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THE REMOVE'S RECRUIT!



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(A Screamingly Funny Scene in the Splendid Long Complete School Tale of Greyfriars in this Issue.)

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The Remove's Recruit!

A Magnificent Long,
Complete Story of
Harry Wharton & Co. at
Greyfriars School.

BY

FRANK RICHARDS.

"Where have you been, Howell?" demanded the captain of the Remove. "I woke up, and found that your bed was empty, and I've been waiting for you to come in!" (See chapter 8.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Archie's Little Joke!

"HOW many 'k's' in 'expect'?" Coker of the Fifth asked that question.

Spelling was not one of Coker's strong points. Any word containing more than five letters found him out of his depth, and he was fairly puzzled now, as he sat at the table in his study, nibbling at his penholder.

Archie Howell, Coker's new study-mate, looked up with a grin from the book he was reading.

"Eh? What was that?" he inquired.

"How many 'k's' in 'expect'?" repeated Coker. "I forget whether it's two or three."

"It's neither, you chump!" said Archie.

"What?"

"There are no 'k's' in 'expect'!"

Coker regarded his study-mate with a pitying expression.

"I can see that I shall have to give you those spelling-lessons we were talking about," he said. "Can't have a study-mate of mine wallowing in ignorance."

"Why, you duffer!" roared Archie. "If I spelt as badly as you, I'd go and suffocate myself in the nearest coal-hole!"

Coker frowned. Not many fellows in the Fifth could have called Coker a duffer without some sort of retaliation on his part.

But Coker did not retaliate now. He wished to keep on friendly terms with Archie Howell, for a very good reason. Archie happened to be the brother of Phyllis Howell, the vivacious Cliff House girl, and Coker was exceedingly anxious to stand well with Phyllis. And, in

order to do this, it was necessary to stand well with Archie. He could hardly be friendly with Phyllis and at enmity with her brother at the same time.

"How do you imagine the word 'expect' is spelt?" asked Archie.

"E-k-s-p-e-c-t," said Coker. "But I thought there might be another 'k' in it somewhere."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Archie roared with laughter, and Coker, who disliked being laughed at by a fellow who was two years his junior, grew very red in the face. It was with great difficulty that he refrained from addressing his youthful study-mate with a cricket-stump.

"Don't be funny, kid!" he said sternly.

"It's you that's funny!" chuckled Archie.

And he turned up the word "expect" in the dictionary, and showed it to Coker.

"There you are!" he said. "You can see for yourself that there isn't a single 'k' in the word!"

Coker gave a snort.

"That's an out-of-date dictionary," he said. "'Expect' is spelt with two 'k's.' That's the modern way."

"Extremely modern," said Archie, with a grin.

"I always endeavour to keep up with the times," said Coker. "And I'm miles ahead of that dictionary in the matter of spelling."

"My hat!"

"I shall spell the words according to my own judgment—not according to an obsolete guide of that sort!"

And Coker continued to write, in his spider-like scrawl.

Archie watched his companion curiously for some moments.

"Writin' home?" he inquired, at length.

Coker shook his head.

"I'm writing poetry," he explained.

"Oh! That accounts for those queer contortions you are makin', I s'pose? Seekin' inspiration—what?"

"That's it!"

"I didn't know you were a giddy Byron!" said Archie.

"My dear kid, Byron isn't in the same street with me. I can turn out poetry on any subject under the sun. If you asked me to describe that wall-paper in rhyme, I could do it!"

"So could I!" said Archie. "I could describe it in very picturesque language—a jolly sight more picturesque than the wall-paper itself! Who chose that pattern?"

"I did!" said Coker.

"Then you deserve to be placed under police supervision! I've never seen such an atrocious design! Enough to turn a fellow colour-blind!"

Coker failed to hear that scathing criticism. He was in the throes of another inspiration.

"Who is the poem for?" asked Archie.

Coker scribbled furiously before replying.

"It's for a young lady," he said at length.

"Oh! Somebody you owe a grudge to?"

"No. It's for your sister."

"My sister?" gasped Archie. "You don't mean to say you're goin' to send that piffle to Phyllis?"

"It isn't piffle!" said Coker warmly. "It's a letter inviting Phyllis over to tea to-morrow—and it's written in rhyme. 'Tain't every fellow who could express his thoughts in verse. Listen to this!"

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And Coker started to declaim what he had written:

"Dear Phyllis—prithce come to tea
To-morrow afternoon, at three.
I simply long to be your host,
Dispensing tea and rounds of toast.
I long to see your cheery smile,
To wait upon you all the while,
To smuggle down your fairy throat a
Sardine or antiquated bloater—"

"Steady on!" gasped Archie. "If you start takin' liberties of that sort with Phyllis, there will be trouble!"

"Liberties?" queried Coker.
"Yes. Fancy threatenin' to shove an antiquated bloater down a girl's throat!"

"Ahem! That—that's merely a figure of speech—"
"I should advise you to cut it out!" said Archie grimly. "How does that precious doggerel go on?"

"I long to see you fill your beak up
With fluid from my china tea-cup—"

"Here, that's libel!" interposed Archie. "My sister hasn't got a beak!"

"Well, I can't call it anything else!" said Coker. "It wouldn't rhyme!"

"You chump!"

"Eh?"

"You burbling imbecile!"

"What?"

"You unspeakable ass!"

Coker rose from the table.

"Steady on with your fancy names, young Howell!" he said. "If you don't behave yourself, I shall refuse to read the rest of the poem!"

"In that case," said Archie, "I shall be on my very worst behaviour!"

And he was. He behaved so badly, in fact, that Coker was given no chance to recite the remainder of his effusion.

The amateur poet had intended to put some finishing touches to his ditty. But Archie interrupted so frequently that Coker was obliged to abandon his intention, and to content himself with what he had already written. He folded the document, and placed it in a stamped envelope, which he addressed to "Miss Phillis Howell, Cliff House Skool, Friar-dale."

"The very least you can do, after making yourself such a nuisance, is to drop this in the pillar-box for me," said Coker.

"Certainly, dear boy!"

Archie Howell picked up the missive and withdrew. But it was not to the pillar-box in the Close that he proceeded. It was to Study No. 1 in the Remove passage.

The Famous Five were within, and they greeted Archie cordially. They had a warm regard for Phyllis Howell's brother, and they were very disappointed that Archie had been placed in the Fifth Form by the Head's orders. He was such a good sportsman that he would have been a valuable asset to the Remove.

"Welcome, little stranger!" said Bob Cherry, as Archie entered. "What can we do for you?"

"Can you lend me your kettle?"

"Eh?"

"I want to steam this envelope open."

"Here you are, my worthy chum," said Hurree Singh, taking the kettle from the hob, and handing it to Archie.

"I say, isn't it a bit thick, steaming open another fellow's letter?" protested Harry Wharton.

Archie Howell gave a chuckle.

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"This is some idiotic piffle that Coker's written to my sister," he explained.

"Oh!"

"And I consider that I'm perfectly justified in intercepting anything which is likely to cause annoyance to Phyllis."

"Of course!"

Having steamed open the envelope, Archie drew out the document it contained, and spread it out on the table for the Famous Five's inspection.

When Coker had recited his poem, the spelling defects had not, of course, been apparent. But they were apparent now.

The following lines met the astonished gaze of the Famous Five:

"Dere Phillis—prithce come to tea
To-morrow afternoon, at 3.
I simply long to be yore host,
Dispensing tea and rownds of toast.
I long to sea yore cheery smile,
To wate upon you all the wile.
To smuggle down yore fairy throte a
Sardine or antikwated blota."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Laughter, loud and long, echoed through Study No. 1.

"Oh dear!" sobbed Bob Cherry.

"This is too funny for words! Coker will be the death of me! If I attempt to read another line, I shall bust a boiler!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Miss Phyllis would have several sorts of a fit if she received that twaddle!" said Harry Wharton.

"The antiquated bloater part amuses me!" chuckled Frank Nugent.

"Coker always was a queer sort of fish!" said Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly lucky you got hold of this, Archie!" said Bob Cherry.

"Yes, rather!"

"You'll destroy it, of course?" said Wharton.

"No jolly fear!"

"What are you going to do with it, then?"

"Lend me an ink-eraser, an' I'll show you!"

Frank Nugent handed over an eraser, whereupon Archie Howell rubbed out the word "Phyllis," and substituted, in sprawling handwriting, the word "Bessie."

"What's the little game?" asked Bob Cherry, in surprise.

"I'm goin' to send this to Bessie Bunter."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five were almost in hysterics at the thought of Billy Bunter's plump sister calling upon Coker of the Fifth, and demanding to be fed.

As Johnny Bull remarked, it was Coker who was likely to be "fed"—in quite another sense.

Archie Howell erased his sister's name from the envelope, and substituted that of Bessie Bunter. Then, resealing the envelope, he nodded to the Famous Five, and went out to post the letter.

Harry Wharton & Co. were almost helpless with merriment.

"Oh dear!"

"Poor old Coker!"

"It will be worth a guinea a box to see the expression on his chivvy when Bessie Bunter rolls up!" gurgled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Meanwhile, Coker of the Fifth was reclining in the armchair in his study, blissfully looking forward to the morrow, when he hoped to act as host to Phyllis Howell!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Terrible Ordeal!

TWENTY-FOUR hours later Horace Coker strode into Mrs. Mimble's little shop under the elms.

"Now, ma'am," he said briskly, laying a rustling fiver on the counter, "I've got a shipping order for you!"

"Very good, Master Coker."

"To begin with, I want a rabbit-pie—a really nice one. That last pie I had from you—"

"Wasn't it tasty, Master Coker?"

"Yes—too tasty!" said the Fifth-Former, with a shudder. "It was the queerest pie I've ever sampled. I thought the kitchen cat had been cooked inside it!"

"Really, Master Coker—"

"But so long as this pie's up to standard, I'll forgive you for dishing up rabbit substitute."

Mrs. Mimble, looking slightly ruffled, produced a pie, and placed it on the counter.

"P'raps you'd like to dissect it first, Master Coker?" she suggested sarcastically.

Coker shook his head.

"I'll take your word for it that it's all square and above-board," he said.

"Now, have you got any chocolate eclairs?"

"Yes, Master Coker. How many would you like?"

"Oh, I think a dozen will be enough. Got any strawberry-ices?"

"Yes. Will you take them now, or shall I send them up to you?"

"Well, I can't very well put 'em in my pocket!" said Coker. "I'll send a fag down for 'em."

"Very good, Master Coker!"

"I hope they are!" said Coker. "The last lot I had were very bad. Tasted like hot custard."

Mrs. Mimble frowned.

"Really, Master Coker, if you keep saying such unkind things, I shall refuse to serve you!"

"Sorry, ma'am," said Coker. "But I've got a lady friend coming to tea, so I'm bound to be particular about the stuff. Make it half a dozen ices, will you? And I'll have a tin of pineapple, too. How much will that be altogether?"

"Sixteen shillings, please, Master Coker."

Coker was agreeably surprised. He had expected to make a very big hole in the five-pound note which his Aunt Judy had sent him. And it seemed to him that he had got off very lightly.

Mrs. Mimble handed over the change, and Coker conveyed the purchases, with the exception of the strawberry-ices, to his study.

Archie Howell was within. He had just laid the table for tea.

"That's the style, kid!" said Coker approvingly. "And now p'raps you'd do me another favour?"

"Certainly, old top!"

"Nip across to the tuckshop and collect some strawberry-ices. Better take a dish with you."

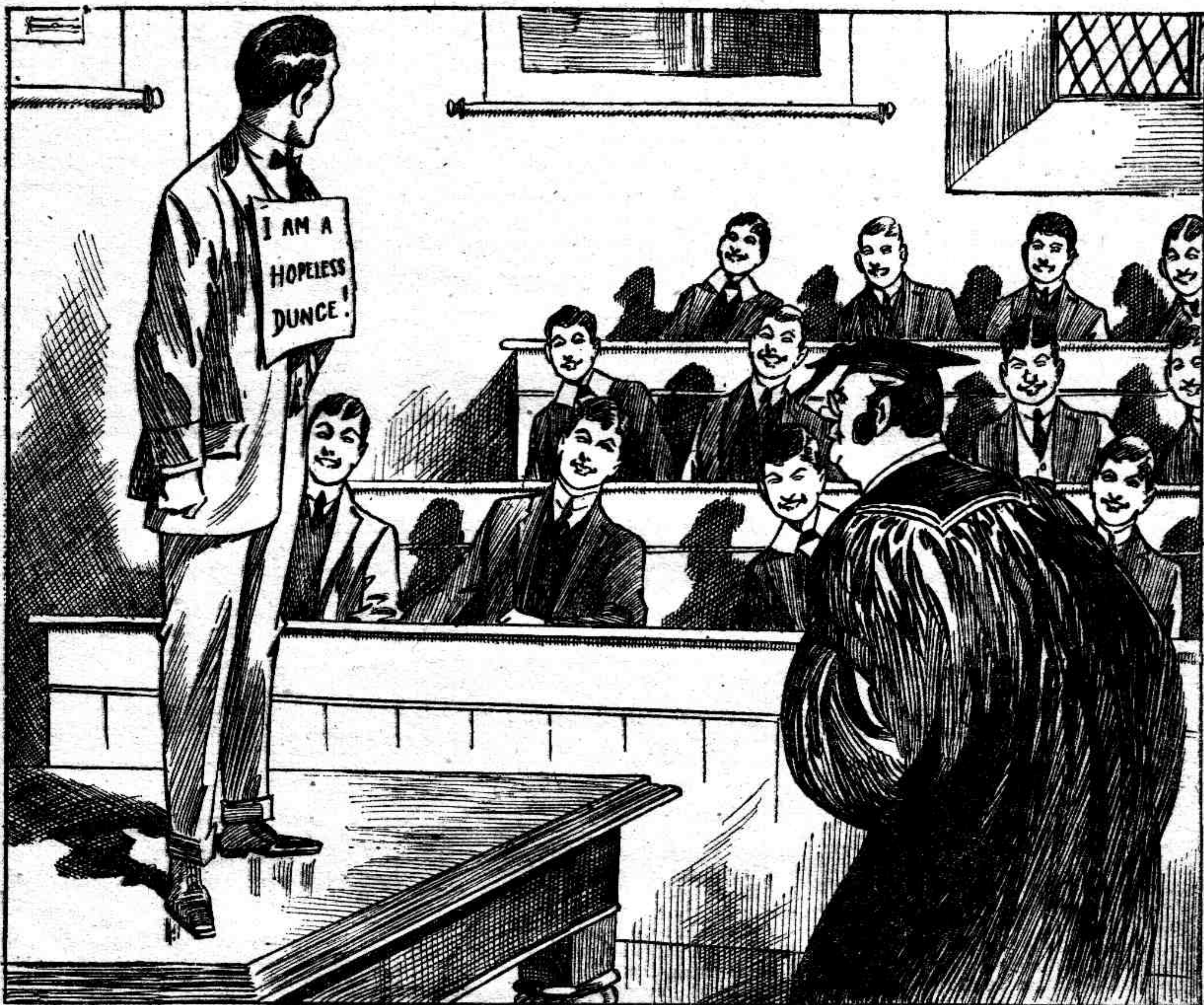
Archie set out on his errand. As he was returning from the Close, he saw the plump figure of Bessie Bunter entering the school gateway.

"Good!" he murmured, in tones of satisfaction. "It's worked like a charm!"

When he got back to Coker's study he found everything in readiness for the repast.

"Am I staying to the feed?" he inquired.

"Of course!" said Coker. "I wouldn't



Archie Howell clambered up on to the table, and stood exposed to the view of his Form-fellows, who grinned when they saw the placard. Instead of appearing humiliated, Archie returned grin for grin. (See chapter 3).

dream of turning away the brother of the guest of honour!"

So Archie stayed. And a moment later the guest of honour arrived.

Coker nearly fell down when Bessie Bunter rolled into the study. He stood goggling at his unexpected visitor like a country yokel.

"Good-afternoon!" said Bessie cheerfully, her eyes scanning the good things which had been set out on the table.

"Gug-gug-good-afternoon!" stammered Coker dazedly. "W-w-what can I do for you, Miss Bunter?"

"Lots of things!" said Bessie. "First of all, you can carve the rabbit-pie!"

"Oh, crumbs! I—I—"

"You're not much of a hand at carving?" said Bessie. "Never mind! I'll tackle the job myself!"

And she did, while Coker looked on in a sort of stupor.

As for Archie Howell, he was enjoying the situation immensely. It was with the greatest difficulty that he refrained from going off into a peal of laughter.

"I—I say, Miss Bunter!" stammered Coker, in alarm. "I—I'd rather you didn't touch that pie!"

"Why?" exclaimed Bessie, in equal alarm. "Is it poisoned?"

"Nunno; but it's wanted!"

"Of course it's wanted!" said Bessie, in surprise. "And, what's more, I've brought a first-rate appetite with me!

They don't give us half enough to eat at Cliff House!"

Coker nearly tore his hair as Bessie wielded the knife and fork.

The unfortunate Horace no longer attempted to be polite. Politeness was wasted on Bessie Bunter.

"Leave that pie alone!" commanded Coker.

"Eh?"

"It's not to be touched!"

Bessie opened her eyes in wonder.

"Not to be touched!" she repeated.

"Do you mean to say that you bought it merely for an ornament?"

"I've got a young lady coming to tea—"

"She's here!"

"Where?" said Coker, looking round in surprise. "Blessed if I can see a young lady in this study!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Archie Howell, unable to restrain himself any longer.

Bessie Bunter flourished her fork admonishingly at Coker.

"Don't you dare to make out that I'm not a young lady!" she said shrilly. "I'm every bit as much a lady as you are a—"

Bessie was about to say "gentleman," but she changed it to "born idiot."

"Look here, Miss Bunter," said Coker, his wrath rising. "I hate being rude to a young—er—girl, but I must ask you to leave that pie alone, and clear out!"

"Well, that's a nice way to treat your guest!" said Bessie.

"M-m-my guest?" stammered Coker.

"Yes! You invite me to tea, and then you tell me to clear out!"

Coker looked utterly bewildered.

"But I—I didn't invite you to tea!" he gasped.

"Oh, yes, you did! You needn't try to back out of it! Why, here's your invitation! I got it by the post this morning!"

And Bessie produced the doggerel which Coker had intended for Phyllis Howell.

Staring Coker in the face were the words:

"Dere Bessie—prithee come to tea
To-morro afternoon, at 3."

"Here's your invitation," repeated Bessie, "in black and white."

"This—this is a trick!" exclaimed Coker dazedly. "I—I intended that invitation to go to Phyllis Howell."

"In that case you shouldn't have addressed it to me!" said Bessie. "But, anyway, Phyllis couldn't come. She's playing tennis this afternoon. And so, if you don't object, I'll pile in, as the saying goes!"

Coker did object—very strongly. But he could not very well eject his unwelcome guest from the study by force.

He was much too chivalrous to dream of using violence where a member of the other sex was concerned.

For the life of him, Coker couldn't understand how the invitation had got into Bessie Bunter's hands. It did not occur to his obtuse mind that Archie Howell had tampered with the original document.

Bessie lost no time in "piling in." She heaped a large portion of pie on to one of the plates, and attacked it in full battle formation, so to speak.

"I must say this pie's awfully good," she mumbled. "Don't you think so?"

The question was addressed to Archie Howell.

"Can't say, dear gal," said Archie. "You see, I haven't sampled it—an' it doesn't look as if I shall get the chance."

Coker was about to seat himself at the table, but Bessie Bunter intervened.

"You can have your turn later," she said. "Meanwhile, you can make yourself generally useful. Pass the mustard!"

"I'm not a beastly fag!" protested Coker.

"Waitin' on Miss Bunter would be a beastly fag, even to a beastly fag!" murmured Archie.

Bessie looked up angrily from her plate.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

Archie gave his name.

"Any relation to that minx Phyllis?"

"Brother," said Archie.

"Well, I should advise you to keep a civil tongue in your head!" snapped Bessie.

And she resumed operations on the rapidly-diminishing pie.

Coker looked on in dumb anguish. He could see exactly what was going to happen. The plump Cliff House girl would scoff the whole of the food, and then demand more. And Coker didn't see why Aunt Judy's fiver should be wholly expended on refreshments for Bessie Bunter. He decided that the best thing to do, in the circumstances, was to make himself scarce at the first possible opportunity.

The opportunity arrived shortly afterwards.

Bessie Bunter finished the rabbit-pie, and then turned her attention to the chocolate eclairs. Having finished the eclairs, she ordered Coker to open the tin of pineapple. A few moments later, when the pineapple had disappeared, she literally mopped up the strawberry ices.

"I feel awfully peckish!" she declared.

It was an amazing remark to make, on top of such a gigantic feed.

Archie Howell, who had never witnessed an orgy of this sort before, was almost overcome.

As for Coker, his politeness and patience had long since given out.

"Well, you've had your feed," he said curtly, "and now you can travel!"

"Oh, really!" said Bessie. "My appetite's as keen as ever! You might run round to the tuckshop and fetch me some jam-tarts. A dozen will do—tuppenny ones!"

Coker moved to the door.

"There's a good fellow!" said Bessie encouragingly.

The Fifth-Former vanished through the doorway. But it was not in the direction of the tuckshop that he wended his way. It was to Blundell's study.

"Hallo!" ejaculated the captain of the Fifth, in surprise. "What's up? You look rather flustered, old chap."

Coker locked the door, and sank into a chair.

"Oh dear!" he groaned.

"Got a pain?" asked Blundell sympathetically.

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"Yes. I've just been watching a human porpoise, and it's made me feel quite ill!"

And then Coker related what had happened.

Blundell rocked with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! Somebody's played a fine old jape on you, Horace! You'd better stay here until Bessie's slung her hook."

"Thanks," said Coker, "I will!"

Meanwhile, Bessie Bunter waited, with growing impatience, for Coker to return.

But he never came.

"Where has he got to?" she exclaimed.

"Must have mislaid himself," murmured Archie Howell.

Bessie gave a snort.

"Coker's about the worst host I've ever struck!" she said. "I say, Howell, p'r'aps you'd be good enough to go and fetch those jam-tarts?"

Archie looked alarmed. He had not expected this.

"Coker will be back in a jiffy, Miss Bunter," he said.

"I'm not prepared to wait Coker's pleasure!" said Bessie haughtily.

Archie gave a groan. He could guess that Coker had made himself scarce, and he felt strongly tempted to follow suit. But he realised that it would hardly be playing the game to leave a girl in the lurch—even such an undesirable girl as Bessie Bunter.

"I—I'll fetch the jam-tarts!" he stammered.

"Do!" said Bessie. "And as soon as you get back you can make some more tea. This stuff is stone cold."

Archie brought the jam-tarts, and made a fresh pot of tea. And when he happened to glance in Bessie's direction, lo, the jam-tarts had vanished!

"You—you don't mean to say you've wolfed all those tarts?" gasped Archie.

"Why, they were only tiny ones!" said Bessie. "I could go another dozen. But I don't think I will."

"Good!" murmured Archie, with a sigh of relief.

"I'll have some doughnuts, by way of variety," continued Bessie.

"Oh, help!"

"Half a dozen will be enough, I think. Buck up!"

Archie Howell paid yet another visit to the tuckshop. On his way back he encountered the Famous Five.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"How did the jape pan out, Archie?"

"Rotten!"

"Didn't Bessie arrive?" asked Wharton.

"Oh, yes, she arrived all right! An' Coker disappeared!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Consequently, I've got to do the entertainin'."

The Famous Five were not at all sympathetic. The fact that Archie Howell had been hoist with his own petard, so to speak, caused them considerable amusement. They fairly shrieked with laughter.

"It's nothin' to cackle at!" said Archie irritably. "How would you like to spend the afternoon feedin' an' entertainin' a tame boa-constrictor? Still, the performance can't last much longer—that's one blessin'." Bessie's already scoffed sufficient to feed a regiment!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Archie conveyed the doughnuts to Coker's study. He felt quite convinced that it would be humanly impossible for Bessie Bunter to consume anything else. But he was wrong.

As soon as the doughnuts had been despatched Bessie Bunter said she fancied some whipped cream walnuts.

"I think you've had enough," said Archie.

"Pardon me, but I'm the better judge of that! I want something to munch on the way back to Cliff House. And what could be nicer than a bag of whipped cream walnuts?"

Once again Archie paid a visit to the tuckshop. His face was becoming quite familiar to Mrs. Mible by this time.

"You seem to be having quite a big party to tea, Master Howell," said the dame.

"The big party," growled Archie, "consists of one person!"

But Mrs. Mible flatly refused to believe that one individual could dispose of a rabbit-pie, a dozen jam-tarts, half a dozen doughnuts, half a dozen chocolate eclairs, a tin of pineapple, and a number of whipped cream walnuts.

"Why, Master Bunter couldn't consume such a quantity!" she exclaimed.

"No; but his sister can!" replied Archie ruefully.

Ten minutes later Bessie Bunter was escorted down to the school gates by her unwilling host. And it was with unspeakable relief that Archie watched her depart.

He had hoped to make things unpleasant for Coker, and he had succeeded. But he had also succeeded in making things decidedly unpleasant for himself. And his supply of pocket-money had become, in the words of the poet, "small by degrees and beautifully less," thanks to Bessie Bunter!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Certain Liveliness!

THE next day—Sunday—was a day of inactivity, so far as Archie Howell was concerned.

But, although there were no sports or pastimes—Dr. Locke viewed with horror the suggestion of Sunday games—Archie found much to occupy his thoughts.

He was keen—desperately keen—on getting into the Remove Form. He was out of his element in the Fifth, whereas Harry Wharton & Co. were fellows after his own heart. But how could he effect a transfer to the Remove?

That was a question which had occupied Archie's mind for days past, and he gave serious thought to it now. In the afternoon he went for a solitary walk, and by the time he returned his plan of campaign was complete.

"I'll get on old Prout's nerves to such an extent," he murmured, "that he'll move heaven an' earth to get me chucked out into a lower Form!"

Accordingly, Archie Howell went in to lessons next morning ripe for mischief.

Mr. Prout was in one of his most aggressive moods. He was suffering from what is known as "Monday morning" feeling.

Although a pin might have been heard to drop as Mr. Prout entered the Form-room, he barked out:

"Silence!"

"Old Prout's on the warpath this mornin'!" murmured Archie Howell.

Mr. Prout looked up sharply.

"Howell!" he thundered. "You were talking!"

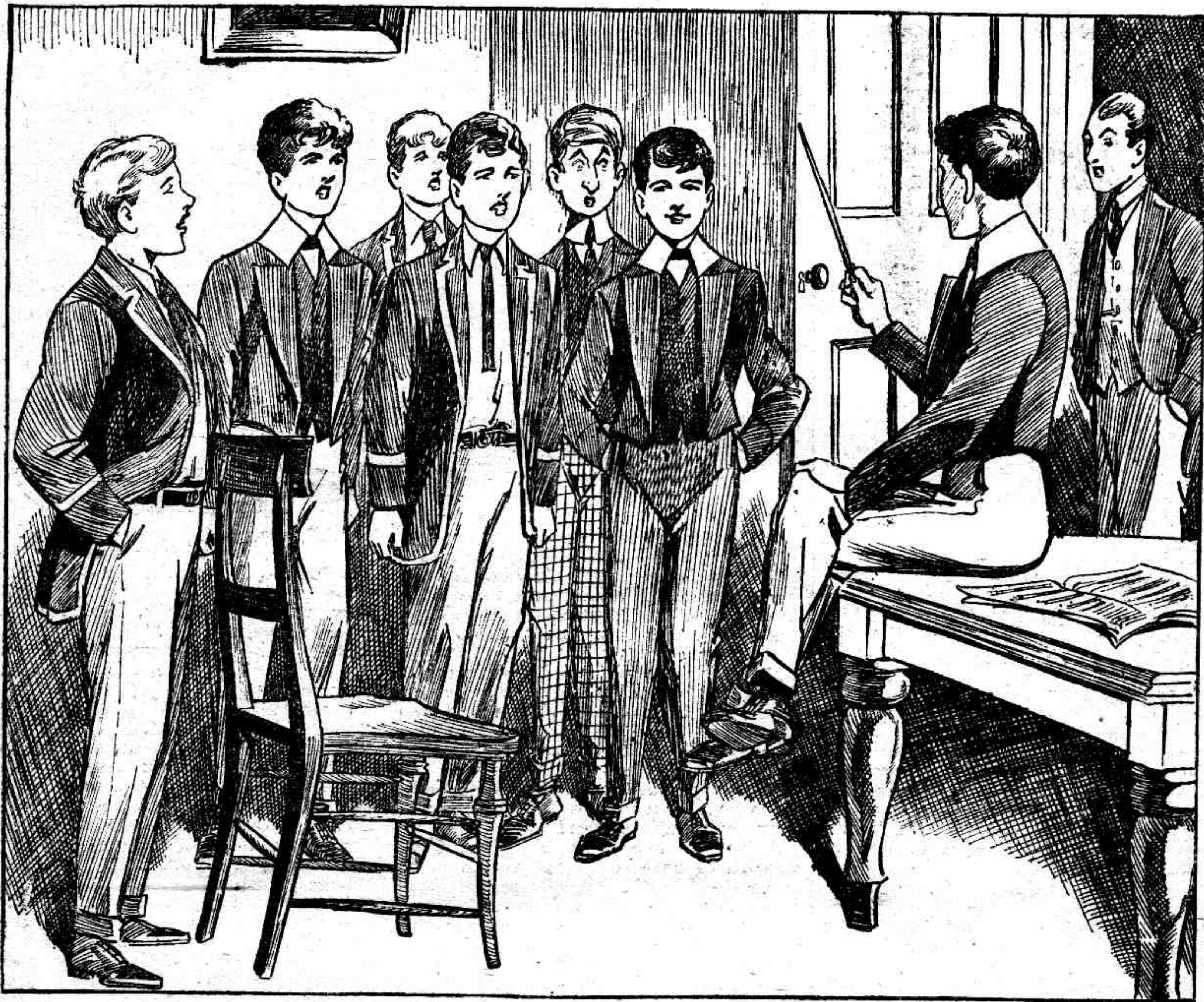
"Yes, sir," said Archie calmly.

"You made a remark which was not intended for my ears!" exclaimed Mr. Prout.

"I insist upon knowing what that remark was!"

"I said, 'Old Prout's on the warpath this mornin', sir,'" said Archie.

There was a gasp from the class. Nobody had anticipated that Archie would



Archie Howell halted in astonishment. Half-a-dozen juniors were singing lustily; and Harry Wharton, the President of the Remove Amateur Dramatic Society, was seated on the table, conducting the operations. (See Chapter 5.)

repeat his actual words to the Form-master.

Mr. Prout's frown was terrible to behold.

"How dare you speak so disrespectfully of your Form-master, Howell?" he rumbled. "How dare you allude to me as 'Old Prout,' when I am still in the prime of life?"

Archie was silent.

"You will take a hundred lines!" said Mr. Prout. "Only your prompt confession has saved you from a severe castigation!"

The lesson then commenced. History-books were distributed to the class, and Mr. Prout instructed his pupils to study the Elizabethan period, concerning which he intended to ask them questions later on.

The majority of the Fifth-Formers applied themselves diligently to their allotted task. But not so Archie Howell. The new boy was thinking of other things than swotting up the exploits of Raleigh and Drake.

Archie's gaze was riveted upon the back of Potter's head.

Potter was seated in the front row, and the rear portion of his cranium, which was very curiously shaped, afforded a splendid target for anyone who was keen on pea-shooting.

Taking advantage of the fact that Mr. Prout was bending over his desk, Archie Howell promptly produced his pea-

shooter. Placing it in his mouth, he took careful aim at the objective.

Whiz!

A hard, round pea went zipping across the room with the velocity of a bullet.

Archie was a good marksman, and his aim had been deadly.

"Yarooooh!"

Potter of the Fifth uttered a yell of anguish, and he sprang to his feet like a Jack-in-the-box.

Mr. Prout looked up in amazement and wrath.

"Boy! Potter!" he roared. "Are you demented?"

"Yow!" gasped Potter, caressing the back of his head.

"I do not regard that as an intelligent answer to my question, Potter!" said Mr. Prout. "I repeat, are you demented, that you should behave in this way?"

"Ow! I'm not demented, sir—but I'm dented!" groaned Potter. "Something struck me, sir—"

"Something else will strike you, Potter, if you are not very careful!" said Mr. Prout grimly. "I—"

At that moment the Form-master caught sight of a small round object on the floor. He went forward and picked it up. It was the pea which had caused the damage.

Mr. Prout compressed his lips.

"Some misguided young rascal," he exclaimed, "has had the effrontery to

make use of a peasooter in the Form-room!"

There was a murmur of astonishment from the class.

Pea-shooting was an accomplishment which was foreign to the Fifth-Formers as a rule. They were much too dignified to indulge in what was regarded as the sport of fags. Yet the discovery of the pea afforded clear proof of the fact that somebody had so far forgotten his dignity as to bring a peasooter into action.

"I insist upon knowing the name of the boy who is responsible for this outrage!" snapped Mr. Prout.

"I'm the culprit, sir!" said Archie Howell.

"You again, Howell? Upon my soul, you are incorrigible! Stand out before the class, and I will deal with you as you deserve!"

Archie stepped out from his place. He was not in the least apprehensive. Before going in to lessons he had rubbed a resinous substance into the palms of his hands, and he was, therefore, well equipped for a caning.

"Hold out your hand!" thundered Mr. Prout, picking up a cane.

Archie obeyed.

Swish, swish, swish!

"Yarooooh!" roared Archie.

He scarcely felt the pain, but he deemed it prudent to behave as if he were suffering agonies. If he took his



punishment without a murmur, Mr. Prout might become suspicious.

"Now the other hand, Howell!"

The process was repeated, and Archie's realistic yell of anguish rang through the Form-room.

"Now go to your place!" panted Mr. Prout. "And do not dare to transgress again!"

As he went back to his seat, Archie told himself that he had opened his campaign in great style. He had no doubt that before morning lessons were over he would be reported to the Head and relegated to a lower Form.

The next half-hour passed without incident. Then Mr. Prout ordered his pupils to close their books.

"I will proceed to question you, my boys, concerning the Elizabethan period in English history. Howell! Name one of the greatest sailors of that period!"

"Jellicoe, sir!" said Archie promptly.

Mr. Prout gasped.

"Your stupidity, Howell, is amazing! Admiral Jellicoe belongs to a much more recent period. Who was the great sailor who was responsible for frustrating the Spanish Armada?"

"It must have been Jellicoe, sir," said Archie, "because when Queen Elizabeth's courtiers warned her that the Armada was on the way, she said, 'Go to Jellicoe!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was an irresistible ripple of laughter from the class.

Mr. Prout frowned.

"Do not snigger at that wretched boy!" he exclaimed. "His appalling ignorance is a subject for tears rather than merriment. Now, Howell, I will give you one more chance to retrieve your absurd blunder!"

"Fisher, sir!" said Archie.

"What?"

"It was Fisher who put the kybosh on the Spanish Armada. I remember now!"

Mr. Prout looked as if he were about to tear his hair—which would have been a pity, as he hadn't a great deal to spare.

"I cannot think what Dr. Locke was about when he assigned you to the Fifth Form, Howell. I can only conclude that you deceived him as to your ability. In the whole course of my experience as a Form-master—an experience extending over many years—I have never come into contact with such an arrant dunce! Blundell!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Kindly enlighten Howell as to the identity of the great sailor in question."

"Sir Francis Drake, sir," said Blundell.

"Very good. Now, Howell, perhaps you can tell us what Sir Francis Drake was doing when the Armada was first sighted?"

Archie shook his head.

"I haven't the foggiest notion, sir," he said frankly. "P'raps he was gettin' round Queen Elizabeth to give him an O.B.E."

"Boy!"

"Or p'raps he was playin' for penny points at the Rose an' Crown, sir?"

There was a fresh outburst of laughter, which Mr. Prout instantly suppressed.

"Either you are even more ignorant than I suspected, Howell, or this is studied impertinence on your part! Sir Francis Drake was engaged in playing bowls on Plymouth Hee."

"How excitin'!" murmured Archie.

"You appear to glory in your stupidity, Howell!" said Mr. Prout. "Come here, sir, and I will endeavour to bring you to a sense of shame!"

Archie again stood out before the

class. He thought he was booked for another caning, but such was not the case.

Mr. Prout produced a large sheet of cardboard from his desk, and inscribed upon it, in capital letters:

"I AM A HOPELESS DUNCE!"

This incriminating placard was then pinned to the lapels of Archie Howell's coat.

"Now," said Mr. Prout, with a glow of satisfaction at his brilliant brain-wave, "you will stand on that table for the remainder of the lesson, in full view of the class! And I trust you will feel heartily ashamed of yourself."

Archie clambered up on to the table, and stood exposed to the view of his Form-fellows, who grinned when they saw the placard.

Instead of appearing humiliated, Archie returned grin for grin.

The lesson then continued.

Mr. Prout moved round the room like a restless spirit, firing out questions as he went. He halted at length in front of the table on which Archie Howell was standing. His back was turned to Archie, who was assailed by a sudden temptation, which he was quite unable to overcome.

Removing the placard from his coat, Archie, with a deft movement, pinned it to the back of the Form-master's gown.

Some of the fellows witnessed the incident, and they were thunderstruck.

Many a prank had been played in that Form-room—but never such a daring and dangerous prank as this!

A few moments later, Mr. Prout had occasion to go to the blackboard. And as he stood there, blissfully unconscious of the fact that he was advertising himself as a hopeless dunce, there was an explosive laugh from Horace Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Prout spun round from the blackboard.

"Coker!" he thundered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Form-master fairly danced with rage.

"How dare you laugh at me in that outrageous manner, Coker?"

"Oh dear! I'm sorry, sir—ha, ha!—but I—I really can't help it—ha, ha, ha! It's altogether too rich! 'I am a Hopeless Dunce!'"

"Indeed you are!" roared Mr. Prout.

"There is no need to call my attention to the fact. And in addition to being a hopeless dunce, you are an impertinent young rascal! Why—bless my soul!—everybody is laughing! It appears to be infectious! Blundell!"

"Yessir—ha, ha, ha!"

"Is there anything amiss in connection with my personal appearance?"

Blundell was too helpless with laughter to reply.

Mr. Prout glanced at his feet; then he surveyed his face in a hand-mirror which he kept in his desk. His appearance seemed to be no funnier than usual.

It then occurred to the master of the Fifth that an insect of some sort might be crawling up his gown, at the back. Accordingly, he endeavoured to obtain a back view of himself; and his antics were remarkably like those of a cat chasing its own tail. He spun round and round, looking first over one shoulder, and then the other; but he could see nothing.

Finally Mr. Prout wrenched off his gown; and as he did so the placard became unpinned and fell to the floor.

The cause of the Fifth-Formers' merriment was at last revealed.

For a moment, Mr. Prout stood petri-

fied. Then he spun round upon Archie Howell.

"Boy! Did you affix this card to the back of my gown?"

"Yes, sir," said Archie coolly.

"I—"

"Not another word!" thundered Mr. Prout. "You are an unmitigated young rascal! Your impertinence has exceeded all limits! You will accompany me at once to Dr. Locke!"

Archie Howell vaulted down from the table, and followed in the wake of the Form-master, who was striding rapidly towards the door.

"That's done it!" reflected Archie. "I've fairly worked the oracle! This means that I shall be dumped into the Remove!"

But the japer of the Fifth was rather premature!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Costly Triumph!

RAP, rap, rap!

Mr. Prout beat a savage tattoo on the door of the Head's study.

"Come in!" said Dr. Locke.

"Why, whatever is amiss, Prout? You appear to be distracted!"

"Distracted is the very word for it, sir!" exclaimed the master of the Fifth.

"I—I am undone!"

"Really, Prout—"

"I have been goaded almost to frenzy by this young rascal!" cried Mr. Prout, pointing to Archie Howell. "Although this boy has been at the school but a few days, he has shown himself to be a graceless young scamp, sir—a mischievous young monkey—a persistent exponent of practical jokes!"

"Bless my soul!"

"As I pointed out to you before, Dr. Locke, this boy ought never to have been placed in my Form. His scholastic attainments are nil. His ignorance is stupendous! He cannot answer the most elementary questions!"

"Really, that is most surprising!" murmured the Head. "I tested Howell myself shortly after his arrival at the school, and he showed a commendable knowledge of numerous subjects."

Mr. Prout snorted.

"Then I can only say, sir, that his knowledge has since evaporated! He has proved himself to be the densest boy in the whole class! Why, even Coker, whose brains are seldom in evidence, is a polished genius by comparison with this—this disgustingly stupid young reprobate!"

"Be calm, my dear Prout—"

"Calm, sir?" roared Mr. Prout. "Would you be calm if you had been victimised by this young sweep—if you had been made a laughing-stock before all the boys?"

"What, precisely, has Howell done?"

"He has converted my Form-room into a Punch and Judy show, sir! I had occasion to cane him for using a pea-shooter during lessons, and later on I took him to task for displaying such lamentable ignorance. I pinned a placard to his coat, bearing a statement that he was a hopeless dunce; and when I was not looking, he transferred the placard to my gown! As a result, the class got completely out of control. I was laughed at to my face—my dignity was outraged! And I have brought this wretched boy to you, with the request that he may be sent home to his parents forthwith!"

Archie Howell looked alarmed. The possibility of expulsion had not occurred to him until now.

Supposing, instead of being sent down to a lower Form, he was sent down alto-

gether—turned out of Greyfriars in disgrace?

Archie shuffled uneasily as he stood there awaiting his fate. The Head's grim frown was anything but reassuring.

"Have you anything to say, Howell?"

Dr. Locke's tone was icy.

"I—I agree that I went a bit too far, sir," said Archie. "But it was only a bit of fun."

"Your peculiar sense of humour," said the Head, "will have to be kept under control. I do not take so serious a view of your conduct as Mr. Prout appears to take. You have behaved abominably, but scarcely in a manner which merits expulsion. I—"

"You are going to allow this boy to remain at the school, sir?" almost shouted the irate Form-master.

The Head nodded.

"I have no doubt that Howell's conduct is largely the result of inexperience," he said. "He has never been to a public school before, but he has probably read stories of school life which have led him to believe that jokes of this sort may be practised with impunity. In my opinion, this is youthful folly, which in time will give place to more sensible conduct."

Mr. Prout grew very red in the face.

"I am surprised, sir, that you can find excuses for this boy. He has behaved outrageously, and I must insist—"

The Head raised his hand.

"Pardon me, Prout, but I do not allow anybody to dictate to me in the matter of administering punishment. Howell has acted wrongly—very wrongly—but the question of expulsion does not arise. I have decided, Howell, to visit your offences with a severe caning, which will be administered here and now!"

Archie looked greatly relieved. In fact, he looked almost joyful. He told himself that the resinous substance which he had rubbed into the palms of his hands would afford ample protection against the Head's cane.

But alas for Archie's hopes!

The familiar words, "Hold out your hand!" were never uttered. Instead, the Head pointed to a chair.

"You will place yourself in a convenient position to receive castigation!" he said.

"Oh crumbs!"

Rather reluctantly Archie Howell put himself across the chair, and Mr. Prout held him down. It was a superfluous proceeding, but the master of the Fifth was determined to see that Archie got his deserts.

The Head selected a formidable-looking cane, and, in the language of his pupils, he proceeded to "pile in."

Whack! Whack! Whack!

The strokes fell with deadly accuracy, and the victim was hard put to it to refrain from rendering a vocal accompaniment. He bit his lower lip until it bled. And still the cane rose and fell, with an ominous pause between each stroke.

The Head desisted at length, panting from his exertions.

"I suggest a further six strokes, sir," said Mr. Prout.

He was not by nature cruel or vindictive, but the recollection of the scene in the Form-room caused him to ignore the quality of mercy.

Archie Howell waited, wishing the Head would buck up. But no further strokes were administered. The Head considered that the victim had had enough—and so did Archie!

"And now, sir," said Mr. Prout, when Archie had risen from the chair, "I must request you to place this boy in a lower Form. He is entirely unsuited for the Fifth."

"Then which Form do you suggest that he should be relegated to, Prout?"

Archie hung on Mr. Prout's reply.

"I suggest the Second, sir," said the Form-master.

"Prout! Surely you are jesting!"

"Do I look, sir, as if I am in the mood for making quips and sallies? I am perfectly serious. There are many boys in the Second Form whose intellectual attainments are greater than Howell's."

"But, my dear Prout, it would be preposterous to place a boy of fifteen in the Second Form. I should not dream of so doing!"

"May I speak, sir?" said Archie.

"Well, Howell?"

"The Remove is just about my mark, sir."

The Head frowned.

"When I require your advice, Howell, I will ask you for it!" he said tartly. "I intend to place you, for a time, at any rate, in the Upper Fourth Form, under the jurisdiction of Mr. Capper."

"Oh crumbs!"

Archie's face fell. After all his scheming and planning, after all he had undergone in the hope of achieving his object, he was to be transferred, not to the Remove, but to the Upper Fourth!

Mr. Prout questioned the Head's decision, but Dr. Locke remained firm.

"I will send for Capper," he said, "and communicate my wishes to him."

"Very well, sir!" snapped Mr. Prout.

"But it is a mistake, a great mistake!"

And the master of the Fifth flounced out of the study.

Mr. Capper arrived a few minutes later.

"This boy—Howell—is being relegated from the Fifth Form to your own, Capper," said the Head. "He has given a good deal of trouble, and it will be advisable for you to keep him under strict supervision."

"I see, sir!"

"If you have any reason to be dissatisfied with his conduct, I trust you will report him to me without delay."

Mr. Capper nodded.

"Come, Howell!" he said, moving to the door.

Archie followed in the wake of the master of the Upper Form. And presently he found himself wedged between Temple and Dabney, in the Form-room.

"This is simply awful!" he murmured.

Life in the Fifth had not been very exciting, to Archie's way of thinking. But the Fifth had yielded far more excitement than the Upper Fourth was likely to do.

Glancing round the room, Archie saw, to his disgust, that everybody was hard at work.

There were no peashooters in evidence, no paper pellets, no "rags" of any description. The Fourth-Formers were on their very best behaviour.

Mr. Capper did not leave his new pupil alone for long. He began to question him concerning the Gaelic Wars, and Archie's answers were so amazingly stupid that Temple & Co. simply gasped.

"Fancy having a freak like that planted on us!" murmured Dabney.

"It's altogether too thick!" whispered Fry. "Why, I've as much sense in my little finger as that fellow has in his whole noddle!"

"We don't want him in the Upper Fourth!" muttered Temple.

"No jolly fear!"

The Fourth-Formers were contemptuous of Archie Howell's knowledge—or, rather, his lack of it. And they quite overlooked the fact that Archie was a born cricketer and a fine all-round sportsman, and would prove a valuable asset to the Form. Their one desire was to get rid of him.

Mr. Capper, too, was anxious to get rid of Archie. The boy's ignorance—which, had the master known it, was only assumed—staggered him.

"You are, without exception, the biggest dunce I have ever come into contact with, Howell," said Mr. Capper. "It seems incredible that you should originally have been placed in the Fifth Form. You seem utterly devoid of knowledge, and your intelligence is inferior to that of a beast of the field. Unless you pull yourself together and make a very big effort, I shall request Dr. Locke to consign you to a yet lower Form."

Archie, of course, became even more stupid, and by the time morning lessons were over, Mr. Capper was almost distracted.

As for Temple & Co., they were furious.

"With a duffer like Howell foisted on us," growled Dabney, "we shall be a laughing-stock to all the other Forms!"

"Shame!"

A hostile crowd surrounded Archie in the passage, and the remarks levelled at him were anything but polite.

"Yah!"

"Get out!"

"We don't want you in the Upper Fourth!"

Archie smiled at his incensed Form-fellows.

"Be calm," he said. "I agree that it's a burnin' shame that a duffer like me should be allowed rub shoulders with learned an' cultured folk like you!"

"Why don't you clear out, then?" growled Temple.

"I can't, without the Head's sanction. But if you fellows would care to draw up a petition to Capper, urgin' that I should be shoved into a lower Form, Capper will take it to the Head, an' the deed will be done!"

"That's a good wheeze!" said Fry.

"Yes, rather!"

The Fourth Formers lost no time in drawing up the petition. It was in the form of a "round robin," bearing the signatures of all the fellows in the Form; and it pleaded that, in the interests of the welfare of the Upper Fourth, Archie Howell should be removed to a lower Form.

As soon as Temple had collected all the signatures, he took the petition to Mr. Capper.

Some masters might have rebuked Temple for insolence; but not so Mr. Capper.

"I can quite understand your feelings on this subject, Temple," he said. "If Howell is allowed to remain in my class, his stupidity and ignorance will bring the Form into ridicule and contempt. I will take this petition to Dr. Locke, and will urge him to grant it his favourable consideration."

"Thank you, sir!" said Temple.

It took Mr. Capper quite a long time to convince the Head that Archie Howell was out of his element in the Upper Fourth. But at last the Form-master succeeded, and the Head sent for Archie.

"I understand, Howell," he said sternly, "that your attainments do not qualify you for a place in Mr. Capper's Form. The other boys, jealous of their Form's reputation, have petitioned the authorities to transfer you to a lower Form. I do not, as a rule, set much store by petitions of this sort, but I am satisfied that on this occasion your Form-fellows have a genuine grievance. I think, therefore, that I will relegate you to the Third Form—"

"The—the Third, sir?" stammered Archie in dismay.

"Yes!"
 "But—but think of my age, sir! Surely you won't put me among a lot of kids of eleven and twelve?"
 "It would be no more than you deserve, Howell," said the Head. "However, I will spare you that humiliation. You will report to Mr. Quelch, and tell him that I have decided to place you in the Remove Form."

Archie could scarcely refrain from giving a whoop of delight. At last, after much effort and tribulation, he had achieved his object. From now onwards he was to be a member of the Remove—the most unruly Form at Greyfriars, and the one which would most suit Archie's fun-loving temperament.

It was a triumph for the new boy—but a very costly triumph, for Archie still felt stiff and sore, as a result of the terrific flogging he had received that morning.

But his goal had been gained. He had been transferred to the Remove, and it was with a triumphant grin that he went along to interview Mr. Quelch.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Talent Going Begging!

"**W**HAT the thump—"
 Archie Howell halted in astonishment outside the door of No. 1 Study in the Remove passage.

Tuneful voices were upraised in song—a song which seemed familiar to Archie as he stood and listened.

"Somebody's havin' a smack at comic opera!" he murmured.

And, after a moment's pause, he stepped into the study.

Half-a-dozen juniors were within, singing lustily; and Harry Wharton, the president of the Remove Amateur Dramatic Society, was seated astride the table, conducting the operations.

"Now, you fellows," he said, "we'll have that chorus over again. Some of you seem a bit wobbly!"

The song broke off, and the singers made a fresh start.

Archie Howell stopped short on the threshold, and looked on with a grin.

"Salamanca sages,
 Full of learned lore;
 Heirs of all the ages
 That have gone before.
 Very wise and zealous,
 Voted rather slow;
 Just a trifle jealous,
 Of superior 'go.'
 Possibly you'll tell us
 What we do not know?"

"That's tons better!" said Wharton approvingly. "Hullo, Archie! Come right in! This is a private rehearsal, but we don't mind you."

"That's 'Christopher Columbus,' isn't it?" said Archie.

Wharton nodded.

"These fellows are supposed to be Spanish sages," he said. "They look more like a set of moonstruck idiots, don't they?"

"Steady on, Wharton!" protested Peter Todd. "The fact that you're boss of the show gives you the right to criticise the performers, but there's such a thing as going too far!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bulstrode. "Of course, we don't look very much like sages at present, but when we're on the stage, wearing flowing beards, and all the rest of it, we shall be the real goods!"

"Absolutely!" said Ogilvy.

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"Are you practisin' already for next Christmas?" inquired Archie Howell.

"No; for next week," said Wharton.

"You're goin' to give a performance in the middle of summer?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Well, it seems rather queer—"

"It's a jolly good move on our part," said the captain of the Remove. "The fact is, the cinema at Courtfield has closed down, for some reason or other, and the people have nowhere to go. So we're going to entertain them with 'Christopher Columbus.'"

"By Jove! You ought to make a good thing out of it."

"We're not on the make," said Wharton. "There won't be any charge for admission."

"Oh, it's purely a philanthropic stunt—what?"

"That's so," said Bulstrode.

At that moment Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent came into the study.

"How's the rehearsal going, Harry?" asked Bob.

"Not so bad," said Wharton. "Do you fellows know your parts yet?"

Nugent nodded.

"We're absolutely word-perfect," he said.

"That's good!"

Archie Howell was very interested in Wharton's scheme to produce "Christopher Columbus" on the local stage. Archie was a fellow of a hundred talents, and singing was one of them. He was a better singer than he was a cricketer; and that was saying a good deal.

"I say, Wharton," he remarked at length, "I think I should like to take a hand in this stunt."

"Sorry," said Wharton, "but outsiders are barred."

"Would you class me as an outsider?"

"Well, you're a Fifth-former; and this play's going to be produced solely by fellows in the Remove."

Archie gave a chuckle.

LIGHTING-UP TIME FOR THIS WEEK.



JUNE.	
28th Monday	- - - 9.49 p.m.
29th Tuesday	- - - 9.49 "
30th Wednesday	- - - 9.48 "
JULY.	
1st Thursday	- - - 9.48 p.m.
2nd Friday	- - - 9.48 "
3rd Saturday	- - - 9.48 "
4th Sunday	- - - 9.48 "

"In this case, you can count me in," he said.

"What! You don't mean to say—"

"Yes, I've worked the oracle. It was a jolly sight more difficult than I expected, but I've wangled it at last. I am now"—Archie beamed upon the occupants of No. 1 Study—"I am now one of yourselves."

"You're in the Remove?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Yes."

"Hurrah!"

A boisterous cheer went up from the Removites, who had scarcely dared to hope that Archie Howell would succeed in effecting a transfer from the Fifth Form to the Remove.

"How on earth did you manage it, Archie?" asked Nugent.

"I led old Prout the dickens of a dance! He got so fed-up, that he hauled me up before the Head, an' I had a narrow shave of bein' sacked from the school."

"My hat!"

"However, the Head decided that a floggin' would meet the case, an' he wielded the beastly cane like a blacksmith swingin' his sledge. An' then he told me I wasn't fitted for the Fifth, an' I was dumped into the Upper Fourth."

"And what happened then?" asked Peter Todd breathlessly.

"Temple & Co. were furious at havin' me for a Form-fellow. I advised them to get up a petition to Capper about it, an' they did. Result—I was shoved into the Remove. But it was a jolly near thing." Archie shuddered at the recollection. "I thought the Head was goin' to put me in the Third. An' he would have done if I hadn't pointed out how humiliatin' it would be."

"Have you seen Quelch?" asked Wharton.

"Yes."

"Has he given you a study?"

"He says I'm to share No. 1 with you an' Nugent."

"Oh, good!"

"Archie, old top," said Bob Cherry. "if ever there was a born wangler, it's you! I'm jolly bucked to know you're in the Remove at last!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I want to take an active part in everythin' that's goin'," said Archie. "Of course, I sha'n't put up for the captaincy of the Form, or anything of that sort. But I'm lookin' forward to playin' cricket an' footer for the Remove, an' takin' a hand in amateur theatricals."

"I can give you a part in this play," said Wharton.

"Thanks! I'll be Columbus."

Wharton laughed.

"Nothing doing," he said. "I'm Columbus myself."

"Then I wish you'd clear off an' discover America, an' leave the part to me!" said Archie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As I can't take the leadin' part," said Archie, "I s'pose I must be content with one of the others. I'll be King of Spain and—"

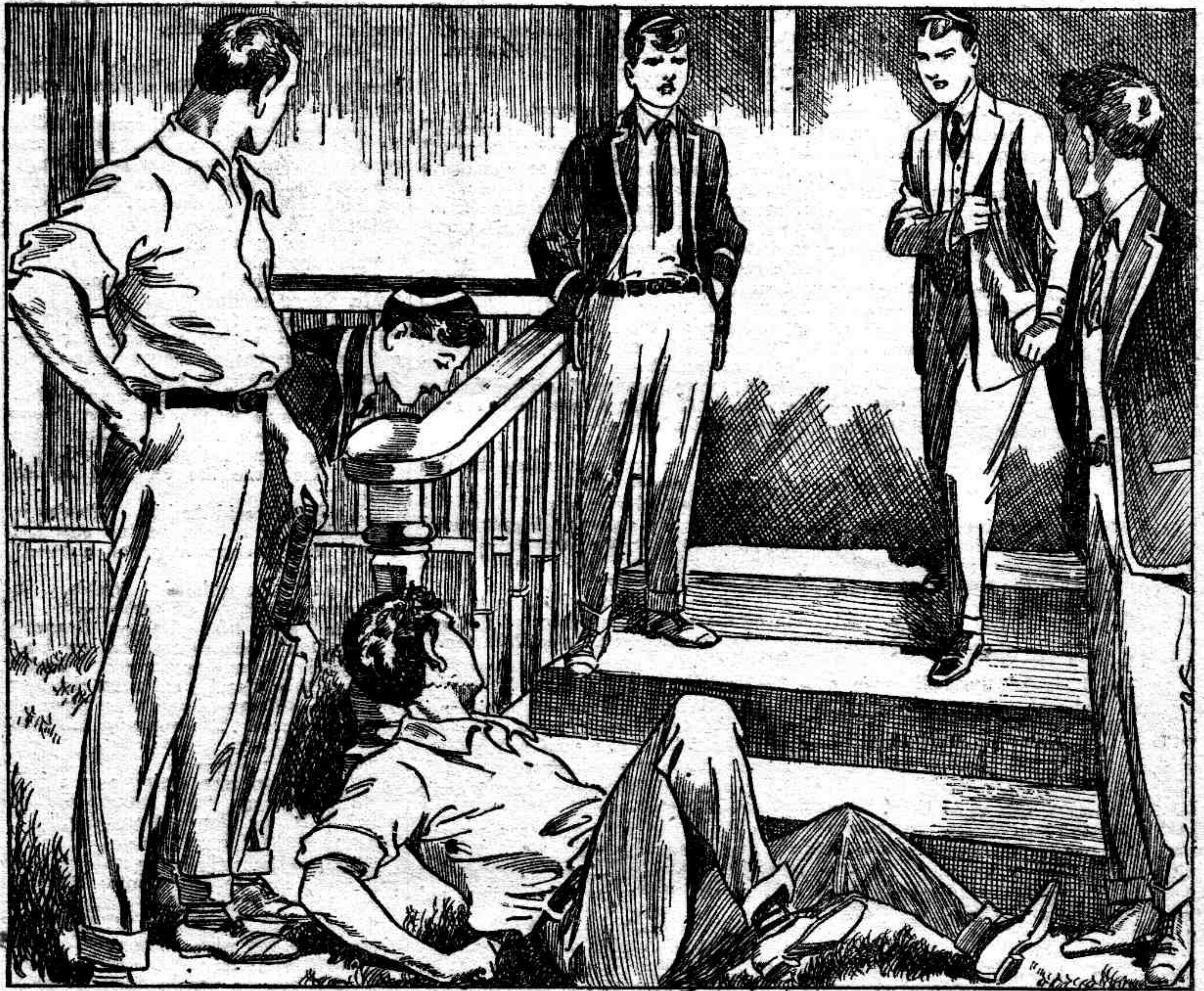
"You jolly well won't!" said Bob Cherry. "You're not going to queer my pitch!"

"Oh! You're the blushin' monarch, are you! Very well. I'll be Queen!"

"Not on your life!" said Nugent. "That's my part!"

Archie frowned. He was equal to taking any of the principal parts, and he badly wanted to do so; but it seemed that they were all booked up.

"Look here, Wharton," said Archie. "I'm not the sort of fellow to go about



To the consternation of the onlookers, Harry Wharton was knocked clean down the pavilion steps, to alight in a dazed heap at the feet of Wingate of the Sixth. "What's all this about?" demanded the captain of Greyfriars sternly. (See Chapter 7.)

swankin' an' shoutin' from the house-tops about what I can do. But there's just one thing—or, rather, two—that I can honestly claim to be good at—actin' an' singin'."

"I don't disbelieve you," said Wharton.

"Let me take the part of Columbus, then!"

"But what am I going to do?"

"Oh, you can become a sailor or a sage, or somethin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton did not take kindly to the suggestion that he should hand over the leading part to Archie Howell. He liked Archie, and he would have made any sacrifice within reason on behalf of the Remove's new recruit. But he didn't see why he should forfeit the part of Columbus, especially as he had gone to great pains to swot up all the songs.

"I can give you a minor part," said the captain of the Remove. "In any case, you wouldn't have time to swot up Columbus. We're having our first full-dress rehearsal this evening."

"Where?"

"In the village hall. We've booked it in advance."

Archie looked thoughtful.

"There's a character in the play called Banana Bill, isn't there?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, that part will suit me down to the ground."

"I dare say it would, but Banana Bill's booked."

"Who by?"

"Bolsover major."

"Can't you kick him out of the concern?"

There was an angry bellow from the doorway. Bolsover major had arrived just in time to overhear Archie Howell's suggestion.

"What's that?" roared Bolsover.

"Who's talking of kicking me out?"

"I am," said Archie calmly.

"You! Get back to your kennel in the Fifth!"

"My kennel's been changed," said Archie cheerfully. "I'm in the Remove now."

"And you imagine you're cock of the walk, I suppose?" sneered Bolsover. "If you give my part to that beastly outsider Wharton, I—I'll burst you!"

"Keep your wool on!" said the captain of the Remove. "You're still Banana Bill."

"Then I s'pose," said Archie, with a sigh of resignation, "I must be Tomato Tom!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can offer you a small part," said Wharton. "You can take it or leave it."

Archie accepted the offer, on the principle that half a loaf was better than no bread. He was allocated one of the minor parts in the piece, a part which

he would be called upon to render only one song, and he was ordered to learn that song in time for the rehearsal in the evening.

"And now," said Archie, "I'll bring my goods an' chattels along, an' we shall all be a happy family."

But Archie Howell would have spoken far less cheerfully had he been permitted to peer into the future.

For there were breakers ahead. And Phyllis Howell's brother would not have so smooth a passage in the Remove Form as he had anticipated!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Archie to the Rescue!

ALL roads led to Friardale that evening.

The first full-dress rehearsal of "Columbus" was not of a private nature, and the doors were thrown open to the public. Consequently, quite a number of Greyfriars fellows went along to the village hall, many of them with the intention of "barracking" the performers.

The audience consisted almost solely of schoolboys. Only a few local people drifted in, including a stout, distinguished-looking gentleman, who might have been Billy Bunter's father, judging by his bulk.

Bob Cherry, taking a sly peep at the audience through the wings of the stage, declared that the distinguished-looking gentleman was a Cabinet Minister, at least.

The rehearsal was delayed at the outset, owing to a quarrel which took place between Bolsover major and the Queen of Spain.

Frank Nugent was taking the part of the Queen, and he certainly looked very attractive in his queenly apparel. But Bolsover major took exception to the size of Nugent's boots.

"You'll be like a blessed rhinoceros floundering about the stage!" growled Bolsover. "You might just as well go on in footer-boots, and have done with it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Look here!" said Nugent. "If you don't dry up I'll make you look blacker about the eyes than you look already!"

Bolsover, whose appearance resembled that of a Christy minstrel, bristled up at this threat.

"You cheeky ass!" he roared. "I'll jolly well pulverise you!"

Harry Wharton, who was conducting the preparations at the back of the stage, promptly intervened.

"Chuck it, you two!" he exclaimed. "The audience is getting impatient. Hark at 'em!"

From the body of the hall came a variety of shouts.

"Buck up, you fellows!"

"We're not going to wait here all night!"

"Get on with the washing!"

Harry Wharton turned to the fellows who were representing the Salamanca sages.

"You chaps ready?" he asked.

"Ready, ay, ready!" murmured Bulstrode.

"Go ahead, then! And what ever you do, don't trip over the scenery!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In spite of Wharton's many apprehensions, the rehearsal proved a great success.

Fellows who came to scoff remained to pray, that they might not miss seeing the actual performance when it came off.

The acting and singing were first-rate, and Wharton and Bob Cherry were very much in the picture.

But the best feature of all was Archie Howell's solitary song. He rendered it in a rich, clear voice, and was loudly applauded, particularly by the distinguished-looking gentleman, whom Bob Cherry had declared to be a Cabinet Minister.

Bob was wrong, of course. The stout individual was very far removed from a Cabinet Minister. He was Mr. Montgomery Bragg, the manager of a theatrical touring company.

Mr. Bragg's eyes were riveted upon Archie Howell. He could not help wondering why such a talented singer had not been given more scope.

"Why, he ought to be playin' the leadin' part!" muttered the theatrical manager. "He's got a magnificent voice, by gad! I wonder——"

At this stage Mr. Bragg fell into a deep meditation, and he refrained from voicing his thoughts aloud.

When the rehearsal was over the performers felt more than satisfied.

"We didn't get a single rotten egg slung at us!" said Bob Cherry. "That's sure proof that we're popular."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"There was just one thing that spoilt the show," remarked Bolsover major.

"What was that?" asked Wharton.

"Nugent's clodhoppers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Nugent gave a snort.

"If you keep harping on that chord," he said, "I'll wipe the floor with you!"

And the speaker looked so aggressive that Bolsover major made no further reference to Nugent's unqueenlike feet.

Behind the scenes the juniors discarded their costumes, and changed back into their Etons.

Archie Howell was the first to finish. He stepped up to Harry Wharton, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Well, did I come up to your expectations?" he asked.

"You were ripping!" said Wharton heartily. "Of course, you didn't have a great deal of scope——"

"Exactly! An', therefore, I want you to give me a bigger part when the real performance comes off."

Wharton looked worried.

"You certainly deserve a bigger part," he said: "but—er—the fact is——"

"Speak up, my little man!" said Archie encouragingly.

"It means that I should have to sack one of the present members of the cast to make room for you," said Wharton.

"Well?"

"It can't be done!"

"Rot! What's the use of bein' sentimental about it?" said Archie. "I don't s'pose the fellow you sack will go an' commit suicide, or anythin' of that sort."

"Sorry," said Wharton; "but I can't find you a bigger part."

"In that case, I'll chuck my present part overboard."

"Don't get ratty——"

"I'm not. I'm as cool, calm, an' collected as the Chancellor of the Exchequer proclaimin' his latest Budget. But a triflin' part like the one I had this evenin' is no earthly use to me. I can't be bothered with it!"

"Then you won't take part in the real performance next week?"

"No, thanks. I think I'll spend a nice quiet evenin'."

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders. He was sorry to have had friction with Archie Howell so soon; but he told himself that he had done the right thing. Archie was a newcomer to the Remove, and it would not have been fair to give him one of the principal parts at somebody else's expense.

Archie nodded to the captain of the Remove, and strolled away.

As he emerged into the dimly-lighted street a hand fell upon his shoulder.

Turning suddenly, Archie found himself confronted by the distinguished-looking gentleman who had applauded his singing so heartily.

Mr. Bragg now started on a second round of applause.

"Capital, my boy—capital!" he exclaimed. "You were in splendid voice to-night. You deserved a much bigger part. It's a long time since I heard such splendid singin'!"

"Flattery, thy name is——"

"Bragg," was the smiling reply. "Montgomery Bragg, manager of the Frivolity Tourin' Company."

Archie blushed in the darkness. Praise from a theatrical-manager—even of a tin-pot touring-company—was praise indeed.

"We're givin' a show in Courtfield next week," said Mr. Bragg.

"Shakespeare?"

"Oh dear no! Gilbert an' Sullivan. We're playin' 'H.M.S. Pinafore.' At least, we hope to play it, but——"

"Somethin' gone wrong with the works?" inquired Archie.

"Yes."

Mr. Montgomery Bragg looked greatly distressed. He seemed almost on the verge of tears.

"It's like this," he said confidentially, as he and Archie walked along the street together. "Our star man, Danny Denver, who was to have played the part of Ralph Rackstraw, has been taken ill."

"Anythin' serious?"

"Pneumonia!"

"Poor beggar!" said Archie.

Mr. Bragg nodded.

"I feel sorry for Danny," he said. "But I feel almost as sorry for myself an' for the company. You see, Danny is always a great draw. He warbles as sweetly as a hummin'-bird. When Danny's in the cast, we always play to a crowded house. But when there's no Danny, there's no audience. Twig? He's the life an' soul of the show!"

"By Jove!" said Archie. "You're in the dickens of a hole, an' no mistake! I only wish I could help you out——"

"You can!"

"What!" exclaimed Archie, in amazement. "How on earth——"

"You can take Danny Denver's place. Don't look so startled, my boy. It's quite a sound proposition. You're younger than Danny, an' a bit shorter; but those differences won't be apparent to the audience. The make-up will hide 'em."

"But my voice——"

"I'm slow to give praise, as a rule," said Mr. Bragg; "but your voice is equal to Danny Denver's any day."

Archie looked incredulous.

"Do you honestly mean to say that you want me to step into Danny's shoes?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Mr. Bragg. "There are obstacles in the way, I know. You belong to Greyfriars, an' it will be necessary for you to break bounds occasionally, in order to attend the rehearsals. Of course, if it's askin' you to take too big a risk——"

"I don't mind risks," said Archie quickly. "In fact, I fairly revel in 'em."

"Then you're willin' to take this on?"

"If you're serious!"

"Of course I'm serious!" said Mr. Bragg, with a touch of impatience. "I haven't been concoctin' a fairy-tale for your benefit. You—an' you alone—can come to our rescue, an' save the performance from bein' a ghastly wash-out. An' if you'll do it——"

"Consider it done!" said Archie.

"You're a sportsman!" said Mr. Bragg heartily. "By the way, I don't know your name."

"Archie Howell."

"I see. Well, you won't play under your own name, for obvious reasons. Nobody—not even your bosom pals—must know that you're taking Danny Denver's place. If it were to leak out that Danny's part was bein' played by a substitute, the performance would be a frost. Will you promise me that you don't breathe a word of this to a soul?"

"I promise!" said Archie, little dreaming, as he uttered the words, what that promise was going to cost him.

"That's a bargain, then," said Mr. Bragg, taking his companion's hand in a tight grip. "It's enormously decent of you to help us out of our fix——"

"My only fear is that I shall make a hash of it," said Archie.

"Not you! You can make your mind easy on that score. If you sing like

you sang to-night, why, you'll out Danver Denver!"

"Where do you hold your rehearsals?" inquired Archie.

"At the Theatre Royal."

"And how soon do you want me to attend?"

"Can you get off to-morrow afternoon?"

"Yes, rather! It's a half-holiday at Greyfriars."

"That's fine!" said Mr. Bragg. "An', mind, not a whisper about this—not even to your own flesh an' blood!"

"Rely on me!" said Archie.

And, bidding Mr. Montgomery Bragg good-night, he walked slowly and thoughtfully back to the school.

Archie felt extremely flattered to think that he had been selected to take the place of a well-known "star" like Danny Denver. And not for one moment did he regret his promise to Mr. Bragg.

His sympathies had been aroused by the theatrical-manager's tale of woe; and he resolved, as he strolled leisurely back to Greyfriars under the evening stars, that he would do his utmost to fill the breach to the satisfaction of all concerned.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

From Friends to Foes.

"HOWELL! Where's that duffer Howell?"

Bob Cherry's voice boomed along the Remove-passage at Greyfriars.

Bob was in flannels, ready for the match with Rookwood. And the other members of the Remove eleven were ready, too—with the exception of Archie Howell.

Archie was nowhere to be found. Harry Wharton & Co. were hunting for him far and near; and Bob Cherry, who had already scoured the Remove studies once, was now making a fresh search in that locality.

"Howell! Archie! Where the dickens are you?"

One of the study doors was thrown open, and Bolsover major glanced out into the passage.

"Hallo!" he ejaculated, catching sight of Bob Cherry. "What's the matter? School on fire?"

"No; I'm hunting for that beggar Howell. Have you seen anything of him?"

"Not since dinner."

"Any notion where he is?"

"Not the foggiest!" said Bolsover. "Wish you wouldn't keep going off like a beastly siren! I'm trying to write an impot."

"Rats!" growled Bob Cherry.

And he continued his quest for Archie Howell.

Tom Dutton, the deaf junior, came along the passage, whistling.

"Seen Howell?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"Why should I?" said Dutton, in surprise. "Why should I howl? That's a pastime for wolves. And I'm not a blessed wolf!"

Bob Cherry gave a snort.

"I asked you if you'd seen Howell—the new kid!" he roared.

"Yes," said Dutton. "I do it myself sometimes."

"Eh? Do what?" gasped Bob.

"Have a growl at Euclid."

"You—you—" Bob Cherry was almost at a loss for words. "I'm talking about Howell—not Euclid! I've been on the beggar's track since dinner—"

Tom Dutton frowned.

"Backed a winner, have you?" he said. "Well, you'll get no congratulations from me! Fellows who get mixed up with gee-gees deserve to be fired out of Greyfriars!"

"You—you—"

Bob Cherry gave it up in despair. Tom Dutton's deafness had always been a grievous affliction—to others as well as to Dutton himself.

After he had toured the whole of the Remove studies, and drawn blank, Bob made his way to the cricket-ground.

The Rookwood eleven had arrived, and were practising at the nets.

"Any luck, Bob?" inquired Harry Wharton, coming up with the other members of the Famous Five.

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"Dashed if I know where the silly duffer has hidden himself!" he said. "He knew he was down to play, of course?"

"Well, I didn't tell him," admitted Wharton. "But I thought he'd take it for granted. That was one of his main reasons for getting into the Remove—so that he could play cricket for us."

"The puzzle is," said Nugent, "where did the silly ass go after dinner?"

That was a puzzle which remained unsolved.

"We can't keep the Rookwood fellows hanging about any longer," said the captain of the Remove. "I shall have to play Monty Newland in Howell's place."

"Do my aged eyes deceive me," murmured Bob Cherry, "or is this Miss Phyllis coming along?"

"It is!" said Johnny Bull. "She's coming over to see the match."

"Perhaps she can locatefully define the preciseful whereabouts of her ludicrous brother?" suggested Hurree Singh.

The juniors raised their caps to the Cliff House girl as she came up.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Phyllis!" said Harry Wharton. "Seen Archie?"

"No," said Phyllis, in surprise. "Isn't he here?"

"He's been missing since dinner."

"How annoying! I came over particularly to see him play."

The Famous Five could not help feeling a trifle nettled. As a rule, it was their own performances that Miss Phyllis was interested in. But now she seemed to have no thoughts for anyone but Archie.

"I do hope he turns up," she said. "He knows what time the match starts, I take it?"

"He ought to know!" grunted Wharton.

"Are you going to wait for him?"

"Afraid we've waited long enough, Miss Phyllis," said Bob Cherry. "The Rookwooders are getting impatient."

The match started without Archie Howell, whose place was filled by Monty Newland. Monty was a persevering player, but he wasn't a cricketer born and bred, like Archie Howell.

Archie had already astonished the school by winning the match for the Fifth against the Remove. And Harry Wharton & Co. had confidently expected him to do great things against Rookwood.

But now—just at the time when he was most wanted—Archie had disappeared!

"The only thing that I can think of," said Harry Wharton, "is that the fellow was annoyed at not being given a bigger part in 'Columbus,' and he's therefore decided not to turn out!"

"If that's the case, he ought to have told you," said Johnny Bull. "It's jolly mean of him to leave us in the lurch without warning!"

At first the Famous Five had been warmly attached to Archie Howell; but

that warm attachment was now in danger of declining. Harry Wharton & Co. could feel nothing but contempt for a fellow who deserted his team.

The juniors were upset, and this was reflected in their play.

Batting first on a good wicket, the Remove were unable to put up a bigger score than sixty. And their batting was so feeble that the majority of the spectators walked away in disgust.

Phyllis Howell went, too. Whether she shared the disgust of the others, or whether she had gone to look for her brother, was not certain.

"We're booked for a licking," said Bob Cherry glumly.

It was not like Bob to be glum, and his dismal prediction did not improve the spirits of his fellow-players.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were as jovial as their opponents were depressed. They went in to bat with the avowed intention of knocking spots off the Remove bowling, and they succeeded.

The Greyfriars total was reached and passed without the loss of a single wicket; and the Rookwooders rejoiced greatly at their easy victory. They knew nothing of the internal troubles of the Remove team.

"Afraid we were a bit above your weight, Wharton," remarked Jimmy Silver. "We'll send our reserve team to play you next time."

"You'd better not!" said the captain of the Remove. "We were off colour to-day, but we shall have pleasure in wiping up the ground with you later on."

To which Jimmy Silver replied with the ancient and classic monosyllable:

"Rats!"

Tea was served in the pavilion, both elevens participating. And still Archie Howell failed to put in an appearance.

The Famous Five remained on the look-out for the renegade. They had something to say to him when he did arrive.

But it was not until the Rookwood team had departed that Archie Howell turned up.

His manner, as he approached the cricket-pavilion, was quite cheerful—jaunty, in fact. But when he caught sight of the expressions on the faces of the Famous Five his smile faded.

"Anythin' wrong, you fellows?" he asked.

"Where have you been, Howell?" demanded Harry Wharton.

The unexpected use of his surname, instead of the familiar "Archie," brought a flush to the junior's cheeks.

"Courtfield!" he replied, with equal curttness.

"You'd forgotten all about the Rookwood match, I suppose?" said Bob Cherry sarcastically.

"Yes. It quite escaped my memory."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Bob.

"How did the game go?" asked Archie.

"We were licked!" growled Johnny Bull, adding, in his blunt way: "Thanks to you!"

"Were you countin' on me?"

"Of course we were!" snapped Wharton.

"I'm sorry!"

"Bless your sorrow! Where on earth have you been?"

"I've told you once—Courtfield!"

"Yes; but what have you been doing?"

"That's no concern of yours!"

"You were mad because I didn't give you the part of Columbus, I suppose?"

"Nothin' of the sort!" said Archie.

"I don't believe you!"

Archie clenched his hands.

"Any fellow who doubts my word," he said, "is liable to get a hammerin'!"

"I'll take all the hammering that you can give me!" was Wharton's retort.

"Come on, then!"

A moment later the two juniors were fighting like tigers. They were no longer friends, but foes.

Although one of the best fighting-men in the Remove, Harry Wharton had met his match now. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that he had met his master, for Archie Howell certainly had the better of the exchanges. He drove in blow after blow with relentless force and wonderful accuracy; and presently, to the consternation of the onlookers, Harry Wharton was knocked clean down the pavilion steps, to alight, in a dazed heap, at the feet of Wingate of the Sixth!

"What's all this about?" demanded the captain of Greyfriars sternly. In the excitement of the contest nobody had seen him arrive.

"Just a friendly rough-and-tumble, Wingate!" said Archie Howell rather grimly.

Wingate frowned.

"The way you knocked Wharton down the steps seemed quite the reverse of friendly," he said. "You will take five hundred lines for brawling! You, too, Wharton! And if there is any repetition of this, I'll haul the pair of you up before your Form-master!"

So saying, Wingate turned on his heel and strode away.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Under a Cloud!

ARCHIE HOWELL created quite a favourable impression at the rehearsal which he had attended that afternoon.

"My judgment wasn't at fault," said Mr. Montgomery Bragg. "It seldom is. I knew you for a first-rate singer the moment I heard you. But, of course, you're playin' a big part—the biggest in the play—and you've got a lot to learn. I should like to see you this evenin', if you can manage it."

"What time?" Archie had inquired.

"Ten o'clock."

"That will mean breakin' bounds."

"I know. And p'r'aps it's asking too much of you—"

"Not at all! I'll make a point of turnin' up."

"Don't come to the theatre," said Mr. Bragg. "Come to my rooms in River Street—No. 8. It won't be a rehearsal. We'll simply run through a number of the songs."

Archie had promised to present himself at Mr. Bragg's rooms at ten o'clock.

Breaking out of Greyfriars at that hour would be a very risky proceeding, for the masters and prefects would still be up, and several of them might be on the prowl.

Archie spent the evening in his new quarters—Study No. 1.

Wharton and Nugent were there, and the trio did their prep in stony silence.

So intolerable did the silence become that Archie Howell closed his books at length, and attempted to make conversation.

"Look here, Wharton," he said. "We had a few words this afternoon, an' a few blows into the bargain. I'm not the sort to bear malice, and I don't think you are, either. Will you shake hands, an' be pals?"

Wharton looked up.

"If you'll explain why you cut the cricket-match this afternoon," he said, "I might think about it."

Archie frowned.

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It was impossible for him to explain that he had taken part in the rehearsal at Courtfield. He could not have explained, even to his own sister. He had given Mr. Montgomery Bragg his word that he would not tell a soul—not even his own flesh and blood, to use Mr. Bragg's rather melodramatic expression.

"I had an appointment," said Archie at length. "More than that I can't tell you."

"Then it's pretty obvious," said Wharton, with a shrug of his shoulders, "that you've been on the razzle, or something of that sort."

"Otherwise you wouldn't be afraid to speak out," said Nugent.

Archie flushed.

"Are you still tryin' to hint that I've acted dishonourably?" he exclaimed.

There was no reply.

Archie Howell gave a snort of exasperation. He looked as if he were about to knock his study-mates' heads together. But he contented himself with glaring at them and stamping out of the study.

On all sides Archie encountered black looks.

The Remove's defeat at the hands of Rookwood rankled very much, and everyone held that it was Archie Howell's fault. Scarcely anybody had a word to say to him.

Archie was a sociable sort of fellow, and this silent persecution annoyed him intensely.

"They'll come round in the mornin', I s'pose," he reflected. "Meanwhile, I must see about keepin' my appointment with Comrade Bragg."

Fortunately, the Removites were not slow in getting to sleep that evening.

When Archie Howell got up after lights out—he had gone to bed partially dressed—he was able to leave the dormitory without being challenged.

But it was not without difficulty that he quitted the school premises.

In consequence he was late for his appointment with Mr. Montgomery Bragg, but that gentleman didn't seem to mind.

For upwards of an hour Archie remained in Mr. Bragg's apartments in River Street. He went through all his songs, and the theatrical manager expressed himself as being well satisfied with the junior's progress.

"You'll play the part better than Danny Denver has ever played it," he said. "You're a real find!"

"Is Denver better?" asked Archie.

"Much better. But he won't be fit to play for at least a fortnight. Goodness knows what we should have done if you hadn't undertaken to fill the breach! It's immensely good of you, kid, to take all this risk an' trouble."

"Rats!"

"You're keepin' your promise about not lettin' on to a soul?" said Mr. Bragg anxiously.

"Of course! I've been as mum as a mouse."

"That's the idea!" said Mr. Bragg.

Although it was close upon midnight when Archie got back to Greyfriars several lights still gleamed from the windows of the masters' studies.

Archie's heart was beating quicker than usual as he crossed the Close.

Had his absence from the school been discovered?

There was every possibility that it had. Archie had not gone to the trouble of placing a dummy figure in his bed, or anything of that sort. Consequently, if Mr. Quelch or one of the prefects had entered the Remove dormitory during the past hour or two, they could not have failed to notice his vacant bed.

Archie half-expected to find somebody in authority waiting for him on his return to the dormitory. And the moonlight's rays, falling slantwise across his bed, clearly revealed somebody's presence.

The returning junior halted in alarm.

"Oh crumbs!" he ejaculated.

Then the figure rose from the bed, and Archie saw that it was Harry Wharton.

"Where have you been, Howell?" demanded the captain of the Remove. "I woke up, and found that your bed was empty, and I've been waiting for you to come in."

"You needn't have bothered!" said Archie drily.

"It's my business to bother!" said Wharton sharply. "You've broken bounds!"

Archie laughed.

"So you still think I've been playin' the giddy goat—paintin' the town red, an' all that sort of thing?"

"I do."

"An' what do you propose to do about it—report me to the beaks?"

"No," said Wharton. "But I mean to show you that the Remove has no patience with razzlers. You seem to have got in tow with some shady gang in the village. And in that case the sooner you're brought to your right senses the better!"

And then Archie and the fellow who had waited up for him went to bed.

Next morning there were developments of a very unpleasant nature, so far as Archie Howell was concerned.

On going into the hall to see if there were any letters for him, Archie's attention was arrested by an announcement which appeared on the notice-board:

"Notice is hereby given that Howell of the Remove shall be sent to Coventry for one week from date.

"Any fellow found in conversation with Howell will be sent to Coventry also.

"This step has been taken because the fellow concerned has put himself right outside the pale.

"(Signed) HARRY WHARTON."

Archie Howell stood still, with clenched hands, and surveyed that announcement.

The Remove's latest recruit was to be sent to Coventry for a week. His popularity had waned, his friends had turned to foes. He had gone to endless trouble to get into the Remove Form; and now the Remove had shunned him, as if he were an unclean thing—an outsider with whom no decent fellow could associate.

For a moment Archie was tempted to go back on his word—to explain to the fellows that he was shortly to take the place of Danny Denver in the cast of "H.M.S. Pinafore." This explanation would mollify them, and enable him to win back the friendship of Harry Wharton & Co.

But Archie trampled down the temptation.

He could not break his promise. He could not put himself right with his schoolfellows at Mr. Montgomery Bragg's expense. Having taken the plunge, and decided to go to Mr. Bragg's assistance, he must see the thing through.

But there were breakers ahead, and it was anything but a cheerful prospect which stretched before Howell of the Remove.

THE END.

(Do not fail to read next Monday's thrilling and dramatic story of Archie Howell, entitled "Her Brother's Honour!" by Frank Richards. Don't wait till the day of publication. Order now!)



"THE SILENCE!"

THE OPENING CHAPTERS OF OUR
AMAZING NEW SERIAL STORY.

A Wonderful Tale of the Future.

By EDMUND BURTON.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A.D. 1924.

"The Silence!"

Tom Hope, the son of Admiral Sir Headley Hope, a midshipman in the Navy, and Dick Elliott, a keen young inventor in the Flying Force, are great friends, and Dick is very fond of Madge Hope, Tom's sister.

When Tom arrives at Seahaven after a cruise he is met, as he comes ashore, by Dick Elliott, who asks him whether he has heard the news.

"What news?" said Tom.

"Phew! Fancy discovering anyone who doesn't know about the silence of America, Japan, and China! Why, the papers are full of it, asking stupid questions, suggesting equally stupid answers, and all that sort of thing, as they generally do."

"But what— Here, let's have the yarn!"

"Well, the main part of the matter is this: No news has come from either China, Japan, or the States for nearly a month past. They seem to be cut off from the world. Wireless messages have been ignored, cables unanswered, and their own Consuls here are as puzzled as everyone else is. That's common knowledge now; and not only have we failed to communicate with these countries, but Europe and the rest of the world are seemingly in much the same fix."

"By Jove!" gasped Tom. "And what about the shipping?"

"All sailing from here stopped now," returned Dick, "as no craft have arrived. Every ship from America, Japan, and China is weeks overdue, and, consequently, no mails. Here's, perhaps, the most serious part of the whole business. About ten days ago, as soon as the situation began to impress the Government that something was really wrong, the Admiralty sent some fast cruisers on a mission of inquiry to New York, and, though our wise men have attempted to smother the truth, the fact has just leaked out that those ships have disappeared!"

"Eh? Well, I'm— D'you mean to say that several cruisers have vanished into thin air?"

"Unfortunately, that's exactly what I do mean!" said Elliott grimly. "They signalled 'All well,' their last message, from somewhere in the Atlantic, but no news since."

"And our ships on the China and other Eastern stations—what about them? And what of Canada, Newfoundland, and—"

"Silent—all silent, old man!" cut in the other. "And yet the Chinese consul in London, from what I can gather, seems more hopeful than either the Jap or the Yankee."

"How so?"

"Well, according to the papers, he still persists in believing that the affair has a perfectly natural solution, as his country was peaceful and quiet when he last communicated with headquarters. He offers no explanation, however, and seems disinclined to discuss the matter at any length, which is different to the other two, who are at their wits' end, while he is quite unemotional."

"The Chinese are not a very excitable race," hazarded Tom.

"No. But wouldn't you expect a little more anxiety on his part? Or maybe he is anxious, but hides it under his native calm."

Hope took off his cap, and ran his fingers through his curly hair in perplexity.

Later on the two boys go into a Chinese restaurant. They have not been in the place for more than five minutes when Tom drew Dick to a spyhole at the back of the seat.

"Look through there!" cried Tom. "There's Ah Ling, the Chinese fellow who used to be a cook at home; and there's someone else with him! The way they are talking to one another looks rather queer. I think—"

He was interrupted by a stifled gasp from his companion.

"Great Scott! Hanson—the chap who was kicked out of the Air Service, and nearly got quod as well! I say— Wait! They're going out!"

TOM HOPE, in turn, looked through the crack in the board. The occupants of the other room were on the point of leaving by the side door. Then, almost before the two boys had time to compose themselves, the soft-footed waiter returned with their meal, departing as silently as he came.

"Sorry, old man," said Tom Hope, glancing after his retreating figure. "I'm afraid you'll be surprised, but I'll leave the cash, anyway."

He placed some coins on the table and quietly left his seat, after another peep through the hole, which showed him the big figure of Ah Ling following his companion into the street. The middy had previously noticed that a key was in the lock of the partition door, and now he softly turned it.

"What's the game?" asked Dick Elliott. "You seem to be—"

"I don't know what the game is yet," replied Hope quietly; "but I overheard some queer words, and you seem to know a deal about that other chap. Come along! My appetite's gone off for the present."

They slipped into the other room, crossing to the far door, and emerging in a narrow alley. The place was practically deserted, no sign of their quarry being visible; nor did they care to ask questions of a chance passer-by, for the locality was rather an unhealthy one to all appearances.

"I'll go this way, and you try the other," said Tom. "Meet me at the Town Hall in half an hour. I can see its tower through the gap yonder. Those fellows cannot have got very far, and I'm rather anxious to find out where they've gone."

But it was a wild-goose chase after all. Tom presently found the alley leading into a regular network of narrow streets—a maze in which he almost lost himself several times, and failed utterly to catch a further glimpse of Ah Ling or Hanson. Finally he gave up in despair, and with difficulty worked his way back to the arranged meeting-place, where Dick, equally unsuccessful, was waiting for him.

"No luck," said the latter. "The main street was crowded. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack. It's a queer business. There was Ling, right enough, and the other chap was Hanson, who was dismissed the service a month ago."

"Why?"

"Oh, some blessed shady business he was thought to be mixed up with. They suspected him of having the plans of some wonderful new seaplane in his possession, but the evidence was not strong enough to convict him outright."

"Ah!"

Tom relapsed into silence after that single ejaculation; then he linked his arm through Dick's.

"Come along! I'll tell you what I overheard, though it isn't very much, and may mean anything, or nothing. Where's the station, and when is the next train for home? We can get a snack in the buffet, if we have a few minutes to spare."

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Anxious Moments!

"**J**OLLY funny!" said Dick, for perhaps the twentieth time, as he stared reflectively out of the railway-carriage window. "Extraordinary funny, and just as mysterious!"

They were swiftly approaching Sedleigh, which is the nearest station to Headley Park, and presently they sprang out upon the platform.

It wasn't much of a tramp across the fields to the house, and on this summer evening everything was looking its best. Indeed, only for the fact that their recent experience worried them strangely, the pair would have enjoyed the walk immensely.

Lady Hope hurried out as they mounted the steps, gazing at them in some astonishment, and looking round as though she expected someone else.

"Where's Madge?" she presently asked, rather anxiously.

The others exchanged questioning glances. Tom thought it peculiar that these should be the first words of greeting he received after his having been absent from home for several months; but as he looked again at his mother's face he saw the anxiety written there, and his own heartstrings tightened.

"Madge, mater?" he replied. "We haven't seen her. Why do you ask?"

Lady Hope's face turned whiter.

"Come in!" she said quickly. "Madge has been strange of late, although the doctor who saw her a couple of days ago says she's only run down; but I'm not convinced. She's so utterly unlike her bright, sunny self, that we're completely puzzled. Your father insists upon her seeing a London specialist at once, but she says she's all right and won't go up."

"Yes, Dick told me she wasn't well; but—"

"And now," continued his mother hurriedly, "she's gone to Seahaven. I knew the Unconquerable was due there this morning, of course, and that you'd likely be getting leave, Tom, so I thought she'd gone to meet you, as she was anxious to see your ship as well. But she must have started very early, for nobody saw her go, nor did she leave any word. They say at Sedleigh Station, however, that she took a ticket for Seahaven, and left by the eight-five."

"Strange; but I don't see why you need be upset, mater," the middy exclaimed. "Madge is old enough to look after herself, surely, and she's probably not so ill as you seem to think if she's able to travel thirty miles. We haven't seen her, but Seahaven's a crowded place, and, depend upon it, she'll be back directly she learns of my getting leave till to-morrow."

"Perhaps, perhaps, but I'm anxious all the same," Lady Hope forced a smile. "If I didn't think she were really ill, I shouldn't worry; but— However, come along! We're short-handed now, but I've no doubt Bridget has something in the pot. Ling has gone away, you must know."

"Ling gone—for good?"

"Yes. We were sorry to lose him, but he got another place. Hark! What's that sound?"

A low throbbing hum came from without, presently ceasing at the door. Next moment Sir Headley Hope walked swiftly into the dining-room.

"Hallo! You two here!" he gasped. "Shut the door, Muriel!"

"Headley! What's wrong? You are—"

"Hush, m' dear! Shut the door, and turn the key! There's dirty work afoot! Sit down, boys! You may as well know, as you're on the spot!"

Silently the others took their places, as the admiral mopped his perspiring brow. His usually ruddy face was deathly pale, and his mouth drawn and pinched-looking.

"We're in the dickens of a mess at headquarters," he said presently, in his

crisp tones. "Some vital secrets have leaked out, and the work was done here!"

"Here!"

"Yes, there's no doubt of it! As you know, I'm in the habit of spending odd week-ends at home, and have frequently taken work back with me to put straight, and so relieve the pressure. Well, these particular papers were here three days ago, nor were they out of my sight save when I put them in my study safe at night. When not in use at the Admiralty they were always in a secret drawer, known only to myself and the First Lord, so it is impossible that the trickery could have been performed there."

"But here, Headley—here!" cried his wife. "It cannot be!"

The admiral brought his fist down on the table with a thump that made the cutlery rattle.

"I tell you yes, Muriel!" he thundered. "Perhaps I was a fool, but that safe is reputed quite burglar-proof, and I hold the only key, so I thought it would be all right. But when I looked at the papers to-day I found they were clever forgeries. The originals have disappeared!"

Tom sprang to his feet.

"Listen, pater!" he said. "A curious thing happened this morning. We saw Ling in consultation with a chap named Hanson, who was suspected of—"

"Of copying the plans of our newest seaplane!" gasped Sir Headley. "I know the man well from description. And Ling—Ling, you say, was with him?"

"Yes; and I overheard some strange remarks. He told the other that his work was successfully completed, and that Hanson had his instructions, whatever they were—"

The elder man sprang to his feet, passing his hand across his brow. In that short time he seemed to have aged twenty years.

"Is Ling gone for good yet, Muriel? You told me he'd got another place."

"Yes; he left on Monday about eleven."

"Good heavens!" gasped Sir Headley. "Have we struck a possible solution to the strange affair of 'The Silence'?"

China, Japan, and America are cut off, and now some vital secrets are stolen, whilst a Chink who was employed here is seen in conversation with a suspected traitor!"

There was dead silence in the room as Sir Headley paced up and down, desperately reviewing the position. Suddenly he stopped and stared hard at his wife.

"Where's Madge?" he asked quickly.

"Gone to Seahaven to meet Tom, I think, but they missed. I'm most anxious about her, because I didn't consider her well enough to go."

"Well enough!" the admiral laughed harshly. "She's not ill, Muriel—she's not ill! I believe I see it all now! Madge is the thief, or I'm making a great mistake!"

Tom gasped in amazement, whilst Dick Elliott's fists clenched, and his face flamed scarlet.

"Sir, you are making a terrible mistake!" cried the latter, but the other cut him short, kindly yet firmly.

"My lad, I don't mean a willing thief—Heaven forbid that I should!" he returned. "But I've just formed a theory that may startle you. Madge, you know, mother, always took a keen interest in Ah Ling's methods of cookery. She was continually in and out of the kitchen when he was there, and quite lately I drew your attention to her demeanour. You remember the first time we noticed it was when she came up from an extra

long stay below stairs, and how frequent her fits of listlessness became after that?"

"Yes, dear, I remember, but—"

"No 'buts,' Muriel! The more I think on this matter the more I'm convinced that I'm right. I was on the China Station for some years, and I know what a clever scoundrel 'John' can be when he likes! Madge is not ill—she's hypnotised—yes, hypnotised, or drugged. That ruffian Ling—or whoever employs him—must have learnt I spent odd week-ends here, often taking home work, and, knowing how impossible it was to get at anything in headquarters, he took this job on in case a chance should arise to give him what he sought. A year it's taken him, but he's fiendishly patient like the rest of his race; and about a week ago, strange to say, I had begun to work on these identical papers. They concern the biggest thing the British Navy has ever done, but they took a long time to complete; indeed, they're not completed yet."

"But, assuming your reasoning to be correct," objected Tom, "why didn't Ling seize his opportunity long ago? Why has a year gone by without his making an attempt?"

"He may have made several attempts, but was baffled by my being so careful, and couldn't see his way to open the safe until the idea of hypnotising Madge struck him," said the other. "The child being so constantly in my company when I was here would give her countless opportunities which he himself lacked. Moreover, from the way the forgeries were executed, I should say that the papers were in the villain's possession several times, only to be returned until sufficient particulars were entered for his purpose. I was continually altering, adding to, and revising them—and the copies show precisely the same alterations!"

"You are suggesting that Madge, if she was the culprit, paid more than one visit to the safe," remarked Tom—"that she brought Ling the papers whenever she saw you had been working on them?"

"Why not? I never suspected the poor child, naturally, and as I always found the originals exactly as I left them, there was no reason to fear trickery. It was only when the final substitution was made that I saw daylight."

"But if you are right, Headley," put in Lady Hope, "the final theft must have been effected three days ago. This is Wednesday, and you last left on Monday morning. Why, then, is Madge still so listless and apparently under the spell, as she was the last time I saw her before she left for Seahaven?"

The admiral looked puzzled.

"There I leave you," he said presently. "Apparently Ling's work was done on Saturday night or Sunday night, when Madge must have taken the safe-key while I slept, but why the girl should not now be all right beats me. According to science, she ought to be herself again, but know nothing of what she's done. Perhaps he prolonged the spell in order to get a good start."

"Then, if so, he hasn't got very far," said Tom, "considering that we saw him only thirty miles away this morning."

Sir Headley drew the telephone towards him, and rang up the police-station at Sedleigh. He spoke rapidly for a few minutes, and then hung up the receiver.

"That is all I can do at present," he said grimly, though his tones were husky. "I'm as anxious as you are about the dear girl, but my duty to my country must come first. I'm going to Seahaven now to see Sir Stanford Martyn aboard the Mammoth. The port has got to be scoured from end to end, if I turn the

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Tom Hope broke off the conversation as they reached the end of the gutter, and halted, open-mouthed. A slight, girlish figure was framed in the window above, staring dumbly and fixedly at the little group, yet not appearing to see them.

(See page 18.)

whole Fleet's complement on the job. The inspector at Sedleigh expects you two over at once to give him a full account of the whole affair, as I haven't time. He will take the matter in hand, and spread the descriptions of Madge, Ah Ling, and Hanson. As soon as you have finished with him, hurry on to the Admiralty offices at Seahaven. If I'm not there, wait!"

And with these crisp, sailor-like instructions, Sir Headley was gone, the big car racing down the drive in a cloud of dust and flying gravel, with the suddenly worn face of its solitary occupant staring grimly through the screen.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Run to Earth!

THE inspector-in-charge at Sedleigh police-station had already got to work when the two young fellows arrived. He told them he had had confirmed that Madge left by the

eight-five train, but, strange to say, she had only booked single.

"Single!" gasped the others in a breath. "Are you sure?"

Their surprise was natural under the circumstances, for, even allowing that Ah Ling's influence had been the cause of the girl's strange departure, they had half-expected her to return as soon as she performed whatever further tasks he might require of her. But the taking of a single ticket now lent the affair a much more gloomy atmosphere. It looked as though the Chinese had instructed Madge to book for one journey only—as though he either intended to employ her for some considerable time, or not permit her to return at all!

"I'm quite sure, sir," said the inspector in reply. "The booking-clerk knows her well by sight, and is perfectly certain on that point. I have spread the description of Miss Hope and the other two Sir Headley told me of. He says Hanson's

stockily built, and has a dark moustache; and the Chink is tall, with a semi-circular weal below his right elbow—that right?"

"Yes."

"And now, gentlemen, I want to know the exact locality of the cookshop where you saw them? There are several Chinese restaurants in Seahaven."

Tom told him, and the inspector picked up the 'phone. He spoke rapidly for some minutes, and finally turned with a satisfied smile.

"Rest assured they won't get far—that is, provided they're still in the town," he said, "and from what I know of the affair, my theory is that if we find either Hanson or Ling, we find your sister as well, sir."

"I hope so!" said Tom fervently; and with a nod to the officer the pair withdrew.

About three-quarters of an hour later they sprang from the train at Seahaven, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 647.

hurrying towards the Admiralty Offices where Sir Headley had bade them meet him. As they passed through the town naval pickets were much in evidence at every corner, whilst the roads leading towards the open country were also strongly guarded.

"Well, this looks business-like, anyway," remarked Dick, who all this time had with difficulty kept down his own anxiety for Madge's safety. "If those two ruffians are still in Seahaven, they'll have a job to get out, I'm thinking. You noticed how everybody was being questioned?"

Tom nodded.

"Yes; and here's the scene of our adventure," he said, indicating the cook-shop which they had visited that morning. A couple of armed marines stood at the door, and a trio of plain-clothes men were inside, evidently questioning the proprietor.

"Won't get much out of him, I imagine," vouchsafed Tom, as he glanced in. "Those Chinks stick together like glue. He'll swear by Confucius and all the other Chinese sages that Ah Ling was never seen in that place in his life. And now, which is the shortest way?"

For answer, Dick turned down the very side-alley where they had separated earlier, and Hope looked at him in some surprise.

"This road?" he queried.

"Yes—first turning on the right now will bring us right against the offices. I've often come up this way from the harbour, but I don't know anything of the rest of the locality yonder."

They hurried down the narrow thoroughfare, swinging off to the right at the first branch. Away in the distance the blue water of the bay, with its splashes of grey and black hulls, gleamed, while up the street a naval picket was tramping to relieve a guard elsewhere.

Suddenly Tom felt his arm gripped like a vice, and he almost halted in his stride.

"Quiet!" hissed Elliott. "Don't stop or look round! I've seen Hanson, or I'll eat my hat!"

"Where?"

"He glanced through one of those top windows on the other side just now. I'm sure I'm not mistaken!"

The picket was almost level by this, but the petty officer in charge caught a swift signal from Tom, and halted his men. A few words were exchanged and a careful move made for the doorway Elliott indicated.

The door was closed but not shut, and, followed by three or four of the others, the boys raced up the stairs two at a time. The place was gloomy and evidently quite empty, unless Dick's eyesight had not played him false. But finally they reached the top landing, which was rather brighter, and here three doors confronted them.

"Are you there, Hanson?" cried the aviator. "The game's up, so you may as well come out!"

There was no answer, so they tried the doors. Two swung creakingly open, and displayed a couple of dirty, empty rooms. The third was locked, but a well-directed kick beneath the handle from the petty officer's boot soon sent it flying inwards.

Crack!

The sailor immediately behind Tom smothered a cry, and clutched at his forearm; while the rest involuntarily drew back on the landing. The room was in semi-darkness, and formed a good stronghold.

"I've seven more shots in this," cried

a voice, "and I know how to use 'em! Best stay where you are!"

"You see, I was right," breathed Dick. "The beggar's in a hole now, but cornered rats fight hard! Hark!"

Just above their heads came a rumbling noise, like something rolling over and over down the slates.

"Someone above!" gasped Tom.

"Can it be—"

"Ah Ling, of course! Good heavens! They are both here, and, maybe, Madge as well! Hanson's covering the Chinaman's retreat!"

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The petty officer reeled and fell in a heap, while Tom's own cap went spinning from his head. The middy dropped on his knees, and peered through the gloom at the prostrate figure.

"Gone!" he said hoarsely. "Got it fairly in the chest!"

Attracted by the firing, the remainder of the picket clattered up from the street. A determined rush was made, and though another man fell badly wounded under Hanson's remaining shots, the latter was finally secured. Not that he offered much resistance at the end, for he realised how hopeless were the odds against him.

The skylight at the far end of the apartment was open, and Tom, armed with the fallen officer's revolver, clambered through. Dick followed him in a trice, but the roof was quite deserted. If Ah Ling had been there, he was not to be seen now.

"Too big a start!" groaned Elliott. "That beggar Hanson did his work well. I— Good heavens! What's this?"

He stooped quickly and picked up something from the gutter—a tiny lace handkerchief, with "M" marked on the corner.

"Madge!" he whispered hoarsely. "Madge is with him, Tom!"

Hope's face was white, but his jaw had set very determinedly. He merely nodded, and then stared along the "valley" formed by the sloping slates on each side. A large lump of mortar lay a few feet off, the fresh scratches on the roof showing where it had recently been dislodged and rolled down.

"That made the rumbling noise we heard," Tom said, pointing. "He went

that way—and, see, there's a taller house at the end of this range, with an open window within easy reach. Below, there!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"How many are you—seven?"

"Eight, sir—at least, only eight sound!"

"Then four of you enter that tall house, five doors from here up the street, two watch Hanson, and the other two join us!"

There was a movement in the attic, and a couple of A.B.'s clambered through the skylight. By this time the news had spread, and the thoroughfare below was literally packed to suffocation, the police and pickets doing their utmost to keep the crowd back. It was a Seahaven "Sidney Street."

"But he'll have left!" cried Dick, as the four hurried along the roof. "You don't suppose he's waiting for us?"

"Yes, I do, though!" was the decided reply. "He won't risk attempting to escape till nightfall, and he can't continue over housetops indefinitely. Why, the precautions are so complete that even by himself he'd scarcely do it, but with Madge—"

The middy broke off as they reached the end of the gutter, and halted, open-mouthed. A slight, girlish figure was framed in the window above, staring dumbly and fixedly at the little group, yet not appearing to see them.

"Madge!" cried Dick chokingly. "Madge, don't you know me? Is Ling there?"

As if in answer to his question, a crackle of shots came from the interior of the house, and an excited murmur floated up from the street. Then, with a series of springs, the quartet were through the casement, Elliott taking the girl unresistingly into his arms, while Tom led the others quickly towards the spot where he judged the shots had come from.

On the second landing the big figure of Ah Ling was watching the hall below like a cat, a revolver ready in his hand. So far, he had eyes only for what was taking place beneath him, and had not yet seen the group above. Tom quietly knelt, and, resting the barrel of his own weapon on the banister-rail, fired. The automatic went flying from the Chinaman's grasp, and he staggered back nursing a shattered wrist.

"All up, Ling! You may as well give in!"

The Celestial, his features quite calm, although the pain of his wound must have been excruciating, walked slowly up the stairs. Dick had by this time joined the others, his arm supporting Madge, who took no notice whatever of the proceedings.

"Ah! It is Mr. Hope, I believe?" Ling said, in perfect English. "And this is Mr. Elliott, I think? We meet again under strange circumstances, but I shall give you no trouble."


"You're a cool beggar, anyway!" muttered Tom, and then proceeded to search his prisoner's person. Presently he drew out a long envelope, with a cry of satisfaction. Ling nodded his head.

"Yes, that is what you seek, sir. I sha'n't deny it. Unfortunately, when the heart is aflame, the brain is apt to act rashly. But, for all that, all would have been well."

"What do you mean?"

The other shrugged his shoulders as he answered:

"Your sister, Mr. Hope—Miss Madge. I compelled her to follow me here. She




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stole the papers against her will, but I wanted her. I love her as your own father loves your mother, but she knows nothing of it; yet in time she might have cared for me."

"You infernal ruffian!" choked Dick. "So that's why Madge came to Seahaven—to follow you like a dog—"

"That is why, Mr. Elliott—yes!" continued Ling imperturbably. "I became cook to Sir Headley Hope in order to obtain the contents of that packet, but was baffled until I found Miss Madge could be employed with success. She fell under my hypnotic spell easily, and performed what was necessary; but I, foolishly, was not satisfied. I wanted her to marry me; but that matters little now. The deception was evidently discovered by Sir Headley sooner than I expected; another full day's delay, and all would have been well. Seahaven would have known us no more, and the packet would have been in safer keeping!"

Tom passed his hand across his forehead in perplexity.

"It's a terrible puzzle to me," he said. "Why should you—a Chinaman—act like this? China is friendly to this country, and—"

A strange smile hovered about Ling's lips.

"I fear, my young friend, you must live a little longer to learn more. I shall not speak further on the matter, save to assure you that Miss Hope will be all right again in a couple of hours. Do with me as you will—I am waiting!"

They led him down to the street, presently picking up Hanson and his captors. Then, having seen the scoundrelly pair safe from further mischief, they hurried towards the Admiralty offices on the front.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Madge Hope's Story!

SIR HEADLEY laid down the telephone, and almost snatched the packet from his son's hand as the trio entered the room, slitting the flap and feverishly scanning the contents. He seemingly had no eyes for Madge, who was leaning listlessly on Dick's arm—only for the sheaf of papers on the table before him. Then, as the boys glanced round the apartment, they swiftly drew themselves up to attention, for another personage was also present—Sir Stanford

Martyn, Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet.

"Good!" cried Sir Headley presently. "Everything is quite in order, and I hear those two miscreants are safely under lock and key, though there have been some casualties, I regret to say. Please pay my compliments where they are due, Sir Stanford, and hold yourself in readiness for further communications from headquarters. There must be something more at the back of this affair."

The other admiral withdrew, and Sir Headley crossed towards Madge, who was now sitting quietly in a chair. The business-like sailor had been replaced by the anxious father, and his eyes were full of concern as he bent over his daughter.

"Madge dear, what is it? You're in good hands now, you know. Tell us what has occurred. Don't you remember these, child?"

He held the papers towards her, but she only looked at them dumbly. Her eyes were certainly a little brighter, but that was all; the hypnotic spell had still a firm grip.

"Let her stay where she is, dad," said Tom. "We can get her some tea, can't we? Ling said she'd be quite herself in a couple of hours."

"Did he, the ruffian?" Sir Headley pressed a bell viciously. "Well, I suppose he knows best. We'll get the tea, anyway, and then I hope to goodness Madge will be able to tell us something, if not all. There's more depending on her than you dream of, lads, for we're all in the dark still. I simply can't get rid of the idea that the strange events of the past month have some bearing on this present affair; but, of course, I may be wrong."

During all the time while Madge was slowly waking to full realisation of her surroundings Dick Elliott scarcely took his eyes from her face. His own was drawn and anxious-looking, but he seldom made a remark.

Then, as though timed to the minute by Ah Ling, she awoke to full consciousness, the same bright, sunny Madge they knew so well.

"Hallo, dad!" she exclaimed. "Is that you, and Dick, and Tom? You're looking worried about something! Where on earth are we, by the way?"

She stared round the unfamiliar room,

then back at their grave faces, and her own expression grew more serious.

"Yes, my child," said the admiral. "There is something very wrong. Do you remember ever seeing these before?" And he again held out the sheaf.

"Those. Why, of course, dad!" she answered instantly. "I've seen them, or some very like them, in your possession from time to time at home. Why do you ask?"

"No matter now," said Sir Headley. "Is that all you recollect, Madge? I hope you can tell us something else, dear. Think! You took them from my safe, did you not?"

She looked astounded.

"I—I took them, father?"

"No, no; I don't mean willingly, Madge! But you knew I kept them there, and—and— You remember Ah Ling?"

The girl gave a slight gasp.

"Yes, yes, I do! He was a strange man, and he fascinated me. His eyes were extraordinary!"

"More than extraordinary, Madge, I fear!" said Sir Headley gravely. "They were dangerous, and caused your apparent illness. Do you remember anything specially connected with him?"

She passed her hand across her forehead.

"Yes, I think I do," she presently replied. "I seem to recollect something vague—like a dream, dad—in which the Chinaman played a part. I noticed it a long time ago, when I first felt queer, but didn't suspect he was the actual cause of it. He simply figured in it, but that was all. Now, however, I realise that I always felt strange just after a visit to the kitchen when Ling was there, that the dream, or whatever it was, seemed to start immediately I left him, I mean."

"Ah! And that's all?"

"Wait! Let me think. Yes, yes; I recollect him telling me to do something, though what it was I cannot properly say. I am not sure. But I clearly remember appearing to wake up at the railway station here, and being accosted by a stranger."

"A stranger! You can describe him?"

"He was stoutly built, I think, and wore a dark moustache. I asked him who he was, and he told me it was all right; that I had been ill, and he had

(Continued on page 20.)



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"THE SILENCE!"*(Continued from page 19.)*

been sent to take me to a very clever doctor. The man led me to a waiting cab, and followed me in."

"Well?"

"There was someone else there, but I felt fearfully dazed, and at first could not see clearly. Then I realised that it was Ah Ling."

"Ah! I suspected as much!" exclaimed Sir Headley. "He thought it might arouse suspicion for a Chinese to accost an English girl, so he sent Hanson instead. What then, Madge?"

"I scarcely know. I remember Ling looking at me with those strange eyes of his; but, after that, nothing until I came to myself for a short time in a bare room where the two were discussing something in low tones."

"By Jove!" said Tom. "You mean you had a spell of consciousness between the meeting at the station and now?"

"Yes; though even that is hazy. I remember Ling saying something to the effect that nightfall would see him out of danger, and that the other would act as soon as he got some signal; but more than that I could not gather, for Ling suddenly noticed me and approached quickly. I—I'm afraid that's all I can tell you. From then till just now everything is a blank."

"I think I'm beginning to see further than I did, and my first theory was correct, after all," said Sir Headley. "By rights, Madge, I believe you shouldn't have wakened at all, but that infernal Chink had so many things on his mind that once or twice he failed to keep you fully under his influence. It was under that spell you took my papers to him from time to time, yet you knew nothing of it, and if those papers had been lost I should have been a ruined man!"

"And it was through the same fiendish hypnotism you followed the rascal here!" burst out Dick. "Madge—Madge, the ruffian intended to kidnap you!"

"Why? I was nothing to him beyond

"Yes, you were! He told us so without a bit of hesitation. In fact, Madge, although you helped him you really proved his undoing. He fell in love with you, and only for his desire to possess you, he could have got clear away to whoever he was working for. Instead of that, he allowed his heart to overrule his sense!"

"Well, he's down and out now!" put in Sir Headley. "Sir Stanford didn't lose much time in attending to that cordon, and the police were pretty smart, also. A house-to-house search was proceeding at the moment of your catching sight of Hanson, Elliott; but the searchers had not reached the spot then. The town was surrounded, and I've no doubt the pair would have eventually been nabbed. But, nevertheless, you deserve great credit for your quickness. Whatever Hanson's job was we don't know, nor does it matter much now that he can't attend to it. Ling's in the same boat, but there are others behind him whose identities and intentions are at present a mystery. But whatever is in the wind it's something pretty big, considering how cheaply human life was held over this affair."

Madge, her head pillowed on Dick's arm, had by now dropped off into a

refreshing sleep—a natural one this time—and, gently raising her, the lad carried her to a couch on the far side of the room. Tom had meanwhile sent a brief telephone-message to Headley Park, informing his mother that everything was all right.

"She'll be the better for that," said the admiral softly. "And now, you two, it may not be quite in order, but I've decided to take you fully into my confidence. Shut the outer door, Tom, and this one also. That's right! Now come close to me, because I'm not going to shout!"

Sir Headley spread the papers out on the table, and, placing his hand upon them, looked straight at Dick Elliott.

"You're a bit of an inventor, so you'll find what I'm going to say doubly interesting," he began. "These are particulars of a new armament, but, unfortunately, they are not complete, yet they are sufficiently so to make them invaluable to a rival Power, especially to a power possessing clever chemists and scientists."

The boys nodded silently.

"The exact nature of this thing," continued Sir Headley, "is supposed to be known to only half a dozen men in Britain, which says much for the astuteness of whoever set Ling on the job. It takes the form of a species of ray which, when in full working order, has the power of instantly melting every class of metal with which it comes in contact. It was invented by a man named Wilton, who presented the formula to the Government, after he had demonstrated its worth by a series of achievements performed with the aid of a crude camera-like affair he had made. I was present at the time, and was astounded at the results obtained. Can you imagine a large steel tank becoming molten metal at the distance of nearly a quarter of a mile, and with seemingly nothing to cause it save a shaft of violet light? It seems like an exaggeration, and yet it was done before my eyes! Not only that, but on the same occasion I saw the weather-cock vanish from a tall church spire, standing twice the distance away, blotted out by the same agency!"

Still no words came from the listeners. They sat as though transfixed, especially Dick, whose inventive instinct had been aroused to an extraordinary pitch.

"Well, Wilton gave us the formula," resumed Sir Headley, "but a couple of nights later his house took fire, destroying his apparatus. He, poor chap, died from shock, and it was then that we discovered the particulars were incomplete. One page, at least, is missing from the papers—the most important one, too. As you know, Tom, I dabble a good deal in chemistry when I can, and have a couple of minor inventions to my credit. So I went into partnership with four of the cleverest scientists in Britain to try and remedy the defect. These men, the First Lord, and myself—who were the only individuals supposed to be in the secret, until the theft was discovered—have worked ceaselessly for months, but all to no purpose. We had various camera-like contrivances made, different tests applied, and rare chemicals tried, both singly and blended with others, all in vain. We are as much in the dark as if we had never received any—Hallo, my lad! What's wrong? Are you ill?"

For Dick Elliott had suddenly uttered a startled gasp. His face was white with suppressed excitement, and his hands were trembling.

(Another grand instalment of this splendid serial next week. Make sure of your copy by ordering EARLY.)

THE
Editor's Chat.

Note:—Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Address: Editor, The "Magnet," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

For Next Monday:

"HER BROTHER'S HONOUR!"

By Frank Richards.

Our next story will deal with the further adventures of Archie Howell and the chums of the Remove Form at Greyfriars. Phyllis Howell, of Cliff House School, also takes a prominent part in the story, as the title suggests, and the manner in which Phyllis fights for the honour of her brother makes the yarn one of the strongest we have had from the pen of our favourite author.

There will also be another splendid long instalment of

"THE SILENCE!"

By Edmund Burton.

By the way, owing to the great pressure on our space in this number of the MAGNET, the usual announcement concerning the "Boys' Friend" 4d. Library has been unavoidably held over. There are four grand new issues on sale this Friday, not one of which you can afford to miss. Ask your newsagent for full particulars.

FAMOUS BOXERS.

Many people think the interest in the noble art is something spasmodic and exceptional. But is it so? Years ago London went crazy over Corbett, John L. Sullivan, Charley Mitchell, and Jem Smith. When any of these exponents visited Fleet Street, and the news got abroad, the crowd interfered with the traffic. I was talking to an old sporting journalist the other day, and he drew for my edification a vivid picture of a typical hour in Fleet Street in those days when "John L." drove up in a smart hansom, and was acclaimed as he went into the office of a sporting daily.

THE TANTALISING ALMANAC.

The world is simply full of tantalisations. You might as well let me have the word. If the printer turns it out I can't help it, but, anyhow, it exactly expresses what the calendar does for one in these times.

This is the kind of thing. Take some particularly bleak week in early spring, when it is more like winter than ever, and this is what you find in the almanac:

"Bullfinch attacks bloom buds. Curved Dotted Moth seen. Alder flowers. Rosy Day Moth appears."

M'yes, it is all very nice and charming, but you don't see them. What the almanac would say, if it were a good little truth-telling almanac, is something like this:

"Flu' very common. Tempers of railway passengers rather short. Cold feet common. Ice on pathways frequent," or something like that. But yet, after all, we would not be minus the allurements of the almanac. I was grumbling just now, but the almanac shows the way to philosophy. It speaks of what might be.

It is full of cheery imagination. If you have not got a thing, imagine it. It is an excellent system.

Your Editor