinary way. I shall make it a point to forget all that has taken place, and nothing will be remembered against any boy for what he has done during this rebellion."

"Bwavo!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

The Head smiled.

"That is all I have to say!" he added; and he held out his hand to Tom Merry and shook hands cordially with the hero of St. Jim's.

Then, stately as ever, the Head descended the stairs.

"Thwee cheeahs for the Head!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

And there was a roar at once, and it rang pleasantly enough in the ears of Dr. Holmes as he quitted the School House.

"Victory all along the jolly old line!" said Ralph Reckness Cardew. "Jolly good—no end rippin', in fact—but there's no more barrin'-out! Sorry for that, but every good thing comes to an end."

"Weally, Cardew——"

Tom Merry's face was very bright.

"All's well that ends well!" he said. "We've won, and the Head has taken it like a little man!"

"Hear, hear!"

"He's a good old sort, said Tom, "and though he made a pretty serious mistake, I don't know that I can blame him much, considering how the matter looked at the time. Thank goodness it's turned out as it has. And it's been jolly good fun while it lasted, too——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And now it's all over," said Tom. "I want to thank you fellows for standing by me as you did—like real bricks."

"Hurrah for little us!" said Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But for the barring-out, it's pretty clear that matters would never have come right," said Tom. "You fellows stood up for me, and we've pulled through; and I shan't forget it. And now——"

"Now," said Fatty Wynn, "I've got a suggestion to make."

"What's that?" asked Tom, with a smile.

"We're clearing out to-morrow, so we shan't want to ration the grub any more," said Fatty, with a beaming face. "I suggest standing a big spread with what's left, as a celebration of the giddy victory."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I wish Kerr and old Figgins were here. But we can tell them about it next term, anyhow."

"Passed unanimously," said Blake, with a chuckle. "And we'll ask Private Brown and the sergeant and his gang to the spread. We've buried the giddy hatchet now, and they're good sorts!"

"Hear, hear!"

Fatty Wynn's valuable suggestion met with universal approval. All the supplies that remained were pooled for a celebration spread; and Arthur Augustus trotted downstairs to invite Sergeant Stuckey & Co. to join in it. They accepted the invitation in the same cheerful spirit in which it was given, and crowded up the stairs, on the most amicable terms with the schoolboy rebels, with whom they had so lately been engaged in conflict.

It was a glorious spread, and there was high good-humour on all sides. Mr. Railton looked in during the feast, and was pressed to stay, and smilingly consented. The hatchet was buried at last, and all, so to speak, was calm and bright.

THE END.

("THE SCHOOLBOY REFUGEE!"
next week's stirring tale of Tom Merry
& Co. Don't miss it!)

MEET THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW, BELOW!

The RAIDER'S LAST TRAIL!

by RALPH REDWAY



OUR BREATHLESSLY THRILLING LONG
COMPLETE WILD-WEST YARN.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Under Suspicion!

POKER POINDEXTER rode into the cow-town of Gunsight from the prairie trail.

It was sundown; and shadows were lengthening in the dusty street. Already the naphtha lamps of the Four Aces saloon were alight.

The rancher checked his grey mustang, as he came within the radius of light from the saloon. The Four Aces had an almost irresistible attraction for the most inveterate gambler in the Rio Claro country. But he did not halt. He rode on up the street to Blake's shack. Many curious glances were turned on him as he rode. The Gunsight men returned his greetings as he passed them, but in almost every man's look was something that the rancher did not fail to notice, something that hinted of doubt and reserve.

Jud Blake, the marshal of Gunsight, was seated on a bench outside his shack, smoking his pipe, and staring thoughtfully down the dusty street. He watched the rancher curiously as he rode up. Poindexter pulled rein, and dismounted, throwing his reins over a post.

"Evenin', Jud!"

The marshal gave him a curt nod.

"I guess I've been expecting to hear from you, Jud!" said Poindexter.

"Sho!" said the marshal.

"It's near a week since we was on the trail of that fire-bug from Frio, the Rio Kid. You ain't letting up on him, I reckon?"

"I guess I ain't honing to rope in that Kid!" answered Jud Blake. "I ain't wanting to see him any."

"You ain't wanting to see the galoot that shot up the last marshal of this burg?" said Poindexter. "I guess I'm ready to take the trail with my outfit, when you give the word, Jud. You don't reckon the Kid has hit the trail out of this section?"

"Nope."

"Then why ain't you trailing him?" demanded the rancher, knitting his brows. "You ain't figuring to let him run loose?"

Jud shook his head.

"I guess the Kid ain't the man we want, Poindexter," he answered slowly. "That masked galoot that's shot up half a dozen guys in this section ain't the Kid. He's rode under the Kid's name, and he had us all fooled for a long time; but we're sure wise to it now. He ain't the Kid, and never was."

"Quit fooling!" snapped Poindexter. "You ain't taking the word of an outlaw that's wanted by half the sheriffs in Texas?"

"I guess it's proved up," said the marshal stolidly. "The Kid chipped in when that masked guy shot up San-

The Rio Kid vowed he would unmask the Unknown Raider, and with relentless cunning he has stuck to his task. And now—fortune favours this daredevil adventurer of Texas!

tander, the Mexican cattle-buyer. I guess he can't be two people at once, Poindexter. He sure saved that Greaser's life after he was shot up. That fire-bug fooled us good by calling himself by the Kid's name. But we're wise to his trick now."

"You don't believe it was the Rio Kid that's been riding the trails with a mask on his face?"

"Sure not."

"What you reckon the Kid's doing in this country, then?" demanded the rancher.

"I guess he's hunting for the galoot that's been using his name," answered the marshal—"and that's the galoot we want, too. I sure know now that if we want the fire-bug who's been raising Cain in this section we want to look nearer home for him."

Poindexter breathed hard.

"So that's your idea, Jud?"

"Yep!"

"And you've let up on the Rio Kid?"

"Sure."

"He's got you fooled!" sneered Poindexter.

"Forget it!" answered Jud. "That masked guy, who called himself by the Kid's name, shot up Santander, and the Kid came along in time to save the Greaser's life. That proves it up. Dog-gone it, Poindexter, you know it as well as I do. What you giving me?"

The rancher's eyes gleamed at him.

"And you got an idea who the fire-bug is, if he ain't the Kid?" he asked. Jud did not reply to that.

"That outlaw's been telling the world that I'm the man," said Poindexter. "He's shouted it out, and all Gunsight's wise to it. You reckon so, Jud?"

The marshal shrugged his shoulders.

"If I reckoned so, Poindexter, you wouldn't be standing there chewing the rag," he answered. "You'd be swinging from a cottonwood at the end of a riata."

"That means that you don't believe it?"

"Sure, I don't."

"The boys have been giving me the marble-eye, and you sure didn't look all-fired pleased to see me, Jud," said the rancher, with a sneer.

Jed looked at him directly.

"I'll give you straight talk, Poindexter. You ain't exactly under suspicion, on an outlaw's word, but—"

"But what?" sneered the rancher.

"I guess this here burg wants to know," said Jud slowly. "Some galoot has been robbing and shooting, and using the Rio Kid's name as cover. I guess that was to save his own hide. The Kid's shouted out that you're the man. Well, whoever the man is, I reckon he's some galoot that belongs to this section—some galoot that wanted the money he's raised on the trails.

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Every man in Gunsight knows that you lose more money at poker and faro than your ranch ever earned. I've seen you lose two thousand dollars in the Four Aces, and you sure never raised the money on your ranch. Where did you raise it, feller?"

"That's my business." The marshal nodded. "Sure!" he assented. "But you can't blame the boys for wondering a few whether there may be suthin' in what the Kid's shouted out. Dollars don't grow on mesquite-bushes, and they ain't picked up in the arroyos. There's another thing—"

He paused. "Spill it!" sneered the rancher. "That Mexican galoot, Santander, was coming to your ranch to buy cattle, with ten thousand dollars in his rags. He was held up on the trail. You was wise to it that he was coming along with the dollars."

"Meaning that I laid for him on the trail?" "I ain't saying so," answered Jud. "But s'pose he had got to your ranch with the dollars? You ain't any cattle to sell. Every longhorn on your ranch is under mortgage. It sure looks—"

He broke off again. "I ain't taking the Kid's word that you're the man," he said. "But it don't look quite square, Poindexter; and you can't blame the boys if they look cross-eyed at you."

"I guess they can look as they durned-well like," said the rancher sullenly. "I tell you, the Rio Kid's got you fooled. You're taking an outlaw's word against a cow-man that was raised in this country."

"I ain't," said Jud. "Not any! But it's a sure thing that the Kid ain't the man we want, and I'm letting him alone."

Poindexter swung away, and remounted his horse. He rode slowly down the dusty street of Gunsight.

His brow was black, and his thoughts bitter. As he came again in the light of the Four Aces, he checked his horse. For a few moments he sat in the saddle, staring moodily at the open doorway of the saloon. In the brightly-lighted interior, he had a glimpse of the poker tables and the crowd gathered round the faro lay-out.

If the rancher had thought of resisting the temptation that had already brought him to ruin, it was only for a brief space. He dismounted, hitched his horse with a dozen others to the rail outside the Four Aces, and strode into the saloon.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Kid Falls Among Friends!

"SHO!" murmured the Kid. He backed his horse from the trail into a clump of cottonwoods.

From the distance the sound of hoofbeats had come to his keen ears, though no rider was yet in sight. It was morning, and the Kid was riding the stage-trail that ran between Gunsight and the town of Claro, fifteen miles away up the river.

The hoofbeats came from the direction of Gunsight, and the Kid prudently quitted the trail and took cover in the trees.

All the cow-town knew by this time that the masked raider was not the Rio Kid, but that did not alter the fact that the boy puncher was an outlaw, and that he rode the trails of Texas with his life in his hand.

Backing into deep cover, the Kid

peered out at the trail from a screen of thick Spaniard's-beard among the branches round him.

A bunch of horsemen came in sight, galloping up the trail from Gunsight.

At their head the Kid recognised Jud Blake, the marshal, and following the marshal came six men, all of whom the Kid had seen before—when they had been hunting him on the prairie.

The Kid smiled grimly.

He wondered whether the marshal and his men were on his trail. They had hunted him long and hard in the belief that he was the masked raider who had used his name. But now that they were wise to the truth the Kid reckoned that they might surely give him a rest.

The horsemen came on at a gallop and looked as if they were going to ride past the clump of cottonwoods that concealed the boy puncher. But just abreast of it the marshal drew rein.

"I guess this will fix us, you-uns," he said.

And the marshal rode into the trees, followed by his men.

The Kid's hand dropped on a gun.

They did not know he was there, that was certain, for not a man touched a weapon as they rode under the cottonwoods. But in a few seconds they would know.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Jud suddenly.

Riding into the trees, he almost rode into the halted horsemen there. And the Kid, with a gun in each hand, sat in the saddle and covered the marshal, smiling over the guns.

"You looking for me, Jud?" he drawled. "You've sure found me, whether you're looking for me or not, feller."

"Thunder!" repeated the marshal.

Guns were gripped on all sides. But Jud did not reach to his belt. Both the Kid's guns were looking at him, and he was too wise to attempt to draw.

"You don't want to burn powder, you-uns," drawled the Kid. "I ain't honing for trouble with any of you guys, but if you lift a gun your town will sure want a new marshal."

"Forget it, Kid," said Jud quietly. "We ain't arter you."

"What you doing here, Kid?" demanded Tex Clew. "You waiting for the hack to come along from Gunsight?"

"Jest that," agreed the Kid coolly.

"Gee, you aiming to hold up the hack, you dog-goned geck?"

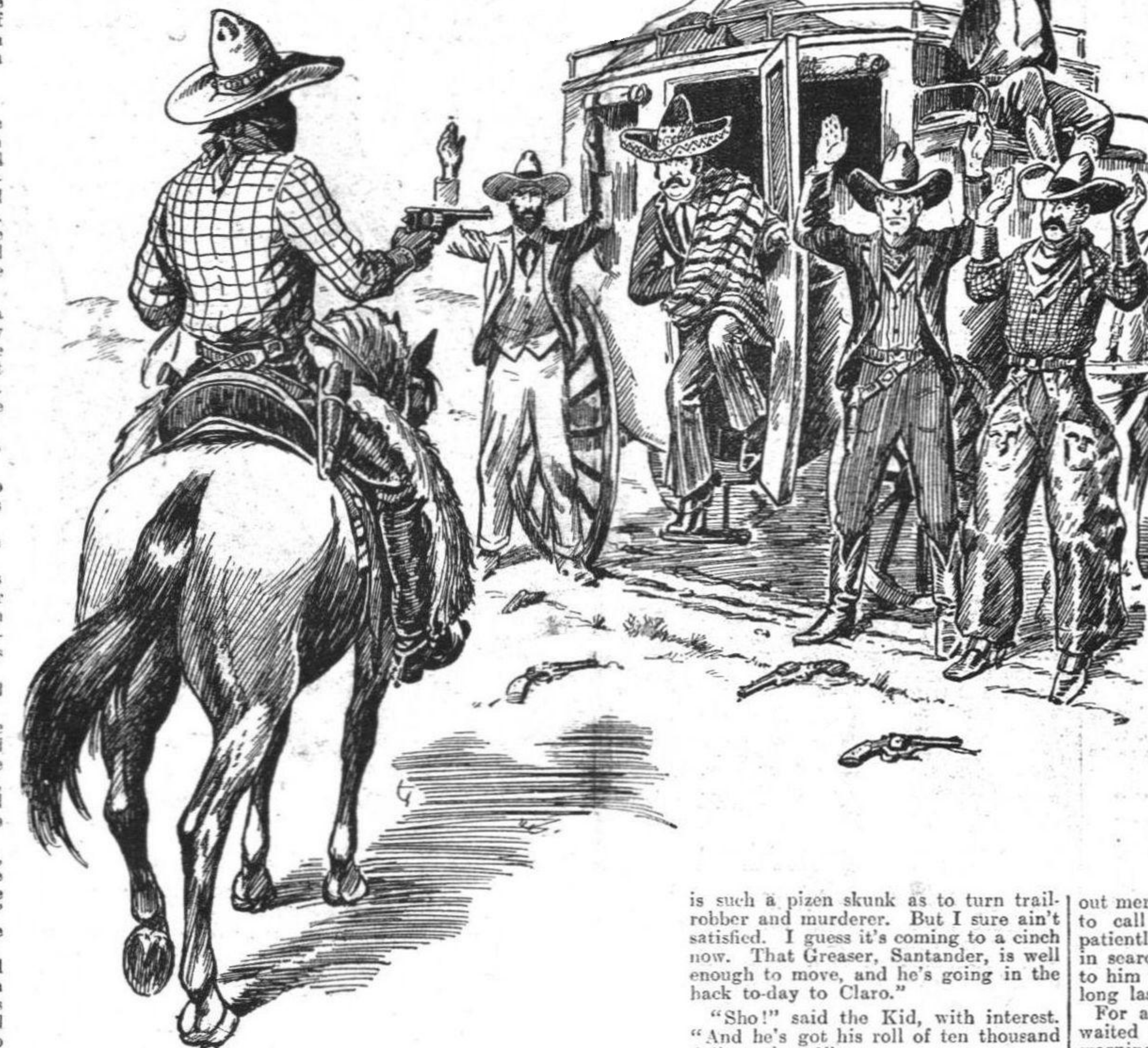
The Kid grinned.

"You big stiff," he said good-humouredly, "if I was aiming to hold up the hack I guess I wouldn't put you wise about it. But I'm here to wait for it, all the same, feller."

"And why?" demanded Jud.

"I'm honing to get a bead on that fire-bug that's been using my name," said the Kid. "He's sure stopped the hack on this trail more'n once. I've been haunting this trail and keeping an

THE HOLD-UP! "Light down!" rapped out the masked raider. The passengers poured from the hack and stood in a row in front of the outlaw. "Now drop your guns!" came the next order. And they all obeyed, for they knew the reputation of this merciless man who had held them up. (See Chapter 8.)



eye open. I guess sooner or later I'll cinch him in a hold-up."

"So that's your game, Kid?"

"You've said it."

The marshal made a sign to his men and guns were holstered. The Kid eyed them warily, however.

"We ain't got no trouble with you, Kid," said the marshal amicably. "I ain't caring a Continental red cent what they say about you in Frio. While I figured that you was that fire-bug who's shot up six men in this section I was arter you with a rope. But that's sure cleared up now. We're arter that fire-bug, and I guess if you want to jine the bunch you're welcome."

"Marshal, you're talking hoss sense," said the Kid, and his guns slid back into his holsters.

"You watch the trail; Tex," said Jud.

"Sure!"

"I guess I'll put you wise, Kid," said the marshal. "I been chewing over what you've said about Poindexter. I ain't believing that a Gunsight rancher

is such a pizen skunk as to turn trail-robber and murderer. But I sure ain't satisfied. I guess it's coming to a cinch now. That Greaser, Santander, is well enough to move, and he's going in the hack to-day to Claro."

"Sho!" said the Kid, with interest. "And he's got his roll of ten thousand dollars along?"

"That's it. Since he was shot up he ain't doing any cattle-buying. He's hitting the trail back to Mexico now he can move. He's going to Claro to get the regler stage. And all Gunsight sure knows that he's going, with ten thousand dollars in his rags."

"Sho!" repeated the Kid. "You've let it out to give that fire-bug a chance to wade in and grab it?"

The marshal grinned. "Jest that!" he agreed. "I ain't believing anything agin Poindexter, but now there's a doubt I ain't trusting him any. That's only hoss sense. Poindexter knows that Santander will be in the hack with his dollars. He don't know that this bunch will be on hand if there's a hold-up."

"I sure get you," said the Kid. "Marshal, if the galoot don't suspicion you none he will hold up the hack to-day for that bag of dollars."

"He don't suspicion me none," said Jud. "I've sure borrowed Tex there

from his outfit, sending a message that we're riding for the Rio Grande country to look for you."

"Oh, shucks!"

"I guess he believes, this minute, that we're the other side of the horizon," said Jud. "If he's the fire-bug you allow I guess he won't figure on seeing us on this hyer trail."

The Kid grinned.

Jud Blake declared that he did not believe the accusation against Poker Poindexter. But that plan he had laid showed that he suspected him deeply. Certainly, he was acting as if he thought it very likely that Poindexter was the man.

"Poindexter or not, the galoot knows all that goes on in Gunsight," went on the marshal. "I've spread it round that we're hitting south to the Rio Grande, and we sure started at dawn, and we've rode twenty miles round, to cover our tracks. Now we're here to see the hack pass—and we're follering on behind all the way to Claro. I guess if there's a hold-up we come on pronto."

"Jud, you've got a whole heap of solid hoss-sense," said the Rio Kid, "and I'm sure riding with you, and I guess if that bandit holds up the hack it will be the last hold-up he will ever handle on this side of Jordan."

"You've said it," agreed Jud.

There was a grim smile on the face of the Rio Kid. He had resolved never to quit the Gunsight country till the masked trail-bandit had been brought to light and the truth made clear beyond all cavil that he had falsely called himself by the name of the Rio Kid. Under that name he had robbed and shot without mercy, and the Kid had determined to call him to account. Long and patiently had the Kid ridden the trails in search of his enemy, and it seemed to him that it was coming to a cinch at long last.

For an hour the bunch of horsemen waited under the trees till Tex gave warning that the hack was coming.

They backed into deeper cover; but the Kid watched the hack, as it passed, from the screen of Spaniard's-beard. There were four passengers in the hack for Claro, and one of them was Don Felipe Santander, the Mexican cattle-buyer, whose life the Kid had saved. The fat, swarthy Mexican looked pale and worn. He was well enough to travel, but by no means recovered yet from the wound the masked robber had given him. No man in the hack glanced towards the cottonwoods, or had any suspicion that a bunch of horsemen were hidden there.

The vehicle passed on with a rumbling of wheels, a clatter of hoofs, and the cracking of a whip. After it was gone Jud signed to his men, and they pushed out into the trail.

"Foller on!" said the marshal.

The Gunsight men rode after the hack, the Rio Kid with them. Far in the distance the hack rolled on. It was out of sight, for the trail was irregular, winding here and there among clumps of trees, or belts of tangled mesquite.

From the distance came the sound of the driver's whip, cracking like a series of pistol-shots. But the sound grew fainter in the distance, and died away.

Five miles had passed under the feet of the horses, when from far ahead came a sudden, sharp ring of a revolver.

Jud Blake started.

"I guess that's the signal."

"The signal?" repeated the Kid. Jud grinned.

"Yes, Santander had it fixed to put us wise. Ride on, you 'uns!"

Gun in hand, the marshal and his men swept on down the trail.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Last Hold-Up!

"H ALT!" The stage-driver from Gunsight did not wait to be bidden twice.

The hack was ten miles out of Gunsight. It was the loneliest part of the trail that ran to Claro.

A horseman with a black mask on his face pushed his horse from the mesquite beside the trail, a gun in his hand.

The hack came to a swift halt.

Every eye was turned on the road-agent as he rode up to the hack, revolver in hand.

That it was the "fire-bug" who had so long haunted the trails in the Gunsight country was plain. His grey mustang had a black muzzle. He wore goatskin chaps like a cow-puncher, and there was a band of silver nuggets round his Stetson. It was the bandit who rode under the name of the Rio Kid. And though all Gunsight no longer believed that he was the Kid, he rode now under the same guise as before. Whether he was the Kid or not, no man in the hack reckoned on offering resistance. Whoever it was, he was the man who had shot six men dead in as many months, and the sight of his levelled gun was enough for the passengers.

"Light down!" he rapped out.

The passengers poured from the hack. Don Felipe Santander stepped out slowly, and as he left the vehicle the masked man eyed him curiously through the holes in the mask.

"Drop your guns!" he rapped.

His revolver swayed, covering all the four passengers as they stood in a row in the trail. All of them packed guns. And they jerked the guns from their belts, and dropped them into the trail.

Crack!

One of the revolvers exploded as it was flung to the earth.

"Put up your hands!" snarled the rider.

The passengers' hands went up.

"Keep 'em up!" growled the trail bandit. "You, Greaser, I guess you're my mutton. You want to hand over your roll pronto."

"Si, senior."

The Mexican cattle-buyer slid his hand under the folds of his serape. It came out with a thick roll of bills.

The horseman's eyes glittered through the holes in the mask.

He took the roll with his left hand. Thud, thud, thud!

The masked horseman gave a violent start.

From the trail, in the direction of Gunsight, came a thunder of horses' hoofs.

The passengers turned eager eyes in the direction of the sound. There was a glint in the black eyes of the Mexican cattle-buyer.

The masked man swung his mustang round.

With the roll of bills still gripped in his left hand he rode away up the trail, turned from it, and dashed away through a belt of mesquite.

Thud, thud, thud! came the crashing of hoofs. Scarce a minute after the raider had fled, the bunch from Gunsight dashed on the scene.

Jud Blake drew rein.

"You Santander! He's been here!"

"Si, senior," grinned the Mexican. "He has taken my roll—the roll I had prepared for him. He will not find it of much value if he gets away with it. Todos los Santos!" He pointed out the way the masked rider had gone. "Follow him, senores!"

"Ride!" yelled the marshal.

The bunch swept on.

"By the great horned toad!" said the Rio Kid, his eyes gleaming. "We've sure got that fire-bug this time!"

"Ride!" yelled Jud.

The Gunsight men swept through the mesquite. Beyond lay the open prairie, stretching for many a long mile away from the banks of the Rio Claro.

Far in the distance, riding hard, was a horseman, plying whip and spur to escape.

Fast on his track rode the Gunsight men. The quarry was in full view, and revolvers rang as they spurred in pursuit.

The masked man rode desperately.

The grey mustang responded gallantly to his urging. It fairly flew over the rolling prairie. But every man in the Gunsight bunch was riding a picked horse. They kept up in the chase. And one of the bunch drew ahead. It was the Rio Kid, riding as he had seldom ridden before. Slowly, foot by foot, the mustang gained on the fleeing trail-bandit.

There was a grim smile on the Kid's face.

His gun was in his hand; and more

than once he could have dropped the fleeing bandit from his saddle. But he did not fire. He was gaining, and that was enough for the Kid. He would not shoot the bandit in the back if he could help it.

The head of the fugitive turned; the eyes through the holes in the mask glittered at the pursuers. His arm was thrown up, and a shot rang sharply.

But it flew wild. A spatter of bullets from the pursuers answered the shot, and some of them whizzed very close to the desperate rider.

He drove on his steed with whip and spur. Far in the distance across the prairie a line of low hills broke the horizon to the north. The masked raider was aiming for the hills, where he hoped to find cover and escape. But ten miles of plain lay between him and that possible refuge.

Gallop! Gallop!

The Gunsight bunch rode hard and harder. Two or three of them trailed behind, dropping from the race.

But the Rio Kid was still gaining, though it seemed only inch by inch, and Jud Blake was almost level with him. Behind came the rest of the bunch, strung out, riding furiously. Far from the stage-trail, far from the sight of the hack and the passengers, the chase swept on over the prairie, mile after mile racing under the galloping hoofs; and, madly as he rode, the masked man failed to shake off his pursuers—and one of them, at least, gained inch by inch, foot by foot.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Lynch Law!

POKER POINDEXTER stared back, his eyes gleaming desperately through the holes in the mask.

He was riding like a madman; but as he drove on the straining mustang with whip and spur, he knew that the game was up.

He knew that he had been trapped.

The marshal of Gunsight and his men, whom he had believed to be riding to the Rio Grande, were behind him now, in fierce pursuit. The Rio Kid, whose name he had used, whom he had made the whole section believe was the desperate raider of the trails, was riding with the bunch behind him.

The game was up—unless the speed of his horse could save him, and he knew that it could not. If he could reach the hills, and stand at bay; if he could escape from sight long enough to discard his outlaw garb, and wash the black paint from the muzzle of the grey mustang—but he could not.

With ten minutes—five minutes at his disposal, he would have been safe. But ten seconds were not granted him. He was in full view of the galloping bunch, in full view of the Kid, who could have sent whizzing lead into his back had he chosen, and that he did not choose could only mean that he was confident of riding him down.

Poindexter grated his teeth with rage. He had been trapped—deluded into holding up the Gunsight hack, with the marshal and his men ready at hand to chip in. He understood it now. The explosion of the Mexican's revolver, as he had flung it down, had not been an accident, it had been a signal. He knew it now. With bitter rage in his heart, he spurred madly on.

He had no mercy to expect if he was run down. One of his own men was in the pursuing bunch; but Tex would noose the riata for his neck as readily as any other man in the Gunsight country. He had robbed on the trails, he had shot without mercy, and if he was roped in, the penalty had to be paid. He spurred and spurred the flanks of the straining mustang streaming crimson under the cruel rowels.

He looked back again.

The Rio Kid was gaining faster now, and the marshal was a little behind. Strung out in a long line, the rest of the bunch followed on as fast as their horses could stride. Poindexter's eyes blazed through the holes in the mask at the Kid.

But he dared not stop to fire. A minute's delay would bring the whole bunch riding down on him. He might kill the Kid, but a volley from the rest would lay him out on the prairie.

He rode desperately on. Only a few weeks before he had ridden with the marshal in pursuit of the Rio Kid. Now the Kid was riding with the Gunsight bunch in pursuit of him. It was a turn of fortune's wheel that he had never dreamed of. He cursed as he rode, gritting his teeth.

Whiz!

He heard the whiz of the lasso. Instinctively he bent forward, and spurred madly, and the whirling lasso dropped behind him.

The Kid coiled in the rope as he rode on after the fugitive.

Poindexter panted. The escape had been narrow, and the next cast of the lasso would not fail, for the black-muzzled mustang was gaining on him slowly but surely.

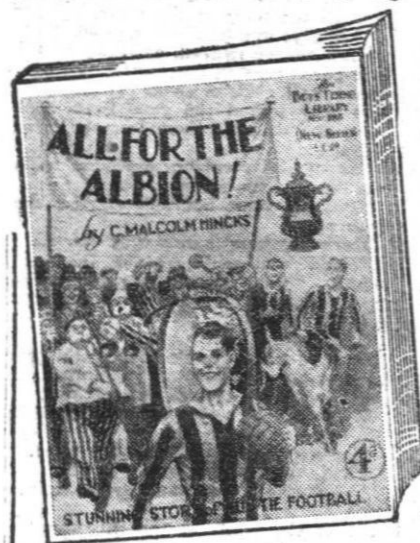
With mad rage in his eyes, the masked man whirled round his horse, his gun in his hand. Escape was beyond hope, unless he could drop the leaders of the pursuit.

But the Rio Kid was watchful.

His gun was ready.

Even as the masked horseman spun round and raised his weapon, the Kid's gun roared.

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Crash!
It was the tossing head of the grey mustang that received the Kid's bullet.
The animal went plunging to the earth, tossing the masked man into the grass as it fell.
He scrambled madly to his feet.
He was dismounted now, and hope was gone. The Kid's gun roared again as the outlaw scrambled up, and the revolver in his grip went spinning from a shattered hand.
There was a fierce yell from the masked man.
Wounded, desperate, fierce as a cornered cougar, he tore the second revolver from his belt with his left hand.
But it was too late. The Rio Kid was riding him down, and the crash of his horse sent the masked man staggering to the earth. The Kid leaped from the black-muzzled mustang, and his grasp closed on the man who was rolling in the grass.

With a clatter of hoofs and a yell of triumph, the Gunsight bunch galloped up.
They sprang from their bronchos, and hands were laid on the struggling desperado on all sides.

It was the finish. The marshal's grip was on one arm, the Kid's on the other.

Tex tore the black mask from his face.
Every eye was fixed on the face, convulsed with rage and fury, that was revealed—the face of the owner of the Poindexter Ranch.

"Thunder!" roared Tex. "It's sure the boss!"
"Poindexter!" yelled the marshal.
The Kid smiled grimly.

"I reckon I allowed it was Poindexter!" he said.
The rancher panted.

The game was up now; he was unmasked; and in the grim faces round him he knew what was to follow. Six men of Gunsight had fallen by his hand in his desperate career as a trail-robber, under the name and guise of the Rio Kid. The blood that had been shed had to be answered for. Already one of the Gunsight men was uncoiling a lasso.

The marshal made a gesture towards a tall cottonwood at a little distance.

"Put him on a cayuse," he said.
"You've got me!" said Poindexter bitterly. "You'd never have got me but for that Kid! I'd go up willingly if I'd shot him up before I went." He ground his teeth.

"Feller," said the Kid quietly, "you're sure going to get yours, and I ain't no hunch to rub it in. You've shot up men that was your neighbours, with a mask on your face, calling yourself by my name. I guess if my luck hadn't been good, it's me that would have been strung up for what you've done. You've sure asked for it, and you ain't got no kick coming."

"Bring him along!" said the marshal of Gunsight grimly.

The outlaw rancher, or the marshal's horse, was led towards the cottonwood, his arms bound. The Rio Kid did not follow. His work in the Gunsight country was done, and he had no hunch to look on the grim punishment of the man who had placed his crimes on him, and who, at long last, had been unmasked and brought to justice.

While the Gunsight bunch led the bandit to his doom, the Rio Kid mounted the black-muzzled mustang, and rode away on the trail to the south.

Not once did the Kid look back.
By the time the Gunsight men were through with their grim work, and returned to the horses, the Kid was out of sight, swallowed up in the distances of the grassy prairie.

Jud Blake and his men rode back to Gunsight. Behind them they left the raider swinging from a branch of the cottonwood—his desperate trail ended at last. They did not see the Rio Kid again; his trail led him far from the cow-town on the Rio Claro.

The Kid was riding for the Rio Grande.
In Gunsight there were many who were friendly to him now, and who would not have cared to remember that he was an outlaw in his own country. The Kid, had he ridden back to Gunsight with the marshal's bunch, would have found friends there.

But the long arm of the law was still stretched out for the boy outlaw of Frio, and in his own land of Texas there was no rest for the Rio Kid.

The sun that rose on the prairie the following day found the Kid on the south side of the Rio Grande; over the border, in Mexico. The Kid had no love for greasers, and he sighed as he looked back at the land he had left.

But the Rio Kid was not the man to grouse. He had resolved to try his fortune in a new country; and, with a cheery heart and a cheery face, he turned his back on the border and rode into Mexico.

THE END.

(The Kid meets with another thrilling adventure. This time on Mexican soil. You'll all enjoy reading: "THE RIO KID IN MEXICO!" It's Ralph Redway at his best!)



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BUNTER

the

RAIDER

By FRANK RICHARDS

(Author of the famous stories of HARRY WHARTON & CO. OF GREYFRIARS, appearing in the "Magnet" every Saturday).

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Hospitable Bunter!

"W HARTON, old fellow—"
"Stony!"
"Nugent, old chap—"
"Broke!"

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, of the Greyfriars Remove, grinned as they made those brief but expressive replies.

It was tea-time, and Wharton and Nugent were on their way to Hall.

Funds were low in Study No. 1—so low that they had almost reached vanishing point. Tea in Hall, at tea-time, was the last refuge of the stony, and to that refuge the chums of the Remove were wending their way when Billy Bunter encountered them.

It was indeed an unpropitious moment for Bunter to encounter them, if he was, as usual, in search of a small loan to tide him over till his celebrated postal-order should arrive.

"But I say, you fellows—" persisted Bunter.

"Nothing doing!"

"I was going to ask you—"

"Try again next week," said Nugent, with a chuckle. "My dear man, there isn't even tea in the study to-day! We're going down to Hall. Roll away!"

"I was going to ask you to tea."

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Tea!" said Billy Bunter, with a great deal of dignity. "I don't see anything to be surprised at in that myself. Being in funds, I naturally ask some old pals to tea."

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Wharton. "It's a rather good spread, and I want you to come," said Bunter. "Better than tea in Hall, I fancy—wisky-wash and doorsteps!"

"What's the game?" asked Nugent. "Game?"

"Yes. If you're pulling our legs—"

"I'm asking you to tea!" hooted Bunter.

"But you never ask anybody to a

feed. When you've got anything you generally scoff it yourself."

"If you call that civil, Nugent—" "Well, it mayn't be civil," admitted Frank, "but it's jolly true. You don't stand spreads, and you know you don't, Bunter. You only scoff them in other fellows' studies!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Is Toddy standing a spread in Study No. 7?" asked Wharton. "Is that the giddy history of the mystery?"

"Toddy's gone out with Dutton. I've got the study to myself," said Bunter. "I'm gathering my good pals round me on this occasion. I've asked Bob Cherry, and Johnny Bull, and Inky. They're coming. Now, will you fellows come?"

"Hem!"

Harry Wharton hesitated. He was not keen on tea in Hall, by any means, but neither was he keen on "teasing" with Billy Bunter. And he was still more surprised at Bunter asking other fellows to share the good things with him, instead of scoffing the whole supply in his usual style.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry's powerful voice boomed along the Remove passage. "Here we are, Bunter!"

"I say, you fellows, my guests have arrived," said Bunter loftily. "I've got to look after my guests, you know. Are you coming?"

"It's genuine, then?" asked Nugent.

"Of course it is, you ass!" hooted Bunter.

"Well, if Bob's going we may as well go, Harry," said Nugent.

The captain of the Remove nodded.

"If you call that a polite way of accepting a kind invitation, Nugent, you—"

"My mistake!" said Frank Nugent, with a smile. "Mr. Bunter, I accept with grateful acknowledgments your extremely kind invitation."

"Same here," said Wharton.

"Oh, come on!" grunted Bunter.

And the Owl of the Remove led the two juniors away to Study No. 7. Bob

Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had already arrived there. For some reason known only to himself, Bunter had asked the whole Co. All the Famous Five of the Remove were his guests on this unusual occasion.

Why he had asked them was rather a mystery.

Knowing Bunter as they did, the Famous Five would not have been surprised to see no preparations whatever for tea in Study No. 7. They would not have been surprised, after arriving there, to find that William George Bunter did not want their company so much as he wanted a little loan—that he expected them, in short, to stand the tea to which they had been invited, as well as tea for Bunter. They would not have been surprised in the least.

But it was not so.

There were preparations in the study for tea on a great scale. There was a large cake—a cake weighing at least eight pounds. There was a stack of jam-tarts, another stack of dough-nuts, and a plate of chocolate eclairs. There was a jug of cream—a rare luxury in a junior study. There were other things too numerous to mention. It was, in fact, a feast of the gods.

"Well, my hat!" murmured Johnny Bull.

It was not, perhaps, strictly polite to exhibit surprise. But Johnny was so surprised that he could not help it.

Any fellow who new Bunter would have expected him to "scoff" even that great stack of good things without calling any fellow in to his assistance. And here he was, with five guests round his hospitable board—five guests whose appetites were quite good—in fact, excellent.

Harry Wharton & Co. could not help feeling that they had misjudged Bunter a little.

"Sit down, old fellows!" said the Owl of the Remove. "Make yourselves at home, you know."

The Famous Five made themselves at home, still astonished.

"Bunter, old man," said Bob Cherry. "I take back a lot of things I've thought about you."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"I do," said Bob. "Why, this is princely! And we're all up against it. I was going to stick Squiff for a tea when you blew in and asked me."

"Jolly glad to see you at my table, old fellow," said Bunter. "After all, you fellows have stood me a lot of feeds."

"Never expected you to remember that, though."

"Eh?"
"I—I mean, you're a good sort, old fat pippin," said Bob. "You must have had a whacking remittance to spread out like this."

"Well, I often get whacking remittances—from my titled relations, you know," explained Bunter.

"Hem!"
"Not to mention the big tips I get from my pater at Bunter Court, you know."

"Hum!"
It was not a time—at Bunter's festive board—for the honoured guests to say what they thought about Bunter's titled relations, and his palatial home at Bunter Court. Such figments of Bunter's fertile imagination were not even to be smiled at on such an occasion.

"Pile in, old chaps!" said Bunter. "Help yourselves! It's a real pleasure to me to see my old pals round me enjoying themselves."

The Famous Five were quite unaware that they were Billy Bunter's old pals. But in the circumstances, they were not disposed to deny the soft impeachment. So they grinned politely and proceeded to do full justice to the excellent spread—which had come their way, in their present stony state, like corn in Egypt in one of the lean years.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Trouble in Bunter's Study!

BILLY BUNTER did the honours with fat hospitality.

He blinked across the table benignly at his guests, through his big spectacles.

Neither did he forget himself. Bunter at a feed, whether his own or another's, was certain to capture the lion's share. His podgy jaws worked with great activity. His stowage capacity was always wonderful, and it seemed more than wonderful now.

Harry Wharton & Co. did full justice to the good things before them. And they felt unusually kindly towards William George Bunter. It was evident that they had judged him too harshly—at least, so it seemed to them now. Bunter was generally hard-up; he was an inveterate butter-in at other fellows' spreads. But it seemed that, being in funds, he was capable of generous hospitality in his turn. So the Famous Five considerably modified their previous opinion of Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove was too busy to talk much at first. His jaws were more usefully occupied.

But by the time he had eaten enough for four or five fellows Bunter slackened down a little, and bestowed the fascinations of his conversation on his guests.

"Rather good—what?" he asked.
"Top-hole!" said Bob Cherry heartily.

"The top-holefulness is terrific!" assured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Like some more cream in your tea, Bob, old man?"

"Thanks!"
"You've borrowed Smithy's cream-jug!" remarked Nugent, with a glance at the rather handsome and expensive jug that held the cream.

"Yes, I—I've borrowed a few crocks, up and down the passage, you know," said Bunter hastily. "There's never enough crocks in a study for half a dozen fellows."

"Quite so," agreed Wharton. "It's rather hard on Toddy and Dutton to be missing this, isn't it?"

"Oh, bother Peter Todd!" said

Bunter, with a frown on his fat brow. "He wouldn't have stood by me, like you fellows are going to."

"Eh?"
"You're not the chaps to desert a pal, are you?" said Bunter, blinking at the Famous Five.

"I hope not, said Harry.
"That's right! You stick to me, and I'll stick to you," said Bunter. "Try the doughnuts, old chap!"

"But I don't quite understand," said Harry Wharton. "What's the trouble, anyway?"

"Well, if Smithy cut up rusty—"
"Smithy?" Wharton stared. "About your borrowing his cream-jug, do you mean?"

"Well, Vernon-Smith's got a jolly uncertain temper," said Bunter. "If he cuts up rusty, you fellows will stand by me, of course!"

"What rot!" said Bob. "The Bounder's all right. He doesn't mind lending his things along the passage."

"Besides I suppose you asked him?" said Nugent.

"Well, he's gone out, you see," said Bunter. "I believe he had a telephone call, and went out quite suddenly this afternoon."

"My hat! Chaps don't often get phone calls in the Lower Fourth!" remarked Johnny Bull. "How the thump did Smithy get a telephone call? They haven't fixed up a phone in the Remove passage, that I know of."

"It was on Mr. Quelch's telephone."

"I hope it isn't any bad news from home," said Wharton. "I remember now, I saw the Bounder go out on his bike. He looked all right."

There was a footstep in the Remove passage, and a voice was heard. It was the voice of Herbert Vernon-Smith of the Remove. Billy Bunter gave a sudden start.

"Oh, he's back!" he ejaculated.

The Bounder's voice had an angry tone. As he came along the passage, apparently in talk with another fellow, Harry Wharton & Co. heard his words:

"I've had my leg pulled! The pater wasn't at Lantham at all! By gad! When I find out who phoned—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry opened the door of Study No. 7.

"What's the row, Smithy?"
Vernon-Smith stopped and glanced into the study. His face was rather red and excited.

"I've been over to Lantham on my bike," he said. "Some silly chump telephoned to me. It was Quelch's phone, and Quelch took the call and sent me a message that my father had come down to Lantham, and wanted me to go over and see him while he was there. I went, of course!"

"You don't mean to say it was spoof?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"I jolly well do!" said the Bounder savagely. "I called at the Lantham Grand Hotel, according to the message, and the pater wasn't there, and hadn't been there, and wasn't expected there. Some silly ass sent me the phone call to give me a journey for nothing."

"What a rotten trick!"
"The rottenfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh sympathetically.

"But who the dickens could have played such a silly trick as that?" said Bob Cherry, in wonder. "A Greyfriars chap, do you think?"

The Bounder grunted angrily.
"Of course it was a Greyfriars chap—a Remove chap, too, I should think. Very likely he rang Quelch up on one of the school telephones, and made him

think the call came from Lantham. I suppose you fellows don't know who it was?"

"Haven't the faintest idea," said Wharton. "I'd jolly well punch him, if I were you!"

"I'm going to!" said the Bounder grimly. "I'm pretty certain it was some silly ass in the Remove."

"I—I say, Smithy—"
"Do you know anything about it, Bunter?"

"Eh! Oh, no! Nothing at all! But I—I think it was most likely some outsider—not a Greyfriars chap at all," said Bunter.

"What rot! It was some silly dummy in the Remove, using one of the school telephones!" growled Vernon-Smith.

"Not likely," said Bunter, shaking his head. "How could a fellow get into the Head's study and use his phone without being seen?"

"He could if the Head wasn't there, I suppose, fathead. And there are other phones besides the Head's. Mr. Hacker has one."

"Hacker was in his study at the time, though."

"At what time?" asked the Bounder, with a sharp look at William George Bunter.

"At the time you got the call, you know."

"And how do you know when I got the call?" asked Vernon-Smith, taking a step into the study with a gleam in his eyes.

Billy Bunter started.
"I—I don't, of course. I don't know anything about it."

"It's a bit too late for that," said Vernon-Smith. "It was you who phoned to Quelch in my father's name, Bunter."

Vernon-Smith pushed back his cuffs, and came round the study table towards Bunter, with an angry glitter in his eyes. The Bounder of Greyfriars never was the best tempered of fellows; and his futile journey to Lantham, over long, muddy roads, had evidently not improved his temper.

"I—I say, you fellows—"

Bob Cherry jumped up from the table, and promptly placed himself between Vernon-Smith and the Owl of the Remove.

"Hold on, Smithy!" he exclaimed.

"Get aside, you ass!" growled the Bounder. "It was Bunter who played that rotten trick on me, and I'm going to thrash him for it!"

He pushed forward; but Bob placed a hand on his chest, and a shove from Bob's powerful arm sent the Bounder back again.

"Easy does it," said Bob coolly. "We happen to be Bunter's guests just now, and we're not going to see him bullied, Smithy."

"Who's bullyin'?" roared Vernon-Smith savagely.

"You are, if you pitch into Bunter without waiting for any proof. Anybody might have played that trick on you; and I don't see why you should jump to the conclusion that Bunter did it."

"That's reasonable enough, Smithy," said the captain of the Remove. "You want to find the right chap before you punch anybody, you know."

"It was Bunter—"

"How do you know it was Bunter?" demanded Nugent. All the Famous Five were on their feet now, and they were all looking rather warlike.

"I do know it was! I never said anything to him about the telephone-call, and yet he says Hacker was in his study

at the time," growled Vernon-Smith. "It's plain enough to me that Bunter went mooching after a telephone to play that rotten trick, and found that Hacker was in his study, and then tried the Head's study. He's as good as admitted it."

"I haven't!" roared Bunter.

"Well, whether you admit it or not, you did it!" snapped the Bouncer. "And I'm jolly well going to lick you for it! Get out of the way, Bob Cherry!"

Bob Cherry did not stir. The Bouncer's angry looks had no effect on him. Johnny Bull moved to get between the Bouncer and Bunter also.

"You must make it a bit clearer than that before you begin punching Bunter," said Johnny Bull, in his slow way.

"Has Bunter been feeding you?" sneered the Bouncer.

"Bunter's just stood us tea," said Harry Wharton. "That's got nothing to do with it, and you know it, Smitty! If Bunter played a rotten trick like that on you you can punch him as hard as you like, but you're not going to handle him on suspicion."

"How did he know the time I had the call, then?" hooted the Bouncer.

"How did you know that, Bunter?" asked the captain of the Remove.

"I didn't."

"Fathead! You've admitted that you did."

"I—I mean, I heard Smitty tell Redwing."

"Well, that's likely enough," grinned Bob Cherry. "Bunter generally hears everything that's said inside Greyfriars."

"Oh, very likely!" sneered the Bouncer. "Only it happens that Tom Redwing has gone up to Hawkscliff for the afternoon, and I haven't seen him since dinner."

"Oh!" ejaculated Bob.

"I—I mean, I heard him tell Ogilvy," stammered Bunter.

"I haven't spoken to Ogilvy to-day," said Vernon-Smith.

"Bunter—" began Wharton.

"I—I mean, I—I—"

"Well, what do you mean, Bunter?" demanded the captain of the Remove, frowning.

"You fellows know I'm short-sighted," said Bunter. "I heard Smitty tell a chap—perhaps it wasn't Ogilvy."

"We know you're as blind as an owl, if that's what you mean," said Bob. "Did you mention the call to anybody at all, Smitty?"

"Yes, I told Newland."

"That was the chap—Newland," said Bunter promptly. "I heard Smitty tell Newland. Personally, I don't know anything about it."

"That won't do," said Vernon-Smith. "It was you, you fat rotter—though I can't imagine why you should take the trouble to play such a trick on me. What have I done to you?"

"Nothing, old fellow. I like you, you know," said Bunter.

"Well, I'm going to scrag you for giving me a bike ride to Lantham for nothing," said Vernon-Smith. "Let me get at him!"

"Keep back, you ass!" said Bob Cherry. "You're not going to touch Bunter unless you can prove what you say."

"It's proved enough for me."

"Not enough for Bunter, though," grinned Bob. "Take it calmly, old fellow. A scragging will keep."

"It won't keep. Will you let me pass?" shouted the Bouncer.

"No, I won't. You'll have to walk

over me before you touch Bunter," answered Bob Cherry coolly.

"I'll walk over you fast enough, if you don't stand out of the way," snarled Vernon-Smith.

"You're welcome to try."

"Smitty—" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

But the angry Bouncer did not heed. He rushed at Bob Cherry, and in a second more they were fighting.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Chucked Out!

"SMITTY!"

"Bob!"

"Stop them!" shouted Harry Wharton.

"I say, you fellows, let them go it!" squeaked Billy Bunter. "Bob can lick him all right. Go it, Bob!"

But Billy Bunter was not heeded. Four juniors closed in on the combatants, and the Bouncer was grasped and dragged forcibly back.

Bob Cherry dropped his hands at once. He had not backed an inch under the Bouncer's furious attack. Smitty had had the worst of the brief encounter. The Bouncer's nose was streaming crimson as the Co. grasped him and forced him back.

"Let me go, you rotters!" roared Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, let him go, you fellows," said Bob, whose blue eyes were gleaming now. "If he wants it bad, let him have it."

"Rot!" said Harry Wharton decidedly. "Look here, Smitty—"

"Let me go, you fool!"

"Keep your temper, you ass!" said the captain of the Remove, tightening his grip on the struggling Bouncer. "I can understand you're annoyed, but you've no right to pitch into Bunter without proof. Keep your temper. There's nothing to fight about."

"Mind your own business!"

"Look here," exclaimed Wharton impatiently, "you're not going to touch Bunter, and you're not going to turn this tea-party into a prize fight. Get out of the study!"

"I won't!"

"We don't want to handle you, Smitty, but if you don't go you'll be put!"

"Yes, rather!" growled Johnny Bull.

"The putfulness will be terrific, my esteemed hot-headed Smitty!"

The Bouncer made a savage attempt to break loose. That was more than enough for the patience of the Co. Smitty was lifted off his feet and whirled to the door.

"Chuck him out!" squeaked Bunter.

"Will you go now, Smitty?" asked the captain of the Remove.

"No!" roared Vernon-Smith. "I won't!"

Bump!

The Bouncer sprawled in the passage. The Famous Five were angry now, and they did not handle him gently. Right or wrong, Smitty's methods were rather too high-handed to suit the clums of the Remove.

Vernon-Smith lay gasping for a minute or two, and then he scrambled to his feet.

A junior came running along the passage from the stairs. It was Tom Redwing, just returned from his visit to Hawkscliff. He arrived on the scene as the Bouncer was rising, and gave Smitty a helping hand up.

"What on earth's this, Smitty?" exclaimed Redwing, in amazement.

"You're not rowing with these chaps?"

"The old scout's lost his little

temper," said Bob Cherry. "Take him away, Redwing, till he's cool."

"Smitty, old man—"

"Let me go, Redwing!" muttered the Bouncer.

"Better come away now, old chap," said the perplexed Redwing. "Come along to the study."

The Bouncer hesitated a moment. His chum Redwing was the only fellow in the Remove who could have influenced him in his present temper. Redwing pulled gently at his arm.

The Bouncer fixed his eyes on the Co. in the doorway of Study No. 7 with a bitter look.

"You'll hear more of this," he said. "Bunter's played a dirty trick on me, and it looks to me as if you fellows are in it. The matter won't end here."

And with that Vernon-Smith walked away with his comrade, and the door of Study No. 7 closed on them.

Tom Redwing eyed his chum rather anxiously in Study No. 4. The Bouncer stood panting, his face still dark with anger, his eyes gleaming. But the fact that he was angry was no proof, even to his best chum, that he had good cause to be angry. Redwing knew only too well the uncertain temper of Smitty of the Remove.

Vernon-Smith threw himself into the armchair at length, and Redwing stirred the study fire to a blaze. He did not break the silence, but waited for Smitty to speak.

"Had a good time at Hawkscliff?" the Bouncer asked at last.

Redwing smiled faintly.

"Yes—I saw a lot of old acquaintances there," he said. "But what's the trouble between you and Wharton's crowd, Smitty?"

"Bunter!" growled Smitty.

"I should hardly have thought that Bunter was worth ragging about, old man."

"He isn't."

"Well, then—"

"I've biked over to Lantham on a fool's errand!" growled the Bouncer, and he explained about the telephone call.

"A rotten trick!" said Tom Redwing. "But what made you think it was Bunter?"

"He as good as admitted it."

"Wharton didn't think so?"

"He said not."

"Draw it mild, Smitty, old man!" said Redwing seriously. "Whatever Wharton said, he believed, and you know it as well as I do. It's more like one of Skinner's tricks, to my mind—Bunter's too jolly lazy to take the trouble, unless he had a good reason. What reason could he have had?"

"I know he did it—I'm no fool! I don't know his reason, and I don't care!" growled Vernon-Smith. "It looks to me as if those fellows stood by him because he was feeding them—there was no end of a spread going on in the study."

"Oh, that's rot!" said Tom.

The Bouncer grunted angrily.

"Let's have tea," he said. "After tea I'm going to call those fellows to account for handling me. I'll make them stand up one after another, and jolly well lick them all round if I can! You can be my second—or if you're too jolly peaceable, I'll ask Skinner."

Tom Redwing made no reply to that. He began to prepare the table for tea.

"Lots of stuff in the cupboard," said the Bouncer. "I was going to have a spread, and ask those very chaps—and then I was called away to Lantham. Never mind—it will keep, and we can

ask somebody else to-morrow. I don't feel much inclined for a party now."

Redwing looked into the study cupboard.

"Lots of stuff, did you say?" he asked.

"Yes; I laid it in ready for the spread when that dashed message came."

"I don't see it."

"What rot! It's there, I suppose."

"It doesn't seem to be," said Redwing, with a perplexed look. "There's nothing here but a loaf."

"What?"

The Bounder sprang out of the arm-chair, and ran across to the cupboard. His brow blackened as he stared into it.

"That makes it clear enough!" he said between his teeth. "That's why

begin with me, and without kicking up a shindy. We've got some gloves here."

"You were all in it!" shouted Vernon-Smith. "The whole gang of you! That's why you stood by Bunter! Which of you sent that spoof message—you or Bunter? You all had a share of the plunder!"

"What the thump are you talking about?" exclaimed the captain of the Remove.

"What plunder?" demanded Nugent angrily.

The Bounder sneered.

"I found you all at a feed in Bunter's study! Do you want me to believe that you didn't know the stuff

the study raid was known, the motive was supplied. And he realised, too, that that was why the Owl of the Remove had been so keen on having the Famous Five as guests in No. 7. The fatuous fat junior evidently expected them to stand by him and rescue him from the wrath of the Bounder. He had been making use of the chums of the Remove, and they had been simply led by the nose.

"The awful rascal!" muttered Wharton.

The Bounder's voice was heard in the passage. He was demanding where Bunter was at the top of his voice. Vernon-Smith was in one of his worst tempers; and at such a time he was not a pleasant fellow. Bob Cherry and



THROWN OUT! "Will you go out, Smithy?" asked Harry Wharton. "No!" roared the Bounder. The next moment he found himself flying through the air. Bump! The Bounder landed heavily in the passage. (See Chapter 3.)

Bunter played that trick! I know now where that feed in his study came from—and Wharton's crowd were in it, too. They all had a hand in it."

"I can't believe that," said Redwing. "But it looks as if you were right about Bunter, after all. The stuff's certainly gone."

Herbert Vernon-Smith breathed hard. He turned away and left the study, without speaking to Redwing again.

"Smithy!" called out Redwing.

But the Bounder did not heed. He strode along the Remove passage to No. 7, and threw open the door. The study was in darkness; the guests had departed, and Billy Bunter had prudently followed their example.

The Bounder strode on to Study No. 1, where he found Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent. He hurled open the door and entered without a knock, and Wharton and Nugent rose to their feet at the sight of his furious face.

"You rotters!" shouted the Bounder. Wharton gave him a grim look.

"That will do, Smithy!" he said. "If you're looking for trouble, you can

was raided from my study while I was fooled into going over to Lantham?"

"What! I don't believe it!"

"You don't choose to admit it, you mean!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith. "My study's been cleared out, and that's why I was spoofed on the telephone. Where did the spread come from?"

"Bunter stood it," said Harry. "He asked us all to tea."

The Bounder laughed.

"Well, we'll see what Bunter says," he sneered. "Where is he?"

"I don't know. But—"

"I'll find him!"

The Bounder strode away; and Wharton and Nugent looked at one another.

"So that was it?" said Nugent. "You—you think—"

"I'm afraid it's pretty clear. We were rather asses to trust Bunter," said Frank ruefully. "We might have known him better."

Wharton compressed his lips. It was dawning upon his mind now that the Bounder had been right in finding Bunter guilty; and now that

Bull and Hurree Singh came into Study No. 1.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob.

"You fellows heard? It seems, from what Smithy's saying now, that Bunter raided that feed from his study."

"Looks like it," said Harry.

"Then it's pretty certain that Bunter did the telephone stunt, after all," said Johnny Bull.

Wharton nodded.

"Nice for us!" said Bob.

"The niceness is terrific!" said Hurree Singh. "The esteemed and disgusting Bounder is making out that we were parties to the surreptitious and execrable raid on his study."

"He's no right to do that!" growled Wharton.

"I say, you fellows—"

Billy Bunter suddenly bolted into Study No. 1, like a very fat rabbit into its burrow. Behind him came the Bounder, and behind the Bounder a crowd of Remove fellows, most of them laughing.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Bunter—"
 "I say, you fellows, stand by a chap!"
 gasped Bunter. "Keep him off! You
 promised to stand by me, you know!"
 "You fat villain!" roared Wharton.
 "Did you raid Smithy's study while he
 was out?"

"I—I—"
 "You know he did!" said Vernon-
 Smith, in the doorway. "You jolly
 well know it, and you knew it all
 along too!"
 "We knew nothing of it—"

"Rats!"
 "Looks jolly suspicious to me!" said
 Skinner. "They had the grub. That's
 clear. This is rather a come-down for
 his magnificence, our honoured Form
 captain! Who ever expected Wharton
 to come down to grub-raiding?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Of course, they put Bunter up to it,"
 remarked Snoop.

"Of course!" agreed Skinner.
 Wharton's face was crimson.
 "Bunter, you've got to own up!" he
 said. "You sent that telephone mes-
 sage to Smithy?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"
 "Yes, or no, you fat rotter?"
 "Certainly not. I never went near
 the Head's study this afternoon," said
 Bunter. "I never telephoned. I don't
 know Quelch's number. I never knew
 Smithy had a feed ready in his study.
 I didn't see him ordering the stuff in
 the tuckshop, and never saw him take
 the bag to his study—in fact, I knew
 nothing at all about it. I never even
 asked Toddy to phone from Courtfield
 —you can ask him when he comes in!
 He never refused to do it, either—the
 subject wasn't mentioned. I hope you
 can take a fellow's word!"

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Bob
 Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Besides, you fellows had the feed,"
 said Bunter warmly. "You promised
 to stand by me. You know you did!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter from
 the passage. Even Vernon-Smith
 grinned. Bunter on his defence was
 rather entertaining.

"Where did the feed come from,
 Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton, as
 patiently as he could. "You told us
 you'd had a remittance."

"So I had!" said Bunter promptly
 "I had a cheque from my uncle—"
 "For goodness sake, ring off!" ex-
 claimed Wharton impatiently. "It
 seems that we've bagged your feed,
 Smithy. Bunter took us in. But you
 ought to know that we were taken in."

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.
 A gleam came into Wharton's eyes, and
 he made a step towards the Bounder.

"The stuff will be paid for," he said.
 "You can put your own figure on it,
 and we shan't dispute it. It will have
 to stand over till next week, as we're
 all stony just now. But I suppose my
 word is good enough for you!"

"They're bound to pay for it now
 they're found out," said Skinner; and
 Snoop giggled.

"And what about my ride over to
 Lantham?" asked the Bounder un-
 pleasantly. "Do you think I'm going
 to let Bunter play a trick like that on
 me without licking him for it?"

"Lick him as much as you like, and
 be blowed!" growled Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"
 Bunter dodged round the table. "I—I say,
 you fellows, you promised to stand by
 me, you know. You keep that beast
 Smithy off."

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"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Rather rotten to put it all on
 Bunter, I think," said Skinner gravely.
 "Oh, very rotten!" said Snoop.
 Wharton did not heed those remarks.
 He fixed his eyes on the Bounder.
 "Are you satisfied that we had
 nothing to do with raiding your study,
 Smithy?" he asked.
 "No!" said the Bounder deliberately.
 And, without taking any further heed
 of Bunter, Herbert Vernon-Smith turned
 and walked away to his own study.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

A Disappointment for Skinner:

THERE was excitement in the
 Remove that evening.

The trouble between the
 Famous Five and Herbert
 Vernon-Smith was the one topic.

Skinner and his friends rejoiced
 openly. They were always "up
 against" Harry Wharton & Co.

"Fancy his Magnificence getting the
 kybosh!" said Skinner to his friends.
 "I believe the Bounder could turn him
 out if he tried. I know I'd back him
 up."

"Yes, rather!" said Stott.
 "Smithy's looking for trouble with
 that gang, anyhow," said Snoop. "I
 think he means business this time."

"I hope so," said Skinner.
 It was just before bed-time that
 Vernon-Smith came into the Common-
 room. Most of the fellows there re-
 garded him curiously.

Skinner & Co. joined him at once.
 They wanted to make it clear that he
 had their support.

"There's going to be a scrap, I sup-
 pose," said Skinner.

The Bounder looked at him.
 "Do you?" he asked.

"Well, you've practically given Whar-
 ton the lie, you know," said Skinner.
 "He can't take that lying down."

"I suppose not," agreed the Bounder.
 "Of course, they were all in the
 game," remarked Snoop. "Rather mean
 of them to put it all on Bunter. Don't
 you think so, Smithy?"

Vernon-Smith regarded Sidney James
 Snoop rather curiously, but made no
 answer.

"We're backing you up, Smithy!"
 said Stott.

"Thanks!"
 "Not at all, old fellow!" said Skinner
 eagerly. "We'd be jolly glad to see you
 give Wharton a fall. We'll back you up
 all along the line, and so will a lot of
 other fellows."

The Bounder nodded thoughtfully.
 "When are you going to have it out?"
 pursued Skinner.

"In the dormitory."
 "Oh, good!"

Skinner, grinning with satisfaction,
 proceeded to spread the glad news. It
 added to the general excitement and in-
 terest in the Lower Fourth. Ere long
 all the Remove knew that the Bounder
 and the captain of the Form were to
 have the matter "out" in the dormitory
 that night. As a rule, the Lower
 Fourth did not look forward to bed-
 time. On the present occasion they were
 quite pleased when Wingate of the Sixth
 marched them off to their quarters.

Harry Wharton had heard the news,
 but he did not look at Vernon-Smith
 when they met in the Remove
 dormitory. He was annoyed and angry
 —but he had a keen sense of the
 ridiculous. A fight with Smithy over
 such an absurd incident as a grub-raid
 was not attractive to him, and he had
 no desire to appear as Bunter's

champion in such a cause. At the same
 time, he bitterly resented the Bounder's
 refusal to accept his word, and his
 feelings just then were not friendly to-
 wards the Bounder.

The dark look on Wharton's face was
 very perceptible to Skinner & Co., and
 they exchanged grins. The captain of
 the Remove was in a mood for
 "trouble," if Smithy sought it—and
 they had no doubt whatever that Smithy
 was going to seek it.

The Removites turned in, and Win-
 gate put out the lights and left them.
 As soon as the prefect was gone Skinner
 sat up in bed.

"Smithy!" he called out.
 "Hallo?" yawned Vernon-Smith.
 "Shall I put on a candle, old fellow?"
 "Certainly, if you like!"
 "Right-ho!"

Harold Skinner turned out of bed and
 lighted a candle-end. Most of the
 Remove fellows sat up.

"Not gone to sleep yet, Wharton?"
 chuckled Snoop.

"No!" snapped Wharton.
 "Smithy's got something to say to
 you!"

"He can say it!"

Two or three more candle-ends were
 lighted. There was an atmosphere of
 excited expectancy in the Remove
 dormitory. Herbert Vernon-Smith sat
 up in bed, and Redwing from the next
 bed, gave him an anxious look. The
 Bounder did not seem to notice it.

"Wharton!" called out Vernon-
 Smith.

"Well?"

"I've something to say to you."
 "Go ahead!"

"Go it, Smithy!" encouraged Skinner.
 "I was pretty ratty when I came in
 this afternoon," continued the Bounder
 calmly. "Any fellow might have been
 after slogging through the mud to Lan-
 tham and back for nothing. I guessed
 that it was Bunter who had played that
 trick on me, and you fellows stood by
 him. I was in a rotten temper after-
 wards, and didn't choose to see the
 facts. I'm sorry for it."

"Oh!" ejaculated Wharton, utterly
 taken aback.

"I know, of course, that you fellows
 had nothing to do with the raid on my
 study, and that Bunter took you in,"
 said Vernon-Smith. "I should have
 known it at once if I'd been cool. But
 you don't make a fellow cool by pitching
 him out of the study on his neck. I'm
 sorry to disappoint you, Skinner; but
 I'm owning up that I played the goat.
 Is it all serene, Wharton?"

"Yes, certainly, old chap!" answered
 the captain of the Remove. "I hoped
 you'd see things better when you were
 cool. I'm jolly glad!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

"Has Redwing been doing his peace-
 making stunts again?" sneered Skinner,
 quite unable to restrain his chagrin.

"Or is it a case of cold feet, Smithy?"

"Redwing has certainly been talking
 sense to me," admitted the Bounder.

"You see, Redwing doesn't want to
 make a catspaw of me, as you do,
 Skinner. And it's not a case of cold
 feet. I'm not going to row with Whar-
 ton to please you, old man; but I'm
 prepared to get out of bed and mop up
 the dormitory with you, Skinner. Say
 the word."

Skinner did not say the word. He
 remained judiciously silent.

"Well, I'm glad to hear you talk
 sense, Smithy," said Frank Nugent.

"As for that fat villain, Bunter—"
 "Oh, really, Nugent—"

(Continued on page 23.)

IN THE CLUTCHES OF CANNIBALS!

IN MERCILESS HANDS!



A STIRRING LONG COMPLETE STORY OF THE EARLY ADVENTURES OF THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S, NARRATED BY NIPPER OF THE REMOVE.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Fearing the Worst!

"POOR old Nipper!" said Tommy Watson hopelessly.

"An' Mr. Lee," put in Sir Montie Tregellis-West, his voice dull with misery. "They're both gone, Tommy, boy. It's the most frightful thing that could have happened—but there's no hope."

"Mr. Lee, and Nipper, and Lord Dorrimore," said Jack Grey. "It's too terrible to realise! It's too awful to think that they all went to their death in that aeroplane! But it's true."

"If you fellows don't be quiet I shall smash something," put in Edward Oswald Handforth, clenching his fists. "I'm nearly dotty, as it is. You've forgotten to mention poor old Trotwood—he's gone, too! Oh, it's the most ghastly thing that ever happened!"

"Souise me," said Tom Burton, "but you're right, messmate!"

The five members of the St. Frank's Remove were sitting in the shade of a great palm-tree. From the nature of their discussion it would seem that something of a disastrous character had occurred.

They were under African skies—to be precise, on the oasis of Zambi, a con-

siderable way into the desert. They represented only a small proportion of the large party which had left St. Frank's in Sir Crawford Grey's magnificent steam yacht, the Wanderer.

The vessel was now lying on the coast, waiting for the return of the party, which had gone into the desert in search of treasure. That party had included Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, and myself, to say nothing of an aeroplane. There had been a great deal of excitement.

Quite apart from the fact that a rascal named Captain Nixon had done his best to wipe out the lot of us, there had been other perils. Nixon had failed in his designs, and he was a beaten man.

The party now in Zambi was composed of the five juniors, Dr. Brett, Fenton and Morrow of the Sixth, Umlosi, the famous Kutana chief, and Simon Grell and Jake Starkey.

The latter had been Nixon's henchman until the skipper had tried his hand at murder. Starkey had realised his folly then, and he had done his utmost to make amends by betraying Nixon while the latter was leading an attack. Owing to Jake's information Nixon had failed. And Starkey was now with Dr. Brett's party, and he was a happy man.

There seems to be no end to the perils and adventures that fall to the St. Frank's adventurers in Africa, for Nipper and his friends find themselves landed in another extremely dangerous situation!

But why had the juniors spoken so gloomily?

That question is easy enough to answer. There had been some very remarkable happenings, and the fellows in Zambi had every reason to suppose that something of a terrible nature had occurred.

Happily, they were wrong. During a terrible sandstorm Nicodemus Trotwood, of the Remove, had been separated from the rest of the party, and it was assumed that he had been lost in the desert. For no sign of him had been found after the simoom had passed.

There had been two parties of us making for El Safra—the small oasis where the treasure was buried. While Dr. Brett and Umlosi led their caravan across the great sands, Nelson Lee and Dorrie and I went by aeroplane.

The machine was a giant biplane, fitted with two engines, the united horsepower of which amounted to seven hundred. It was a machine which had been designed to carry anything from twelve to twenty passengers.

But most of the passenger space was occupied by extra supplies of petrol—for there was no fuel to be obtained out in the desert, and it was necessary to take an ample supply.

Well, we had reached the oasis first, and we had found the treasure—a gorgeous collection of precious stones, worth nothing less than three hundred thousand pounds. And on that same day the sandstorm had occurred.

In the evening we had searched for Brett's party, fearing that disaster had overtaken them. We had succeeded in picking up Trotwood, who was alive and well, and who had become separated from the caravan during the storm.

The others had seen us descend; but they did not know that we had picked up the lost member of the party. And then we had flown off without going near—and nothing had been seen of the aeroplane since.

There were several reasons for this. The gov'nor had intended flying over the caravan, but our aeroplane had run into a treacherous, gusty wind. Mounting higher, we had encountered clouds, and in the finish we lost sight of the caravan altogether.

But we knew that they were all safe. On the other hand, they only knew that we had flown away into the haze.

It had been our intention to land in El Safra again, so that we could welcome Brett and his party when they arrived. But that high wind had ruined our plans. Blown helplessly along above the clouds, we had been compelled to go where the wind took us, for it was a dangerous, gusty gale.

And upon descending below the clouds we had been somewhat astonished to find ourselves not over the desert, but in the heart of a great forest. And when we descended we discovered that we were in the Beejee country—one of the worst territories in West Africa.

The blacks were hostile, and our position was by no means healthy. But we were still alive and well—and that was something.

Farther north, in the desert, it was assumed by Dr. Brett that we had met with death on the endless sands. And

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it was really only natural that this conclusion should have been arrived at.

The party had returned to Zambi over a week since. And there they had waited, their hopes dwindling day by day. Until now, at length, they were compelled to conclude that the worst had happened.

Dr. Brett was talking with Fenton and Morrow, while the juniors were discussing the situation. And Umlosi stood by with folded arms, listening. He did not show any sign of emotion, but his heart was sad. For Lord Dorrimore was Umlosi's master. The black giant would have laid down his life willingly for Dorrie.

"We must face the facts, boys," said Brett gravely. "There is no sense in keeping up a pretence. Three days ago there was still a faint hope that Mr. Lee and the others would turn up. But that hope is now dead."

"I know, sir," said Fenton quietly. "It's impossible for Mr. Lee and Lord Dorrimore to come back now—unless they fell into the desert near a travelling Arab caravan—"

"No, no, Fenton, that won't do!" put in Brett. "There is no such hope. It is over a week since we saw the last of the aeroplane. It flew into the haze—into the clouds, and there is only one possible conclusion to arrive at."

"That they lost themselves?" asked Morrow.

"Yes," said the doctor. "It was getting towards evening, you remember, and there were not many hours of daylight. I figure it out this way. In searching for the oasis Mr. Lee flew past his objective. He scouted round for some hours, until darkness fell. And then, in attempting to land, he crashed the aeroplane."

"Perhaps they landed safely," put in Fenton.

"That is possible, of course," agreed Brett. "But, having landed in the soft sand, the machine was not capable of taking off again. And so it lies there, a derelict, with the bodies of our three friends near by."

"Isn't it possible that they may be alive—"

"No, Morrow," interrupted Brett. "The machine only carried sufficient water to last three or four days; and that was considered more than enough. Eight or nine days have elapsed, and it is absolutely impossible to suppose that our friends can be alive now. Even if they did not crash, and were killed in that way, they have undoubtedly died of thirst."

"How awful!" said Fenton, with a shiver.

"That word is hardly adequate," said Brett quietly. "I merely wish to make you thoroughly understand, my lads, that no further hope can be entertained. The very fact that the aeroplane is still missing proves that the machine and its crew will never return to civilisation."

"Thou art speaking terrible words, my master," put in Umlosi, in his rumbling voice. "But are not all the facts grave enough to cause thee to make use of such words? Disaster has undoubtedly befallen N'Kose, my father. But I, his slave, will not bemoan his death until I have seen his lifeless body with mine own eyes."

"You'll never do that, Umlosi," said Brett quietly.

And so preparations were begun for the return trip across the desert to the forest. There a party of carriers were waiting. And it would only be a matter of a few days before the coast was reached once more.

of a few days before the coast was reached once more.

If Brett and the others had only known the actual truth!

While they were bemoaning our fate we were very much alive. We had the treasure, and we were in the best of health. But we were not free to do as we willed. And that was just the crux of the whole matter.

We were in such a position that we were unable to communicate with our friends, and we guessed that they would regard us as lost. But we were hopeful that all would come right in the near future.

And before Brett's caravan took its departure from Zambi another white man left the oasis.

But he travelled towards the coast with a party of trading Arabs. This man was Captain Nixon. He had failed, and he knew it. In Zambi he had learned that the treasure he had been after was not even obtainable. It had been lost out in the desert with the aeroplane.

And so there was no reason why Nixon should remain. Bitter at heart, he knew that everything was lost. He had sacrificed all to obtain possession of the treasure.

And he would return to civilisation an outcast and a wanted criminal! The very thought of it all sent the man into a frenzy. And he became fired with a terrible hatred for Sir Crawford Grey.

Why he should adopt this attitude was rather strange. But his warped mind led him to regard Sir Crawford as the root cause of all the trouble. The treasure had been Sir Crawford's, and Nixon had failed to obtain it.

And so, when he set out for the coast he intended taking his revenge, although he had not the faintest idea as to how he would do so. In his madness he was ready for any villainy.

Shortly after his departure from Zambi Dr. Brett and all the others started out on their homeward trip. They had come out into the desert a merry, happy throng.

They were returning sick at heart, and with not the trace of a smile amongst them. How they would face the others on the yacht they did not know—they did not care to think about it.

And, meanwhile, some rather dramatic events were taking place in that part of the world known as the Beejee country.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

In the Hands of Savages!

LORD DORRIMORE uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"More of that frightful mess!" he exclaimed plaintively. "By gad, Lee, I can't stand it! It's enough to turn a fellow sick!"

"I quite agree with you, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "But we must either eat this, or starve—and, personally, I have strong objections to starving. The stuff doesn't look nice, but it might be wholesome."

His lordship stared into the gourd which he held between his knees. It was filled with a steaming mess, which could not possibly be given a name. We didn't know what it was, and couldn't imagine.

"I believe it's stewed caterpillars, or somethin' iike that," said Dorrie. "These blacks are rather fond of 'em, I believe—but that's no reason why they should give the horrible concoction to us."

There was every reason for Lord Dorrimore's complaint.

For over a week we had been held prisoners by the Beejee tribe. No escape had been possible. And during all that time our meals had been the same—that steaming, greenish-looking mass of mystery.

The blacks could not have selected a better prison for us.

For escape was impossible. We were in a thatched hut. It was quite a comfortable affair, in its way, and the door was wide open and unguarded.

But the hut happened to be built right in the topmost branches of a high tree. The trunk for about thirty feet was as smooth as stonework, with no projections. The only way up was by means of a frail-looking ladder, which was only fixed in position when our meals were brought to us.

And the tree was in the centre of the village. Even if we had succeeded in getting to the ground we should have been in a hornets' nest. The only good point about our prison was that we received plenty of fresh air.

After having descended in the aeroplane—and we had made a perfect landing, by the by—we had been captured by the blacks at once. And within half an hour we were in the prison.

And there we had remained.

It was a great comfort to know that the big biplane was still intact. The blacks were apparently afraid to touch it. From the platform of our prison we could look right down across the river.

And there, still standing serenely on a grassy slope, stood the good old flyer.

But we were helpless.

Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, and I had experienced something of this kind of thing before. It was not the first time we had been held prisoners by savages. But it was all new to Trotwood of the Remove.

He, however, took things calmly.

"You see, my dear Nipper," he explained, "I gave myself up for lost in the desert—and I was rescued. I am quite sure that before long we shall get away from these awful black people. I have great faith in Mr. Lee."

"Good for you, my son!" said Dorrimore. "Don't give up hope, an' everythin' will come right. If we had been booked to peg out, we should have been polished at once. I can't understand why the blacks are keepin' us here—unless the idea is to fatten us up in readiness for the feast."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"It is my opinion, Dorrie, that the chief of the tribe is away on a hunting trip," he said. "We are being kept until his return, which cannot be long delayed now. I really think the crisis will come either to-day or to-morrow."

"By gad, I hope so!" said Dorrimore. "I loathe suspense, old man! It makes a fellow all shaky an' nervous. Still, I'm not givin' up hope; there might be a scrap yet. An' we've still got our guns an' ammunition."

"The machine-gun is on the aeroplane," I put in. "By gosh, if we only had that with us here! We could sweep the village—"

"It's no good talkin' like that, Nipper," said the gun'ner. "We haven't got the machine-gun here, and all the wishin' in the world won't bring it here. Neither can we get to the aeroplane. We can do nothing but wait, and trust to Providence!"

I nodded gloomily, and passed out of the low doorway. Trotwood followed me, and we emerged on to the platform.

Our floor was much bigger than the hut itself. Thus a platform of about



THE PRISONERS! "There's absolutely no chance of escape!" said Nipper. "Just look at 'em!" He pointed down to the ground where the native village straggled across the clearing beneath their prison. "No, we're done!" said Trotwood. (See Chapter 2.)

three feet, on the average, was left all round the hut.

It was possible to walk right round this without any fear of tumbling to the ground far below. For there were handy branches to grab hold of if a sudden gust of wind happened to come.

"They ought to make prisons like this in England," I remarked, as Trotwood joined me on the platform. "There's absolutely no chance of escape. Just look at the inky brutes!" I added savagely.

I was staring down into the Beejee kraal.

The African sun was glaring down—although we were in grateful shade—and the native village was sweltering. The huts were dotted about in all directions haphazard. Children played about in various spots, and the amount of clothing they wore appeared to be exactly nil.

The village itself was planted on one bank of the river only. The river was not wide—just a slow, sluggish stream of deep water. On the opposite bank lay a large stretch of grassland, sloping gently upwards towards the trees of the forest. And there were no huts here.

A frail-looking bridge spanned the river; and almost opposite this bridge stood the aeroplane. It was intact—as whole as it had been when it left the factory. There was not even a stay-wire severed.

Nelson Lee had piloted the machine perfectly, and its adventures in the desert had done no harm. The landing near the Beejee village had been effected without a hitch.

We had fondly supposed that we

should be received in a friendly spirit—until we discovered that our hosts were the Beejees. Then it was too late. Capture had come instantly, and we had occupied the tree-top ever since.

"If we could only get to the old bus," I said, with a sigh, "it wouldn't take us five minutes to get clear—"

"But, my good Nipper, we cannot reach the aeroplane," said Nicodemus. "It is idle to talk in that way. I will admit that the situation is extremely galling. The machine is there—right before our eyes—and it is a vehicle which is capable of carrying us to civilization and to our friends. But our position is something, like that of a convict, who sees from the bars of his cell a railway train speedin' across the countryside."

I grinned.

"You're getting staid in your old age," I remarked. "But what you said about the bars is about right. This prison is more secure than a barred cell. But perhaps we've a lot to be thankful for—"

"Eh?"

"We might have been eaten on the first night," I explained.

"Oh!" said Trotwood. "Oh, really, Nipper! Don't be so disgusting—"

"My dear chap, there's more than a chance that we shall be piled into the stewpan!" I said grimly. "That's not disgusting—it's just the plain truth. And we might as well look the facts in the face. Why they're keeping us here is a mystery, though. I expect—"

I paused, listening.

"What was that?" I asked abruptly.

"I heard nothing—"

"Yes! On the wind, you ass!" I interrupted. "Listen!"

We both remained quiet. And a curious sound came to us on the breeze. The sound was that of many voices, accompanied by the beating of tom-toms or drums. And it swelled into loudness occasionally, only to die away again.

Nelson Lee came out of the hut.

"Did you hear anything, Nipper?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," I replied. "Sounds like an army coming along."

"The chief returning probably."

And this, no doubt, was the true explanation. After waiting for some time, the noise was much louder and nearer. And then, through a break in the trees, we caught a glimpse of a great procession of blacks.

They came on towards the village, which was already stirring. Children were running about excitedly; the women jabbered together in groups. And at last the vanguard of the procession marched into the kraal.

They consisted of a number of gaily-bedecked warriors, and they were all beating their tom-toms. Behind came a kind of litter, made of rushes, in which reposed an enormously stout savage. The litter was carried by a dozen men; and behind this strode scores of other warriors, laden with the spoils of the hunt.

"His majesty has returned," remarked Lord Dorrimore. "Thank goodness, he's brought the meat rations with him!"

"We shan't be allowed to touch any of it, old man," said Lee.

"I wasn't thinkin' of that," explained his lordship. "If these blacks have plenty of meat of an animal variety, they won't take a fancy to our carcasses. We shall probably be safe until there's a famine."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I'm afraid that'll make little difference, Dorrie," he said. "But I am glad the chief has returned. We shall know something for certain before long. I'd like to gain an interview with the fat scoundrel, but I don't suppose I shall have an opportunity. I can talk enough of the lingo to make myself understood, and I'd like to warn the fellow that serious trouble will roll over if he kills us."

"By gad!" said Dorrie. "What does that matter? If we're killed, it won't be much consolation if these blacks are wiped up—consolation to us, I mean! I'd rather miss the whole performance." There was great excitement in the village. The chief's hut was much larger than all the others, and stood within an enclosed square. The hedge which enclosed it was well-kept and thick, with only one entrance. His majesty was set down in front of the "palace," and there were many shouts of enthusiasm.

We watched with interest, but after a while the excitement began to die down, and there was nothing particular to watch. Then, toward the evening, we became aware of a fresh outbreak of animation.

The scene we gazed upon was somewhat ominous.

Small parties of blacks were carrying baskets of short sticks into the great enclosure, and dumping them down. These sticks were piled up in neat heaps, and each pile was adjacent to a hollowed-out stone slab.

"Evidently the fuel for a number of bonfires," remarked Nelson Lee. "It seems that preparations are being made for some great festival. See how some of the blacks are painting themselves up."

I had already noticed it. Now and again a Beejee would appear, bedecked with feathers of gorgeous colour, and with his body daubed with some crude form of paint. And the chief's hut was the centre of activity.

"Yes, by gad!" said Dorrie. "This is goin' to be the final scene, professor. This is where we make our inglorious exit."

"Perhaps it is something quite different," I said hopefully.

"Perhaps so," agreed the gov'nor.

But he didn't mean it.

It was only too plain to all of us, in fact, that these preparations were being conducted on our behalf. If there had been any doubt, it was dispelled by the sight of many children and women—and some of the men, too—gazing intently up into our tree. It was easy to guess why they took such an interest in their prisoners. We were to be the star turn of the evening!

And then the matter reached a point beyond guesswork.

For one of the headmen of the tribe came to the tree. The crude ladder was placed in position by six or seven blacks, and the headman mounted to our prison. We watched his ascent grimly.

"He's come to pronounce the sentence," murmured Dorrie.

The headman came to a halt on the ladder.

Then he looked up and jabbered for about three minutes without pausing.

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Having finished—as abruptly as he had commenced—he descended the ladder again, and went away.

"I fancy the gentleman was makin' an important announcement about bones goin' rotten, an' cheerful things of that sort," said Dorrie. "I heard a few words; but you're the man to ask, professor. What did Inky-sides say?"

Nelson Lee looked grave.

"I was unable to understand even a quarter of what the man said," he replied. "But the little that I did grasp is bad enough. There is to be a big feast just after sundown—"

"With Nipper an' the rest of us as the joint?" asked Dorrie.

"No," replied Lee grimly. "It is not so bad as that—"

"Good!"

"But it makes little difference," went on the gov'nor. "The feast will consist of the meat which was killed in the hunt. But after that orgy there is to be a great spectacular sacrifice—"

"Oh!" I ejaculated.

"By gad!" said Lord Dorrimore.

We gazed at one another in dismay.

"A sacrifice," went on Nelson Lee.

"I could not understand the exact nature of it; but it is a certainty that we are to be murdered. I say it bluntly, because there is no sense in mincing matters. The chief has decreed that we shall die—that we shall be offered up as a sacrifice."

"Well, I hope it won't be a messy business," said Dorrie, with a sigh.

"It will be terribly hard on you poor boys—"

"Oh, don't worry about us, sir!" I growled.

"We can stand it bravely, sir," added Nicodemus steadily.

"Well spoken," said Lee, patting Trotwood's shoulder. "It is courageous of you, my boys. The whole position is terrible, and I hardly know what to do. But to submit to a humiliating death is out of the question."

At the same time, we were all rather subdued.

We were to be put to death at dawn, it seemed—that is what the gov'nor understood. What chance was there for us to escape?

We were surrounded by enemies.

To escape from the clutches of the Beejees seemed impossible. But I was quite certain that Nelson Lee would not "throw up the sponge" until he had made a big and desperate fight for freedom.

The crisis had, indeed, arrived!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Dreadful Tidings!

REGINALD PITT sighed.

"It's beginning to feel awfully lonely without the rest of the fellows," he remarked, as he lounged back in his deck-chair. "How long have they been gone now?"

"Oh, months!" said McClure.

"Rats!"

"Well, it seems like months," amended McClure. "I didn't think we should miss old Handy so much, blessed if I did! But we seem to be a bit lost without Handy and Nipper and Tregellis-West."

Bob Christine joined in the discussion.

"Hang it all, they can't be long now," he said. "They've been away two or three weeks, and it's a wonder to me we've heard nothing. I thought the aeroplane would be back days ago."

"And so did I, by Jove!" said De Valerie. "I hope nothing's happened."

Christine sniffed.

"With Mr. Leo in charge?" he asked. "Oh, don't be an ass! I'll bet Mr. Leo has stopped behind with the other party, just to keep them company. They'll all turn up soon."

"That's what the skipper says," remarked Pitt. "But I've noticed rather an anxious look in Captain Burton's eyes now and again. I believe he's worrying a bit—although he wouldn't dream of saying anything. Sir Crawford's a bit concerned, too."

The group of St. Frank's juniors were chatting under the awning on the beautifully fitted promenade deck of Sir Crawford Grey's steam yacht Wanderer. It was in the latter part of the forenoon, and the day was blazingly hot.

The little port of Agabat was roasting in the sun, but out in the bay the air was rather cooler. And the juniors were fortunate in being able to have as many iced drinks as they cared to ask for.

They all scoffed at the very idea of anything untoward having occurred. Yet each boy secretly had an inner fear that all was not exactly as it should be. The treasure-seekers had not returned, and the aeroplane at least had been expected several days since.

If they had only known where the machine actually was!

While the juniors were talking, Sir Crawford Grey was chatting with Captain Burton in the latter's luxuriously appointed cabin. Both were smoking cigars, and their faces were not expressive of good cheer.

"It's no good denying the fact, Burton, but I'm worried," said Sir Crawford. "We've heard nothing—nothing whatever. And Lee promised to get back at the earliest moment. I'm beginning to get anxious."

"They say that no news is good news, Sir Crawford," said the captain. "That's not always true, but I don't think it would be wise for us to worry at this stage. Let us wait until we have reason to be concerned."

Sir Crawford nodded.

"You are right, Burton—quite right," he agreed. "I suppose I'm an infernal pessimist, but I can't help having a few fears. I almost wish they hadn't attempted the journey—But what's the good of talking in that strain? They've gone, and we can only await their return."

The skipper nodded, and the pair soon went out on deck. They noticed that the four girl-guests were talking together with unusually serious expressions upon their faces. Lady Helen Tregellis-West, the girls' chaperon, was sitting in a cane chair, quietly reading.

The party in the yacht had had quite a good time during their enforced stay in port. For the first week parties and dances had been the order of the day. There was quite a number of Europeans in Agabat, and many of these had been invited to the yacht. In return, there had been parties ashore.

Sir Crawford's guests, in fact, had had a splendid time; they had enjoyed themselves wonderfully.

But now things were beginning to pall somewhat. There were no more parties, for the adventurers were expected to return at any time. And yet nothing had been heard of them.

Everybody was beginning to get worried, although everybody didn't like to admit it. The girls, while seemingly light-hearted in the presence of others, confided amongst themselves.

"I do hope Tommy's all right!" said Violet Watson, her eyes alight with con-

cern. "He told me he'd be back long before this—"

"Oh, you mustn't get worried!" interrupted Agnes. "The boys pretend to be careless, but I know they're worrying. And I think it's silly. How could anything have happened?"

"They might have been killed by Bedouins—" began Maggie Fenton.

"Oh, you would say something silly!" exclaimed Ethel, with a sniff. "Just as if Mr. Lee would get killed! Or Lord Dorrimore! They've been in Africa many a time, and if they thought the trip was dangerous, they wouldn't have taken any of the boys. If we only wait— Oh! Look at that boat!"

She broke off abruptly, and stared out across the bay towards the shore. A native boat, propelled by three or four blacks, was being paddled at express speed towards the yacht.

The niggers were putting all their strength into the work, and it was clear that something unusual was in the wind, for the boats from shore usually paddled out to the yacht in the most leisurely style.

"Perhaps they've got news!" exclaimed Violet, her eyes sparkling.

"Oh, how lovely if they have!" said the other girls.

They crowded to the rails, and watched with great eagerness. The juniors some little way off, saw that their fair companions were excited about something, and they looked up the deck wondering.

"What's the commotion, I wonder?" said Christine.

"Oh, nothing much!" said McClure. "A boat coming along, I suppose. Those girls get excited over nothing at—"

"Great pip!" exclaimed Yorke suddenly. "I don't know about getting excited over nothing! Just have a look at this!"

They all jumped up, and they, too, were soon staring at the rapidly approaching boat.

There was quite a stir on board, and Captain Burton, who was now on deck, saw that something unusual was afoot. He sent Mr. Clive, the first officer, to the head of the accommodation-ladder.

Mr. Clive had lived on the West Coast of Africa for a good many years, on and off, and he could speak a good many native lingos. The boat swung to the yacht's side, and a moment later a black figure mounted the ladder and imparted the information in a quick volume of words.

Mr. Clive's expression was one of satisfaction as he turned away to report to the captain. Sir Crawford Grey was with Captain Burton, when the first officer came up and saluted.

"Well, Mr. Clive?" said the captain. "The party headed by Dr. Brett is just entering Agabat, sir," said Mr. Clive.

"Splendid—splendid!" exclaimed Sir Crawford, with great relief. "And are they all sound, Mr. Clive? Has everybody returned in good health?"

"I don't know, sir," said the first officer. "These men have simply brought the news that the party is near at hand."

"Well, I am thankful to learn it," said Captain Burton. "No doubt we shall soon see the aeroplane soaring overhead."

Sir Crawford rubbed his hands together.

"That's it!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Lee wanted them all to arrive together, no doubt, and so he delayed his departure from Zambé until Brett

and Umlosi were well on their way. Excellent!"

The news soon spread to the juniors. "They've arrived!" shouted Pitt. "Within an hour the whole crowd will be here—Handy and Tregellis-West and all the rest of them!"

"Hurrah!" "Isn't it fine, Miss Vi?" yelled De Valerie.

"Splendid!" answered the girl, with a happy smile.

And everybody waited eagerly and excitedly for the returned wanderers to make their appearance.

They did not know of the dreadful news which the party brought!

But their premature happiness was not to last long. The motor-launch and two other boats were sent to the jetty to meet the adventurers, but no juniors were allowed to go.

The guests remained on board, waiting.

And, through glasses, they saw the first signs of the treasure-party. They appeared from the town, and collected on the jetty. The motor-launch did not wait for the rest of the party, but came speeding towards the yacht, bearing Dr. Brett, Fenton, Morrow, and Jack Grey.

The launch grew nearer, and those on the yacht watched eagerly. The juniors were lining the rail, and they waved their caps excitedly.

"Give 'em a cheer, you chaps!" roared Pitt.

"Rather!" "Hip, hip—!" "Hurrah!"

It was a rousing cheer, and it clearly reached the ears of those in the launch. Dr. Brett glanced at the two seniors, and shook his head.

"They don't understand—yet!" he muttered.

The swift boat came nearer and nearer.

"Hurrah!" "Welcome back!"

The juniors yelled, and the girls, further along the rails, waved their handkerchiefs. But they could not help noticing that the occupants of the launch made no further attempt to return the waves. Furthermore, they were all grave-looking, and their faces were not smiling.

"Something seems to be wrong," said De Valerie.

"They're tired, I expect," remarked Christine.

"Not too tired to smile," said Pitt grimly. "Yes, there's something wrong."

He waved again. "Aho, there!" he roared. "Hallo, Jack, old son!"

Jack Grey, in the launch, waved his hand.

"He didn't even smile," said Pitt. "My hat! What's happened?"

They had not long to wait. The launch came alongside, and Dr. Brett mounted the ladder, with the others close behind him. He found a big group awaiting his arrival on deck.

Sir Crawford Grey was in the forefront, with Captain Burton just near. The juniors and the girls, and some members of the crew, hovered in the rear, all excited and curious.

"Well, Brett, back again!" said Sir Crawford genially. "I suppose Mr. Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Nipper are coming along by air—eh? They'll be here presently, I suppose?"

The doctor grasped Sir Crawford's hand.

"I'm afraid that—" He paused. "I have some news for you—"

"News?" broke in the baronet. "Not bad news, surely? No, of course not! By the way, I have been examining your party through the telescope, and I failed to see one boy—that quaint youngster, Trotwood. Perhaps he is coming—"

"Don't, dad!" said Jack Grey huskily, coming forward. "Poor old Nick will never come back again!"

Sir Crawford changed colour.

"What on earth do you mean, Jack?" he asked sharply. He held his son tightly, and looked at Brett for his answer.

"Trotwood was lost in the desert, Sir Crawford," said the doctor quietly. "We encountered a sandstorm, and— and Trotwood was buried! We saw no further sign of him! The poor lad perished—"

Brett could get no further, and he paled.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Sir Crawford. "Trotwood has been killed! I cannot believe it! I cannot credit—"

"It's true, dad!" said Jack. "Oh, and that's not the worst—"

"Not—not the worst!" shouted Pitt from the rear.

"Great Scott!"

"Poor old Nicky!"

"Oh, how awful!"

There was a regular chorus of exclamations, all expressive of sadness and sympathy. The smiles had vanished, and everybody was grave.

"Brett, you must tell us the truth," said Sir Crawford hoarsely. "You have stated that Trotwood perished in the desert, and that item of news has almost stunned me. What else have you to say? Tell me bluntly."

Dr. Brett nodded, and cleared his throat.

"We do not know for certain, but we fear that the tragedy is far more serious," he said steadily. "Please do not raise your hopes because we have no proof of death. There is no hope at all. Mr. Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, and Nipper flew into the desert, and they have not returned."

Sir Crawford staggered.

"You—you do not mean—" he gasped.

"Yes, Sir Crawford," said Brett quickly. "They have perished—they will never return. We did not lose hope until we arrived at Agabat. Then we learned that the aeroplane had not come direct to the coast, and we knew that the worst had happened. They are dead!"

There was a dead silence for a full minute.

This awful news had bowled everybody over. They thought it was true. Brett himself thought it was true. Perhaps it would be true, after all. Our position in the hands of the Beejes wasn't at all healthy, at all events. But the yacht's party thought we had met with a different fate.

"Dead!" muttered Sir Crawford dazedly. "Dead! Lee—Dorrimore—Nipper! All dead! And Trotwood! Oh, it is too terrible, Brett!"

"I will tell you the circumstances, sir, and then you will believe," broke in Dr. Brett. "Will you come below, or shall I speak here?"

Sir Crawford waved his hand.

"Here, Brett—here!" he exclaimed. "For Heaven's sake speak—speak quickly! These boys must know the truth—everybody must know! Speak now!"

(Continued overleaf.)

And, amid a great rush, the doctor related what had occurred—or, rather, what he thought had occurred. He described Trotwood's fate; he told of the aeroplane's flight into the desert, and its non-return.

When he had finished everybody was convinced.

Four valuable lives had been lost, and the treasure was still in the heart of the desert! The scorching sands had triumphed!

There was no quiet on board the Wanderer that afternoon or evening. Sir Crawford remained in his cabin. He was bowed down with the awful news. And the ship was quiet and still at a much earlier hour than usual. By eleven o'clock everything was silent. And then something curious happened.

A dark form appeared in the water near the stern of the yacht. It moved to and fro once or twice, and then remained still right beneath a rope that dangled down from the deck.

Two arms grasped the rope, and a moment later a man was hauling himself up, hand-over-hand, to the deck. The swimmer had just come from the shore, braving the perils of the tropic sea.

And the intruder on board the Wanderer was none other than Captain John Nixon.

He had arrived at Agabat secretly, and nobody knew of his presence there. Awaiting his time, he had come out to the yacht.

Just for a moment or two he stood on the dark deck in his dripping clothes. Then he moved forward like a shadow, and disappeared below. Captain Nixon had failed all along the line—so far.

But he did not mean to fail now. He was not beaten yet. The treasure was lost, he believed, but it was still possible for him to have his revenge upon those who had foiled him so many times. The rascally skipper had become somewhat unbalanced in mind, owing to his long succession of failures.

He was not after the treasure now. Captain Nixon meant mischief—dire mischief!

THE END.

("THE RIVER OF FIRE" is the title of next week's thrilling story of the Boys of St. Frank's.)

BUNTER THE RAIDER!

(Continued from page 22.)

"Bunter's played a dirty trick, and bagged my tick," said the Bounder. "I think something ought to be done for Bunter. I really think he's gone over the limit this time—especially by dragging the captain of the Form into his rotten games."

"I agree!" said Wharton. "Hear, hear!" said Squiff. "I leave the matter in Wharton's hands, as Form captain" said Vernon Smith, and he laid his head on the pillow.

"I—I say, Harry, old man—" mumbled Bunter.

"Smithy, old man, you've played up jolly decently," said Harry Wharton. "I think every fellow here will agree that Bunter has gone over the limit this time. My opinion is that Bunter ought to be barred by the Form for the rest of the term."

"Hear, hear!" said Peter Todd. "As Bunter's study-mate, and the fellow who has to stand him at close quarters—" I

fully endorse the sentence of our worthy Form captain. Bunter's sent to Coventry!"

"I say, Peter, old chap—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"I wasn't—"

"Bunter's barred!" said Harry Wharton. "It's no good licking him; he's been licked lots of times. It's no good kicking him; he's worn out more boot-leather than any fellow at Greyfriars. He's barred by the Form for the rest of the term."

"Hear, hear!" said Polsover major.

"I say, you fellows—"

Nobody answered Bunter. The sentence of "Coventry" was already in force.

"Peter, old man—"

Silence.

"Harry, old chap—"

No reply.

"Beast!"

And Billy Bunter laid his head on his pillow, and his deep snore soon resounded through the Remove dormitory.

THE END.

(Another fine story of Harry Wharton & Co. next week, chums, entitled: "BARRED BY THE REMOVE!")

TRICKING THE FOURTH!

(Continued from page 7.)

"I—I can't!"

"Why not?" hooted Lovell.

"I—I had to have a snack in quarter, and—"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

There was a silence in the end study. The gentleman from Potters began to look restive.

"Well, this does not concern me," he said at last. "Am I to collect the money, or take the bat back?"

Lovell's grasp closed on his new bat. The expression on Tubby Muffin's face grew positively anguished. Only too well he knew that if the gentleman from Potters did not receive either the bat or the money, he would proceed directly to the Head. Lovell knew it, too! and his grasp on the bat slowly unclosed, and in silence—a silence that could be felt—he handed it over to the gentleman from Potters.

With a far from satisfied expression on his face, the gentleman from Potters retired with the bat in his possession.

What followed was like a dream of anguish to Reginald Muffin, when he thought about it afterwards.

The fat Classical could not see that he had been to blame in any way—though Jimmy Silver & Co. did their very best to make it clear to him.

Tubby Muffin's manners and customs had often led to a ragging before; but this ragging was a real record.

When the fat Classical crawled out of the end study at last, he was wishing from the very depths of his podgy heart that he had never hit on that brilliant scheme for raising the wind.

And though Muffin seemed still unable to understand what the fellows were making such a fuss about—he gave up the idea of further raffles.

THE END.

(Don't miss: "MR. GREELY, AGAIN!" next Tuesday's rousing tale of Jimmy Silver & Co.)

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