GRAND COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE!

And Many Other Attractive Features in this Number.

The Magnet Library 1d.

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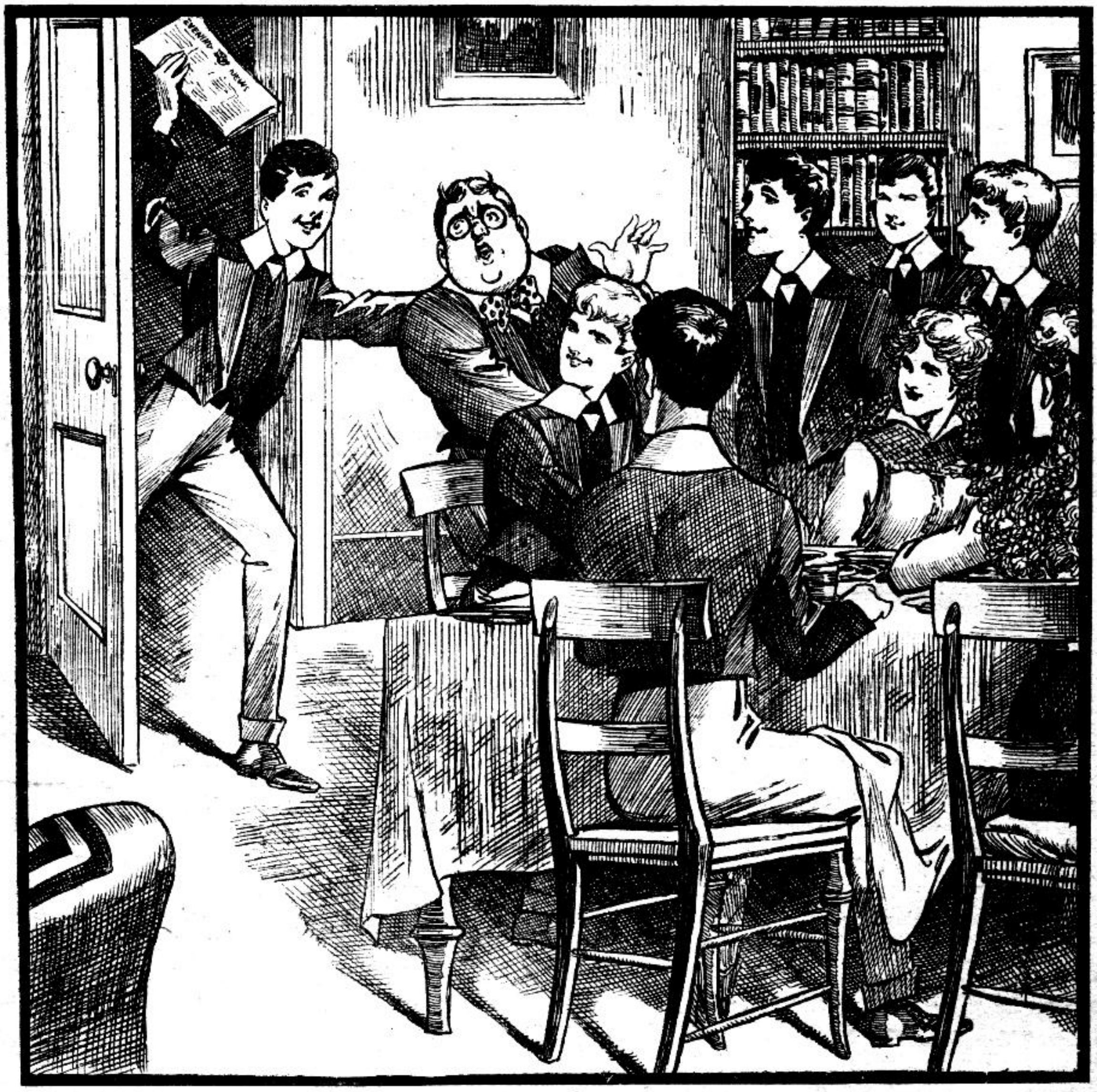


GOOD NEWS FROM THE SEAT OF WAR!

(A Dramatic Scene in the Magnificent Long Complete School Tale Inside.)

MY READERS' PAGE

The Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums, at home or abroad, and is only too willing to give his best advice to them if they are in difficulty or in trouble. . . . Whom to write to: Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

For Next Monday:

"KICKED OUT OF SCHOOL!"

By Frank Richards.

Next Monday's grand, long, complete tale of the chums of Greyfriars School is of the thrilling and dramatic order. Rattenstein, who hates Harry Wharton as only Huns can hate, conspires with Banks, the bookmaker, to bring about Harry's expulsion. The scheme works with a fair measure of success, until Billy Bunter inadvertently stumbles across proof of Rattenstein's guilt. An expulsion follows, but, needless to state it is not Harry Wharton who is

"KICKED OUT OF SCHOOL!"

A SPRING POET MAKES MERRY!

Spring is here, and in its train the vast army of poetically-inclined people who leap into rhyme at the least provocation. From a stack of spring poems in my sanctum I have selected for publication one by Muriel C., of Finsbury Park. I have selected her poem, not because it shows exceptional merit, but because, instead of dealing with ploughed fields and warbling skylarks, it treats of Billy Bunter, the ungainly porpoise of the Remove. Here are my girl chum's verses:

"A fat freak of Nature, by name Billy Bunter,
Of all sorts of grub is a very keen hunter.
Currant-buns he adores, and at dough-nuts he darts,
And plays fast and loose with tuppenny tarts.

"From morning till evening he's stony, it's true,
For he blues his tin, puffy pastries to chew;
And therefore it's usual to hear him say,
'I've been disappointed, you fellows, to-day.

"'My order's not come from my titled relations,
So I haven't the tin to procure any rations.
If you lend me five bob, I'll give you back ten
When my order arrives' (and Bob Cherry says 'When!')

"Then Bunty, in wrath, says, 'Oh, really, you know,
If you won't take my word, you outsiders, I'll go.
I won't dream of taking a loan from you now.'
'You won't get the chance!' says Frank Nugent.
'Bow-wow!'"

In sending me the above effusion, Miss Muriel observes: "I think your books are divine, and our family of seven reads them. Even baby loves Bunter!"

Verily, there is no accounting for tastes!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. IN "CHUCKLES."

"Chuckles" still gives the lead to every other humorous paper on the market, and the issue on sale this Friday will contain a rousing story of school life, introducing the chums of Greyfriars. It is a cricket story, entitled

"LAST MAN IN!"

and no "Magnet" reader should allow himself or herself to miss reading it.

Quite apart from Prosper Howard's school story, "Chuckles" is replete with many fine features. Our go-ahead little companion paper also boasts the biggest and best Boy and Girl Club in the universe.

Don't wait until Friday morning before ordering your copy of "Chuckles," or you will probably be disappointed. Place an order with your newsagent to-day, and when finished with, pass "Chuckles" on to your younger brother. The kiddies simply love it!

NOTICES.

J. Diamond, 1, Railway Place, Cambridge Road, Bethnal Green, London, N., wants to buy the old halfpenny numbers of the "Magnet," and is willing to pay full price.

Lance-Corporal A. Jackson, No. 1 Coy., 16th Royal Irish Rifles (P.), B.E.F., France, will be much obliged if readers will send him back numbers of the "Magnet."

A. Hoy, 3, Ward's Place, Kilmarnock, wants more members for his "Magnet" League, promoted chiefly to help men on active service. He would also like to hear from the editor of any amateur magazine who is prepared to consider the possibility of running it in connection with his League.

Trooper G. R. White, 3622, 3rd Troop, "B" Squadron, Q.O.Y.D., 37th Division, B.E.F., France, would like correspondence with a girl reader between 17 and 19.

Gunner J. Jackson, 35427, "C" Battery, 96th Brigade, R.F.A., B.E.F., France, would be glad of old "Magnets" and "Gems."

Trumpeter A. S. Jepson, 1331, Hut 11, and Trumpeter G. Tyler, 2483, both of the 46th Division Training Battery, R.F.A., South Camp, Ripon, expecting to leave for the Front very shortly, ask for letters from girl readers of 17—18.

T. Brooker, 4, West Hill, Hitchin, wants to buy numbers of the "Magnet" earlier than 400.

Private J. E. Morris 2457, Machine Gun Section, 8th Royal Sussex, B.E.F., France, would be glad to receive the "Magnet" and "Gem" weekly from some girl reader.

Norman J. Steele, 7, Tintern Street, Clapham, S.W., wishes to form a "Magnet" and "Gem" League, open to the whole United Kingdom, and would be glad if readers interested would send stamped, addressed envelope for particulars.

Private G. Walker, 26146, 49th Coy., "E" 42, East Lines, Machine Gun Corps, Grantham, would be glad to correspond with a reader, and also to receive old numbers of both the "Magnet" and "Gem."

S. Silverstein, 3, Cleveland Grove, Cleveland Street, Mile End Road, London, E., wants to buy Nos. 55, 111, and 171 of the "Magnet," and Nos. 128, 137, and 191 of the "Gem."

Sapper J. P. Laidlaw, of the R.N.D.E., wishes to thank all the readers who wrote in response to his request for letters, but has received so many that he is quite unable to answer them all.

J. A. Needs, 32, Sonning Street, Roman Road, Barnsbury, N., wants to form a "Magnet" and "Gem" League for boys and girls of 14—18 in the North London district, and will be glad if those who write him will enclose stamped and addressed envelope.

W. Bolderston, O.Tel., and C. H. Panther, O.Tel., both of H.M. Yacht Ombra, care of G.P.O., London, would each like to correspond with a girl reader of about 20.

Fred L. Apps, of Morpeth, N.S.W., Australia, would like to hear again from Miss Jessie Drysdale.

Sapper C. Reade, 38239, and Sapper J. Lowe, 139296, both of 4th Section, 354th Tunnelling Coy., R.E., B.E.F., France, would like to correspond with girl readers.

J. L. Hinks, 45, Belmont Street, Swadlincote, Burton-on-Trent, is starting a correspondence club, and will be glad if readers interested will send him stamped and addressed envelopes for particulars.

Cyril Pratt, 111, Far Gosford Street, Coventry, wants a few early numbers of the "Magnet," and will pay full price for them.

H. P. Lawson, 15, Byfield Road, Walthamstow, expresses regret to the many readers whose applications for back numbers he was unable to meet. These applications came in shoals, and his stock was soon exhausted.

Miss Eileen Conrad, 20, Harold Road, Hornsey, London, N., wants a copy each of "The Sunday Crusaders" and "Special Constable Coker," and will pay 2d. each for them.

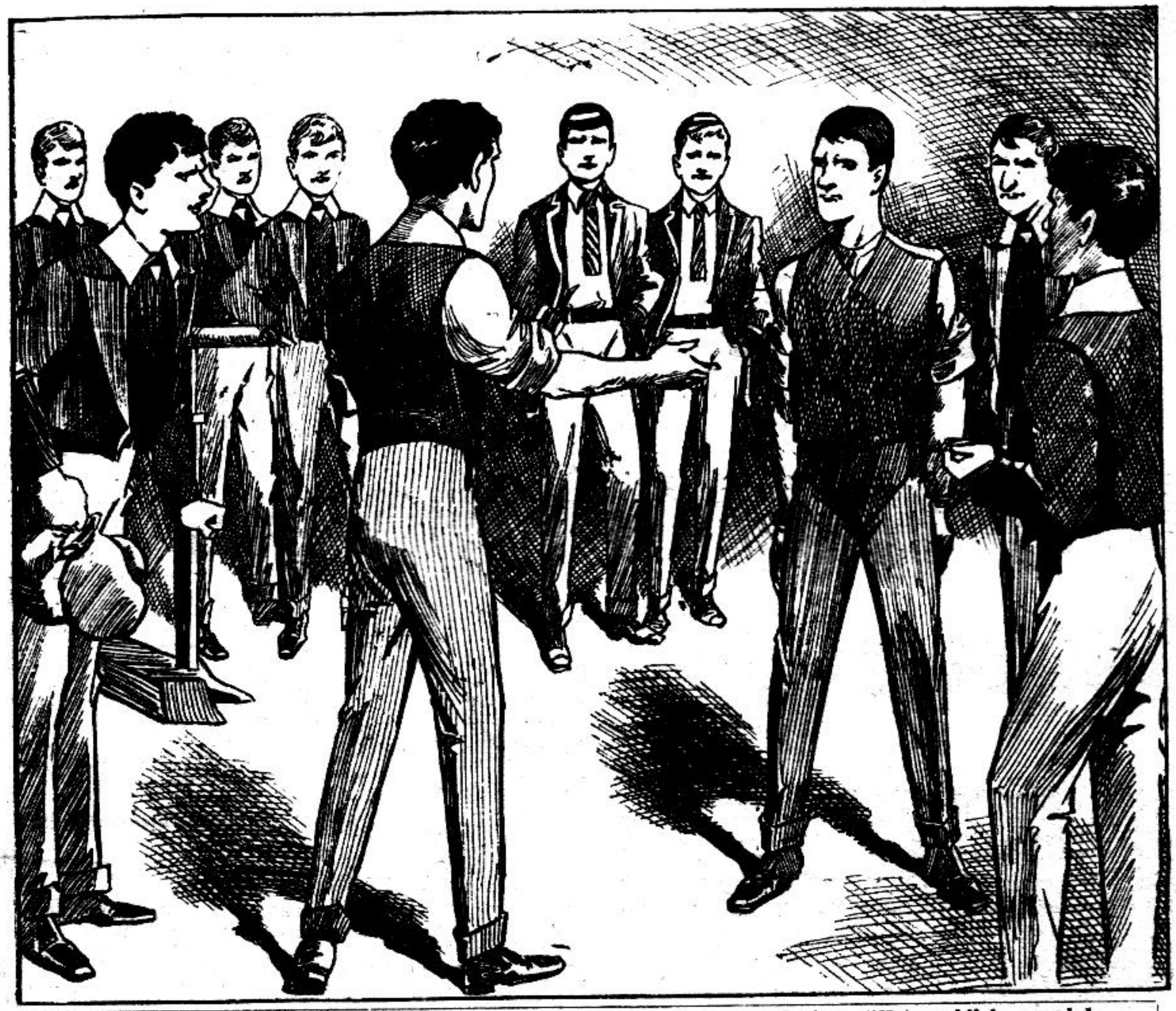
Yours Editor

The Magnet Library 1d

THE BOY FROM SOUTH AFRICA!

A Magnificent New Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.



The new boy held out his right hand, but Bolsover put his hands behind him. "Not me!" he growled. "Not with a pro-German!" (*See Chapter* 6.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Squiff's Job!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Whither away, Squiff, old son?"

Bob Cherry, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, thus hailed Sampson Quincy Iffley Field—called "Squiff" because life was short—across the Close at Greyfriars on a sunny afternoon in May.

"I'm looking for Browney," answered Squiff. "Nugent said he was at the gates a few minutes ago."

"So he was," said Bob. "And if he's not there now he's bound to be somewhere. What's on, Squiff?"

"Just seen Quelchy," replied the Australian junior. "He wants Browney and me to go and meet a new chap who's blowing in this afternoon."

"New game for Quelchy," remarked Bob genially. "He generally turns little us on to that sort of job. But we

ain't grudging you it, Squiff. You're welcome. 'Tain't all beer and skittles chaperoning new kids."

"Oh, he'd a sort of a kind of a reason," Squiff said. "Quelchy does have at times. The man ain't altogether an ass."

"I've noticed that myself, old scout. What's his giddy reason?"

"New chap's a Colonial of sorts, and the old bird seemed to think Browney and me the most suitable specimens of Greyfriars to meet him."

"Ah, I see! Oh, yes, Squiff, it's quite plain—as plain as your cheerful old face, and that's saying a lot. Rough diamonds to meet a rough diamond, eh? Mind you don't cut him."

"Diamonds don't do much cutting while they're rough, I reckon," growled Squiff. "And I don't know that Browney and I are any rougher than the rest of you chaps, or that my face is a heap plainer than yours."

"Don't be ratty," answered Bob. "I don't mean anything—never do, you know. Strikes me, Squiff, you don't quite cotton to your giddy job."

"Ain't sure I do," said Squiff.

He sighted Tom Brown, the New Zealander, at the gate, and sent shrilling across the Close a long-drawn:

"Cooee-ee-ee-ee-ee!"

"What's up?" yelled Tom Brown.

"I want you!" shouted back Squiff. Then he turned to Bob Cherry again.

"Any more questions?" he asked a trifle gruffly. "May as well have 'em all, while we're about it."

"Where's the new chap come from?" demanded Bob. "Australia?"

"Fathead! Didn't I say a Colonial of sorts?"

"Well ain't an Australian a Colonial of sorts?" inquired Bob innocently.

"No; he's a real Colonial."

"New Zealander, then?"

"Better not let Browney hear you! There's not much difference between them and us—not after Anzac, anyway. If a New Zealander ain't exactly an Australian, he's the next best thing."

"H'm! I see, Squiff. Canadian, p'r'aps?"

"Rats! Do you think I'd talk like that about a Canadian after the way they showed up in that blessed poison-gas attack at What's-its-name—and everywhere else, too? They're all right, you bet!"

"Got to guess again, and try to think of something that you Anzac merchants wouldn't exactly love. New chap ain't a West Indian nigger, I suppose?"

"No. Dunno that I'd mind much if he was. They're loyal, anyway."

"He can't be from Yankeeland," said Bob, rather puzzled.

Tom Brown came up just then.

"Yankeeland!" snorted Squiff. "You chump! Giddy neutrals! You couldn't call them Colonials, either."

"What's this about the Yankees?" inquired the New Zealander.

"Nothing," replied his Australian chum. "Only this chap's rotten silly guesses. There's a Colonial chap coming this afternoon—booked for the Remove, I understand—and Quelchy wants you and me to go and meet him. That's all."

"Except that Squiff ain't exactly in love with the job," added Bob Cherry, his eyes twinkling merrily as he watched the Australian junior's face. "So, as you're not altogether an idiot, Browney——"

"Thanks, Cherry!" put in Ton. Brown drily.

"Oh, don't mench! I'd say as much for you almost any day—or for Squiff, either. Not being altogether——"

"You can cut that out!" chipped in Tom Brown. "I sha'n't mind. Don't care about flattery laid on with a trowel, so I sha'n't miss it."

"We shall miss being at the station in time for this bounder's train if we don't get a move on us!" growled Squiff.

"I'll walk as far as the gate with you," volunteered Bob.

"Thanks, awfully!" replied Tom Brown. "Got nothing to do, I suppose?"

"Nothing in particular, thanks, Browney. There's no cricket this afternoon, you know. But you haven't guessed it yet."

"Guessed what?"

"Where the new chap comes from. 'Tain't Australia. Squiff would want to fall on his neck and hug him if it was."

"I'll fall on your neck, you fathead, and——"

"Don't trouble, Squiff, old chap! I'm not feeling up to luxuries to-day. And 'tain't New Zealand. Squiff allows there's some tolerably decent chaps from there. So——"

"Must be South Africa," said Tom Brown.

"Guessed it at once!" growled Squiff.

"Well, what's the matter with a South African?" asked Bob Cherry, looking rather surprised.

"Not much, I should say," Tom Brown answered.

"It all depends," said Squiff. "There's the right kind, and there's the other kind."

"And this chap's the other kind—is that it?"

"I didn't say so, did I?"

"Bow-wow!" said Bob. "Do be civil, Squiff, even if it hurts you. What is the matter with the giddy new merchant?"

"He's a beastly Boer—Afrikander, or whatever they call themselves!" snapped the Australian.

"Well, look at Botha, old chap," said Tom Brown.

Squiff only grunted.

"Look at Smuts, too," added Bob Cherry.

Squiff grunted again.

"I reckon Botha's a jolly good sort," said the New Zealander. "He may not be British—— What did you say, Squiff?"

"I didn't say anything," growled Sampson Quincy Iffley Field.

"Well, it did sound more like a pig's voice than a human being's, certainly," remarked Bob.

"Botha isn't British, then, if you will have it that way," went on Tom Brown. "But, whether he loves us or not, he's loyal—right to the backbone."

"So is Smuts," said Bob. "Ripping fine chaps, both of 'em, if you ask me. They fought against our fellows, but there's no malice on either side because of that. Why should there be? Look at the Japs and the Russians—they're chummy enough now."

"Hang the Japs and the Russians! No, I don't mean that; they're all right. But, see here, you chaps! You jaw away about Botha and Smuts. They're two of the best. If it was a kid of Botha's or the other chap's coming here, I'd take him on trust for the right sort. But——"

"But what, Squiff? Surely it's not a De Wet?" asked Tom Brown, as the Australian paused.

"Might almost as well be!" growled Squiff.

"Beyers?" suggested Bob.

"Beyers be hanged!" Squiff snapped.

"He ought to have been. But he got himself drowned instead," replied Tom Brown calmly.

"A Kruger?" guessed Bob.

"Oh, hang it, no! He's a Delarey, if you must know."

Bob Cherry looked rather puzzled. But Tom Brown understood.

"Well, it might be worse," he said. "It never was properly proved that old Delarey was in that bizney."

"No, it wasn't proved. Because why? He went and got himself shot before the affair blazed up."

"Oh, I remember now!" said Bob. "The Johannesburg affair, you mean, Squiff? What relation's this new chap to the old general? Grandson, I suppose—he wouldn't be a son!"

"Dunno! May not be any relation at all. Come along, Browney! This chap talks too much for me!" Squiff growled. "Why didn't Quelchy send him and Wharton and Nugent? Heap more sense in it. These Old Country people can stand Huns and Boers and such cattle a jolly sight easier than we can in the Colonies. Look at all the uninterned aliens! Look at all the Hun money they daren't touch—and the Hun ships rotting in port—and——"

"Ring off, Squiff! I'm not the giddy Government, am I?" howled Bob, getting angry now.

Sampson Quincy Iffley Field grinned.

"Got your wool off at last, Bob, old sport!" he said. "Come along, Browney!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Piet Delarey!

A DARK-HAIRED fellow of about fifteen got out of the train at Friardale Station, and gazed up and down the platform.

He was the only person to alight at the little country station, and the only person on the platform, besides the porter, was a fellow wearing the Greyfriars cap, with its blue-and-white colours.

The new-comer walked up to him

"Have you come to meet me?" he asked.

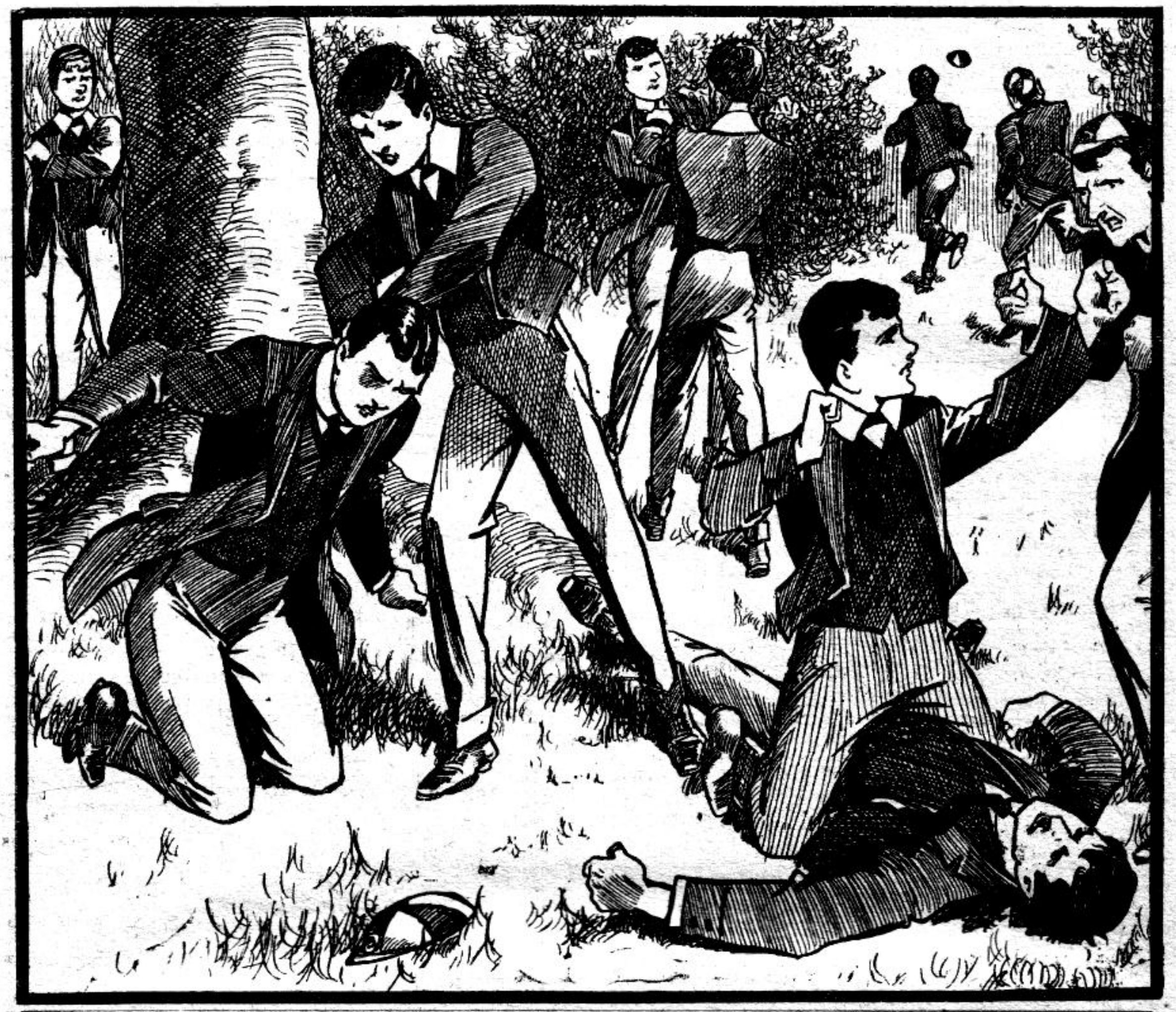
The fellow in the Greyfriars cap eyed him from head to foot, and then from foot to head again, before he answered curtly:

"No!"

"I was told that I should be met," said the new-comer.

"Oh, indeed!" replied the other, with a sudden change of tone. "Then you are a new boy, I suppose? If I can help you in any way——"

"It isn't much help I want. If you will put me on the road



"You'll apologise for that!" said Squiff, giving Ponsonby another fierce shake. "I'm hanged if I will! Leggo, you beast! Rescue!" yelled Pon. *(See Chapter 3.)*

for the school, that will be enough. My name's Delarey, and I come from South Africa."

Piet Delarey was rather puzzled by the look of the fellow who wore the Greyfriars colours.

He knew that he himself might easily have been picked out of a crowd of British boys as scarcely one of them. But this fellow was much more plainly un-British than he.

He looked like a German. Yet it seemed impossible that a German should be found at a British school in war-time!

"And mine is Rattenstein—Prince Rupprecht von Rattenstein," said the other fellow.

"But—but——"

Delarey paused, for he scarcely knew what to say. But Rattenstein understood.

"Oh, I am British!" he said. "My father was naturalised in this country, and I was born here. Surely that makes me British? It should do, I think. But Greyfriars persists in regarding me as an alien."

Delarey thought that Rattenstein's evident clinging to his petty German title might have something to do with that. German titles in England to-day were scarcely things to flourish in people's faces.

But he did not say so. He waited for the other fellow to tell him more.

"Greyfriars will probably regard you in the same light," went on Rattenstein, with an unpleasant smile. "Your name will not do you much good. Are you a relation to the General Delarey who was shot in a motor-car outside Johannesburg early in the war?"

"I am not near of kin to him, though of his blood," answered the new boy. "And, if you please, I would rather not discuss him."

"It would be better not to talk about him, certainly," said Rattenstein, with a sneer, "though you may find it difficult to avoid doing so. Your name will certainly be against you."

Delarey lifted his head proudly, and for a moment his hands clenched.

"It is not a name to be ashamed of," he replied, with a touch of heat. "No one ever could say that my kinsman, the general, was anything but a fair and gallant enemy. He is dead now. Whatever his errors may have been, let them rest!"

"Oh, I am willing enough to do that!" returned Rattenstein. "It was out of kindness that I spoke. You can take the warning, or leave it, as suits you best!"

Delarey put out his hand.

"Thanks!" he said. "Of course, I knew that everything would not be just easy for me. That would be too much to expect. I dare say you realised that before you came. We've got to live it down, I suppose? The war's cut you off from Germany once for all, and—well, it's much the same thing in South Africa. Our people see now that their only hope for the future is under the British flag. At least, they nearly all see it, and in a few years those who want to stir up strife will die out."

Rupprecht von Rattenstein listened with a smiling face that was only a mask for his real feelings. The German poison was in his blood.

But Rattenstein had learned one lesson at least by this time. He knew that his petty German title counted for less than

nothing in the eyes of Greyfriars. He knew that his schoolfellows, who could accept Mark Linley, the son of a Lancashire factory hand, and Penfold, the son of a village cobbler, as their equals, looked down upon him because of his foolish pride in his title and his Prussian arrogance.

Rattenstein failed to realise that Greyfriars would have given him fair play if he had only shown himself a decent fellow. Indeed, Greyfriars had given him fair play even as it was. The unpleasant things that had happened to him were his own fault. He had been punished not because he was a German, but because he was an arrogant cad and a malicious schemer.

Fisher T. Fish, the Yankee junior, who prided himself on being a "nootral," and had all his countrymen's love for a title, had bowed his knee to Rattenstein at first, esteeming it an honour to take off the princely boots, and be treated to the rough side of the princely tongue. William George Bunter, the gorging Owl of the Remove, had also been ready to play the sycophant's part. In his crass folly Bunter believed that a prince must be rich, and would naturally be ready to whack out his money for the benefit of those who played up to him.

But Billy Bunter had discovered that Rattenstein was not rich, and that he was mean. Whereupon Bunter had renounced his allegiance. And Fisher Tarleton Fish, though he had continued to toady somewhat longer to the Hun, had got fed up at length.

Since then Rattenstein had tried a new tack.

Dropping his arrogant methods, he had adopted with certain fellows a most ingratiating manner. He could be pleasant enough when he liked, especially with anyone lacking the force of character to resist his wheedling. With Hazeldene, who was very weak, he had met with some success; and through Hazel he had managed to set by the ears two such staunch chums as Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry.

But all his schemes had come to nothing in the event.

He had failed dismally, and he knew that Greyfriars regarded him as a pariah.

Rattenstein was a coward, and a duffer with his fists. There was no chance of his being able to humble in fair fight the fellows he hated.

But here was a hefty-looking fellow who might be made use of—might be manœuvred into antagonism to Wharton and his chums!

That thought had flashed into Rattenstein's mind even before he heard Delarey's name.

The name gave the scheming Hun fresh encouragement.

Everybody knew that General Delarey had been more than suspected of complicity in the plot fostered by De Wet, Beyers, and the rest. Some maintained that, though no lover of the British rule, he had been loyal to his oath, and had never intended to take part in the rising. But at best there was enough against him to give his name no very pleasant sound in British ears.

Delarey would start at Greyfriars with something against him. Though Rattenstein had not heard the talk between the two Colonial juniors and Bob Cherry, he realised that.

"Come along, and I'll tell a porter fellow to take your luggage up to the school!" he said. "I suppose you don't mind walking on an afternoon like this? And you need not be in any hurry to get there. I should not be surprised if you wished yourself well out of it before you've been twenty-four hours in the place!"

Rattenstein spoke so bitterly that the new boy could not help believing there must be something behind his words. He hesitated a moment, and then said:

"Have they been particularly rough on you?"

"They have made my life a misery to me, and for no better reason than that I bear a German name," answered the Hun schoolboy.

"That's rotten! You can't help it. Not a thing to be proud of, after what the Germans have done, of course. But they can't expect a fellow to change his name to suit his notions. I wouldn't do it, I know!"

Rattenstein winced inwardly, but his face showed no sign of what he felt.

"I am glad to meet someone with wider views," he said; and then walked along the platform to tell the one porter on duty to bring Delarey's traps along.

The new boy did not follow him. He stood still, looking around him at the fair Kentish landscape, bathed in the glory of the spring sunshine.

Perhaps Piet Delarey was wondering whether the friendship of Rupprecht von Rattenstein was going to be just exactly the best possible thing for him at the outset of his career at Greyfriars!

But if it was so, he shook off his doubts. He and Rattenstein were more or less in the same boat, it seemed to him. If the Greyfriars fellows were unfair to Rattenstein because of his German ancestry, they would be unfair to him—Delarey—because of the Boer blood in his veins.

He made up his mind in that moment that he was not going to tell them in any hurry that his dead mother had been British, or that his father was as loyal to the oath sworn when peace was made as Louis Botha himself.

Meanwhile, Squiff and Tom Brown, who were to have met the new boy at the station, had failed to do so, and he had thus been thrown upon the tender mercies of Rattenstein. Upon this slight mischance a good deal was to turn, as it happened.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
A Fighting Man!

"GREYFRIARS cads!" yelled Ponsonby of Highcliffe, sighting Squiff and Tom Brown as they came swinging along the road to the station.

The Highcliffe nuts were in force. Ponsonby had the support of Gadsby, Monson, Vavasour, Drury, and Merton.

Three to one was long enough odds, even for the Highcliffe nuts, who were not precisely of the heroic breed.

Cecil Ponsonby grinned as he saw the two Colonials pause for a moment, and then come on again.

"It's those two Colonial cads," he said to his followers. "Rush 'em, you chaps, an' give it to them hot an' strong, by gad!"

"Half a dozen of 'em!" Squiff said to Tom Brown. "It's long odds, Browney, but we can't back down. Remember Anzac, and give it the rotters in the neck!"

"I don't believe they'll dare to try any of their little games," answered the New Zealander. "Train's going out, Squiff—twig the smoke?"

A long roll of white smoke showed against the blue April sky.

"We sha'n't be in time to meet the Boer merchant," replied Squiff. "Never mind. 'Tain't our fault. And I didn't feel keen, anyway!"

They were moving towards the Highcliffe band at the rate of about six miles an hour.

Ponsonby & Co. strung themselves across the road.

"Here, hold on, you bounders!" sang out Ponsonby. "What's the blessed hurry? We want to talk to you!"

"The desire is not mutual," replied Tom Brown, not in the least slackening his pace.

Squiff said nothing, but his strong jaw set hard. He was thinking that if only Bob Cherry had come along the nuts would have cleared out of the way. Or, even if they did attempt to bar it, they would have had the worst of a dust-up with three such redoubtable warriors as the cheery Bob and the two Australasians.

But six to two was long odds, even when the six were of the Ponsonby breed.

"Going to rush 'em, Squiff?" asked Tom Brown.

His chum nodded.

They were close upon the Highcliffe crowd now.

Suddenly they dashed forward.

Squiff's right shoulder took Ponsonby in the chest, and made him stagger backwards. Squiff's left fist smote Vavasour upon the nose, and sent him sprawling.

"Grooooh!" yelled Ponsonby.

"Yaroooogh!" howled Vavasour. "Ow-yow! The beast's smashed my nose absolutely!"

Tom Brown sent one hard fist crashing at Gadsby's chest, and the other at Merton's jaw.

Both reeled, but neither fell.

Monson and Drury grabbed the New Zealander.

"That's the style! Stick to the rotter, by gad!" roared Ponsonby.

Squiff might have gone on. The way was open to him for the moment.

But, of course, Squiff didn't!

He piled in at once. Monson got a rattler on the chin that made him relax his hold. Tom Brown dealt Drury a slashing blow between the eyes.

But the whole half-dozen swarmed upon the fighting pair.

Back to back Squiff and Tom Brown stood, and hit out lustily. Ponsonby and Gadsby assailed the Australian, with Vavasour prancing in the rear, holding his nose with one hand, and trying to get in a blow with the other. But, as Squiff's reach was longer than the dandy's, and as Vavasour was taking no end of care not to get hurt again, Vavasour was not likely to achieve much in the way of damage.

Drury, Monson, and Merton piled in on Tom Brown, and, hefty and active as the New Zealander was, he had all his work cut out to keep up his end. Two fists smote at once

upon Tom Brown's jaw, and Squiff got a knock from the back of his comrade's head that made him see stars.

Still the undaunted pair battled on, heavy though the odds were.

Merton suddenly took a seat in the dust, and clapped both hands to his mouth.

"Ow-yow! Ow-yow!" he yelled. "The cad's knocked half my teeth out!"

Squiff's fist shot over Ponsonby's shoulder, and landed neatly and precisely on Vavasour's left optic.

It was the first time the dandy had risked himself within striking distance since the blow upon his nose, and now he wished he had been wiser.

"Yoop!" he yelled. "Oh, smash the cad, Pon! He's pretty nearly killed me! Ow-yow!"

Ponsonby was not particularly troubled on Vavasour' account. He never did mind greatly about the knocks other fellows got.

But Ponsonby himself had been catching it hot, and Cecil Ponsonby's blood was up. Had the fight been man to man he would have thrown up the sponge. But the fact that the odds were so much in favour of his side lent to the leader of the Highcliffe nuts a species of fictitious courage.

He got in a nasty one on Squiff's nose. Squiff was quite surprised to find that Ponsonby's fist could hurt so much. But, though surprised, Squiff was by no means daunted. He let out with a vigorous left-hander, and Ponsonby went sprawling backwards.

But as he sprawled Ponsonby thrust out a foot, got it between the Australian's feet, and yanked hard. At the same moment Gadsby, realising that he was in the dire plight of having to stand up alone to Sampson Quincy Iffley Field, lost what small notion of fair play he could be credited with at the best of times, lowered his head, and butted Squiff hard in the waistcoat.

"Gerrrooogh!" howled Squiff, all the wind driven out of him by this unexpected assault; and he toppled over.

It was just at this instant that Rattenstein and Delarey, turning a corner, got their first glimpse of the combat.

Rattenstein went pale Delarey red.

"They're chaps from the school!" cried the new boy. "Two of them, at least. I see their caps. And the rest——"

"They're from Highcliffe," answered Rattenstein, his face ashy. He laid a hand on Delarey's hand. "Don't meddle! It's no affair of ours."

"Why, they're three to one!" answered Delarey, in astonishment, and shook off the restraining hand. "A fellow can't stand by——"

"I can!" hissed Rattenstein, his eyes gleaming with malice. "They've been more than three to one against me, and those two pig-dogs among them!"

Delarey did not answer that. He dashed forward, eyes blazing, nostrils wide, like a war-horse scenting the battle.

Rattenstein stopped dead. The colour came slowly back to his pallid cheeks. His lips curled sneeringly.

"The fool!" he muttered. "The silly young fool! But, by thunder, he can fight! Oh, yes, he can fight! And it shall go hard but I make him fight my battles yet, though he doesn't guess that!"

Delarey dashed in, hitting out right and left.

But he did not hit wildly. There was science behind each punch. And if he did not trouble to guard, that mattered the less, for the Highcliffe nuts were too utterly taken by surprise to put up much of a resistance.

He was just in time. Squiff's fall had upset Tom Brown's equilibrium, and a combined rush by Monson and Drury finished off the business.

Tom Brown went down. Ponsonby, already on his hands and knees, trying to get up, flung himself full upon the New Zealander's chest.

A hard fist took Gadsby on the ear, and sent him sprawling. Over the prostrate bodies of Tom Brown and Ponsonby Delarey leaped, and next moment both Monson and Drury were on their backs in the dust. Merton, just on his feet again, got a punch in the chest that sent him back to mother earth.

Vavasour saw and fled. He was streaking at his best pace down the road towards Highcliffe when Squiff wriggled up, caught Ponsonby by the collar, and yanked him off Tom Brown.

The New Zealand junior rose to his feet.

"Come along, Pon!" said Squiff genially. "Vavasour's done a bunk, but you're five to three yet. You haven't finished, have you?"

It did not seem to occur to Squiff that Cecil Ponsonby had not much chance to show further fight while he was down on his knees in the dusty road, being shaken vigorously by the collar.

But it did not matter much, because Cecil Ponsonby had not an ounce of fight left in him.

"Leggo, you rotter!" he howled. "Leggo, you low Colonial cad!"

"You'll apologise for that!" said Squiff, giving him another fierce shake.

"I'm hanged if I will! Leggo, you beast! Rescue, you fellows—rescue!"

But rescue there was none from any of his crew. They were all floored, and two of them were looking up into the flushed and battered face of Tom Brown, while the other two contemplated, with surprise a face strange to them—the lean, dark, and somewhat cynical-looking face of the new boy, Piet Delarey.

"Are you going to apologise?" demanded Squiff, giving Ponsonby another shake.

"No! I won't! Leggo, you rotter! Grooooh! You're choking me, Field! Pax!"

"We're getting on a bit," grinned Squiff. "You'll apologise soon. Ain't you going to make your little victims beg pardon, Browney?"

"Oh, they aren't really mine!" answered Tom Brown modestly. "This chap settled their hash. I was practically down and out, you know. He can have their apologies if he wants them."

"Don't see why he should want 'em," Squiff returned, still shaking Ponsonby. "They didn't even hit him back. Now then, Pon, buck up with that apology!"

"I won't! Groooh! Stoppit, Field! I—I—— What do you want me to say, you rotten cad?"

"No, no no! That ain't at all what I want you to say, Pon. That's not a pretty apology," replied Squiff, and gave another vigorous shake.

Delarey smiled, but said nothing.

"Grooh! Yooo-oop! You're choking me! What am I to say, Field?"

The new boy's smile broadened. Ponsonby's caving-in seemed to appeal to his sense of humour. The Highcliffe fellow, seeing the smile, scowled at him, and registered a vow of vengeance in the future.

"Say after me—'I apologise for being such a rotten, silly ass.' Go on!"

"I—I—I apologise for being such a—a—a rotten, silly ass," mumbled Ponsonby.

"Louder, Pon—louder! Your dear little friends can't hear you," chuckled Squiff. "Go on! 'I apologise for being such a rotten, silly ass as to think that two Greyfriars chaps couldn't whack six Highcliffe nuts to the wide, and——'"

"Here, hold on, Squiff!" put in Tom Brown. "That's hardly correct, you know. Because the rotters would have had the best of us if this chap hadn't come up, as sure as eggs are eggs."

"You're right, Browney! Never mind, Pon; I'll let you off this time. But don't try it on again, unless you're jolly sure there ain't any reinforcements in the neighbourhood. Because it don't pay, you know. You can get up!"

Squiff relaxed his hold on the Highcliffian's collar, and Ponsonby struggled to his feet.

The other four nuts were also getting up. Delarey and Tom Brown had turned their backs upon them. For one wild moment Gadsby meditated a sudden renewal of the assault upon those backs, turned so contemptuously.

But a glance at the other three convinced Gadsby that any such display of boldness was dead off. They would not support him. There was no scrap of fight left in Drury, Monson, or Merton.

"You're Delarey, I suppose?" said Squiff, holding out his hand to the new boy. "Well, all I've got to say about it is, whatever else you may be, you're bonza as a fighting-man!"

Delarey looked puzzled. Perhaps he did not understand the Australian word. He also looked doubtful. He gazed at Squiff's hand as if he did not feel quite like taking it.

But he took it, after all.

"It was nothing," he said, just a trifle stiffly. "I couldn't stand by and see you up against odds like that."

The Highcliffe nuts were slinking off now. They passed Rattenstein without a word or look, and Rattenstein turned his face from them.

"Yah!" yelled Ponsonby, when they were at a safe distance. "Wait till next time, that's all, you Colonial cads!"

"That's for the three of us," said Tom Brown, grinning. He had not noticed the stiffness of Delarey's manner, and was quite ready to chum up with the new fellow. "By the way, Squiff, there's a chap who could stand by and see us up against odds, however Delarey might take it."

He nodded towards Rattenstein, holding out his hand to Delarey as he did so.

To his surprise, Delarey did not accept the proffered hand.

"Why should Rattenstein come to your help?" he asked.

Delarey no longer smiled. His dark eyes gleamed with an unfriendly glint.

"Oh, I dunno! Ask me another," replied Tom Brown.

"He's no chum of ours, of course. But, after all, he's Greyfriars."

"And has Greyfriars treated him so well that he should care to fight for anyone who belongs to the school?" demanded Delarey.

"Hang it all, you're barking up the wrong tree, man!" snapped Squiff, getting ruffled again. "If you've been letting that rotter feed you up with his lies——"

"That is enough!" struck in the Afrikander. "I do not know that they are lies!"

"He's a rotten Hun!" growled Squiff.

"Worse than that," aded Tom Brown quietly. "I suppose, after all, he can't exactly help that, can he? But he could help being a backbiting, mischief-making, cowardly cur!"

Delarey glanced from one to the other. It was evident that he scarcely knew what to make of things.

"Rattenstein is more English than I am," he said. "At least, he was born here, and his father chose to be British. I was not born under the British flag, and my father fought against it!"

"Oh, go slow with that!" retorted Squiff. "You don't want to go ramming it down chaps' throats, you know! It doesn't matter, really, because your folks have made up their minds to pull together with ours now."

Some impulse of contrariness, regretted almost at once, made Delarey answer:

"Not all of us, you know—not quite all!"

"Oh, if you belong to that rebel, pro-German gang, you'd better chum up with Rattenstein!" retorted Squiff hotly. "He'll be just about your mark. But what in the wide world you're doing at an English school—and in war-time, too—beats me to the wide!"

"I say, Squiff," put in Tom Brown, "don't let yourself go too much. Delarey waded in to help us like a real plucked one. And I'm not going to forget that, if you are."

"I would rather you forgot it," said Delarey, looking them straight in the eyes. "I think that I will take your advice, and chum up with Rattenstein. We thought that under the British flag all were sure of fair play—my father and I—but I can see that we were wrong!"

He turned his back on the two, and waited for Rattenstein.

"Come along, Browney!" said Squiff, shrugging his shoulders.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Tea in No. 1 Study!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" cried Bob Cherry, as Squiff and Tom Brown showed themselves at the door of No. 1 Study on the Remove passage. "Here are the giddy Anzacs! What's the new specimen like, Squiff, old scout?"

It was tea-time now. Squiff and Tom Brown had had to put in quite a lot of repair work in the bath-room, and both still bore marks of their conflict with the Highcliffe nuts.

"Been scrapping with him already?" inquired Frank Nugent, grinning.

Harry Wharton looked up from his job of making the tea. Now that the sun was dropping low there was quite a chill touch in the air, and the blazing fire was, like a certain well-advertised cocoa, grateful and comforting.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Nabob of Bhanipur, otherwise called Inky, evidently found it so. Chill winds did not suit Inky, who hailed from India's sunny clime. He was squatting on the hearthrug now, making toast, and basking in the warm rays of the fire.

"What's the matter with your face, Squiff?" asked Wharton, skipper of the Remove.

"Oh, blow my face!" answered Squiff crossly.

"Good idea! At least, so somebody seems to have thought. For it's been getting blows, if not——"

"Dry up, Nugent!" snapped Squiff.

"You chaps can't deny you've been fighting," remarked Johnny Bull, the fifth of the Famous Five, contemplating thoughtfully the features of Squiff and Tom Brown.

"Who's going to deny it?" growled Squiff. "We don't want you funny merchants gassing about it, that's all."

"Give me that tin-opener, Harry," said Frank Nugent, with a big tin of sardines in his hand. "Come to tea, you chaps?"

Squiff glanced at the well-spread table, and Squiff's somewhat battered face took on a better-tempered expression.

"I dunno about Browney," he said. "Let him speak for himself. But I'll come, all serene, if you chaps will stop chipping."

"I'm on," said Tom Brown, speaking for the first time.

The fact of the matter was that speaking rather hurt Tom Brown. Most of the blows which the Highcliffe nuts had got home upon the New Zealander had landed in the neighbourhood of his jaw.

Eating might hurt him, too. But, whereas talking was not especially necessary, eating was. And the tussle had given Tom Brown an appetite.

"But your face, Squiff——"

"Bust my face, Cherry! Dry up, will you?"

"The bustfulness of the esteemed and ludicrous face is terrific," mildly remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, in his weird and wonderful English.

"It does look a trifle busted, certainly," said Nugent.

"What the merry dickens did you get scrapping with the new chap for, Browney?" asked Bob Cherry. Tom Brown had taken a seat, and was already helping himself to ham from a dish on which the pile of pink and white slices looked distinctly appetising.

"Didn't!" was Tom Brown's answer.

"My hat, the new chap must be pretty hot stuff if he can take on Squiff and Browney at once, and put them through it like this!" said Johnny Bull, pretending that he had not heard.

"Rats!" snapped Squiff. "It was Ponsonby & Co.—half a dozen of the rotters! We met them on the way to the station—pass the mustard, Wharton—and there was a bit of a dust-up—— I say, Nugent do you expect a chap to eat ham with his fingers?"

"Generally eat mine with my mouth," answered Frank Nugent. "But here's a fork, Squiff. You've got a knife, I see, though I ain't at all sure you ought to be trusted with it in such a frame of mind as you're in!"

"Right-ho!" returned Squiff, clenching the handle of his knife, and glaring round him at the assembly. "I don't mind answering questions, but you'd better cut out the funny cackle, because I don't feel like standing that!"

"Six to two is pretty heavy odds," remarked Harry Wharton. "How did you get on, Browney?"

"Rotten badly," answered Tom Brown briefly.

"I say, though——"

"Can't talk while I'm eating," said the New Zealander. "Much as I can do to eat. Dunno that my jaw's actually fractured. Feels like it, though!"

And he helped himself to a couple more large slices of ham.

The Five turned to Squiff.

Squiff politely requested Inky to pass the sardines, took half a dozen, and got busy with the pepper and vinegar.

"My hat! Of all the aggravating bounders——"

"You asked us to tea, I understood," said Squiff coolly. "If you only asked us because you wanted to pump us——"

"Pump you be hanged, you old idiot!" roared Bob Cherry. "Can't you tell us whether you licked Pon and his gang, or whether they licked you, and where the new chap came in, and——"

"I can," answered Squiff. "And I will—when I've done grubbing. Pass the butter, Johnny, old ass!"

"Not jolly well likely!" growled Johnny Bull. "You don't get a giddy scrap more margarine till we've heard all about the bizney!"

"'Tain't margarine," said Nugent.

"Then it ought to be!" Squiff retorted. "Have you chaps heard that there's a war on?"

"And it is, too," said Johnny Bull, grinning. "I ought to know, for I bought it. And not one of you fellows could tell the giddy difference!"

"My hat! I don't care if it's cart-grease!" Bob Cherry said impatiently. "I want to hear all about this bizney with Highcliffe. Can't you speak, Browney, you old duffer?"

"Nunno—at least, not much! It hurts!" replied Tom Brown.

"There were six of 'em," said Squiff. "Ponsnoby, Gadsby, Vavasour, Monson, Drury, and Merton. Don't sound much, do they? I guess any of us could take any one of them on with one hand behind his back."

"That would help a bit," put in Nugent. "But I suppose they hadn't got their hands there?"

"Ass! Idiot! I mean with our hands——"

"Is that how you and Browney got put through the mill so?" grinned Johnny Bull. "Shouldn't have agreed to that if I'd been you, Squiff."

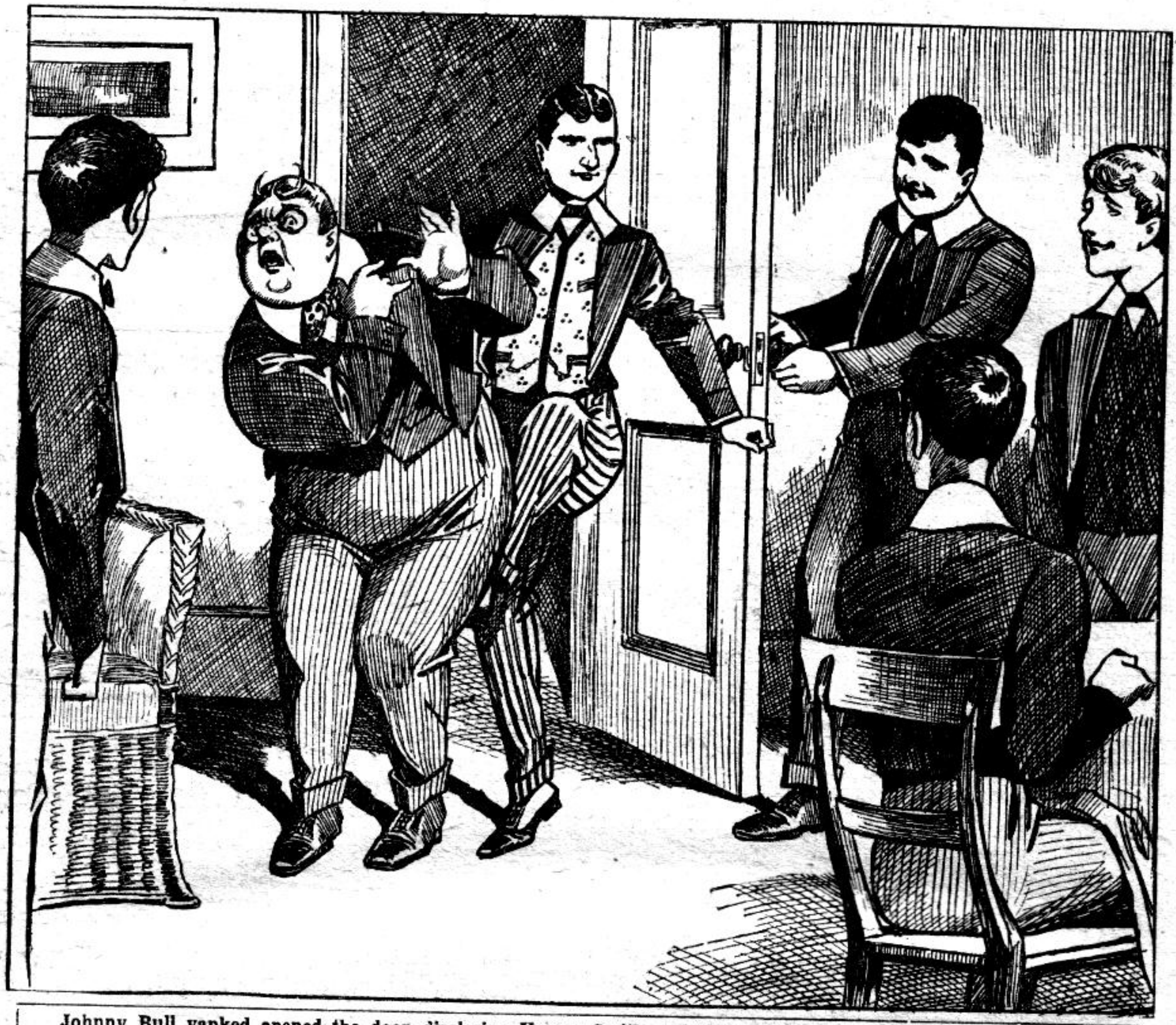
"The nuts aren't exactly first-class fighting-men," remarked Wharton, shaking his head gravely. "But that was a bit too stiff a handicap——"

"Oh, you frabjous asses!" howled Squiff. "I was only speaking hypo—— What is it Quelchy calls it?"

"Hypotenuse?" suggested Bob Cherry.

"Hypothetically," corrected Wharton.

"Hypo-rats! What I mean is—but never mind that! The half-dozen of 'em piled it on us, and we were jolly well



Johnny Bull yanked opened the door, disclosing Vernon-Smith and Billy Bunter. 'This fat beast was at his old games," said the Bounder. "There seems no curing him." *(See Chapter 4.)*

getting the worst of the giddy deal. Matter of fact, we were both floored, and they were just going to jump on us, like the beastly Huns they ought to be. Then round the corner came Rattenstein and the new chap——"

"Do you mean to say Rattenstein came to the rescue?" asked Harry Wharton in amazement

"What do you think? Not he! He'd have seen us jolly well slaughtered first! No; it was the new chap. And he didn't half let them have it—eh, Browney?"

"Not half!" replied Tom Brown, reaching out for the cake. "I say, you fellows, it fairly gives me beans to eat!"

"My hat, nobody would guess that!" said Johnny Bull. "You ain't doing so badly, old chap!"

"Why don't you talk instead of eating, then?" inquired Nugent.

"Hurts more," answered the New Zealander. "And don't do so much good," he added as an afterthought.

He helped himself to a large slice of cake. Evidently there was not much to be got out of Tom Brown.

The Five turned to Squiff again.

"New chap must be a pretty hefty sort," said Wharton.

"Oh, there's no giddy doubt about that."

"And a pretty decent sort, I should say," remarked Nugent.

"Not so sure about that," replied Squiff.

They stared at him. Tom Brown went on with his cake.

"Look here, Browney, just you take your share of the giddy explanations," said Sampson Quincy Iffley Field. "These chaps want to know so much, and I'm getting fed up."

"So's Brown," chuckled Bob Cherry, as the New Zealander put out a hand for the tarts.

"Ought to be, anyway," said Nugent.

"The fedupfulness of the esteemed Brown is——"

"Can't jaw. It hurts," Tom Brown said.

"Rats, you shirker! Eating hurts just as much, I'll bet!" growled Squiff.

"More. But I like it better," answered Tom Brown. "Besides, it's usefuller."

"What's the matter with the new chap, then, Squiff?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Beastly Boer," answered Squiff.

"Well, he can't help that, I suppose?"

"Can't help being a Boer, of course. But there are Boers and Boers. And he's one of the wrong sort."

"You don't mean——"

"Yes, I do. Owns it straight out. Says he's going to chum with that Hun Rattenstein."

"I wouldn't just say that he owned it, Squiff," mumbled Tom Brown.

Tom Brown had all along resented rather less than the Australian the mission on which Mr. Quelch had sent them.

"I would, then. If he had been old enough, I guess he'd have been up to the giddy neck in the rebellion."

"It don't seem likely," said Bob Cherry. "If it was like that, what would he be doing here?"

"Might be a spy," suggested Nugent, more than half in joke.

"Shouldn't jolly well wonder!" growled Squiff.

At this moment there was heard a commotion in the passage.

"Oh, droppit, Smithy! Ow-yow! Yarooogh! That hurts!"

Johnny Bull yanked open the door, disclosing Vernon-Smith and Billy Bunter.

Vernon-Smith had the Owl of the Remove gripped by his fat neck.

"This fat sweep was at his old games, you chaps," said the Bounder. "There seems no curing him."

"Oh, really, Smithy, I wasn't listening! I would scorn to listen!" protested Bunter. "Everybody knows what a strictly honourable chap I am. I—I was only——"

"Don't say tying your bootlace, porpoise!" said Bob Cherry humorously. "That's an addled egg of a yarn. Try something fresh."

"Oh, really, Cherry! I wasn't going to say anything of the sort. I—I'd dropped a sixpence."

"Whose sixpence?" asked Wharton sharply.

"Mum-mum-my own, of course, Harry, old man. I'd just dropped it. I think it must have rolled under the door."

"Sure it didn't roll into the keyhole, Bunty?" inquired Nugent.

"Nun-no! At least——"

"He wasn't looking through the keyhole," said the Bounder.

"There you are, you fellows! Even Smithy speaks up for me, though I can't think why he grabs me by the back of the neck like this. Ow! Leggo, Smithy! You're hurting!"

"No," said the Bounder. "He wasn't looking through the keyhole—unless he looks with his ear."

"I—I—— Honour bright, Harry, old man, I never heard a word! I haven't the least idea what you were talking about. I don't even know what the chap's name is, but he must be a rotter if he's chumming up with that Hun Rattenstein. At least—well, I dunno, because if he could lick half a dozen Highcliffe chaps after they'd wiped up the floor with——"

"Oh, bump him!" howled Johnny Bull. "The fat sweep's been listening to every blessed word we said!"

"Leggo, Smithy! Oh, droppit, you fellows! I wasn't listening! I never heard a word! I was only looking for my bootlace——"

"Don't you mean tying up your sixpence?" inquired Vernon-Smith.

"Yes; that's it. Ow-yow! I won't be bumped! Droppit! Harry, old man——"

"Bump the fat sneak!" yelled Wharton.

"All right, Wharton, you beast! Ow-yow! I hope the new rotter can jolly well lick you, and I hope he jolly well will! Ow-yow! Yaroooh! Stoppit! I hope he'll lick you, too, Cherry, you cad! Ow-yow! Don't, Bob, old man—don't! I hope he'll lick every one of you beastly cads! Yarooo-ooo-ooh!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

Billy Bunter had been transferred into the passage by a dozen eager hands, and well and truly bumped. Then the study door closed upon him, and he was left alone, sitting on the cold and unsympathetic linoleum, with the tears making a mist on his glasses.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
In the Common-room!

WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER got up, and shook his fat fist at the study door.

"Beasts!" he howled. "I'll pay you out for this! You've broken my spinal column in three places, and dislocated my backbone——"

The study door flew open, and Bob Cherry's face appeared.

Bunter scuttled away in alarm.

"Not half bad for a chap with a busted backbone, porpoise!" shouted Bob after him.

"Yah!" retorted Bunter.

It was not a very clever retort, but Billy Bunter was scarcely a genius at repartee.

The door closed again. Bunter halted.

He saw no use in returning to Study No. 7, which he shared with the cousins, Peter and Alonzo Todd, and the deaf junior, Tom Dutton. Less than half an hour ago Peter Todd, who ruled the study with a rod of iron, had kicked Bunter out, having previously administered to him chastisement with a cricket-stump. William George would be forced to return for prep, and that would be quite soon enough.

So Bunter wended his way to the Common-room.

If he had known where to find the new boy he would have gone to him.

Billy Bunter always made a point of seeing new boys early—before they had heard anything about his famous postal-order, which was always coming, and so strangely failed to come. There were very few juniors at Greyfriars whom Billy Bunter had not tapped for a loan during their first few hours at the old school, and there were still fewer who, having lent, had ever seen their money back.

There were not many fellows in the Common-room. A glance around showed Bunter that most of those present belonged to the anti-Wharton faction.

Bolsover major stood with his back to the fire, pretty well monopolising the warmth of it. Skinner, Stott, and Snoop were close by. Rake was playing draughts with Micky Desmond, and Trevor and Treluce were squabbling over something that they called a game of chess.

"Hallo, Tubby!" said Bolsover. "What's the giddy news? Been listening at somebody's keyhole, I suppose, as usual?"

"Oh, really, Bolsover, I never do that sort of thing! It would be quite impossible for a chap with high principles, like mine."

"Not so sure about principal, Bunty," said Skinner. "But you certainly do take a jolly lot of interest in other fellows' affairs."

"Is your earache any better, Billy?" asked Stott, with pretended sympathy.

"Earache! I haven't got an earache!"

"Oh, my mistake! I thought most likely you had."

"I never do have an earache, Stott."

"Of course he don't!" put in Dick Rake. "A draught's nothing to him. He's used to them."

"Oh, really, Rake! I never play draughts! I consider it a childish game!"

Everybody cackled. Bunter looked at them in surprise.

"Blessed if I see what I said was funny! I never do play draughts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Rake.

"Sure, an' it's a thick-headed spalpeen ye are, Bunter!" remarked Micky Desmond politely. "Rake manes the sort of draught that blows through a keyhole, bedad!"

"Oh, rot! You fellows think you're funny, but you're not. Have you heard about the new chap, Bolsover, old man?"

"What about him?" growled Bolsover, who did not greatly relish Bunter's familiarity, but was generally ready to listen to Bunter's tales.

"He's a Boer," said Bunter.

"So're you—a beastly bore!" remarked Skinner humorously.

"I don't mean the sort of bore I am—at least, I mean—— Oh, really, Skinney, you are an ass! I mean he's a Boer from—from—oh, Egypt, or wherever they come from!"

"Try Alaska," suggested Dicky Rake, grinning.

"Faith, yes, or Kamchatka—though, bedad, I can't spell it, at all, at all!" chipped in Micky Desmond.

"The Boers," said Bolsover heavily, "are generally supposed to live in South Africa."

"Oh, yes, I knew that very well, only I forgot!" went on Billy Bunter. "Any ass knows that, of course. Oh, leggo my ear, Bolsover! I didn't mean you were an ass! Oh! Yow!"

"What's his name?" demanded Bolsover, letting the Owl's aural appendage escape his clumsy fingers.

Bunter didn't know. But Snoop did, it seemed.

"It's Delarey," he said.

"De-la-rey, you mean," corrected Wibley, who had just come in. He gave the name its proper French pronunciation. For the Delareys are among the Boers who descended from French Hugenot stock, not from the Dutch settlers.

"Same thing," said Snoop sulkily.

"Don't see it," returned Wibley. "I say, I wonder whether he's a relation of the old general, who was supposed to be mixed up in the rebellion, only he got shot before it was found out for certain whether he was?"

"Oh, yes, he is!" said Bunter eagerly. Bunter didn't really know, but he wanted to appear as if he knew all about it.

"Rummy thing you should be sure of that when you don't even know the chap's name," remarked Skinner.

"Oh, really Skinney! I heard Field say so while I was—I mean, when I was having tea in No. 1 Study."

"What's Squiff know about it?" asked Rake.

"I should think he ought to know something, if anybody did. Quelchy sent him and Brown to meet the new chap. And they met Ponsonby and that gang——"

"That's what comes of disobeying your masters," put in Skinner mockingly. "If they'd only done as Quelchy told them——"

"They were on their way to the station. And there were six of the nuts," went on Bunter. "And they'd got Field and Brown down. I can't say I'm sorry, either—serve the beasts right! And the new chap came swooping down like a lion——"

"Lions don't swoop."

"Oh, really, Skinney! I wish you'd let me tell the tale without interrupting me at every word!" said Bunter peevishly. "The new chap piled in, and gave the nuts the very dickens of a licking."

"I could do that myself," Bolsover proclaimed. "They're nothing—those Highcliffe rotters. I'd take on the whole crowd with one hand behind me!"

But, for all his boasting, the bully was somewhat impressed.

Bulstrode and Hazeldene came in together.

"Let's have a peep at the fire, Bolsover," said Bulstrode. "It ain't over and above warm to-night. What are you chaps talking about?"

Bolsover major moved about two inches. Bulstrode, who was not in the least afraid of Bolsover major, shouldered him a couple of feet or so further, and knelt in front of the fire to warm his hands.

"This new fellow," answered Skinner. "Bunter says he's a Boer. But Bunter's such an awful Ananias——"

"Oh, really, Skinney! I'm sure I don't tell any more whoppers than you do!"

"Bunter's right this time," said Hazeldene. "Must be an accident. He'd never tell the truth purposely. Poor old Mauly! He'll enjoy himself no end, with a Hun and a Boer for company in his study, you bet!"

"Is he in Mauly's study, then?" asked Trevor, who had just finished off his game with Treluce by sweeping all the pieces off the board, after a heated and indecisive argument as to a checkmate claimed by his opponent.

"Yes," replied Hazel. "He doesn't look a bad sort, but he can't be up to much, for he's chummy with the Hun already."

Rattenstein and Delarey came in at that moment. The German princeling glared at Hazel. He had heard, and there was no love lost between him and Hazel in those days, though for a little while they had been friendly enough.

"Hallo, you new chap!" said Bolsover. "What's your name?"

"Delarey. What's yours?"

Bolsover major glared. The other fellows cackled. Rattenstein looked on with a sneering face.

"What's that got to do with you?" asked the bully of the Remove, when he had regained enough composure to be able to ask anything.

"Oh, it really doesn't interest me," answered Delarey. "But as you asked mine, I thought it was only civil to return the compliment."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Rake. "Had you there, Bolsover!"

"This fat ass," said Bolsover, indicating Billy Bunter by a lordly wave of his big hand, "says you're a beastly Boer."

Delarey looked at Bunter.

"I've never seen him before," he said. "I'm quite sure of that, because he isn't exactly the sort of object a fellow would forget seeing. It's true that I am a Boer, though I don't see that it matters, now South Africa's British. Whether I'm beastly or not is another question. I don't think the fat fellow has any good right to judge it, either."

"Oh, really, Delarey——"

"Ring off, porpoise! I——"

"But he called me a fat fellow, Bolsover! I'm not going to——"

"So you are a fat fellow, ass—horrid fat!"

"I'm not! I'm only—er—plump and well-proportioned. It's other fellows' beastly jealousy that makes them call me——"

"Get him down and sit on his head, some of you!" howled Bolsover. "I want to talk to this cheeky new merchant."

Skinner and Stott dragged the Owl aside.

"Shut up, Bunter!" muttered Skinner. "Don't go and spoil things. It's rather good fun seeing the new chap up against Bolsover, and if they fight, it will be funnier—whichever gets licked!"

"The Boer chap won't fight," said Trevor, who had overheard. "He ain't up to Bolsover's weight."

"Rats! He doesn't care about that. You watch it. He's ready to punch old Bolsy's head for two pins."

"I hope he will!" mumbled Bunter. "Bolsover's a beast!"

Bolsover himself did not appear to realise that he was in danger.

"There's several sorts of Boers," he said.

"Quite right," answered Delarey, with provoking coolness. "We want to know what sort you are."

"Hear, hear!" cried some of the rest.

"Dunno what sort he may be. But I'll bet you he ain't the funky sort, Wib," said Dicky Rake, aside.

"Don't you think you might as well wait and see?" returned Delarey.

"My hat, you'd better not try japing with me!" hooted Bolsover.

"I wasn't japing. It seems reasonable enough."

"You may think so. We don't!" said Bolsover arrogantly.

"I don't know that it matters much to me what you think."

"Oh, don't you? We'll see about that. There's this rebellion business. Were you mixed up in that?"

Treluce spluttered. It seemed to him a foolish question. But it was not so foolish as it sounded, for boys no older than Piet Delarey had borne arms in the Boer War, though it is doubtful whether Bolsover major was aware of that fact.

"Not exactly," answered Delarey, with a smile that added fuel to the fire of the bully's wrath.

"What do you mean by 'not exactly'? Do you mean your pater was?"

"Yes, my father was out with a commando."

A hush fell upon the little crowd. Delarey had answered quite frankly, and as if he saw nothing to be ashamed of in the fact he announced. But to everyone there it sounded like a bold advertisement of his father's treason.

"And you're not ashamed of it?" rapped out Bolsover.

"Not a bit!"

"You—you Dutch rotter!"

"Excuse me, I'm not Dutch at all. My name proves that!"

"Blow your beastly name! I suppose your cad of a father was on old Kruger's side in the war?"

"My father fought for his own people—as Louis Botha did, and Smuts, and many others who are now friends of Britain. He is not a cad, and if you insult him again I will slap your ugly face!"

Bolsover restrained himself by a mighty effort—the effort was so mighty, indeed, that it nearly made him purple in the face.

"If they'd jolly well shot him after the war, he wouldn't have had the chance to play his low tricks again!" he said fiercely. "And I hope they'll have sense enough to shoot the cad this——"

Before he could finish the sentence Delarey's hand shot out.

Smack!

It took the bully full upon the cheek with a report like a pistol-shot.

"You—you—— Oh, hang you! I'll—— Let me get at him, you fellows! I'll eat him alive!" roared Bolsover.

Rake and Wibley and Bulstrode had thrust themselves in between.

"Let's have things done decently," said Bulstrode. "Whatever the chap may be, you'd no need to insult his father, and he gave you fair warning. You can't fight here, you know. Besides, it's just on time for prep."

"I'll fight him in the gym after prep!" roared Bolsover major, nursing his smarting cheek.

Bulstrode turned to Delarey.

"Are you on?" he asked.

The question was not put in any friendly fashion. Except Rattenstein, there was not a fellow present who did not resent Delarey's cool cheek, as they all thought it.

But Bulstrode and two or three of the rest had no liking for the overbearing ways of Bolsover major. They considered that he had fairly earned that smack on the face.

"I am willing," replied Delarey coolly.

"You'll have to get somebody to second you," said Dicky Rake.

Rake would have done it if he had been asked. He liked the look of Delarey, and was wondering whether there might not be some catch in the answer he had given.

But Delarey did not ask him. Instead, he turned to Rattenstein.

"Will you be my second?" he asked.

Rattenstein hesitated just a moment. He was not the sort to care about showing up in an unpopular cause. But he wanted to keep in with the new fellow.

"Yes," he said.

"Shows what that chap is, asking a beastly Hun to second him!" remarked Skinner to Stott, as the two, German and Boer, went out together.

"I dunno! Strikes me we might have heard things that would have made it all look a bit different if Bolsover hadn't been in such a giddy hurry," said Rake.

"Sure, thin, an' it's mesilf thinks the same, Dicky!" agreed Micky Desmond.

"Oh, you dry up!" growled Bolsover. "You wild Irishmen are more than half traitors, anyway! And as for you, Rake——"

"Well, what about me, Bolsover?"

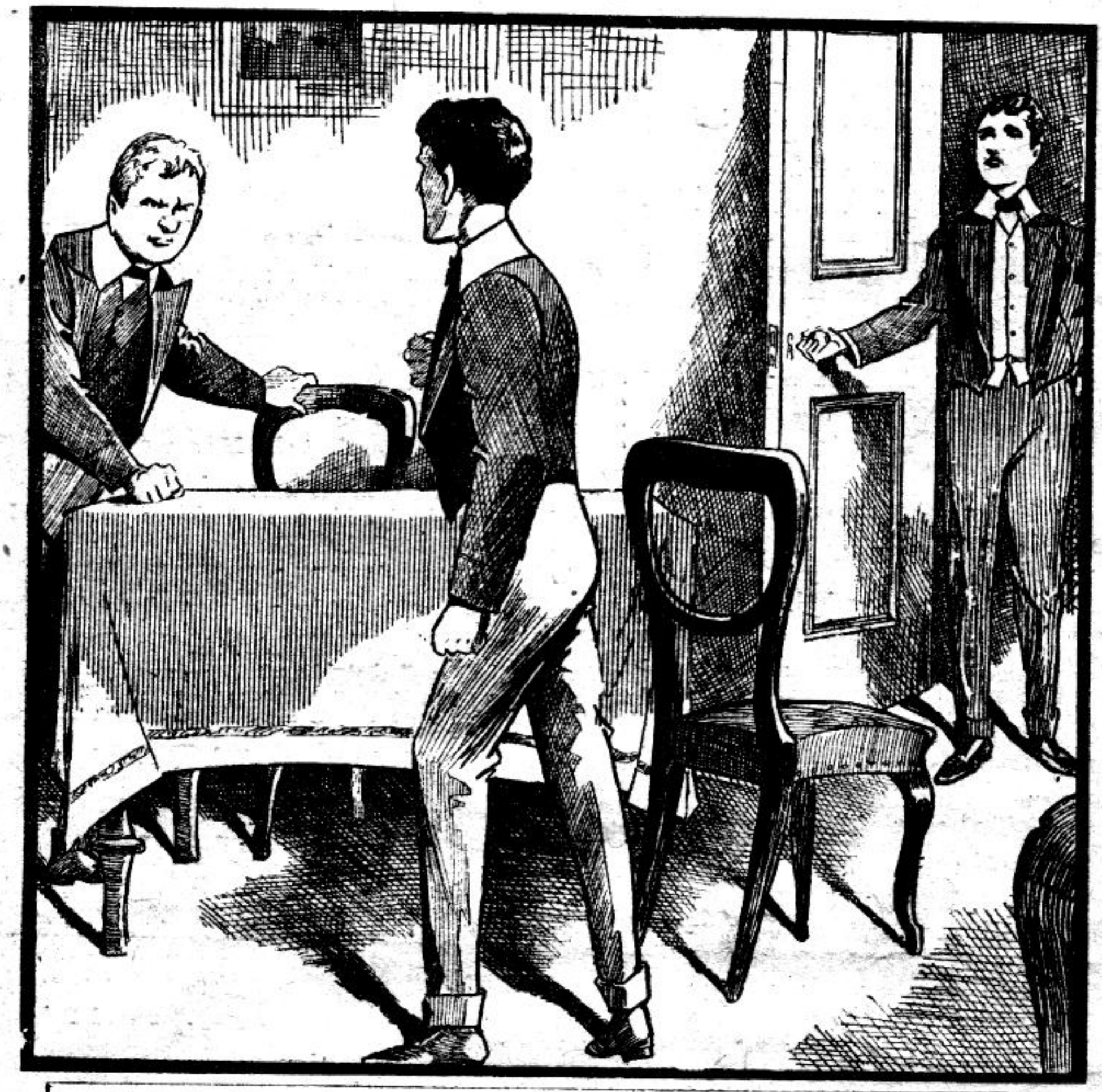
Bolsover major might be able to lick Rake, but that didn't mean Rake was going to funk him.

"Never mind! I'll attend to you later on. Wanted to second that chap yourself, didn't you?"

"I shouldn't have minded," admitted Rake. "We didn't hear half his story, you know. And, anyway, the beggar's got pluck enough!"

Rake was right. They had not heard half the story.

"Is it true, then, that your father was in this late



Rattenstein drew further back, and tried to seek refuge behind the table. Then the door opened, and Lord Mauleverer strolled in. (*See Chapter 7.*)

rebellion?" asked Rattenstein, as he and Delarey passed on their way to the study which they shared with Lord Mauleverer.

"No—at least, not in the sense you mean," was the answer.

"But you said——"

"I said that my father was out with a commando. But it was not a rebel commando—it was a loyal one. Most of the men who went out to round up De Wet and Beyers were Boers."

Rattenstein stared at him.

"You made those fellows think——"

"I do not care what they think! They mean to treat me as they treated you. But they will find that I shall take it fighting!"

Rupprecht von Rattenstein clapped him on the back. This was exactly the temper which he had wanted to arouse in the new fellow.

Delarey shrugged his shoulders. Perhaps already Piet Delarey had his doubts about the value of the Hun's friendship.

But he meant to go his own wilful way.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
In the Gym.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! What's bitten you, Mauly?" asked Bob Cherry, in amazement.

For the slacker of the Remove had just put in an appearance in No. 1 Study, which meant that he must have walked several yards along the passage. And Lord Mauleverer hated walking.

Prep was just over, and the study was crowded. Bob Cherry, Mark Linley, Inky, and Johnny Bull had come along together. A minute or two later Squiff and Tom Brown had arrived. Then Vernon-Smith and Peter Todd had turned up.

"Nothing's bitten me, dear boy. Oh, begad, can't anyone offer me a chair?" returned his lordship.

Three or four chairs were thrust at him. One took him at the back of the knees, and he sat down rather more hastily than he had meant to. Another took him in front of the knees.

"That hurts, begad!" he said plaintively. "What a clumsy fellah you are, Bull!"

"Don't mention it, old ass!" replied Johnny Bull cheerfully.

"Tired, Mauly?" asked Harry Wharton, smiling.

"Oh, yaas, begad! I'm always tired, don't-cherknow—born so, I think!"

"The tiredfulness of the esteemed Mauly is——"

"Terrific!" grinned Bob Cherry. "What made you come all this way, old chap?"

"It's that fellow Delarey," answered Mauleverer.

"What's he been doing to you?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Oh, nothing, begad! I rather like the chap, though he does seem a bit too thick with that outsider Rattenstein."

"My hat, you've lost your giddy isolation to some purpose now, Mauly!" remarked Vernon-Smith.

Mauleverer grinned feebly.

"Never mind," he said. "I can stand Delarey. Chap has decent manners, anyway. He's not a Hun-hog."

"Well, what about him?" asked Squiff, getting impatient.

"Don't you chaps know? He's just gone off to fight Bolsover major in the gym, begad!"

A thrill of interest swept through the small crowd. Nobody there had known, as it chanced. The fight had been fixed up only just before prep, and none of them had been in the Common-room at the time.

"That's what our prize porpoise was trying to tell me, I suppose," remarked Peter Todd. "I shut him up with a cricket-stump. And then he turned sulky, and wouldn't say anything. Come along, you fellows! We must see this!"

"Who's seconding the new chap?" asked Wharton.

"That's just what I've come about," answered Mauleverer, and then stopped.

"Go on, you chump! Anybody would think getting out a dozen words was too big a fag for you," said Bob Cherry impatiently.

"Yaas!" replied the schoolboy earl, and stopped again.

Bob seized him by the shoulders and shook him hard.

"Oh, please don't, Cherry! You are so beastly rough, begad, and I'm so horribly tired!" pleaded the slacker, subsiding backwards as Bob released him.

"I'll do it again if you don't buck up and tell us. Now then!"

"Oh, begad! I thought, you know, one of you chaps might second him!"

"Why can't you do it yourself?" asked the Bounder. "You know more about the fellow than we do."

"Oh, begad! It isn't much I know about him, really. And it's so frightfully energetic, seconding a chap. Sponge and towels, an' all that sort of thing, you know. I couldn't

do it, really. It makes me tired to think about it."

"What about Rattenstein?" snapped Squiff.

"He promised. But he's backed out. Says he's got a headache, and is going straight off to bed, begad. I think perhaps he funks it."

"We may as well go along, anyway," said Wharton.

They began trooping out. Mauleverer did not move.

"Coming, Mauly?" asked Bob Cherry.

"No, old chap, I don't think so. I think I'll take a snooze here, if you don't mind."

"Your mistake, you slacking old duffer! You are coming!" shouted Bob, seizing him by one arm. "Catch hold of him, Johnny!"

Johnny Bull seized the other arm. They yanked Mauleverer out of his chair, and drew him along in the wake of the rest.

Mauly did not struggle. It was too much trouble to do that. He simply let himself be drawn along, and only groaned once or twice.

Quite a crowd of Removites had already assembled in the gym, together with a few of the Upper Fourth—Temple, Fry, and Dabney among them.

Delarey stood on one side, quite alone.

Already the story that his father had been mixed up in De Wet's affair had gone the rounds, and the feeling of hostility against him was strong.

Moved by a common impulse, the two fellows who had been pounding away at each other a few seconds before dashed at the dog. One on each side they seized the huge brute by the collar. Squiff pulled, Delarey pulled. *(See Chapter* **11.)**

The fellow must have extraordinary nerve—that was the general opinion. The mere fact that he was a Boer was nothing much. But the thing he had admitted to be true, or had seemed to admit, and only Rattenstein knew that it was mere seeming—ought to have made it impossible for him to obtain entry into any school in Britain.

Yet here he was, apparently thinking himself as good as anybody else, and glorying in his father's share in De Wet's treacherous plot!

Even Rake and Bulstrode, who had admired the pluck with which he had faced Bolsover, had gone over to the majority now.

Piet Delarey stood alone. His dark face had gone a little pale; but his eyes gleamed, and his lower jaw was set firm. He looked the fighting-man all over.

Bolsover major was already stripped for the fray, and a burly, beefy chap he looked in his thin vest. There was plenty of muscle in his long, thick arms, and his broad chest and bull neck showed up plainly.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" cried Bob Cherry. "Wherefore this thusness? Who's the other chap, Bolsover?"

The bully of the Remove indicated Delarey by a contemptuous nod of the head.

"He ain't in any giddy hurry, now that it comes to the point!" he growled.

Delarey stepped forward, his eyes flashing.

"I am ready," he said. "Since no one will second me, I do not mind fighting without a second."

And he began, with cool quickness, to peel for the fray.

Harry Wharton looked round inquiringly. His eyes chanced to catch Temple's.

"Oh, I shouldn't have minded!" said Temple at once. "I'd like to see anybody put Bully Bolsover through it. But hanged if I'm going to second a rotter who admits that his governor was hand-in-glove with that old sweep of a De Wet, and jolly well seems to be proud of it!"

A murmur of approval followed Temple's words.

Delarey must have heard them, but he made no sign. He went on methodically with his preparations.

Wharton hesitated. His natural chivalry had made him ready to sympathise with the fellow who stood, a stranger, amid all these hostile faces.

But this was just a little too thick!

Temple was right. One might be glad enough to see Bolsover's colours lowered, but to second a fellow who seemed even more of an alien enemy than Rattenstein, and in time of war, too—it was simply off!

What Squiff had told them was bad enough; though, as Wharton remembered, Tom Brown's views had not been quite the same as Squiff's. But this was a hundred times worse.

And the fellow did not speak a word of denial!

"Squiff," said Tom Brown, "it's up to us!"

"I don't see it!" growled Squiff.

But he did. Squiff saw it, but he didn't like it.

"Yes, you do, old chump! The bounder came to our rescue this afternoon, when we were just about done in. One of us has got to back him up now. I'm not nuts on it, but——"

"Me either!" growled Squiff. "But I guess you're right, Browney! There'll be nobody to barrack for the Boer, any-

how, but it's a bit too thick that he shouldn't have anybody to second him. We'll toss for it. Got a copper, Bob?"

"Eh? Oh, yes, Squiff! In fact, I'm in affluent circumstances. I've got a namesake. You're welcome, old son, though I can't see how you're going to spend it just now," answered Bob Cherry, producing a shilling.

"Don't want to spend it, fathead! Don't want to borrow it, chump!" growled Squiff. "Toss it, will you? Heads, me; tails, you, Browney!"

Bob Cherry twirled the shilling in the air, and caught it on the back of his hand.

"Tails!" he said. "Browney's won!"

"I rather reckon Browney's lost!" grinned Squiff.

Tom Brown said nothing, but walked straight over to Delarey.

"I'll second you, if you like," he said quietly

The rest stared in surprise. Tom Brown was one of the last fellows they would have expected to see go over to the enemy.

"Thanks! But I don't want you," answered Delarey.

"Rot! You must have a second."

"I don't see why."

"I do, then. You came to our help to-day, and——"

"That's nothing. I'd have done as much for anybody. If it's because of that——"

"It is, and it isn't. Hang it all, man, give us credit for some sense of fair play! We all know Bolsover's ready to pick a quarrel with any new-comer he thinks he can lick. I—I hope you'll lick him!"

And Tom Brown really did hope so. Somehow, for all the new fellow's seeming desire to be anything but friendly, Tom Brown could not help liking him.

Delarey said no more. He did not appear to think it worth while to argue the matter. But at least he did not totally reject the New Zealander's offer.

Bolsover major slapped his great arms across his chest, like a cabman trying to get warm.

"Can't you bring your man up to the scratch, Brown?" he growled.

"My man's coming all right!" answered Tom Brown cheerfully.

"So is Christmas!" sneered Skinner, who was seconding the bully of the Remove.

Delarey came forward.

He looked slight, compared with the burly Bolsover, but he also looked wiry, and very fit.

Rake held the watch, and Temple now agreed to referee.

It appeared that Delarey must have put in some fighting before. He knew the customs of the game, anyway, for he stepped right up to Bolsover before his gloves were fastened on, and held out his right hand.

But Bolsover already had his gloves on. He put his hands behind him.

"Not me!" he growled. "Not with a pro-German!"

The South African boy flushed, but said nothing. He stepped back and slipped on the gloves, and Tom Brown fastened them for him.

The fight began.

Bolsover came on like a bull charging.

Delarey awaited his onslaught coolly.

At the last second he side-stepped, avoided Bolsover's vicious punch, and caught the bully a nasty clip on the right ear.

Bolsover swung round. But Delarey was much quicker than he, and faced him again.

Bolsover rushed. Delarey dodged. Again it was Bolsover's blow that wasted itself on thin air, his fist shooting over the Afrikander's shoulder; and again Delarey got home, this time to some purpose, for that punch on the jaw evidently rattled Bolsover major.

"New kid can box," said Fry critically.

"Uses his feet jolly well," remarked Bob Cherry.

"Also his little fists!" grinned Nugent. "Bolsover doesn't like it!"

Harry Wharton said nothing. Squiff was also silent. Both of them were finding something to admire in Delarey, and each was wondering how it could be possible the fellow should be a rank outsider.

Tom Brown looked pleased at the end of the round. Harold Skinner didn't. It was not so much that Skinner minded Bolsover getting hurt. The only person whose feelings Skinner had any special regard for was Harold Skinner. But he wanted to see the new boy beaten.

"You'll have to look out, or he'll lick you!" he said, sponging Bolsover's cut lips and bruised cheeks.

"Dry up!" snarled Bolsover. "What do you know about it, you chump?"

"You're cleverer than he is," said Tom Brown to his man. "If you can keep him from getting to close quarters, where his weight's bound to tell, I guess you've got him set!"

"Oh, give the galoot beans, Bolsover!" howled Fisher T. Fish, as the second round began.

"Thought you were a 'nootral,' Fishy?" grinned Wibley.

"Yep! But I'm not going to yell for a mugwump like that, who hasn't got a durned solitary backer!" replied Fishy.

"Whatever the fellow it, he can box," said Bulstrode.

"Oh, really, Bulstrode! I can't see anything in it myself!"

replied Bunter. "He simply keeps getting out of Bolsover's way, that's all. Anybody could do that. I could——"

"If you were only active enough, and about a ton and a half lighter, and could use your feet and your head, porpoise!" said Peter Todd. "But you ain't, and you can't, and you don't know a good thing when you see it. This merchant's going to lick Bolsover, and I'm not dead sure that there's a fellow in the Remove he couldn't lick!"

But the second round did not show Delarey up so well.

He slipped in dodging, and Bolsover got to close quarters, and used his weight and strength for all they were worth.

When they returned to their corners the South African's face was a good deal marked, and his nose was bleeding.

"It's nothing," he said to Tom Brown.

He did not seem in the least rattled or blown. Bolsover, in his corner, was blowing heavily.

"That's better!" said Harold Skinner.

"Ring off!" snarled Bolsover major.

He was by no means so sure that it was better. There had been a good deal of satisfaction in getting in those heavy punches. But they had scarcely had as much effect as Bolsover thought they should have had.

Delarey came forward again. He limped, for he had ricked one ankle slightly; and every now and then a drop of blood fell from his nose. But his eyes gleamed with the light of battle, and his jaws were set hard.

Bolsover came rushing in, keen on finishing off the fight at once.

The Afrikander dodged one blow at his head, guarded two body-punches, and gave ground a little.

"Go it, Bolsy! You've got him set!" howled Stott.

"Yes—I guess not!" grinned Bob Cherry.

Then, almost in a flash, the fight ended.

Bolsover's guard was too high as he made in again. Delarey's left shot out—a regular pile-driver.

Biff!

Right on the mark it took the bully of the Remove. He fairly crumpled up. Backwards he reeled, and fell, and lay there while Rake counted.

"One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—— Out!"

The new fellow had knocked out the burly Bolsover in the third round!

But not a voice was raised to cheer him.

He did not seem to expect it. He did not even glance around him.

"Well done, Delarey!" said Tom Brown, as he unfastened the gloves.

Delarey looked up at him, smiled, hesitated a second, and then answered very quietly:

"Thanks, Brown!"

He let the New Zealander help him on with his waistcoat and jacket. Then he walked down the gym alone, limping a little. He glanced neither to one side nor the other.

"Oh, hang it!" cried Bob Cherry. "We can't let the fellow go like that! Whatever he may be, he fought jolly well, and——"

The generous Bob led a cheer. But only a dozen or so joined in it, and Delarey did not even turn his head.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Rattenstein's Mistake!

"YOU'VE soon got it over," remarked Rattenstein, as Delarey entered the study which he and the Hun schoolboy shared with Lord Mauleverer.

"Yes," answered Delarey.

Rattenstein looked curiously at him.

He saw marks of blood about the new fellow's mouth and chin, and noted that his face was bruised. He had observed also that Delarey limped as he walked.

Rattenstein drew his own conclusions.

"Licked, I suppose?" he said sneeringly. "Found Bolsover a bigger handful than those Highcliffe cowards—eh?"

If Bolsover major had licked Delarey, there was an end to the Hun's schemings. A fellow whom Bolsover could thrash so speedily would have no chance worth speaking of against Wharton, Cherry, Peter Todd, or the Bounder, all of whom Rupprecht von Rattenstein hated with a poisonous hatred.

It might still have been worth while for the Hun schoolboy to keep in with Delarey had it been true that the new boy was the irreconcilable the other fellows believed him to be, come straight from a hotbed of sedition against British rule.

But Rattenstein knew that there was no truth in all this, for he knew that only his own cunning devices had made the South African boy ready to challenge the hostility of Greyfriars. The Hun had caused Delarey to believe that he had no chance of getting fair treatment there, and so Delarey had been up in arms before ever he set eyes upon any Greyfriars fellow except the German.

"It's nothing to you, I fancy," answered Delarey quietly. "If it had been, you wouldn't have broken your promise to second me."

"My head ached," said the Hun schoolboy sullenly.

"Oh, no doubt!" replied Delarey.

"Don't you believe it? Do you want me to make an oath on it?"

"Not in the least. It is of no consequence."

Delarey sat down and began to unlace his boots. A drop or two of blood fell from his nose on to Mauleverer's luxurious carpet.

"It's the old game, I see—Britons shedding Boer blood!" sneered Rattenstein.

Delarey looked up.

"As it happens," he said, "it's German blood they are shedding just now!"

Rattenstein's face flamed with fury. Let him call himself what he may, the Hun is always a Hun at heart.

He moved a step or two nearer the new fellow. His fists were clenched.

"What do you mean by that?" he snarled. "Oh, I dare say the nation of scoundrels to whom your people have submitted so tamely may be killing Germans! But Germans are also killing them, remember, and in the end my countrymen will be victorious!"

"Your countrymen? I thought you considered yourself as good a Britisher as anyone?"

"What is it to me what you think, you half-bred cur? I am not of those who tamely lick the hand that strikes them, not I!"

"No. You are the sort who bite the hand that feeds them!" returned Delarey, with cutting coolness.

Rattenstein sprang at him before he could rise from his chair, and struck savagely.

The blow caught Delarey under the ear, and for a second or two he was half stunned.

Rattenstein drew back, quivering with rage and nervousness.

The Hun had not meant to go so far as this, and now he was half afraid of what he had done. He would never have struck that blow but that he believed Delarey had come back from a licking at Bolsover's hands.

Delarey got up. Rattenstein drew further back, and tried to seek refuge behind the table. His face had gone almost green. The new fellow might not have proved Bolsover's master, but it did not follow that he could not lick Rupprecht von Rattenstein.

The door opened, and Mauleverer strolled in.

The slacker of the Remove was not by any means specially observant. But even he could not fail to notice that the atmosphere of his study was a trifle fiery.

"Oh, begad!" he exclaimed. "What the dickens is the matter, Delarey?"

Then he sank limply upon the couch, as though the effort of saying so much in one breath had fairly exhausted him.

"It's not much," answered Delarey. "It's nothing, really."

"Quarrelling with Rattenstein—eh, what?"

"No. He isn't worth quarrelling with."

Mauly shook his head sagely. He quite agreed with that opinion, but natural politeness urged him to temper it.

"Don't say that, dear boy," he said lazily. "Though, of course, Rattenstein, who isn't exactly a dab with the gloves, wouldn't stand much chance with a chap who could knock out Bolsover as you did, begad!"

"What! Did he knock out Bolsover?" muttered the Hun schoolboy.

"Yaas," answered Mauly.

Rattenstein's hands were trembling, and his face worked queerly.

What a mistake he had made!

In a few seconds he had foolishly thrown away all the influence so easily gained over the new junior.

And he had thrown it away just at the time when the campaign he had planned was beginning so well.

Bolsover major was one of those whom Rattenstein hated, and Bolsover major had been licked. It was true that Bolsover major, though the biggest fellow in the Remove, and the strongest, was not the Remove's best fighting-man.

But, having thrashed Bolsover major, Delarey might have been urged on to try conclusions with the rest, one by one.

Rattenstein had formed the opinion that not even Bob Cherry could stand up long against the Afrikander's hot attack. Cherry, Wharton, Field, Todd, Vernon-Smith—all the fellows who had incurred the wrath of Rupprecht von

Rattenstein might have been put through it one after another.

And now he had spoiled the whole scheme!

Not if he could mend matters by crining, though. He was ready to cringe to Delarey, hating him all the while in his heart as savagely as he hated the rest.

He would try it, at least.

"I apologise, Delarey," he said thickly. "My temper got the better of me. You must allow that what you said wasn't very pleasant to hear."

"I accept your apology," answered the Afrikander; "but I don't want anything more to do with you. We've got to share a study, I suppose, and it will be a trifle unpleasant for Mauleverer if we're going to squabble."

"Rotten unpleasant, begad!" murmured Mauly feebly.

Mauly regretted now the foolish generosity which had led him to accept Rattenstein as a study-mate; and, though he was disposed to like Delarey much better than the Hun, the fellow seemed to his pacific nature to have a good deal too much of the firebrand about him.

"But we needn't do that," went on Delarey. "We can be civil to one another, I suppose."

"I thought you meant to be friendly," mumbled Rattenstein. "The other fellows have treated me badly because I'm not British, and they've started on the same lines with you. We ought to pull together, for we are in the same boat."

Mauly spoke up then with quite unwonted emphasis.

"Oh, begad, you know, Rattenstein, you got no more than you deserved; an' they'd let bygones be bygones if you'd only behave decently, don'tcherknow, an' not play the giddy snake. I don't want to shove my nose into other chaps' business, Delarey, but I tell you plainly, to Rattenstein's face, that it won't pay you to be chummy with him!"

"I'm not thinking so much about whether it would pay me or not," replied Delarey. "But I'm not going to be chummy with him, anyway."

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Tom Brown's Plea!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

It was Bob Cherry who uttered this exclamation, bursting into the study which Tom Brown shared with Hazeldene and Bulstrode.

The New Zealander looked up. He had been sitting at the table, his left elbow upon it, and his chin in the palm of his hand.

"What's the row, Browney? You seem to be in a brown study. Aren't you coming down to cricket?"

"Not this morning, I think. 'Tisn't worth while."

The genial Bob stared.

"That's not like you, Browney. Never knew you were a slacker before."

"Rats! I'm nothing of the sort. I was thinking, that's all. Trot off, old son!"

But Bob had no notion of trotting off. He sat down.

"Don't it make your giddy head ache, old scout?"

"Don't what make my head ache, chump?"

"Thinking. It does mine."

"My hat! I guess it would!"

And Tom Brown relapsed into deep thought again.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Come out of it, Browney!"

"Oh, hang it all, Cherry, can't you leave a fellow alone for a minute or two?" growled the New Zealand junior.

"Could, but not going to," replied the genial Bob.

"Aren't you going down to cricket?"

"Not just yet. I don't know that I shall go at all to-day. As you say, it's hardly worth while."

"Oh, go and play marbles!"

"Thanks, Browney; but I'm not on. Too wildly exciting, you know."

"Well, leave me alone, anyhow. I want to think."

"Can't you think with me here?"

"Not while you chatter like a blessed parrot and grin like a giddy monkey!"

Bob grinned still more.

"What a polite chap you are, Browney!" he remarked.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" snapped Tom Brown.

"What's it all about?"

"My only aunt! What's that to do with you, Cherry?"

"Oh, don't get your wool off, old son! Hallo, here's Squiff!"

Sampson Quincy Iffley Field came in. He also, it seemed, had no notion of cricket that day. At any rate, he was not in flannels.

"Bulstrode told me you wanted me to trot along here, Browney," said Squiff, with a glance at Bob Cherry, who took no notice of it.

"I did. But it's no good now, with this idiot butting in," answered Tom Brown, also glancing—or, rather, glaring—at the unperturbed Bob.

"Well, he's going, I suppose," said Squiff pointedly.

"Bet you I'm not!" said Bob cheerfully.

Squiff looked at Tom Brown, and Tom Brown looked back at Squiff.

"Shall we put the bounder out?" asked Squiff.

"You'd have your hands full," said Bob. "But if it's really private, here's off!"

And he moved towards the door.

Tom Brown looked at Squiff, and Squiff looked at Tom Brown.

"Half a jiff!" said the Australian junior. "I don't know what the bizney is, but I don't really suppose it's anything Browney minds you hearing, Bob."

"Don't know that I do, for the matter of that," Tom Brown replied. "But I didn't intend to tell anyone but you, Squiff—not yet. It's about that fellow Delarey."

Bob moved back to the chair he had left, and sat down again.

"Then I'll stay, I guess," he said. "I'm a bit interested in the new bruiser; and I ain't exactly thin-skinned."

"You're not!" snorted Tom Brown. "When it comes to taking a hint to go, a hippotamus is thinner-skinned than you are, Bob!"

Squiff sat down, too.

"What about Delarey?" he asked. "The beggar can fight; I allow that. But I've no use for his sort."

"What sort do you take him to be?" returned the New Zealander.

"A beastly rebel—that's what! He told the fellows in the Common-room so, and that ought to be good enough for anybody, I guess."

"H'm! It depends," said Tom Brown.

"Depends on what, you old fathead?"

"Whether he meant it, for one thing."

"Don't see that even that makes a giddy heap of difference. If it's not true, it was a slap in the face to Greyfriars that he should say it. He couldn't expect us to take it lying down."

"It was a pretty middling silly thing to say," agreed Bob Cherry. "I feel a bit like Browney. I rather like the bounder. But I feel a bit more like Squiff. I simply can't stand a rebel!"

"I don't believe that he's anything of the sort," persisted Tom Brown. "Doesn't it occur to you fellows that a Boer of the De Wet type would be just about as likely to put his hand into the fire as to send his kid to school in England?"

"There's something in that," admitted Squiff. "Because if the kid stuck to his own side he'd be sure of a rotten bad time when he went back. All the same——"

Squiff paused.

"All the same—what?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, only that he as good as owned it."

"There may be a sort of a kind of reason for that," agreed Tom Brown. "You see, Rattenstein got hold of the fellow first; and you know what a snake in the grass that rotter is. He'd stuff Delarey up with yarns that there wasn't a dog's chance that he'd get fair play here. And a chap with Boer blood in him must be a bit like an Irishman, I fancy. He'd admit he's on our side."

"Delarey doesn't admit it," put in Bob Cherry.

"Ring off, fathead! I'm not talking about Delarey."

"Oh, my mistake, Browney! I thought you were," answered Bob, running his fingers through his curly mop of hair.

"Well, so did I, Browney," said Squiff, looking rather puzzled.

"I mean a Boer of the sort that follows Botha's lead. He's on our side, but he clings to his own nationality, like an Irishman, and he don't exactly cotton to being thought just the same as an Englishman, any more than an Irishman does. So now you've got it."

"My hat—yes! And it might be useful, if we only knew what it was we've got," murmured Bob.

But Squiff seemed to understand.

"I dare say you're right, old son," he said. "But, still, I don't see where this lands us. We can't very well go along to Delarey and apologise for being British, and say we know that a Briton, home-grown or colonial, simply ain't in the same street as a giddy Boer, as long as the Boer graciously permits the British flag to wave over him."

"And protect him," added Bob, nodding agreement.

"We don't need to," said Tom Brown, with a touch of heat. "That's piffle! You've got sense enough to know it's piffle, Squiff, even if Cherry hasn't."

"What do you want us to do?" asked Squiff.

"Yes, that's the question," chimed in Bob.

"I don't want you to do anything, Cherry. It's no bizney of yours, really. But it is of Squiff's. Delarey waded in and rescued us when Pon and his rotters had got us down."

"He did. I was grateful enough for that," broke in Squiff. "My word, Cherry, I wish you could have seen the bounder! It was pretty enough, the way he polished off poor old Bolsy, but that wasn't a circumstance to the way he handed it out to the Highcliffe nuts! He wasn't very civil after it, though, Browney."

"No. That I put down to the Hun's account," said Tom Brown quietly. "Rattenstein had had first innings—that's all."

"You're only guessing!" growled Squiff.

"P'r'aps. I reckon it's a pretty good guess if I am. Anyway, we're Colonials, and Delarey's a Colonial. And we owe him something for that rescue. And I thought that if we could get a quiet talk with him we might make him see reason. Are you on?"

"Dunno. I'll think about it," replied Squiff.

"I am, Browney," said Bob Cherry.

"You weren't asked!" retorted Tom Brown bluntly.

"Bow-wow! Who cares about that?"

"You're not a Colonial either," said Squiff.

"No, thank goodness!"

"What do you say that for, you cheeky bounder? Ain't——"

Tom Brown made a dart for the door, and Squiff stopped short.

"What's the row Browney?" asked the Australian junior.

"Thought I heard a noise outside. Not sure I didn't. Bunter was rolling down the passage, but he was half a dozen yards away. "Might have been listening—most likely was, but we couldn't prove it," answered Tom Brown.

"Tubby wouldn't be interested in all this," said Squiff indifferently.

"Dunno. You never can tell that about Tubby," sagely remarked Bob.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
Bunter Butts In!

"OH, I say, Delarey!"

It was Billy Bunter who made this remark.

Delarey looked up from the daily paper he was studying so intently. There was a long report from German East Africa in that paper, and the new fellow seemed to be deeply interested in it.

He was alone in the study, which suited Bunter, who had just opened the door.

Billy Bunter always tried to touch a new boy for a loan. Delarey had been at Greyfriars three days now, and Bunter had not approached him thus far. But that was not Bunter's fault. He had simply not had the chance.

"What do you want?" asked the new fellow sharply.

"Oh, nothing—at least, nothing much! Is Mauly here?"

"You can see for yourself that he's not."

"Oh, really, Delarey, you needn't snap at a fellow like that! It isn't very polite, you know—or very friendly. And—and I'd like to be friendly, you know. I'm jolly keen on foreigners, when they're the right sort. Not like that beast Rattenstein, of course. He's a rotten sweep, and I simply wouldn't be seen dead with him!"

Delarey smiled rather cynically. He had no intention of discussing Rattenstein with Bunter, yet the Owl had started better than he knew in that remark about the Hun schoolboy. The terms upon which Rattenstein and Delarey now stood were terms of armed neutrality. And Lord Mauleverer was spending more time outside his own study than he usually did, because he found the armed neutrality of its two other inmates just a trifle wearing.

"I'm not a foreigner," answered the Afrikander.

"Oh!" returned Billy, Bunter, blinking at him through his glasses.

"No more than you are," went on Delarey.

"Oh, really, Delarey! I don't see how anybody could be more English than I am. My ancestor, Sir Fulke Bunter de Bunter, came over with the Conqueror."

"Over from where?"

"Why, from—from France, or—or wherever—— Oh, yes, it was France, of course."

"There you are! French, on your own showing."

Bunter blinked in perplexity. It really seemed as though Piet Delarey were trying to pull his leg. And the South African junior was the very last fellow whom Bunter would have expected to do that sort of thing. The Owl of the Remove had somehow got the notion that Delarey was rather a tragic kind of character, which was a very mistaken notion indeed. Piet's old schoolfellows at Johannesburg could have told of many a wild jape he had planned and taken the lead in.

As for Delarey, he knew very little indeed about Bunter, and nothing at all of his sponging proclivities. He was inclined to take this fat, foolish fellow as a colossal joke, though he had no great relish for any sort of a joke at the moment.

"Oh, really, Delarey, I'm not French, any more than you are!"

"Not so much, I dare say," replied the Afrikander, remembering the Huguenot blood that ran in his own veins.

Bunter was still more puzzled. He concluded that he had better give up the argument as a bad job. He gazed vacantly round the study, and then said:

"Did you say Mauly wasn't here?"

"I said you could see for yourself that he wasn't. But it seems you can't. You must be horribly short-sighted."

Bunter breathed a sigh, something like half a gale of wind.

"I am, a bit," he said plaintively. "I suppose that's why the other fellows are so down on me. I have a beastly rotten time of it here—beastly! But I'm sorry Mauly isn't in."

"Do you want him particularly?" asked Delarey.

He did not feel specially sympathetic towards Bunter. But he thought it quite likely that this fat, short-sighted specimen might have a fairly rotten time of it. For Piet Delarey had not yet learned that, on the whole, Greyfriars had a pretty high standard of fair play.

"Well, yes,; I did, rather. You see, he was going to lend me some tin."

This was not quite true. But it was not entirely false, for Mauleverer had often lent Bunter money, and would probably be weak enough to do so again. The loans might more accurately have been termed gifts. But Billy Bunter always called them loans.

Bunter was not exactly a second George Washington.

Delarey had already learned how careless Mauly was with his money, and, not knowing Bunter well, saw no special reason for disbelieving his yarn.

"Oh!" he said. "Well, he isn't here, as you see."

Billy Bunter did not go. He stood there, blinking hard behind his glasses, with a face like a full round moon.

"It's—it's a pity," he said. "I wanted it rather badly—a debt of honour, and all that, you know. I've got a postal-order coming to-morrow—from one of my titled relations—and I could pay you back then."

"I don't see why you should talk about paying me back when you're going to borrow from Mauleverer," replied Delarey, with a smile that seemed to encourage William George Bunter.

"Oh, I say, Delarey, I suppose you couldn't——"

"Perhaps I could. But I don't see why I should."

"Oh, really! It's horrid for a chap to feel so empty inside as I do, and to be stony."

"I thought you said it was a debt of honour you had to pay?"

"I—I—— Oh, so it is! Bub-bub-but if I could borrow enough, you see, there would be something over for a snack. I couldn't eat anything—at least, nothing much—at dinner. I didn't feel very well. But I'm quite peckish now."

Delarey had come to Greyfriars well supplied with pocket-money, and he was naturally generous. He was shrewd, too. Bunter would not take him in twice. Perhaps he was not really taken in that time. But he was willing to lend, and William George Bunter's fat face expanded into a smile as he saw the new fellow's hand go to his trousers-pocket.

"If five bob would be of any use to you——"

"Oh, really, Delarey, it's no end good of you! But can't you make it a quid?"

If the Afrikander was a trifle staggered, he did not show it.

"All right," he said briefly, and handed over a sovereign. Billy Bunter's fat fingers gripped it like a vice. Bunter turned as if to go, but halted at the door. Something dimly resembling gratitude stirred in him. Also, it seemed wise to keep on good terms with one who parted so easily with his money.

"I say, Delarey——" he began, sidling up to the table again, and speaking in mysterious tones.

"What is it?"

"You needn't snap at a fellow like that, you know! I'm your friend—at least, I'm willing to be. So are some of the other chaps. There's Tom Brown, and Squiff, and Bob Cherry—they'd all be friendly if you would let them. They—they told me so."

Delarey's eyes gleamed in a way Bunter did not quite like. The Owl moved a little nearer the door.

"Oh, did they?" asked the Afrikander sharply. "And what made them tell you that?"

"Why shouldn't they ask my advice? They know that I'm a level-headed chap, and one that's looked up to in the school, and all that, you know. We don't want to be rough on you. We don't think you're really a proper Boer—not a beastly rebel, that is. And if you'd like to explain, and own up that you were only pulling the fellows' legs——"

"Stop, you fat idiot! Why should I explain anything?"

"Oh, really, Delarey, I must say you're not very polite! It ain't exactly pleasant to be called a fat idiot. But I don't suppose you meant it, and I'm not going to bear malice. That's not my nature. If you'd only explain, we're willing to be friendly——"

"Did those other fellows send you here to say this to me?" snapped Delarey.

Billy Bunter hesitated, then lied.

"Yes," he said. "They—we—thought it couldn't do any harm if—if I kind of sounded you first, just to see how the land lay, you know."

Delarey looked at him very hard. Billy Bunter blinked innocently. On the whole, his intentions were quite friendly, though, as usual, he was thinking more of his own benefit than of anyone else's. He wanted to establish a claim on the new fellow's gratitude.

"You can go back to them and tell them I'm not taking any!" Delarey said fiercely—so fiercely that Bunter began to back towards the door again in real alarm.

"Oh, really Delarey," he said feebly, "I'm blessed if I can see why you should take it like this! Anyway, you needn't get your wool off with me. It's no affair of mine, you know. If those fellows are asses enough——"

"No affair of yours? Why, you say they sent you!"

"Nothing of the sort. You must have misunderstood me. I think I'd better be going, as you don't seem able to be civil to a fellow who wants to do you a good turn!"

And with that Parthian shot Billy Bunter beat a retreat.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
Not Taking Any!

PIET DELAREY paced up and down the little study like a caged lion. He could not have explained why this should anger him so much, but anger him it did.

Tom Brown and Squiff—those were the two fellows to whose rescue he had gone. And Brown had seconded him in his fight with Bolsover, when everybody else had been hostile. Decent sort, Brown—quite the right sort! And Squiff—yes, he had seemed all right, too! And Cherry—wasn't that the curly-headed fellow who had led the cheering in the gym?

"What an ass I am!" he muttered to himself. "That brute Rattenstein's a Hun—and a liar, as all Huns are; and if he hadn't happened to meet me at the station, everything might have been different! Why should I take any notice of the things he said? But they were ready to be rough on me just because I'm a Boer; and—and it's too bad when—when——"

He did not finish the sentence. He turned again, with flushed face, dimmed eyes, and clenched fists to the paper on the table.

For Piet Delarey had a trouble of his own that no one at Greyfriars suspected; and in that column, which told of the fighting in the wilds of German East Africa, lay a clue to his trouble.

The father whom he almost worshipped—the straightest and best man he had ever known—was serving under General Smuts, after having shouldered a rifle in a loyal commando during the soon-squashed rebellion of De Wet and Beyers. And now had come news that a small detachment of the British South African forces, under Captain Armand Delarey, had been cut off by a much bigger force of Germans and natives, and that it was feared all had been wiped out!

Piet would not believe it. His father was full of resource, the last man likely to be caught napping. But it might be true! And at best weeks might pass before better news came. And he was all alone at Greyfriars, with no one to whom he could confide his trouble. And they were down upon him because his father had fought against Great Britain in that other war, just as Botha had done, and Smuts, and many another now counted as loyal friends!

His own fault? Yes, he saw that now—in part, at least. His own fault for listening to Rattenstein, believing all that he said. But hadn't they shown that part, at least, of what Rattenstein said was true?

He could not reason clearly. His nerves were too jangled for that, and his naturally hot temper was jumpy.

It was a bit of real bad luck that Tom Brown, Squiff, and Bob Cherry, meaning as well as those fellows could mean—although Squiff had come, as he said, against his own better judgment—should turn up before Delarey had recovered his self-possession.

Delarey fronted them in such hostile fashion that none of the three quite knew how to make a start.

It was Bob Cherry who did so at length, though Bob had only "butted himself into the show," as Squiff said.

"I say, Delarey," he began, "this rot about your father—we know it's rot, of course—bound to be—Browney says——"

"Oh, cheese it, Cherry! You're getting the whole thing mixed up!" groaned Tom Brown.

"I don't care to discuss my father with you," said Delarey coldly.

"But don't you see, that it's because of his being a rebel—at least, your saying so——"

"I'm not aware that I did say so."

"There you are, Squiff!" said Tom Brown. "Look here, Delarey; all this is partly your own fault, you know. Anyway, you ought to see it. I don't want to say anything nasty behind a fellow's back, but I'd say to Rattenstein's face that he's a lying, back-biting cur!"

"As a matter of fact, I've no more use for Rattenstein than you have, so you can cut that out!" returned Delarey, his tone as hostile as ever.

"That's all right, then! Just put out of your mind all he told you, and take us as you find us."

"I'm doing that! But I don't find you very pleasant or friendly, I must say!"

"We're willing to be friendly enough," said Squiff. But Squiff's temper was already a trifle on edge, and he did not speak in as conciliatory a way as either of his comrades. "It's only a matter of putting one thing right, and after that I don't fancy you'll find any decent fellow bucking against you. Your pater——"

"Cut my father out of it, please!"

"He can't be cut out of it!"

"Then I'm not taking any! And I'd be obliged to you if you'd clear!"

"Don't be an idiot! If your pater——"

Into Delarey's brain there flashed a mental picture of a tropical jungle, and men, white and black, lying dead in a clearing, and among those men, with tanned face upturned to the brazen sky, his father! And to him, with his nerves all strained, and his heart full of fear, it seemed an insult that these fellows, for whom he cared nothing, should question the loyalty of that strong-souled man who had given his life to prove it. He forgot that only Rattenstein's lying and his own hasty folly had led to anybody's questioning it, save in so far as his name might arouse suspicion.

He broke in savagely on Squiff's speech.

"If you name my father again I'll strike you!"

Squiff was not the fellow to let such a challenge pass.

"To judge by his son," Squiff said deliberately, "your father——"

Smack!

The mark of Delarey's hand showed redly on the Australian junior's face. Squiff drew a deep, hissing breath.

"Right-ho!" he said. "You may think that because you licked Bolsover you can lick me. And I won't say you can't, but you jolly well sha'n't if I can help it! When shall it be?"

"To-morrow. But not in the gymnasium. Can you meet me away from the school somewhere? Then we can have it out with bare fists."

"As you like! Will you arrange about it, Cherry? You would persist in being in this, so you may as well do something! Come along, Browney!"

Tom Brown went unwillingly. Bob Cherry stayed, though perhaps Bob did not feel much more willing to stay than Tom Brown did to go.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Fight That Never Finished!

TOGETHER Bob Cherry and the new boy made their way towards the cliffs near Pegg on the afternoon of the following day.

They talked little as they went, for Delarey would only answer in monosyllables, and never made a single remark on his own account; and even the genial Bob found it difficult to keep up a conversation under such conditions.

Bob was beginning to think that, whether Delarey was a rebel at heart, or otherwise—and there really seemed a good deal of doubt about it—he was certainly a sulky bounder.

"There's Browney and Squiff ahead," Bob said, as they neared the cliffs.

"Yes," answered Delarey.

He was gazing over the shining sea, seeming to have scarcely a ripple on it under the May sunshine. There was a far-away look in his eyes, as if his thoughts were thousands of miles away, Bob Cherry thought.

And so they were! Piet Delarey was thinking of East Africa, where, far away from the main theatre of war, in the most difficult circumstances, loyal sons of the Empire, white and black and brown, British and Boer, Indian and negro, were winning wide lands to add to that Empire. Armand Delarey had been among them. Was he still fighting on? Had he managed to bring the remnants of his little force out of the tight corner into which it had got, or——

His son scarcely dared face the alternative.

Squiff and Tom Brown had not been much more talkative than the other two at first.

Squiff was not really keen on that fight. He and the New Zealander had agreed that nobody else should know about it, and had managed to get Bob Cherry to see things their way, though in the ordinary run of events Bob would certainly have told his chums of it.

"Have you heard about the mad dog, Squiff?" asked Tom Brown.

"No. Don't mean Delarey, do you, or Rattenstein?" asked the Australian junior, with a feeble attempt at humour.

"Of course I don't, chump! I mean that great thing of Ward's, at the farm near Cliff House. Half boarhound and half mastiff, I believe—an ugly beast!"

"Don't know it. I know the farm. I suppose the thing's been shot?" returned Squiff.

"That's just the thing—it hasn't. Done a bunk, and hidden in the woods, or in some cave in the cliffs, I guess."

"I say, though, that's jolly dangerous, so near Cliff House! What about the girls?"

"Oh, they won't be allowed to run into danger, you bet!" answered Tom Brown. "They'll simply be gated till all's safe!"

Among the Cliff House girls were three who were great friends of the Greyfriars juniors—Marjorie Hazeldene, sister of Peter Hazeldene of the Remove, Clara Trevelyn, and Phyllis Howell. The Famous Five were their special chums; but Tom Brown and Squiff also knew them well, and admired them greatly.

"My hat! I think Cherry might have chosen a better place than the one we're going to, with a brute like that roaming about near it!" said Squiff.

"Cherry didn't know anything about it—doesn't know now, I dare say," Tom Brown answered. "It was old Gossy told me, while I was waiting for you at the gate. He'd just got the news from the butcher's boy."

"Bet you it's a whacker, then!" Squiff said. "I know that butcher's boy. He lies like Bunter. Ananias ain't in the same street with them!"

Tom Brown did not think it was a lie; but Tom Brown was not worrying about what seemed such an off-chance as an encounter with the mad dog. Most likely, he thought, the animal had been chased down and shot by this time.

They reached the place chosen by Bob Cherry for the fight. It was quite a good place—a grassy hollow in the cliffs, twenty feet below the top, and shut in on every side except that facing seawards. There was something like a rough, natural flight of steps leading down to it; but few people ever descended this, and, indeed, few passed along the edge of the cliff above, while the chance of being spotted from the sea was scarcely worth taking into account.

At the top they paused, and waited for the other two to come up.

It did not occur to them that as they stood there they were visible from some of the windows at Cliff House.

A pair of bright and very wideawake eyes saw them from one of the windows, and Phyllis Howell hurried off to her chums. Intuition told her what was afoot. It was not long since she had stopped a fight between Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton, who had been at loggerheads through Rattenstein's base plotting.

Now she imagined Bob was going to fight again, though she was not at all sure with whom.

There was something in the manner of the four as the two later-comers came up to the two ahead which suggested hostility.

The quartette made their way down into the hollow. Delarey looked round.

"Think this will do?" Bob asked him.

Delarey nodded, and then spoke.

"Queer sort of place," he said. "I shouldn't have suspected it from the look of the cliffs above. There's a cave over there, isn't there?"

"Yes," Bob answered. "'Tisn't a mucher, though. We've explored it, as we have most of the caves about here. I say, Delarey, is it worth while to fight with old Squiff? He's a decent sort, you know."

"I struck him," replied Delarey gravely. "But he forced me to it. I do not see how I can apologise, and I do not think he would be satisfied even if I did."

He began to peel. Squiff was doing likewise.

"Will you keep time, Browney?" asked Bob.

Tom Brown nodded. Tom Brown was looking very grave—almost as if this was a funeral, Bob thought. Squiff's face was set hard too. And Delarey certainly didn't look happy. Bob was not aware that his own customarily cheery countenance was about half as long again as usual.

The two closed. Fights without gloves were not reckoned quite the thing at Greyfriars. But Delarey had suggested bare fists, and Squiff was not the fellow to refuse.

Each was on his mettle. They sparred warily, watching for an opening. Squiff knew that the Afrikander was hot stuff. Delarey saw that the Australian was no novice, and certainly more quick and active than the lumbering Bolsover.

But before the round ended they had given and taken punishment, for all their wariness. Squiff's left eye was half closed, and Delarey's jaw was bruised.

At it they went again, after a short but welcome breathing space. Now the fight waxed hotter. Australian and Afrikander alike felt his blood coursing fast through his veins. Each recognised in the other fellow a foeman worthy of him, and meant to do his level best to win.

Squiff staggered from a blow under the chin. Delarey followed it up with a pile-driver in the region of the mark, and Squiff measured his length on the scanty turf.

But he was up again in less than three seconds, and the Afrikander was forced to give ground a bit before his hot attack.

"Time!" called Tom Brown, and they fell apart.

The third round was half-way through, and the two had closed in and were fighting desperately at close quarters, when Bob Cherry suddenly exclaimed:

"Oh, crumbs!"

Neither Squiff nor Delarey heard; but Tom Brown did, and Tom Brown's eyes followed the direction of Bob Cherry's.

Down the natural stairway, her hair floating behind her in the wind, came bounding Phyllis Howell. At such a pace she came, and with such seeming recklessness, that Bob's face went pale, and Tom Brown's hair stood almost on end.

Behind her, with somewhat more care, but quickly, too, came Marjorie Hazeldene and Miss Clara.

"Drop it, you two!" cried Bob.

"Ring off, you idiots!" sang out Tom Brown.

The two combatants heard in utter amazement. Then, falling apart, they saw.

Squiff's face, scarlet already, deepened to a tomato hue. Delarey, who was a complete stranger to the girls, stared wonderingly.

"I wonder you're not ashamed!" cried Phyllis, in ringing tones. "And without gloves, too! Bob Cherry, I'm surprised——"

"My hat! It isn't me, Phyllis!" groaned Bob. "I didn't make them fight! I——"

"Be quiet!" ordered the girl, stamping her little foot imperiously. "Really, Field——"

Squiff's mouth was open to explain—or try to explain. It would not have been a very satisfactory explanation, as Squiff realised.

But it was never made, for at that moment there sounded a deep growl, and out of the cave burst a great, dun-coloured creature, with foam-flecked jaws and fiery eyes—the mad dog from the Cliff Farm!

Bob Cherry flung himself in front of Phyllis on the instant.

As if he saw nothing else, the dog made straight at the girl. She did not scream. The scream that rang out so shrilly was Clara Trevelyn's. But Phyllis began to back towards the edge of the cliff, her face white as death, her bright eyes looking twice their normal size.

The great animal leaped. Full in the chest he struck Bob Cherry, and sent him to earth.

"Oh, look out, Miss Howell!" yelled Tom Brown, rushing in to bear his part. "You'll be over——"

Then Tom Brown caught his foot in some of the clothing thrown on the ground and went sprawling.

"Oh!" cried Marjorie Hazeldene, clasping Miss Trevelyn's arm in a nervous grip that left its mark for days afterwards. "Oh, Clara!"

Moved by a common impulse, the two fellows who had been pounding away at each other a few seconds before dashed at the dog.

One on each side they seized the huge brute by the collar. Squiff pushed, Delarey pulled.

The great beast was within a yard of Phyllis, and she was scarcely more than a yard from the edge of the cliff.

They swerved him aside, though his mad rush brought them both to their knees. Foam from his mouth flecked their faces. Squiff's jaw was set hard, and not for the life of him could Squiff have got out a word. But——

"Shove him over!" cried Delarey, still gripping the collar hard.

Squiff thrust with all his strength, and Delarey tugged with all his, reckless of his own danger.

"Hooray!" yelled Tom Brown, struggling up and hurrying to help. "Hooray! Well played, you fellows! Oh!"

His note had changed on the sudden to one of dismay. The great dun body plunged over the cliff. But with it, still clinging to the collar, unable to loosen his grip in time, went Piet Delarey!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.
Squiff to the Rescue!

SQUIFF fell back, and lay panting, knocked out for the moment. Phyllis Howell and Bob Cherry, on his feet again now, though the wind had been knocked out of him, looked each other in the face, and felt the icy hand of fear clutching their hearts. Marjorie Hazeldene dropped backwards in a swoon, and Clara Trevelyn screamed, and screamed again.

Tom Brown's knees felt like giving way as he neared the edge of the cliff and gazed over.

Then his strength came back to him, and the colour flooded his face as he shouted:

"Hooray! He hasn't fallen far, after all! Hooray! Come along, Squiff! Come along, Bob! We must get him up!"

Squiff scrambled to his feet. Bob Cherry rushed to Tom Brown's side. But Phyllis Howell was there first, looking over the New Zealander's shoulder.

"Don't come too near!" cried Tom Brown in alarm. "You might fall!"

"Not likely!" answered the girl. "Oh, he isn't dead, is he? He lies so still—— No, he's moving! I saw his eyes open!"

The great dun body of the hapless dog lay a hundred feet below, smashed upon a jagged rock. But it seemed that Piet Delarey had loosened his hold just in time, after all, and he had been stayed in his flight to otherwise certain death by a stunted tree growing on a narrow ledge. One arm, thrown out instinctively, clutched this; one leg was over the ledge; and they could see that the shock had almost torn the tree from its insecure roothold.

"We've got to get him up," said Bob Cherry. "He'll never manage it by himself."

"Right-ho!" answered Tom Brown. "I can get down, I guess."

But the task scarcely looked an easy one. The cliff was sheer, without any projections or crannies which would help a climber.

"Rot!" growled Squiff. "You're not going, Browney! I am!"

"You've done enough already, old chap. I'll go!" said Bob Cherry eagerly.

Phyllis Howell's ringing voice struck in. There was no sign of fright about Phyllis now, though she must have felt horrible fear when the great mad brute came for her. But she had overcome it, and was cooler than any of the three juniors.

"Nobody can climb down," she said. "But if you knot your jackets together by the sleeves, I can take hold, and you can let me down far enough for me to drop all right. It won't be more than six feet or so, and I'm lighter than any of you."

They stared at her. She meant it, they knew, every word. But the idea of her thinking that they would let her take such a risk while they stood by!

"Rot!" snapped Bob Cherry.

"That's very rude!" answered Phyllis hotly.

"I don't care if it is!" retorted Bob. "You won't go—not if we have to hold you back! But the jacket notion isn't half a bad one. Only thing is, we can't get Delarey up that way if he's as helpless as he looks."

"No. Somebody must run to Cliff House and fetch a rope —— Oh, and a chair, too," said Phyllis.

Squiff and Tom Brown were knotting together the four jackets by the sleeves. Then they tested them by pulling hard against one another. The jackets stood the test.

Phyllis ran across to the other two girls. Marjorie Hazeldene had now come to, and, feeling quite needlessly ashamed of herself, was only too eager to help in any way possible. She and Miss Clara hurried up the rough steps to give the alarm at Cliff House.

When Phyllis returned to the cliff edge, Bob Cherry lay flat with his head over, watching Delarey. Squiff and Tom Brown had settled their dispute. Both were agreed that Bob, being heavier than either of them, must not go. And Bob, who knew that his strength would be needed up above, had reluctantly given way.

"It's up to me, Browney," said Squiff. "I forced a quarrel on the fellow when you wanted to treat him decently all along, and I shall feel an utter cad if I don't do this for him."

But it was not the words that won Tom Brown over so much as what he saw. He saw something very like tears in the eyes of Sampson Quincy Iffley Field, and in those bold eyes no one at Greyfriars had ever seen tears before.

"Right-ho, Squiff!" Tom Brown said. "I think you've done enough already, and you make me feel an awful worm. But have your own way, if you must."

"It's no go, Phyllis," said Bob. "Anyway, we couldn't let you do it. Squiff's going down. You can help up above."

The girl threw herself down at the edge of the cliff, and took her share of the work manfully. The three held on while Squiff was lowered carefully down. Their hearts were in their mouths for fear the improvised rope should give way.

But it held firm.

Now came a critical moment. Squiff's feet were several feet above the ledge, and not another inch could those above give him. Already they were leaning perilously far over. The ledge was narrow. It was touch and go whether he would not topple over it as his feet struck it.

He screwed his neck round to look up at them. His face was white, but his eyes gleamed. Squiff knew his peril, and faced it, as his countrymen faced death at Gallipoli.

"Look out for yourselves!" he said coolly. "I'm going to drop!"

His face was turned to the shining sea below, and for just one second he gazed out over it. Perhaps his thoughts travelled with a speed greater than the speed of electricity to his far-away home in the sunny south land.

Then he dropped, and the sudden loss of his weight almost caused Phyllis Howell to plunge over, though he had prepared them for it. But Bob Cherry clutched her in a strong grip and held her back.

"Hooray! He's all right!" yelled Tom Brown, while Phyllis shut her eyes for a moment, and Bob, shaken by her danger, dared not look.

Squiff had landed on the ledge, digging his heels well in, his back to the cliff. Now he stooped over Delarey, and, not without difficulty, lifted him clear of the tree.

"Whew!" whistled Squiff. It had been the narrowest of squeaks for the Afrikander. The tree was so nearly torn from its roothold that it looked as though another pound of weight would have dislodged it completely.

Delarey looked up, smiling wanly.

"Hurt, old man?" asked Squiff, and his voice was like that of one who speaks to a tried and trusty comrade.

"No—bones—broken—I think," panted the Afrikander. "Took—the breath—out of—me—and—wrists—pretty bad."

They were. As was discovered a little later, both wrists were badly sprained. The damage had been done when the great dog and the boy, in falling, had come one on each side of the out-growing tree, and the shock had loosened Delarey's grip.

Squiff, kneeling on the ledge, lifted Delarey's head. Delarey smiled up at him again, and then fainted dead away.

It seemed a long time before help came, though Marjorie and Clara made all possible haste. When at last help did come, there were still some trying moments. Squiff had no easy task in fastening Delarey up safely in the chair, and everyone went through some anxious seconds while he was being hauled up.

Then the rope was sent down again to Squiff without the chair, which he said he did not need, and he came swarming up hand over hand.

He stood apologetically before Phyllis Howell.

"I'm no end sorry, Miss Howell!" he said. "It was all my fault, you know!"

"Sorry?" she flashed back. "Why, you're a hero, Squiff—Field, I mean!"

It was under his breath that Squiff murmured "Rats!"

For Sampson Quincy Iffley Field did not regard himself as being in the very least a hero.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Good News!

"CAN'T I come, Browney? I say, Squiff, I'm coming, you know! I want to see the fellow just as much as you do."

It was Bob Cherry who spoke thus, meeting Tom Brown and Sampson Quincy Iffley Field on their way to the sanatorium three or four days later.

"Can't be did, Cherry!" answered Tom Brown, shaking his head. "Doctor says two chaps is the very outside limit he must be allowed to see yet."

"Rats! I shouldn't do him any harm! See here, Browney, let me go instead of you. That's an idea, isn't it?"

"It is—a jolly rotten one!" Tom Brown replied, grinning. "We had trouble enough to get leave. Giddy likely we're going to give up our places to you! Eh, Squiff, my pippin?"

But Squiff did not answer. Squiff was looking uncommonly grave this morning.

The irresponsible Bob yielded, for once. He saw that it was no go. But he hung about waiting for the two to come from the sanatorium.

Bob Cherry had some time to wait. Squiff and Tom Brown found Piet Delarey sitting up in bed, looking better than they had expected to see him, but pretty helpless, with both of his wrists sprained.

"I'm jolly glad to see you fellows!" he said. "It's dull here."

"I say, Delarey, before anything more is said, I want to apologise to you," blurted out Squiff. "I'd no right——"

"Don't say another word," said the Afrikander quickly. "I've been thinking things over, and I see I've been in the wrong right through. If you fellows had known the truth, there wouldn't have been any unpleasantness."

"What is the truth?" asked Tom Brown quietly. He did not even look at Squiff. Tom Brown was not going to say: "Told you so!"

"Just this—my father's not a rebel at all! It's true enough that he was with Botha during the other war. But he was with Botha in German South-West, too; and now he's with Smuts in German East Africa—that is, unless he's dead!"

"Dead! What do you mean, Delarey?"

"They say he and the men under him were cut off and wiped out. I don't believe it; but it's beastly difficult to keep on not believing!"

"When did you hear about this, old man?" he said.

"The other day. I was reading about it in the paper before you fellows came."

"And I——"

"Never mind that! You couldn't know," said Delarey, breaking in quickly on Squiff's penitent speech. "Let me tell you all about it."

"When did you hear about this, old man?" said Squiff.

"My mother was British, you know. And my father had nothing against the British, but when the war came he held it his duty to stand by his own people. Mother saw that; she didn't blame him, though it nearly broke her heart. She went down to Cape Town, and I was born there. My father never saw me until after the end of the war. He was one of those who held by Botha. They thought that now the fighting was over, and your people had given them such fair terms, it was up to them to be loyal to the British flag. Father never swerved from that.

"I was ten years old when mother died, and almost the last words she said were, 'Our boy will be a Britisher, Armand?' And dad said, 'No, sweetheart; not a Britisher, but a good Afrikander, and as loyal as any Englander of them all.' He would say 'Englander' sometimes; he could not quite get out of the old Boer ways. But always he said that I should come to school here in England when I was fifteen, and now——"

Delarey paused. They could guess why. He was thinking that there would be no father to welcome him back.

"What asses we were!" said Squiff, with a little catch in his voice.

"I was the biggest ass," answered Delarey, smiling—or trying to smile. "I knew my name would be against me, and—— No, never mind that!"

They knew what he meant. It was the poison that Rattenstein had instilled into him about which he would not talk.

"It's all right now," said Tom Brown. "The school will know that it was a mistake; and I'm not dead sure that, after what you did the other day, the fellows would mind much if you were an out-and-out rebel. And you know now that Greyfriars believes in fair play."

"I'd rather nobody else knew till—till I'm certain about my father," Delarey answered, controlling his voice with difficulty.

They did not understand that. Possibly he hardly knew himself why he felt so. But they promised not to tell the whole school till they had his leave.

"See here, Delarey," said Squiff, "if you're willing to chum up with Browney and me, we're on. We're all Colonials, you know, so we ought to pull together."

"I should be very glad," answered the Afrikander. He looked at Tom Brown, and Tom Brown nodded and smiled.

"We can't all get in one study just yet," said Squiff. "Mauly wouldn't cotton to taking Fish in, though Johnny Bull would agree to Browney and you all serene, I know. But perhaps we can wangle that later on."

Then the matron came and ordered the two away. They went unwillingly, and found Bob Cherry waiting outside for news of the patient.

"When's he coming out of sanny?" Bob asked. "Because when he does we're going to have a scrumptious spread in his honour in No. 1, and ask the Cliff House girls; and if you fellows behave yourselves you may get an invite too."

"Blest if I don't like that!" answered Tom Brown. "You could leave me out all right, but to leave Squiff out would be something like playing 'Hamlet' and cutting out the part of the Prince of Denmark."

"Rot!" snapped Squiff, flushing.

. . . . . .

The spread duly came off about a week later. No. 1 Study was crowded. Phyllis Howell, Marjorie Hazeldene, and Clara Trevelyn were all there, looking very pretty and charming. There were the Famous Five, and Tom Brown, Peter Todd, Mark Linley, Vernon-Smith, and Hazeldene. There was Piet Delarey, only just out of sanny.

"But where's Squiff?" asked Miss Clara, looking round.

"Really, Clara! You ought to say 'Field,' I think."

"Rats, Marjorie! Where is he, anyway?"

"Gone down to Friardale, I fancy," answered Tom Brown, who knew that Squiff had made that journey every afternoon except Sunday during the past week—and knew why, too.

"He ought to behave better!" said Miss Clara sharply. "It is very rude of him to keep us waiting when we're all so peckish, and there are so many good things ready."

"The rudefulness of the ludicrous Squiff, and likewise the peckfulness of the esteemed and honourable Miss Clara——"

"Oh, ring off, Inky!" cried Harry Wharton, perceiving that Clara Trevelyn's fair forehead was knitting into a frown.

"Give her something to start on," suggested Phyllis Howell, smiling. "The rest of us don't mind waiting for Squ—ahem!—Field, I mean, of course."

Frank Nugent obligingly planked down a big dish of tarts in front of Miss Clara, receiving a frown and a pout as reward.

"Oh, really, you fellows! You must have forgotten to ask me!"

It was Billy Bunter who made that remark, trying to wedge his fat form into the already crowded study.

"Nothing of the sort, tubby! Nobody asked you, because nobody wanted you!" replied Peter Todd.

"Blest if I can see what bizney it is of yours, Toddy! You ain't——"

Billy Bunter's fat form was thrust unceremoniously aside, and Squiff burst in, waving an evening paper.

"Good news from East Africa!" he yelled at the top of his voice. "The best news, Delarey—the very best! Your father's safe, after all, and he's done no end big things! The despatch is full of him!"

Piet Delarey sprang to his feet, his eyes gleaming.

The rest—all but Tom Brown—stared.

"But I thought——"

Harry Wharton got so far, and then stopped dead.

"Rats!" shouted Squiff, almost beside himself with excitement. "Delarey's father is no more a rebel than mine, or Bob Cherry's, or your uncle! He was out with Botha to hunt down the rebels, and he went all through the German South-West campaign, and now he's in East Africa, fighting still. And Piet thought he was dead, but—but——"

Squiff's words were drowned in a cheer that might have been heard a mile away. They were all cheering, the girls, too—all but Bunter, who took advantage of the general excitement to squeeze into a corner beside Clara Trevelyn.

And they were still cheering when the fat hand of William George Bunter reached out and grabbed at the tarts!

THE END.

(Do not miss "KICKED OUT OF SCHOOL!" next Monday's Grand Story of the Chums of Greyfriars, by FRANK RICHARDS.)

Our Magnificent Adventure Serial Story. START TO-DAY!

: : By : :

T. C. BRIDGES.

The First Instalments Told How

DICK DAUNT and DUDLEY DREW, two chums, discover a letter in a bottle which they have extracted from the body of a shark.

They are informed by its contents that a certain MATTHEW SNELL is marooned on an unnamed island in the Keys, and he offers a substantial reward to any persons effecting his rescue.

On going to the island, however, they are unable to find Mr. Snell.

EZRA CRAY, a moonshiner, and his scoundrelly colleagues then visit the island, and, finding that it contains gold, attempt to kill the two chums.

Dick and Dudley eventually find Matthew Snell hiding in a small cave, and with his help they flood out Ezra Cray's camp, thus compelling the gang to evacuate it.

Meanwhile, Snell and the two chums have taken refuge in a small shanty, and suddenly Dan Grayson, one of Cray's black slaves, appears at the door.

(Now read on.)

"We're Too Late!"

"I done knew you'd fix dem fellers," was Dan's greeting, as he came in. "I done told yo' all so, didn't I?"

"Where do you come from?" demanded Dick.

"Up out ob dem woods, de odder side ob de creek," was the answer. "Dat's whar we all ran when de big flood come down."

"And where have you been since?"

"Waiting round till dat Cray go off."

"What—is he gone?"

"Bet yore life he's gone, he an' Seth Weekes wid him!"

"Which way did they go?"

"Down to de schooner, I guess, whar all de rest went."

"Where all the rest went!" repeated Dick. "What do you mean, Dan?"

"Why, I reckoned you all knowed dat dey'd gone, and dat was why yo' ran in when yo' did," replied Dan, in evident surprise.

"We don't know anything about their going!" retorted Dick sharply. "Who has gone, and where?"

Bent; he done took four ob de chaps, and went off to de schooner jest about sun-up I guess dey was a-gwine ober to Havana or Key West to get grub."

Dick looked at the others in dismay.

"We're a day too late!" he groaned.

Snell kept his head.

"Maybe they haven't started yet. I guess we may have a chance of stopping 'em yet!"

"That's so!" said Dudley, snatching up his rifle.

Dick paused a moment.

"Dan," he said quickly, "you stay here and take charge. Don't you go letting the other niggers come stealing! There's Degan's gun down by his body. You take it, and hold 'em off if they play the fool!"

"You bet I will, boss!" declared Dan, grinning. "And I jest hopes as you will shoot all dem oder debbils," was his parting wish, as Dick hurried after the others.

"Cray's got a long start," he said, as he came up with Dudley.

"He has that!" Dudley answered. "But for all we know, Bent may have sailed before Cray and Weekes reached the bay. In that case, we'll have to look out mighty sharp."

"If they're aboard, the schooner won't be out of sight yet," replied Dick. "We shall be able to see as soon as we get out of this beastly scrub."

They hurried along at the top of their speed. In spite of the heavy clouds, it was abominably hot. The air seemed absolutely stagnant, while the sky was covered with a sort of mist which had a queer, yellowish tinge.

Dudley, who was quite himself again, after his long rest and good feeding, got a little ahead of the others, and was the first to break out of the scrub on the edge of the ridge.

"There's the schooner!" he cried.

Dick came panting up. An angry exclamation escaped him.

"I thought as much. We're too late! She's sailed!"

Sailed she had, but only just. As yet she was hardly outside the bay. The wind was so light that she was hardly moving. She just had steerage way, and no more, but the tide was helping her out.

"Then I reckon Cray and Weekes are aboard all right," said Snell, as he came up.

"I suppose they are!" said Dick bitterly.

Dudley broke in.

"Seems kind of funny to me that Cray didn't bring his crowd back to tackle us," he said. "There must be seven or eight of them left, even now—quite enough to put us out of the running if they'd meant business."

"Yes," said Snell, "if they'd have meant business. But I guess most of 'em have had enough of business of this kind. Take it all in all, they've lost five, if not six men out of their crowd since they landed, and if they'd have tackled us in earnest, as you say, they'd ha' been mighty certain to lose two or three more.

"Now it seems to me," he continued, "that they've done the wisest thing they could. I don't doubt they got all or most of their gold aboard, and a pretty tidy lot it ought to be. What they've said to 'emselves is as they got their lives and their gold and their ship, while we got the island and

(Continued on page iv of cover.)

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THE GOLDEN KEY.

(Continued from page 20.)

the niggers and mighty little anything else. No, sir, there ain't nothing the matter with their argument so fur as I can see."

They stood watching the schooner move slowly out of the bay, under the heavy, lowering sky, and for some moments none of them spoke again.

At last Dudley broke the silence.

"And what do you reckon we're going to do now?" he asked, rather bitterly.

"Get back and rope in those niggers before they've stole all the grub!" replied Snell, with calm good sense.

They went back, and found every one of the wretched slaves gathered around the house. There were no fewer than twelve in all. The faithful Dan had collected all the spare rifles and ammunition, and was sitting over them with his shot-gun.

"They ain't touched a thing," he announced triumphantly. "But," he added, "I reckons they's all durned hungry."

"Where does Cray keep their grub?" asked Dick.

"Dat's locked up in de house whar de guard lib, ober by de logs!" was the answer.

"By the stockade, he means," explained Dudley. "I guess we'd better bring it all over here."

Snell agreed, and they took half a dozen of the men and went across. They found several barrels of hominy, a supply of bacon which, with care, would last a month, and a good amount of molasses and corn-meal. These they had carried across to the cabin. Then they gave out rations, and told the wretched negroes that they could cook their dinner, and have a day's holiday. But they ordered them not to go away, and gave Dan instructions to let them know if any tried to bolt.

After that they set to work and cooked a meal for themselves, of which they were badly in need.

The next task was a very unpleasant one. They had to bury the dead men. The negroes dug the graves, and the bodies were covered up without ceremony.

All this time the heat was increasing. What little breeze there had been was dying out completely, and the sky was the colour of dirty copper.

"There's weather brewing," remarked old Snell, with an eye on the dull horizon. "I don't know as I ever saw it look much worse. If it wasn't so late in the season I'd be looking for a proper cyclone."

"We've had one already this autumn," remarked Dick. "I hope to goodness there won't be another. And now, Mr. Snell, what are we going to do? What's your notion as to how we are to carry on?"

"I was jest going to say as it was about time for a council of war," replied the old man. "Ef you want to know my notion, I was thinking we'd best set to work and build a new boat. There's grub to last while we do it. We've got plenty of lumber and plenty of labour."

"And when we've built it?" asked Dick.

"Ship these here niggers back to where they belong, get a right good load of stores, and come back here with proper appliances to wash out the rest of this here gravel."

"That sounds good to me!" declared Dudley. "What do you say, Dick? D'ye think it's a good plan?"

"The best!" said Dick heartily. "And that reminds me. If Cray & Co. haven't found it and dug it up, our little hoard ought to be still under that log just outside. There's enough to buy all the grub we want for six months."

"You needn't to worry about that," smiled Snell. "Before I left this old shack I planted my little lot o' dust right under the path by the gate. I don't rightly know how much there is, but I guess it's more'n I can tote at one journey. It took me two days to carry it to the cache."

The boys stared.

"Why, you won't need to do any more digging!" exclaimed Dick.

Snell smiled again.

"No. I expect I've enough to keep me the rest of my natural," he answered. "And, as we're talking of it, I guess we may as well see if it's there yet. We'd better tell Grayson to shift them niggers away first."

This was done, then Snell took a spade, and they went out to find the gold.

"I reckon we'd better hurry!" remarked Snell, as he glanced again at the sky. "It's a-coming mighty soon now."

"Gee, but it does look black!" agreed Dudley. "It's worse than that thunder-storm the other night!"

Snell struck the spade into the ground and began to dig. He went down about two feet, and then the steel struck something hard.

"Still thar," he said, with a twinkle in his clear blue eyes. "I guess Cray would be mad to think he's walked over it a hundred times and never knowed it was thar!"

A strange, droning, roaring noise had been going on for some moments, but so keen were all three on their treasure-hunt that they had not even noticed it. Now, however, it grew so loud that Dick glanced up.

He gave a shout of dismay

"Down, all of you! Down on your faces. It's a tornado!"

As he spoke a huge column of what looked like black smoke came marching off the sea on to the island. Its foot was on the ground, its head in the clouds. Around its vast spinning form lightning played in violet and blue flashes. Its roar was appalling.

"Down!" roared Dick again. "It's coming right on top of us!"

With a screech like a thousand steam sirens the tornado swooped upon them. Darkness blacker than the blackest night covered the sky, yet illuminated every moment by the livid play of lightning around the swirling column of the storm.

Deafened, blinded, stunned by the appalling uproar, Snell and the two boys lay flat upon the bare ground, driving their fingers and toes into the earth in the hope of anchoring themselves, and saving themselves from being whipped away like straws in a whirlpool.

Louder and louder grew the indescribable roar; then Dick had the feeling that giant hands were striving to pluck him up from the ground, while he was pounded all over by dust, sticks, every kind of rubbish, which struck him with a force as if they had been fired from the muzzle of a gun.

So fearful was the weight of the wind that for the moment he almost lost consciousness. He felt as though his body was being crushed under a ton of stone.

The seconds seemed like minutes as he clung desperately to his hold amid the frightful turmoil. Above the screeching of the spinning column he heard a crack like the firing of a six-inch gun. Then, as suddenly as it had come, the awful pressure was relaxed, and he lay panting, breathless, hardly knowing whether he was dead or alive.

"Dick—Dick!"

It was Dudley's voice. Dick rolled over, and saw Dudley struggling to his feet. His face was very white, and there was a smear of blood on his forehead where something had struck him, and cut a long, shallow gash.

"Where—where's Snell?" panted Dudley.

Dick got unsteadily to his knees, and glanced round. The tornado had passed, and was screaming and thundering away over the hill on the eastern end of the island. But although it had gone, it was still almost as dark as ever; it was blowing a full gale, and the rain was coming down as if the bottom of the sky had fallen out.

"Snell! Mr. Snell!" Dick shouted.

There was no answer.

"Great heavens, he's gone!" gasped Dick.

"Not much, he ain't!" came a voice; and Snell himself, his clothes in tatters, and his face plastered with mud, rolled out of an adjoining palmetto bush.

"Gosh, I thought it was the end of the world, sure!" he exclaimed, as he scrambled to his feet, and began to wipe the mud from his face. "What about that there gold? I can't even see the hole!"

"The storm's filled it in for us," replied Dick, who was now on his feet and looking round. Suddenly he gave a sharp exclamation. "Where—where's the cabin?"

He might well ask. It was gone. There was simply not a sign of it left except one corner post. The rest of the stoutly-built structure had vanished—literally wiped off the face of the earth.

"Gee, but I thought I heard a crack!" said Dudley. "Dick, this is the everlasting limit. What in sense are we going to do now?"

"There's always the cave," answered Dick. "I don't fancy that's gone, whatever else has."

"The cave! Man alive, what's the use of that? We can always find shelter of some kind. It's grub I'm thinking of!"

Dick started.

"I'd forgotten!" he exclaimed, in a tone of dismay. "I'd clean forgotten that all the grub was in the shanty. By Jove, we're in the soup this time, and no mistake!"

"What's left of the stuff will be soup right enough if we don't hurry up and look for it," put in Snell. "Call up them niggers, if there are any of 'em left, and set 'em right in to picking up anything that remains!"

Dick at once started across towards the stockade. It was actually raining so hard that he could not see the stockade until he got down to the edge of the creek. The water was already rising, and took him to his knees as he waded across.

(Another long instalment of this grand serial story next Monday. Order your copy in advance.)