TO NEWSAGENTS!

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The Penny Popular

No. 241.

Three Complete Stories of—

HARRY WHARTON & Co.—JIMMY SILVER & Co.—TOM MERRY & Co.

THE RIVAL BANDS!

(An Amusing Incident from the Long Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co. contained in this issue.)

THE SCHOOLBOY MUSICIANS!

A Splendid Long Complete Tale, dealing with the Early Adventures of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
The Schoolboy Musicians.

THE woodshed at St. Jim's was crowded with juniors. Tom Merry had resolved to form a concert-party, an idea which had quickly caught on in the School House. The juniors had soon possessed themselves of the necessary musical instruments, and had forthwith adjourned to the wood-shed for rehearsal purposes.

Tom Merry & Co. were there, and so were Jack Blake and his chums, and Reilly and Kangaroo and Clifton Dane.

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, holding up the half of a broken cricket-stump, which he was using as a baton, "I think we are all here——"

"There'll be some more coming," grinned Harry Noble. "The word's got round that there's going to be a rehearsal here. I left Glyn hunting for his violin."

"Had he lost it?" asked Blake.

"No. I lost it for him," said Kangaroo.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gore was looking for his cornet, too," said Monty Lowther. "Unless he thinks of looking behind Gussy's trunk in the top box-room, I don't think he's likely to find it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen——" said the conductor.

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen of the T. M. Concert Party——"

"Hurrah!"

"We are going to get up a party to perform vocal and instrumental music in a way that will redound to the credit of St. Jim's. Some schools have amateur orchestras, and why shouldn't we?"

"Echo answers why!" said Jack Blake.

"Surely that's a mistake, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"Eh?"

"Surely echo should answer 'we,' if Tom Mewwy's wemark is echoed at all."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Gentlemen——"

"If echo does not answah the last word uttahed, there must be somethin' decidedly w'ong with the acoustics of this buildin'."

"Order!"

"Gentlemen, we are laying the foundation of a great movement—the immovable foundations of a rapid movement."

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We are going to set an example to THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 241.

St. Jim's. If we get perfect in time, our first public performance will be at the Rylcombe Fete. We are going to select the budding talent of the Lower Forms. Gentlemen, we shall now proceed to rehearse the first concerted number. I have selected——"

"We have selected," corrected Blake.

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

"We have selected," continued Tom Merry, when these amenities had been exchanged—"we have selected the celebrated coon song, 'Come and Kiss Me, Honey,' arranged for a band. We have the music here, and every chap will have to copy out his part. Parts for trombone, 'cello, and first and second violins are written out already, so those instruments can now rehearse, and the other fellows can listen."

"Good!" said Lowther, taking out his violin.

"Good!" said Manners, starting on his trombone.

"Good!" said Blake, who had also provided himself with a fiddle.

"Rotten!" said the others, with great unanimity.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in a tone of patient remonstrance. "Would it not be bettah—I only suggest it, of course—to let me sing it, and the instwuments accompany me? I have a copy of the song, and a solo——"

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Tom Mewwy——"

"The editor's decision is final—I mean, the conductor's decision is final," said Tom Merry. "This is a ripping tune, and it will do for overture when the concert party starts. Now then, first and second violins and trombone."

"Ready!"

"Faith, and I——"

"I'll put in a flute obligato," said Bishop, producing his flute.

"Got the part written?" demanded Tom Merry.

"No. I'll play it by ear."

"'Ear, 'ear!" said Lowther.

"You won't!" roared Tom Merry. "None of your blessed rot! We're going to play this thing in tune, if we play it at all."

"But I tell you I play better from ear than from music."

"I dare say you do; but if you can't play from music, old man, you can go and bury that flute. Now, then——. I wish we had a violoncello—it pulls a band together."

"Could hire one," said Digby.

"Who can play it?"

"Kerr of the New House can."

"Oh, blow Kerr! This is a School House wheeze, and the New House bounders are barred. It's bad enough to let the Fourth Form into it," said the conductor.

"What's that?" roared all the Fourth-Formers together.

"Ahem! I mean—er—get on with the washing. Manners will have to do the best he can with the trombone. A piano would be all right, and I could play that; but we can't have a piano at the Rylcombe Fete."

"Jolly useful thing, a piano, for accompaniments!" said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "And in case of a flood——"

"A what?"

"A flood," said Monty Lowther seriously. "I heard of a case once, when a musician was washed out by a flood, he floated away on his 'cello, and his wife accompanied him on the piano."

"You—you funny ass——"

"Order!"

"Now, then!" said Tom Merry, raising the half of the cricket-stump. "Ready?"

"All serene!"

And the band played.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Services Not Required.

TROMBONE and two violins wailed out in the wood-shed.

Manners, with the trombone, took it easy. Lowther, with the first violin, bucked up. Jack Blake, second violin, hit the happy medium. The effect was striking, though it could not be called effective from a musical point of view.

Tom Merry conducted.

He put plenty of energy in the conducting. If his hair had been a little longer, and his face a little fatter, he might have passed for a fashionable conductor in a West End concert-hall—certainly his antics were wild enough.

He used both arms and both legs in conducting, in the latest modern style.

But somehow he couldn't quite keep the band together.

First violin was evidently in a hurry. He played two bars to anybody else's one. At times the trombone bucked up very creditably, but he never succeeded in catching up the first violin, though he sometimes overtook and passed the second.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Is that 'Come and Kiss Me, Honey'?"

"Tom Merry says so," grinned Kangaroo.

"It sounds more like Wichard Stwauss," said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head.

"Might be Debussy!" chuckled Digby.

"Or a lawn-mower run mad!"

"Or a sawmill out of gear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" roared the conductor. "Order! Slack a bit, Manners! You're going too fast now! Put the brake on that fiddle, Lowther!"

The door of the woodshed opened, and Taggles, the porter of St. Jim's, put his head in. Taggles was looking very bewildered.

"Wot's all this, young gents?" he exclaimed. "It ain't like you young gents to torture cats in the woodshed I'm sure—— Oh!"

Taggles saw that it was a band, and fled.

The band raced and dragged and shrieked on, and Tom Merry brandished his baton, and the other fellows stood round and watched the conductor with great interest.

"Good idea!" said Kangaroo. "Musical gymnastics, you know. It's bound to go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The strains died away. First violin was finished first, and then the second. Trombone had a dozen bars yet to play, and he played them out with grim persistence.

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"If that's the way the band's going to play, we shall be chivvied off the ground at the fete!" he remarked. "Of all the horrid cacophonies——"

"Well, that's a good word!" said Herries.

"First violin's fault," said Manners. "The trombone was exactly to time."

"Yes; if you'd been playing the 'Dead March in Saul'!" snorted Lowther.

"Look here, Lowther——"

"Look here, Manners——"

"Here they are!" roared a voice at the door.

Wally & Co. entered.

D'Arcy minor was accompanied by Frayne, Hobbs, Jameson, and Curly Gibson, of the Third. The Third-Formers had brought their musical instruments with them.

"Oh, get out!" said Tom Merry. "You mustn't interrupt!"

"Yaas, wathah! We've had wow enough!" said Arthur Augustus.

Wally snorted.

"We've heard that you're conductor of the concert party now, Tom Merry," he said.

"Yes, that's so!" said Tom Merry.

"We've heard the awful row these chaps have been making," said Wally, with a nod towards the enraged band. "We want to give you a sample of what music is like. We've got music with us this time—'The Wedding March of the Priests.'"

"The what?" yelled the concert party.

"I mean 'The War March of the Priests,'" said Wally hastily. "We were undecided whether to select that or 'The Wedding March,' you know. Both by the same composer—Wagner——"

"Wagner!" yelled Tom Merry. "Mendelssohn, you ass!"

"Yes; I meant Mendelssohn," said Wally, unabashed. "We can play it splendidly, and I should like you to hear it. You've got more sense than Blake."

"You——" began Blake.

"Order!" said Wally loftily. "I'm addressing the conductor of the band, Tom Merry Richter. Will you give us a show, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Well, you see——" he began.

"If you don't let us into the band, we're going to run a rival concert party," said Wally. "You know what to expect."

"So look out for squalls!" said Jameson truculently.

"We will—if Wally sings!" said Monty Lowther.

And the concert party chuckled.

"Play up!" said Wally, turning to his followers. "'The Wedding March of the Mendelssohn'—I mean, 'The War March of the Priests.' Now, then—tum—tum—tum! Tooral-looral——"

The Third-Form band struck up.

It might have been "The War March of the Priests"; it might have been the Wedding March from the "Midsummer Night's Dream"; it might have been anything else. Certainly it did not resemble anything in the earth, or above the earth, or in the waters under the earth. There was one unanimous roar from Tom Merry & Co.:

"Shut up!"

"Play up, my sons!" said D'Arcy minor, unheeding.

"Kick them out!"

"Bump them!"

"Jump on them!"

And the concert party made a furious rush.

The Third-Form band were swept out into the yard outside the woodshed rolling over one another, and their musical instruments were scattered far and wide.

"Bump them!" roared Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yow-ow!" roared Wally, as Blake and Kangaroo grasped him, and he smote the hard ground. "Yaro-oh! Yah! Leggo!"

"Ow! Help!"

"Oh! Ah! Yowp!"

"Gerro-o-oh!"

The concert party retired into the woodshed again, leaving the fags and their musical instruments strewn upon the ground.

Wally & Co. picked themselves up dazedly.

"The rotters!" gasped Wally.

"The bounders!"

"Beasts!"

"Gro-o-oh!"

"That's their last chance!" growled Wally. "They haven't any ear for music. They don't know a good thing when they see it. We won't join Tom Merry's concert party now if he goes down on his knees and asks us."

"I can see him doing it—I don't think!" growled Jameson.

"Ow!" murmured Joe Frayne. "I've got a pain! Ow!"

"I've got an ache all over!" gurgled Hobbs. "Ow! Yow! Wally, you silly ass, what did you bring us for!"

"That's right, put it on me!" said Wally witheringly. "I'm trying to buck you chaps up, and show the fellows that the Third Form can't be passed over."

"They've passed over me with their blessed boots on!" groaned Hobbs.

"Ow! Yow! Yah!" murmured Jameson.

"We'll start a rival band!" growled Wally. "And when they go to play at the giddy fete, we'll go, too, and play against them. We'll take our biggest tin-whistles, and play within a yard or two of them. We'll show the bounders!"

And the fags limped away. As they passed round the School House, they encountered three juniors belonging to the New House—Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, of the Fourth. The New House juniors looked at the dusty and rumpled fags in amazement.

"Hallo! Been sweeping up the yard with yourselves?" asked Figgins.

D'Arcy minor snorted.

"No, ass! We've offered ourselves to Tom Merry's concert party, and they cut up rusty. They've got no ear for music."

"Tom Merry's concert party!" echoed Figgins. "This is the first I've heard of it. Is it a new wheeze?"

"They're rehearsing in the woodshed," growled Jameson, who was a New House fag. "Go and raid them, Figgy, old man, and smash up their instruments. They're making an awful row, and it would be a kindness to the whole school."

Figgins & Co. exchanged a joyous grin.

"My word!" murmured Kerr. "We're on this!"

"Come on!" said Figgins.

And the New House trio strolled away in the direction of the wood-shed, while Wally and his comrades departed in search of a much-needed wash and brush-up.

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THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Tenor in Trouble.

FIGGINS chuckled as he drew near the woodshed with his chums.

A voice, which may or may not have been a tenor, but which was certainly very high, was sounding through the open window.

It was the voice of D'Arcy of the Fourth.

"Caruso the Second!" murmured Figgins.

"Tamagno the Greater!" grinned Kerr.

"Sims Reeves in a fit!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus was evidently bestowing upon the concert party a specimen of his vocal powers, with which he intended to ravish all hearts when the party sang at the Rylcombe Fete. The voice of the swell of St. Jim's rose loudly and clearly, though the words were in a foreign tongue, which nobody understood excepting Kerr; probably Arthur Augustus himself having a very dim idea of what they meant.

"Vesti la giubba—" came the solo from the wood-shed.

Figgins & Co. approached the window and peeped in. The concert party were standing round with various expressions of anguish upon their faces. Arthur Augustus appeared rather at a loss for words, or perhaps the shriek of Lowther's accompanying fiddle put him out. He paused.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

Monty Lowther sawed on.

"Lowthah, you ass, you are goin' too fast."

"Buck up, then," said Lowther. "You're going too slow."

"The accompanist has to keep time with the singah, you feahful ass, not the singah with the accompanist."

"Rats!"

"You fwightful duffah——"

"Why not let me give you a flute obbligato instead of that see-saw?" suggested Bishop. "That song goes all right with a flute obbligato."

"Br-r-r-r-r!" said Lowther.

"Buck up, Gussy—unless you're finished," said Blake.

"I am not finished, you ass," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I am goin' simply to knock them with this Italian aria. Vesti la giubba——"

"What on earth does that mean?" demanded Kangaroo.

"On with the motley," said D'Arcy. "It's a wippin' tenah solo, fwom Leoncavallo's opewah, 'I Pagliacci.'"

"Is it necessary to sing it now?" asked Bishop, putting up his flute with a sniff.

D'Arcy snorted.

"You uttah ass! Aren't we wehearsin'?"

"Well, go ahead, and get it over," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Pile in!" roared Blake.

"Oh, vewy well! Pway keep time, Lowthah."

And the voice of the swell of St. Jim's

rose in melody once more. It was certainly a ripping aria; and perhaps it was sung rippingly—at all events, it seemed to rip the air, as Figgins remarked in a whisper to Fatty Wynn. Kerr had stolen away from his chums for a moment, to jam a wedge of wood under the shed door, which opened outwards. The concert party were prisoners in the shed now. Kerr rejoined his chums with a grin. Arthur Augustus was going very strong now.

"Vesti la giubba,
E la faccia infarina,
La gente pagar, e rider vuole qua.
E se Arlecchin' t'invola Columbina,
Ridi, Pagliaccio, ognun applaudira."

Words and music, both straight from the heart of a great musician, needed a greater tenor than Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to do them justice. And as the juniors understood hardly a word of Italian, and as D'Arcy's voice, like Mr. Gilbert's piper's bagpipe, wandered around into several keys, the concert party may be forgiven for not enjoying the performance.

D'Arcy had just reached "applaudira" when there was a sudden, sharp, loud squeak in the air.

Squeak!

Tom Merry & Co. glanced in the direction of the window, and saw three grinning faces. Kerr held a toy "squeaker" in his hand, with which he was evidently bent upon accompanying the amateur tenor of the School House.

It was one of those terrible instruments much used by hilarious youths at exhibitions and other places where holiday-makers do congregate, and it had a particularly loud and raucous tone.

The School House juniors grinned. Arthur Augustus sailed on unheeding.

"In una smorfia il singhiozzo e'l dolor!"

Squeak-k-k-k!

"Ridi, Pagliaccio——"

Squeak!

"Sul tuo amore infranto——"

Squeak!

"Ridi del duol——"

Squeak, squeak!

"Che t'avvelena il cor!"

Squeak, squeak, squeak!

Arthur Augustus's eyes were gleaming with wrath. He lowered his copy of music, and glared round in search of the impertinent squeaker.

"You feahful asses!" he yelled. "You have uttahly spoiled my aria!"

Squeak!

"Who is making that widiculous noise?"

Squeak!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The School House juniors burst into an irresistible roar of laughter; they could not help it. Arthur Augustus had his back to the window, and could not see Figgins & Co. there. The amateur tenor was pink with fury.

"I shall have to twy it ovah fwom the beginnin' again now," he said. "Lowthah, you may as well leave the fiddle alone. You put me out."

"You want putting out badly," growled Lowther.

"You have done it vewy badly," Lowthah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Vesti la giubba," recommenced Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, getting within some yards of the right note; "e la faccia infarina——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"La gente pagar——"

Squeak-k-k!

"You uttah asses——"

Squeak!

Arthur Augustus realised at last that the sound was behind him. He whirled round, and stared at the three grinning faces in the window. The juniors in the woodshed yelled. Figgins & Co. blew kisses to the swell of St. Jim's.

"Go on," said Kerr sweetly. "I'm accompanying you—or punctuating you, which ever way you like to look at it."

"You fwightful boundahs——"

Squeak!

"If you do not go away immediately, I shall come out and give you a feahful thwashin' all wound!" shouted the swell of St. Jim's.

Squeak!

"You awful wascals——"

Squeak!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus wasted no more breath in words. He rushed at the door and turned the handle. He expected it to open as he pushed it, of course; but as it was wedged from the outside, it did not budge an inch.

Arthur Augustus bumped upon it, with the impetus of his rush, and his aristocratic nose came in violent contact with the wood. There was a howl in the woodshed which put the top-note of "Vesti la giubba" completely in the shade.

"Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Blake, staggering to a heap of faggots and sinking upon them breathlessly. "Gussy will be the death of me yet! I know he will!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the concert party.

"Ow!" groaned Arthur Augustus, rubbing his nose. "The beastly door's fastened somehow. Ow! Yow! Gwooh! Help me to open this door, so that I can go and thwash those New House boundahs!"

Squeak!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus drove at the door, and after some minutes it yielded. The other fellows were laughing too much to help him. The door flew open at last, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed out, on vengeance bent.

But the squeaker was gone, and Figgins & Co. were gone with it; and only from the distance, round the corner of the house, came back a faint echo of them.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Skimpole's Generous Offer.

TOM MERRY wore a worried look.

Two days had elapsed since the rehearsal in the woodshed.

Those two days had not been lost by the amateur musicians. They had met again and again for practice.

Some of them were doing well, some weren't.

Those that weren't outnumbered those that were.

Tom Merry had taken on the task of conducting the concert party with a light heart. But he had found since that conducting amateur orchestras was not all beer and skittles, so to speak.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther talked it over.

"It's a bit rotten," Tom Merry remarked, as he pushed his chair back from the tea-table, in his study in the Shell passage. "We want a good violinist, and we haven't got one in the House—not in the Lower Forms. And we don't want to let in any giddy seniors."

"Not to mention the fact that they wouldn't play in a junior band," remarked Lowther.

"They would want to run the show," Manners observed.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes; we know what comes of letting seniors into anything. But what are we to do for a really good first violin?"

Lowther glared.

"We've got one!" he said.

"Ahem!"

"Look here, Tom Merry——"

"We ought to have a double-bass, too," said Tom Merry. "Now, Fatty Wynn can play both the double-bass and the 'cello like—like an angel."

"Do angels play basses and 'cellos?" asked Lowther sarcastically. "I fancied they played harps."

"Oh, don't be an ass, Monty! We want Kerr and Wynn in the orchestra, as a matter of fact; but, of course, we can't own that up to the New House bounders."

"Of course not!"

"We want a good clarionet, too," said Tom Merry. "Young Hancock has offered, but entre nous he can't play for toffee. Young Redfern, of the New House, does the clarionet beautifully."

"Well, we can't have any New House bounders."

"Oh, no!" said Manners.

"It's a pity, though," said Tom Merry reflectively. "If we had Kerr, we could put in a violin solo. He's ripping."

"Look here——"

"Well, it can't be helped," said Tom Merry, with a sigh. "We shall have to manage to pull the orchestra together somehow. We've got to make some sort of a show at the Rylcombe Fete. Now the secret's out, and the whole coll. knows about it, we shall be chipped to death if we don't make some sort of a show."

"Blake isn't bad with the guitar, to accompany a song," said Manners. "Herries and his cornet ought to be boiled together."

"And Gussy's tenor solos——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kangy is all right with the banjo, too," said Lowther. "Not what you'd call classical, but people like that sort of thing."

"I wish we could get a chap to handle a double-bass," said Tom Merry. "We could hire one in Wayland, if we had the man for it."

A junior with a large, bumpy forehead, and a pair of large spectacles, looked into the study. It was Skimpole, of the Shell, the genius of the school. Skimpole was a youth with any amount of brain, though, as Lowther had remarked, it did not seem to be in very good working order.

"Ah! I'm glad I found you fellows here," said Skimpole, with a beaming smile.

"Can't say the same," growled Monty Lowther. "No; we don't want you to read out a chapter from Professor Balmycrumpet's book on Determinism. We don't want to hear anything on the subject of evolution, and we don't care twopence whether the human race evolved from a speck of jelly floating in a primeval sea, or from a rotten apple on the banks of a prehistoric river. And we don't care whether it happened twenty million years ago, or only the day before yesterday. Run away!"

Skimpole blinked at him.

"I did not come here to enlighten you upon scientific subjects, Lowther, much as that is needed," he said. "I have an idea——"

"Go and tell it to Gore."

"But it is about the concert party."

"Oh! Do you want to play first fiddle?" asked Lowther sarcastically.

"I was thinking of offering my services as 'cellist," said Skimpole modestly. "You need a 'cello in the orchestra, I've heard you say several times, and you can't find one. I should be very happy to oblige."

The Terrible Three stared at him. They had never suspected the scientific Skimpole of musical proclivities before.

"You play the 'cello?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I did not say I played it," corrected Skimpole. "I merely remarked that I was willing to play it. A fellow never knows what he can do till he tries, of course."

Tom Merry gasped.

"You—you ass! Do you think we're going to let you start practising for the first time, in our orchestra?" he roared.

"You—you fathead!"

"My dear Merry——"

"Oh, buzz off, Skimmy!" implored Lowther. "You make me tired!"

"But, you see, I have a new scheme for playing the 'cello," Skimpole explained. "I intend to play it upon purely scientific principles. Pure science will enable me to deal with it, without previous practice——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothing whatever to laugh at," said Skimpole reprovingly. "You fellows do not understand the marvels of science. Science can combat deadly disease simply by puncturing you in the arm. Science can measure the unmeasurable void——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weigh the solar system——"

"And the anchor?" asked Lowther.

"My dear Lowther——"

"Better go and read Balmycrumpet on Determinism," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head. "Or perhaps the New House chaps might like you to play the 'cello to them on purely scientific principles. Go and try Figgins & Co."

Skimpole shook his head.

"No use, my dear fellows. Figgins is strangely obstinate. I have already offered him my services for his orchestra, and he has declined. He——"

"His what?" roared the Terrible Three with one voice.

"His orchestra!"

"You—you mean to tell us that that New House bounder is starting an orchestra too?" roared Tom Merry.

"My dear Merry, I see nothing to get excited about. I happened to come upon Figgins & Co. practising in the old chapel garden, and I offered——"

Tom Merry looked at his chums.

"The bounders!" he exclaimed. "They've had the cheek to bag our wheeze, and——"

"And they've got better players than we have!" grinned Manners.

"The awful spoofers!"

"How many were there of them, Skimmy?" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"I saw Figgins, and Kerr, and Wynn, and Redfern, and Owen. I offered Figgins to play the 'cello for him upon scientific principles——"

"In the old chapel garden?"

"Yes. I offered——"

"Are they still there?"

"I left them there," said Skimpole, blinking in surprise at the excitement of the chums of the Shell. "I offered——"

"Come on!" shouted Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three rushed for the door. Skimpole stepped in the way; he had a great deal more to say. But he had no opportunity of saying it. Three Shell fellows rushed right into him, and he rolled over on the carpet, and the Terrible Three trampled over him and ran off.

Skimpole sat up, looking very dazed and bewildered.

"Dear me!" he gasped. "How very extraordinary! I really do not understand this at all! Ow!"

But the Terrible Three did not stop to bother about whether Skimpole understood or not. They shouted to Kangaroo and Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn, and yelled into Study No. 6 for Blake & Co., and the whole band rushed off to the chapel garden to interview the new Figgins orchestra!

"Cut off, you young villains!" shouted Kerr to the rival concert party. The latter took no notice, however, and next moment a medley of sounds crashed out from the Third Form orchestra.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Capture from the Enemy.

SWEET strains of music proceeded from the old garden. It was a somewhat solitary spot, secluded from the rest of St. Jim's. The garden had belonged to the ruined chapel, and fragments of the old building encumbered it, and the walks were shaded by thick trees. Hidden by the trees, the Figgins orchestra was at practice.

Tom Merry & Co. heard the sweet strains

as they advanced. Tom Merry made a sign to his followers, and they approached quietly through the trees, with all the caution they had learned as Boy Scouts, to take the enemy by surprise.

They glared from the trees upon the unconscious orchestra.

Figgins & Co. were going strong.

Figgins had a 'cello, Kerr a violin, Fatty Wynn a cornet, Redfern a clarionet, and Owen the second violin. They had music pinned on the trees, or on sticks stuck in the ground, and were playing in time and tune—wonderful to relate. There was no doubt that Figgins & Co. had made up a better orchestra than the School House Co. It was due to Kerr and Fatty Wynn, both of whom were born musicians.

"The bounders!" murmured Tom Merry.

"The awful wottahs!"

"Kerr's conducting with his eyelashes, I s'pose," murmured Monty Lowther. "The cheek, to borrow our wheeze like this."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I wonder whether Wally has offered Figgins his services?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet! Listen!"

There was a pause in the music.

"Good!" said Kerr. "You'll have to buck up with that 'cello, Figgins. But really you're all very good, a bit different from the School House stuff!"

"What-ho!" said the Co. heartily.

"Like their cheek to take up the idea at all," remarked Redfern. "They can't play for toffee. Tom Merry can play the piano, but he's no good at anything else."

"And have you heard Lowther's fiddling?" grinned Owen.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The New House juniors laughed in chorus, and Monty Lowther turned crimson.

"Did you hear that, Monty?" murmured Manners. "What did I say?"

"Oh, shut up!"

"And Manners' trombone!" went on Kerr, chuckling. "Have you heard Manners play the trombone? It's a treat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the New House musicians laughed more heartily than ever; and this time it was Monty Lowther's turn to nudge his chum.

"Hear that, Manners?" he murmured. "What did I tell you?"

"Oh, cheese it!" growled Manners.

"And Reilly with the flute?" said Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Gussy's tenor solos!"

The musicians shrieked.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wefuse to wemain here and listen to this wot! Let's wush the boundahs!"

"And Blake's guitar!" grinned Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They'll get chased off the ground at the fete," said Kerr. "Serve 'em right for their cheek. We are the musical geniuses of St. Jim's."

"We are!" said Redfern. "We is!"

"Queer we didn't think of the idea ourselves," Figgins remarked. "But we're the chaps to carry it out, anyway."

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, let's get on to the next piece," said Kerr. "I've got the Grand March from Tannhauser written out for these instruments. I wrote it out after dinner to-day from the score. Here you are."

"Good egg!"

Kerr handed out the pencilled sheets.

The band was about to commence, when there was a rush of feet, and Tom Merry & Co. burst upon the scene.

In a moment each of the musicians was struggling in the grasp of a couple of the School House fellows.

There was a roar of wrath from Figgins & Co.

"Yah!"

"Leggo!"

"Gerrout!"

The New House fellows could not offer a vigorous resistance for fear of damaging their instruments. They were taken at a disadvantage.

"Now, you bounders!" said Tom Merry.

"Gerraway!" roared Figgins. "You'll damage my 'cello! Buzz off!"

"Put it down!"

"Shove all those instruments down!" commanded Tom Merry. "We're going to bump you. If the instruments are bumped, too, they'll be hurt."

"Look here——"

"Bump them!"

"Hold on!" yelled Kerr. "If you damage my violin I'll scalp you!"

"Put it down, then!"

The infuriated musicians put their instruments down.

Then they fought, but they fought in vain. The School House party were two to one, and they were prisoners.

Tom Merry surveyed them with a stern and frowning brow.

"You bounders!" he exclaimed. "So you were going to borrow our wheeze, were you, and take a concert party to the fete."

Figgins grinned breathlessly.

"All's fair in war!" he remarked.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Exactly! All's fair in war; and so we're going to confiscate your instruments."

"What!" roared the New House juniors.

"Getting deaf?" asked Tom Merry pleasantly.

"Look here——"

"You awful rotter——"

"Gather up the instruments, you chaps," said Tom Merry. "Take them away, and put them in my study in the School House."

"What-ho!" grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Blake and D'Arcy and Kangaroo gathered up the instruments, and put them in their cases, and disappeared with them under the trees, in the direction of the School House.

Figgins & Co. struggled desperately.

But they struggled in vain. The odds were too great, and Tom Merry & Co. had the upper hand.

"Look here, you rotters!" yelled Kerr, as he sank down again breathless under the weight of Reilly, of the Fourth. "Look here, you can't take our instruments."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Seems to me that we've taken them," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "Of course, we're not going to keep them permanently!"

"I should say not!" yelled Redfern. "You—you giddy burglars!"

"We're only going to keep them till after the Rylcombe Fete," said Tom Merry. "We can't have a rival concert party there."

"You—you——"

"We can do with that 'cello, too," Manners remarked.

"Yes, and an extra violin, and a clarionet."

"You're not going to use our instruments!" shrieked Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who's going to stop us?" asked Digby agreeably.

"Why, you—you——"

"All's fair in war, as you just remarked yourself, Figgins, old man," said Tom Merry. "You bagged our idea, and you were going to take a rival concert party to the fete. We've bagged your instruments, and stopped you. One good turn deserves another."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll take the very best care of them, and let you have them back the day after the concert," promised Tom Merry.

"You—you——"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came back through the trees, with a sweet smile upon his aristocratic face.

"It's all wight, deah boys. The instwuments are quite safe."

"Good!"

"Look here!" roared the exasperated Figgins. "I tell you——"

"Bump them!" said Tom Merry. "Bump them for their cheek! Who's cock-house at St. Jim's?"

"School House!" roared the juniors.

"Who's done brown?"

"Figgins & Co.!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump, bump, bump!

And Figgins & Co. were bumped heartily, and then the School House fellows departed, leaving the unfortunate orchestra sprawling in the grass, gasping for breath. From the School House party, as they retreated, came an echoing yell through the trees.

"Hear us smile! Ha, ha, ha!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Figgins & Co. Come into Line.

TOM MERRY was looking particularly cheerful when he came out of the Shell class-room the next morning after lessons.

Whether his instrumentalists were quite up to the mark or not, there was no lack of instruments for the concert party, and that was a good thing. And his rivals of the New House had been defeated, and that was better still.

The Terrible Three gloated.

As they came down the wide Form-room passage, the Fourth Form came out of their class-room, and Figgins & Co. came over towards the Terrible Three at once.

The chums of the Shell were ready for war. But Figgins was not on the war-path this time. He held up his hand in sign of peace.

"Pax!" he said.

"Certainly, old man!" said Tom Merry, smiling.

"Look here," said Figgins, "I want to talk to you about the concert biznai."

"Go ahead!"

"You've got our musical instruments——"

"Spoils of war, Figgy, old man," said Tom Merry solemnly. "To the victor the spoils, you know. Vae victis!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all right," said Figgins. "We would have done the same to you, and we're not grousing. But I've got a proposal to make."

"To which of us?" asked Monty Lowther, with a grin.

"All of you."

"Why, you giddy Mormon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Figgins. "I want to propose to you——"

"Ask mamma!"

"You ass! Don't be funny!" roared Figgins. "I want to propose to come into the concert party. You've got our instruments, but you can't play 'em for toffee. We're willing to come into the band and make it pax."

Tom Merry's face brightened.

"Well, that's a jolly good idea!" he exclaimed. "We want some more instrumentalists. We are willing to take in recruits."

"But about the conductor?" said Figgins.

"I'm conductor," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "It's the Tom Merry Concert Party, you know. I conduct."

"Br-r-r-r! You couldn't conduct a 'bus!"

"Look here——"

"Now, be reasonable," urged Figgins. "I don't say it because Kerr is a New House chap, but you know he's the best conductor we could get."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, I'll be reasonable," he agreed. "Kerr could conduct better than I could, I know that. Only it's the Tom Merry Concert Party—that's understood."

"Right you are. But Kerr conducts?"

"Agreed!"

"We'll have a rehearsal before dinner," said Kerr briskly. "I dare say I shall be able to knock you chaps into shape before the Rylcombe Fete."

"Will you?" said Monty Lowther, rather truculently.

"Well, we'll try," said Kerr blandly. "Go and dig out the instruments, and we'll get down to the woodshed and play up."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "It's pax, then—no larks? Honour bright?"

"Honour bright!" said Figgins.

"Good enough!"

And the captured instruments were brought down, and the united bands—massed bands, as Tom Merry proudly called them—adjourned to the woodshed for rehearsal.

This rehearsal was without doubt, the most successful one that had been held. Under Kerr's able conducting the show went off very well, and when it was over each of the schoolboy musicians felt confident that the performance at the Rylcombe Fete showed every prospect of turning out well.

Figgins and Co. seemed to think the improvement was due entirely to their efforts.

Tom Merry and Co. would not have it, but the fact remained that the New House juniors worked a remarkable change in the Tom Merry Concert Party.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Wally, Too!

THE Rylcombe Fete was drawing near.

It was a local affair of very considerable importance, and, indeed, famous for three or four miles in every direction from Rylcombe.

It was given in the grounds of General Sir Hotham Wapps, a retired Anglo-Indian veteran, whose extensive estate ran for many a mile along the banks of the Ryll. The fete was given annually in the cause of charity, the chief beneficiaries apparently being the local tradesmen, who did very good business on the occasion. Crowds came from far and near to the fete, and the St. Jim's fellows usually turned up in strong force.

But the idea of taking a school concert party there had not been thought of before that brilliant idea occurred to Tom Merry.

After many vicissitudes, the Tom Merry Concert Party seemed to be in excellent working order at last.

It had been greatly improved by the addition of the New House members, and under Kerr's conductorship it was going really strong.

By the time the fete day arrived, Tom Merry was quite satisfied with his band, and he had easily obtained permission for it to perform in the general's grounds on the occasion of the fete.

Some of the juniors suggested making a collection for the performance, but Tom Merry would not hear of it.

"Can't be did!" he declared. "We're amateurs, not professionals, and we're not after the shekels. It's in the cause of charity, my dear chaps."

"Yaas, wathah! When a chap has a wippin' tenah voice, for instance, I considah that he ought to be willin' to place it at the disposal of othahs," remarked D'Arcy.

"Ahem! Yes! We shall get lots of kudos, anyway—especially if Gussy sings Vesti la giubba!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Quite wight, deah boy."

"I suppose you're going to sing it in Dutch?" asked Redfern.

"Weally, Weddy, the song is in Italian, you know."

"Still, you might as well sing it in Dutch," said Redfern gravely. "The people won't know any difference."

"I shall sing it in Italian," said D'Arcy. "I will wun ovah it now, if you fellows like——"

There was a rush to escape.

"Weally, you fellows, you know——"

But the concert party were gone.

The school had a half-holiday on the day of the fete, and after dinner that day, the concert party made great preparations.

There was a last rehearsal in the woodshed, and Kerr expressed himself satisfied; and later in the afternoon, the bandsmen packed up their instruments and prepared to start.

As they came out with their bags and cases in their hands, another party emerged from the School House. There were five members of it, and they belonged to the Third Form. Tom Merry cast his eye suspiciously upon the fags.

"Where are you chaps going?" he asked.

"To the fete," said Wally cheerfully.

"Oh!"

"My band!" explained Wally, indicating the grinning fags, with a wave of his chubby hand. "We haven't been rehearsing quite so much as you chaps have, but I think it will be all right."

"Your band!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

D'Arcy minor nodded.

"That's it! Jameson plays the tin whistle in first-rate style, don't you, Jimmy?"

"What-ho!" grinned Jameson.

"Frayne does the bones, don't you, Joe?"

"Wotto!" said Joe Frayne.

"Curly does the mouth-organ, don't you, Curly?"

"Not half!" said Curly Gibson.

"And Hobbs can play the tin whistle, too."

"My strong point," said Hobbs blandly.

"I'm conductor," said Wally. "But I can play the tin whistle when required, or click the castanets."

"Look here, you young bounders!" exclaimed Tom Merry wrathfully. "Do you mean to say that you are going to make a row at the fete?"

"Weally, Wally——"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gussy!" said Wally imploringly. "As for making a row, Tom Merry, I don't know what you mean. We are a concert party!"

"A concert what?"

"Party!" said Wally affably. "P-a-r-t-y party! We're going to enliven proceedings at the fete, for the honour of the school. With a school band playing out of tune, you know, it's up to us to show the public that there are some real musicians here."

"You—you young ass——"

"March!" said Wally, waving his hand to his orchestra. "Tempo di marcia! Buzz!"

And the grinning fags marched off towards the gates.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Figgins.

"They'll have to be stopped!" exclaimed Kerr. "They're going to rot us at the fete, and spoil the whole show."

"The feahful young wascals! Pway hold my music, deah boys, while I wun aftah them and give them a feahful thwashin'."

"They're gone!" growled Tom Merry. "Come on!"

"But we can't let them rot us at the fete," said Manners excitedly.

"I don't see how we're to stop them."

"Bai Jove! I considah——"

"Why don't you keep your blessed minor in order, Gussy?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Oh, come on!" said Tom Merry. "If they bother us, we'll chase 'em out of old Wapp's grounds, that's all!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the concert party started off. But some of them were looking very thoughtful. They had almost forgotten about Wally & Co., in the intense interest of rehearsing for fete day; and they had now discovered that they had to reckon, after all, with the heroes of the Third Form.

There were a good many St. Jim's fellows on the road, all of them bound for the grounds of Sir Hotham Wapps.

Many country people, too, were coming in; and the village of Rylcombe seemed to have transferred itself bodily there.

The extensive grounds were crowded.

The trees were hung with Chinese lanterns, to be lighted when darkness fell; and there were entertainments of all sorts going on, and tents at which refreshments could be obtained in all varieties.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Rival Bands.

SIR HOTHAM WAPPS, a stout old gentleman with white whiskers arranged like a fringe round a purple countenance, moved among the merrymakers with a benevolent smile.

A band was discoursing sweet music near the river bank, and in a large tent couples were already dancing. When that was over for a time, Tom Merry's Concert Party got to work. Kerr planted his band on the great lawn, and the instruments were taken out of their cases, and the bandsmen tuned up. A good many St. Jim's fellows were in the crowd that gathered round to listen.

The amateur orchestra were starting with the Grand March from "Tannhauser," a stirring march that was to give the entertainment a good send-off. As there were twelve instruments in all, and the bandsmen had been rehearsing hard, there was no reason why the march should not have been a big success.

But just as the opening bars crashed out, Wally & Co. appeared.

They took up their stand a few yards away, and produced their instruments.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Gore. "What's that?"

"A rival concert!" grinned Pratt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerr waved his baton to Wally, rather interrupting the time of the band he was conducting.

"Cut off, you young villains!" he shouted.

Wally did not reply.

He was conducting.

Two tin whistles, bones and castanets, and mouth-organ, crashed out and shrieked out together.

What tune they were playing, if they were playing a tune at all, was not easily recognisable.

But they made plenty of noise.

The shrieking of the tin whistles, and the braying of the mouth-organ jarred upon the sweet strains that were proceeding from Tom Merry's Concert Party, and the result was a most terrific cacophony.

But the spectators did not seem to mind.

They laughed.

A number of St. Jim's fellows in the crowd cheered on the fags to greater efforts, for no better reason than for the fun of seeing the genuine concert-party growing more and more crimson with fury.

Kerr set his teeth, and conducted grimly. The Tannhauser march crashed out, and the medley of sounds from the Third-Form orchestra crashed out with it.

The crowd roared.

The "Grand March" came to an end. Wally & Co. were still blaring away with all the force of their instruments.

"Gussy does his solo next," said Tom Merry.

The band struck up the opening strains of "Vesti la giubba," and Arthur Augustus coughed a little preliminary cough, and started.

Immediately Curly Gibson stepped forth from the ranks of the Third Form band, with a sheet of music in his hand, in absurd imitation of Arthur Augustus.

As D'Arcy started "Vesti la giubba," Curly started a song to the tune of "Sulle labbra," but with words in an Italian that had been invented in the Third Form-room at St. Jim's, and which would have puzzled an Italian very much. Instead of the words "Sulle, sulle labbra, sulle labbra, si potesse, dolce 'un bacio, ti darei, dolce 'un bacio, ti darei——" Curly Gibson sang:

"Candel-candelabra,
Candelabra, Saffronillo!
Greeko Streeto, Ice-creamo!
Organ-grindo, hip, hip, hurrah!"

There was a yell of laughter. It drowned the voices of both the tenors.

Curly Gibson's humorous Italian quite cut out the real article as rendered by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's stopped.

"Keep on!" yelled Kerr.

"Imposs, deah boy, undah the circs!" Tom Merry frowned.

"We shall have to clear those young rascals out!" he exclaimed. "Put the instruments down here, and Gussy can look after them. The rest of you follow me."

"Good egg!"

And the concert-party rushed upon the rival band.

There was a shout of alarm from Wally:

"Look out! Rescue, Third!"

Then Tom Merry & Co. were upon them.

There was a wild and whirling scrimmage, and a crowd of Third Form fags rushed to the aid of Wally & Co.

But Tom Merry & Co. were the champion fighting-men of the lower school at St. Jim's, and worth any number of fags.

Wally and his band were knocked right and left, and their rescuers were whirled to and fro, and put to flight amid roars of laughter from the spectators.

Tom Merry & Co. smote them hip and thigh, and their musical instruments—not very expensive ones, truly—were trodden out of shape under foot.

"My only Aunt Jane!" gasped Wally, sitting down upon a grassy bank, and fanning himself with his cap. "That was warm!"

"Groo!" grunted Jameson, dabbing his nose with a handkerchief already crimson.

"Let's go back!" said Wally.

"Groo! No fear!"

"'Nuff's as good as a feast," said Curly Gibson, caressing an ear that was decidedly thick. "It was funny while it lasted! But 'nuff's 'nuff!"

And Wally agreed that it was.

Tom Merry & Co., in a very breathless state, resumed their instruments, but for a time the laughter of the crowd was so great that they found it difficult to get a hearing. And it could not be denied that the appearance of the band was somewhat marred by the liberal distribution of darkened eyes and swollen noses among them.

"Pewwaps I had bettah give 'em some solos, while you fellows west," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy suggested considerately.

Kerr sniffed.

"We don't want them to chase us off, same as we have the fags," he replied.

"Why, you uttah ass——"

"Play up!" said Kerr. "Give 'em the march from 'Carmen,' and they'll stop sniggering presently!"

And the band played up.

The laughter died down after a time, and as the fags did not return, Tom Merry's concert-party were allowed to get through the remainder of their performance without interruption.

And it was a very creditable performance, indeed.

Number after number was performed, and the crowd became quite enthusiastic, and they cheered the items, and Tom Merry & Co. gradually found their good-humour restored. True, there was a recurrence of sounds of laughter when Arthur Augustus delivered a tenor solo; but everything else went down in first-class style; and after the concert performance the party retired for refreshments amid loud cheers.

Indeed, there were a good many fellows at the fete who declared that the great item of the day, the piece-de-resistance of the whole show, was the amateur band from St. Jim's. The fellows who held that opinion were all members, needless to say, of Tom Merry's Concert Party!

THE END.

PREHISTORIC GREYFRIARS!

By JOHNNY BULL.

The following effort was submitted by Johnny Bull for publication in the "Greyfriars," but being convinced that it was the best thing Bull has ever done, Harry Wharton very kindly consented to my publishing it in the "Penny Popular." This effort is, we believe, something of what Johnny Bull dreamed after a history lesson on Primitive Man. To avoid further dreams of a like nature we should urge Bull to forego heavy suppers before going to bed.—*Editor.*

"WOW!"

It was Billy Bunter who howled thus. And he said it again.

"Wow!"

I looked up. I had just returned from catching the supper—a delicious pterodactyl. And I saw at once what was the matter.

Bunter had swarmed out on to a bough, which would not bear his weight. And it was giving way rapidly beneath the strain.

"Help, you fellows!" he roared.

The next moment he had fallen with a thud on the ground.

"Ha, ha, ha!" sounded from No. 1 Bowery in the nearest tree-top.

"Serves you right!" came a shout from another tree.

I was just about to laugh myself when I heard Mr. Quelch's voice.

"If you boys don't go up in your tree," he said, "I shall set the lions on to you!"

"Oo-er!" muttered Bunter, springing to his feet.

He had torn his new spring coat of blue paint rather badly, but that did not matter. He scrambled up the tree like a three-year-old.

Then I heard Coker's voice from somewhere in the distance, and the next moment he hove in sight.

"Ha!" he said, spotting me. "I want something from you!"

Coker had been out on the trail, fishing for alligators, or something like that. He was not bringing any back with him, so I concluded that he had had no luck.

As he came on, however, I heard a chuckle from No. 1 Bowery, and the next moment a large cocoanut dropped on Coker's nut.

"Something from me, instead!" said Bob Cherry sweetly.

"Yaroogh!" roared Coker.

He dropped to earth with a terrific bang, and I waited no longer. I knew, somehow, that Coker would not be pleased, and he was fearfully fond of using his bow and arrow. Not, of course, that he could hit a dinosaur at ten-yards range. But there was always the risk. If he aimed at Bob, I was in real danger!

I reached No. 1 Bowery in record time. Harry Wharton was doing his history on a cabbage-leaf, and Bob Cherry was chipping geometry on a piece of stone.

"Hallo, stranger!" said Nugent, spotting me. "That caught Coker a good one!"

I nodded.

"I've left our supper on the ground," I said. "I was lucky in getting it so easily. Old Prout was out shooting with his bow and arrow, and he aimed at a lizard and killed a pterodactyl which was watching him at the side.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Bob Cherry. "He'll do some damage with that some day!"

Nugent interrupted us.

"Look!" he said, pointing to the ground. "Monkeys! They're all round Coker!"

I looked down.

"Which of them is Coker?" I asked.

"You can tell him easily enough," said Harry. "He's the one with a bump on his head!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

He sat watching for a few minutes, and then Nugent laughed.

"They're not monkeys," he said. "They're those Third Form fags. I wonder what they're doing there?"

"Don't worry about them," said Bob Cherry. "Look what's coming up the tree to see us!"

I looked down. Fisher T. Fish was ascending.

"Shall I stun him?" asked Bob, fondling a club.

"Better not," said Wharton. "Hear what he has to say."

As he spoke Fisher T. Fish came swarming along the branch.

"I guess I've got a real good stunt here!" he said, exhibiting a piece of bone, on which were several characters in straggling carving.

"What's up now?" asked Nugent.

"The greatest Fish insurance scheme out, I guess!" said Fishy. "It's this. If you fall out of a tree fifty feet high, I give you forty big cocoanuts if you come to my bowery within five minutes. I calc'late that some inducement, when the entrance-fee is only two cocoanuts each!"

"Go hon!"

"And if you fall from a hundred-feet tree, you can claim one hundred and thirty cocoanuts!"

"Never!"

"I guess——"

Bob Cherry interrupted him.

"Buzz off, Fishy!" he said. "Nothing doing!"

Fisher T. Fish glared.

"I guess you ain't no business instincts!" he growled. "Why, in my country——"

"Oh, dry up!" said Wharton. "You haven't got a country! It hasn't been discovered yet!"

Fishy snorted.

"You galoots!" he howled. "I kinder calculate——"

Bob Cherry tapped him playfully with his club.

"Don't trouble," he said, as Fishy slid down the tree. "We're busy!"

He had just started to carve a fresh circle when the tree shook perceptibly, and, looking down, we saw that Bunter was coming up.

"I say, you fellows!" he said, as he reached the branch. "Has anyone got a nut they don't want?"

"You have!" retorted Nugent. "You never use yours!"

"Don't rot!" said Bunter peevishly. "I'm expecting a consignment from my rich aunt, who lives in the palm-tree. It hasn't come yet, but it's certain to come anytime now. Mrs. Mimble won't let me in her cave now."

"Serves you right!" growled Wharton. "You owe her for two dinosaurs and a pterodactyl already."

"But I say——"

"Don't shake the tree as you go down," said Bob interrupting.

He handed his club lovingly, and Bunter began to retreat.

"I say——"

Bob interrupted him again.

"If you bang the leaves together, I'll knock every square inch of paint off your fat hide!" he snapped.

Bunter started to struggle back, and then the unexpected happened. His weight had been too much, and the bough was breaking. There came a tremendous splintering sound, and everything seemed to give way.

I found myself flying down and down towards the ground—and then I woke up!

THE END.

A Grand Long Complete Story, dealing with the Early Adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co.

THE ROOKWOOD MINSTRELS!

By Owen Conquest

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Good Samaritans.

"WHAT was that?"

Jimmy Silver gave a sudden start.

Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Newcome, and Raby, the Fistical Four, were strolling along the passage towards their study. A sound from behind a closed study door had caught Jimmy Silver's ear—a sound that made him stop suddenly.

It was the sound of a sob.

Jimmy Silver was as hard as nails to an enemy, and a pretty tough customer at any time—as Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle, of the Modern side at Rookwood had found to their cost; but, all the same, he had a tender heart, and a sound like that was sufficient to awaken all his sympathy in a moment.

"Did you hear it, kids?"

"Rather!" said Lovell. "Somebody had a licking, I suppose, and turning on the tap as a relief."

"It didn't sound like that kind of a howl," Jimmy Silver remarked thoughtfully, looking at the door of the room from which the sound had proceeded. "It's Topham's study. I wonder what's wrong with him?"

"Can't go in very well," said Lovell, shaking his head. "If there's anything the matter, he would think we had come to taunt him."

"That's so. Still——"

"Well, we'll see what's the matter, anyhow," said Jimmy Silver. "I hate to see a fellow doubled up without trying to lend him a hand."

And Jimmy tapped at the door.

There was no reply from within.

Jimmy Silver waited a few moments, and then opened the door and looked into the study. It was indeed Topham who was in trouble. The dandy of the Fourth was sitting at the table, his elbows resting upon it, his head in his hands.

"I say, Topham!" said Jimmy Silver.

Topham had not heard the tap, nor had he heard the door open. But Jimmy Silver's voice startled him, and he looked up suddenly. He showed a ghastly face—white, drawn, and tear-stained.

"What's the matter, Topham?"

"Get out!" muttered Topham hoarsely.

"I say——"

"Get out! Let me alone!"

At any other time the chums would not have needed telling twice that they were unwelcome. But the case was unusual now. Instead of leaving the study, they came further in, and Raby quietly closed the door.

"What's the matter, kid?"

"Mind your own business!"

Even at that Jimmy Silver did not flinch. He came closer to the junior. Topham gave him a bitter, savage look.

"You are going to stay!" he muttered. "You enjoy this, of course. You'd jump for joy if I was expelled from Rookwood, wouldn't you?"

The Fistical Four stared at him in amazement.

"Don't talk rot!" said Jimmy Silver sharply. "If you really felt like that, you want a good hiding; but I don't believe you do. We haven't come in here to crow over you, as you seem to think. If you're in trouble, we'd like to help you."

"Yes, rather!" said Lovell, in his straightforward, sincere way.

"Hear, hear!" said Raby. "Now, what's the trouble, Topham? I reckon we'll help you out of it if we can."

"Yes, we will!"

Topham's face brightened up.

He had evidently deemed himself quite friendless in his misery, and the offer of aid from fellows whom he had not got on with to any extent came like a ray of light in great darkness.

"You mean that, Silver?"

"I reckon so."

"You could help me if you liked—more than anybody else at Rookwood," said Topham eagerly.

Jimmy Silver looked puzzled.

"I don't see how that can be. But explain. How can I help you?"

"Because you've got the money."

Jimmy Silver stared at him.

"You don't mean to say it's money?"

"Yes."

"You are in want of money? All this fuss because you want——"

"You don't understand. I owe Beaumont, the prefect, four pounds!" faltered Topham.

"You—four pounds! What on earth——"

"I—I lost it on—on a horse!"

"And Beaumont wants it back?"

"Ye-es."

"And you can't pay it?"

"I haven't more than five bob in the world."

"But that's nothing to howl over. I can't understand a prefect lending a junior four pounds; but if he did it, he ought to take the consequences of being such a careless idiot. Tell him you can't pay. You're not afraid of his speaking to the Head, I suppose? Dr. Chisholm would jump on him for lending you the money."

Topham caught his breath.

"You—you don't understand, Silver."

"No, I don't."

Jimmy Silver looked at him keenly.

"Is there something more behind this?"

"Ye-es."

"What is it?"

"I—I borrowed the money of Beaumont."

"Well?"

"But—but Beaumont——"

"Go on!"

"Beaumont doesn't know!"

It was out at last. Topham sank into his chair again and covered his face with his hands. The Fistical Four looked at one another, sufficiently impressed now by the gravity of the case. It was serious—more serious than they could have imagined. Topham was a thief!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Jimmy Silver's Promise.

JIMMY SILVER was the first to break the silence.

"I understand now," he said quietly.

Topham sobbed miserably.

"You mean that you stole the money from Beaumont!"

"No, no; not that!" moaned Topham. "I knew where he kept it, you see, and I was quite certain that Freezing Point was going to win——"

"Another of your dead certs., I suppose?" remarked Jimmy contemptuously.

"I was told it was a dead cert. by a man who knows——"

"But it lost?"

"Yes. Joe Hook says it was pulled."

"And you took four pounds of Beaumont's money to lay on that horse?"

"Ye-e-es; with Hook the bookmaker."

"And there's no chance of getting it back again, I suppose?"

Topham looked up in amazement.

"Get money back from a bookmaker?" he ejaculated.

"Well, I reckon it's impossible."

"I should say it is."

"Then this is what it comes to: You borrowed, as you call it, four pounds of Beaumont's money to lay on Freezing Point, and the money's gone, and you can't replace it."

"I've got hardly five bob in the world."

The Fistical Four could not raise ten shillings between them just at that moment, though each was willing to contribute all he had.

Jimmy Silver looked perplexed.

He was determined to help Topham; but how to do it was a puzzle. An appeal to Beaumont was not to be thought of. Beaumont was the most unpopular prefect at Rookwood, and as hard as iron. He was of a "sporting" taste himself, and probably his bad example had in the first place led Topham into the wretched sin of gambling, which had been followed by worse. But that would make no difference to Beaumont. If he found his four pounds gone, he would make Rookwood ring with his loss. The Fistical Four knew Beaumont well, and they did not even think of trying to appease him. The money had to be replaced before the prefect discovered the loss. But how?

The juniors did not reflect upon one side of the matter. Topham had not intended to steal the money; they believed that. But the fact that he was a thief, whether he had intended to replace the money or not—that was a serious aspect of the case. In their pity for the wretched culprit, the Fistical Four had rather recklessly taken on the responsibility of hushing up his fault. After all, if he were saved, this terrible experience would be certain to be a lesson to him.

But could he be saved? Where was the money to come from?

"Four pounds!" muttered Jimmy Silver restlessly. "By writing——"

"There's no time," groaned Topham, "even if it were any good. Beaumont is

certain to discover his loss to-morrow, if not to-night."

"How's that?"

"He'd put the money aside in a drawer in his desk, to pay for a new camera he's just ordered. The man is going to bring it over from Coombe to-night or to-morrow."

Jimmy Silver's face became grave.

"Then what on earth is to be done?" muttered Lovell.

"Blessed if I know!"

"It's an absolute giddy puzzle."

Topham threw himself forward, his face on the table, shaking from head to foot with a passion of misery and terror.

"It's all up! Oh, what shall I do—what shall I do? I shall be expelled! What will my father say? Oh, what shall I do?"

"Buck up, Topham. We'll see you through."

The words were spoken upon a generous impulse; the means were as unknown as ever. But Jimmy Silver was so well known as a true and honourable fellow at Rookwood that the words were as the balm of comfort to the unhappy young gamester. He raised his haggard face hopefully.

"Do you mean that, Silver?"

"I reckon I do."

"But you have no money."

"I—I'll get some, somehow."

His chums looked doubtfully at him, but their faith in Jimmy Silver was also strong, and they felt something of assurance as they read his determined expression.

Topham gave a choking sob.

"If you can get me out of this, Silver, I swear it will be a lesson to me. Oh, if I can only get out of this!"

Jimmy Silver did not reply to that. He knew that this would be a lesson to the junior.

"Keep your pecker up, kid," he said at length. "I've given you my word. I'll get the money from somewhere—and to-day, if possible. Mind, not a word to a soul! And we'll keep mum, too. Come along, you chaps!"

The Fistical Four left the study, leaving Topham comforted, half-tearfully hopeful. Jimmy Silver's face was very grave.

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Raby, as the Fistical Four walked up the passage.

"There's only one thing for it," said Jimmy. "I must try to wire to the pater."

"But then the money couldn't come down to-night, could it?"

"I reckon so."

"I'll ask him to telegraph it."

"It's pretty steep to wire to your governor, asking him to wire you as much as that," said Lovell.

"I don't know how it will turn out," admitted Jimmy Silver. "Still, we can only try."

They forthwith made their way to the post-office.

The telegraphist told them it would be an hour or more before a reply could come through.

They strolled out into the village street to pass the time away until they could get a reply from Jimmy's father. After a few minutes the chums were attracted by the sound of a twanging banjo and a squeaky tenor voice.

They came across a couple of nigger minstrels, and listened for a while. It was obvious that the niggers were doing very well, as there was quite a rain of coppers when they had finished.

"Come away, you fellows!" said Jimmy Silver abruptly.

The others followed, surprised by his manner. He was looking excited now, as if a new idea had taken possession of him.

"What is it?" asked Lovell.

"What's the matter with turning nigger minstrels?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Eh!"

"What!"

"I can play the banjo, and you, Lovell, and you, Newcome, can sing—after a fashion!" said Jimmy. "Raby can go round with the hat."

"But those two have roped in all the cash in this place, so it's no use going round here again," said Lovell.

"I wasn't thinking of this place," said Jimmy.

"Where then?"

"Rookwood!"

"Rookwood? The school?"

"Why not?"

"My only hat!" said Lovell. "Of all the nerve——"

"Well, are you game?" said Jimmy.

And the others replied:

"We are!"

"That's settled, then. Let's go to the post-office now, and see if there's an answer to my wire."

"Come right out of your little black feet—— I mean come right out of your cabin, sweet!" A yell of laughter interrupted the nervous singer. Lovell had not the nerve of Jimmy Silver, and he was getting mixed. "Go on, Brudder Sambo!" exclaimed Jimmy, as Lovell paused in confusion, and he twanged away with might and main on the banjo.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Amateur Minstrels.

THE Fistical Four entered the village post-office, and inquired for the answer to Jimmy's telegram, and sure enough there it was. Jimmy Silver opened it eagerly. Then a look of disappointment overspread his face.

"No good?" asked Lovell.

Jimmy silently handed him the telegram.

"Silver, Post-office, Coombe.—Your father away on business. Have sent on your telegram. Will wire again later.—Blaine."

"Who's Blaine?" asked Newcome.

"Pater's secretary."

"H'm! Then your dad hasn't seen the wire—may not see it to-day at all. And may not send the cash if he does. I fancy the game's up in that direction, Jimmy."

"I reckon it is."

"Suppose you leave instructions here for anything that comes for you to be sent up to the school, and then—we'll busk it."

"That's right."

It was done, and the chums left the post-office. Hope from that quarter was practically over, and if Jimmy Silver's pledge was to be redeemed, it was necessary to find other means of raising the wind.

The nigger minstrel idea might be a wild one, but it was the only one they had at present, and there was no other course. The idea was to be carried out.

Mr. Isaacs was a second-hand clothes dealer, naturalist, dealer in athletic goods and fishing-tackle, and costumier, and half a dozen other things all rolled into one. He had good customers in the Fistical Four, and they found him very obliging.

He was surprised to learn what they wanted, but he knew the Fistical Four, and asked no questions. Their money was safe, and that was the chief object with Mr. Isaacs.

He had the things they wanted, from coloured pants to wigs and grease-paint, and for the charge of ten shillings he was willing to lend the properties for the afternoon, with as much make-up as the juniors required. And, moreover, to lend his valuable assistance in the process of making-up in his stuffy little back-parlour.

Under Mr. Isaac's skilled hands, the Fistical Four, divested of their own attire, were soon transformed into three very good imitations of nigger minstrels.

Mr. Isaacs declared that he would never have known them from the genuine article. Their faces were black and shiny, so were their hands, and they wore striped red pants and gay jackets, and thick woolly wigs. It would indeed have needed a keen eye to detect the Fistical Four under that remarkable disguise.

Jimmy Silver took the banjo provided by Mr. Isaacs, and strummed on it. Jimmy could play the instrument quite well enough for the twanging accompaniment that was required; but Lovell did not feel so sure about his singing when it came to the point.

As for Raby, there was no doubt that he could do his part of the business, and take round the cap. Whether he could collect nearly four pounds in it was another question.

"This is ripping!" said Jimmy Silver, surveying himself in a cheval-glass. "We look a treat. How do you feel, Lovell?"

"Rotten!" said the straightforward Lovell.

"That won't do, old fellow," said Jimmy anxiously. "Remember, if we got spotted in this rig at Rookwood, life wouldn't be worth living afterwards. We simply must not give ourselves away!"

"Oh, I'll be jolly careful!"

"So will I," said Raby. "I'll say things to put them off the scent."

"No, you won't!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "You'll keep your mouth shut, you ass! They'd know your tongue at once. Mum as an oyster, remember!"

"Oh, anything for a quiet life, Jimmy!"

"You'll take round the cap, keeping your mouth shut," said Jimmy Silver. "If you speak, we shall be known, and then I shall bust the banjo on your silly

"I shouldn't think so, Jimmy. I should say they happened to be there by accident," remarked Raby.

"I don't see why they should be watching us," Jimmy assented. "If they saw us go in they might be suspicious. Anyway, we're in for it now, and we've got to risk it. Come on! We're going to get a little practice in the street here before we go on to the school. Now, then, Brudder Sambo!"

Jimmy Silver, whose nerve was seldom wanting, strummed on his banjo. Lovell struck up his song in a quavering voice:

"Honey, honey, I'se your loving coon,
Tra-la-la-la-la-la!
Honey, honey, I want a boon,
Tra-la-la-la-la-la!
Come right out from your cabin, sweet,
Come right out on your little black feet,
Honey, you're the girl I'se gwine to meet,
Underneath de lubly moon!"

This beautiful lay, which was one of Lovell's own composition, was sung in a shaky voice, but it was well backed up by the banjo. But either Coombe had had enough nigger minstrels for that afternoon, or else the quality was not up to that of the former entertainment.

Only three persons stopped to listen, and one of them was a deaf old lady, another a tramp, and the third a cheeky

visit the school, and take in the fellows ——"

"They'd have taken us in, too, if we hadn't spotted the wheeze," said Tommy Cook. "Come on!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
A Select Entertainment.

"WHAT'S that row?"

"Sounds like a banjo!"

"And that other noise—is that somebody singing?"

"Yes, or else a dog run over!"

"What on earth does it mean?"

Such were some of the ejaculations of the Rookwood fellows as a strange, weird noise made itself audible in the quad.

In a spot where the big trees hid them from the view of the windows four young nigger minstrels had taken up their stand.

They had walked in at the open gateway of Rookwood with all the coolness imaginable, followed by curious glances from the fellows who happened to see them. They stopped under the elms, and the individual who carried the banjo began to strum.

The noise was heard near and far, and curious fellows crowded to the spot. In less than a minute fifty fellows at least were crowding round the minstrels, among them Dodd, Cook, and Doyle.

Jimmy Silver hastily strummed on his banjo, and Lovell started off, while Newcome kept time with his feet.

napper—so remember! It's time we got along, kids. We shall get to Rookwood about the time the fellows are coming in, just in good time to gather a crowd."

The ten shillings were handed over to Mr. Isaacs, and the Fistical Four left the little parlour and made their way through the shop. In the outer doorway they paused.

It was a kind of stage-fright they felt at showing themselves in the open street in their peculiar rig-out. But they were in for it now, and Jimmy Silver made the plunge boldly.

He strode from the shop, and Lovell, Newcome and Raby followed. There were several passers-by in sight, and they naturally glanced at the supposed nigger minstrels. The chums turned crimson, but their blushes were hidden under the black upon their faces.

"Hallo, look there!" muttered Lovell.

The chums glanced across the street. Leaning against the churchyard railings opposite were three well-known figures. Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle, the leaders of the Moderns at Rookwood, were staring across the street straight at Mr. Isaacs's shop, and looking with great curiosity at the four minstrels.

Jimmy Silver bit his lip.

"Have they spotted us, do you think?" he muttered.

village youth, who advised the young minstrels to chuck it, and to get 'ome.

Even Jimmy Silver was a little dismayed, but he bore up.

"You see, we can't expect to catch on first try," he remarked. "I reckon we shall simply make things hum at the school!"

"Let's get along, then," said Lovell, rather desperately. "'In for a penny, in for a pound'—and we've got to go through with it."

"Where are those rotters?" asked Jimmy Silver, looking round as they started up the lane towards the school. "They've gone!"

The Modern juniors were no longer in sight. Their disappearance comforted the amateur minstrels. It was a proof that they were not suspected. Alas, if they could have seen them at that moment! Behind a corner of the church wall Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle were rocking to and fro with laughter.

"My hat! To think of those silly Classicals taking to busking to raise the wind! Won't this make a furore at Rookwood!"

"I should say so! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tommy Dodd peeped round the corner. The quartette of amateur minstrels were just vanishing out of sight up the lane. Tommy Dodd gave a start.

"My only aunt! They're going to

"Honey, honey, I'se your loving coon,
Tra-la-la-la-la!
Honey, honey, I want a boon,
Tra-la-la-la-la!
Come right out of your little black feet—
I mean come right out of your cabin, sweet!"

A yell of laughter interrupted the nervous singer.

Lovell had not got the nerve of Jimmy Silver, and he was getting mixed.

"Go on, Brudder Sambo!" exclaimed Jimmy, as Lovell paused in confusion, and he twanged away with might and main.

Lovell hastily started off again. But his confusion was worse than ever now, especially as he discerned peculiar grins upon the faces of Tommy Dodd and his chums. They were watching him with such curious expressions that a dread feeling seized him that they had penetrated his disguise.

He plunged into the song again, starting the second verse, and in his confusion getting it mixed up with the first.

"Honey, honey, I want a boon,
Tra-la-la-la-la!
Come right out in your little black moon,
Tra-la-la-la-la!"

The Rookwood fellows roared with laughter.

They could see that the minstrel was confused, though why he had lost his nerve was unknown to them. But his peculiar version of that coon song was certainly funny. Dodd, Cook, and Doyle clapped till their hands ached.

"Bravo!" shouted Tommy Dodd. "Ripping! Come right out in your little black moon!"

"Quite so! Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell blundered on:

"Come right out and—and—and——"

"Well, go on, you——" began Raby.

"Hallo! I know that voice!"

Jimmy Silver strummed desperately. He gave Raby a dig in the ribs, and whispered to him fiercely:

"Go round with the hat, and keep your head shut!"

"Right, I will, Jimmy! I won't say a word—ow!" Raby hopped on one foot, the other having been jammed under Jimmy Silver's heel.

"Ow! What did you do that for?" yelled Raby.

There were exclamations of amazement from the nearest of the crowd.

"Shut up!" whispered Jimmy, in an agony. "Can't you see they'll guess? Go round with the hat, and shut up!"

"All right!"

Raby took round the hat. Some of the fellows were staring at him in blank amazement, not knowing what to make of the matter. Most of them were laughing hysterically, the result of Lovell's pathetic song.

All seemed to be in a generous mood, for coppers rained into the hat, and there was here and there a glistening of silver among the bronze. Dodd, Cook, and Doyle paid up, and hardly one fellow let the hat pass him by.

Raby was grinning with delight as he carried the hat back to Jimmy Silver, who was still twanging away on the 'jo.

"It's a real harvest, Jimmy!"

"Shut up!"

"Well, I——"

"Oh, come along, we've finished here!"

Jimmy Silver caught Raby by the arm, and Lovell took him by the other, and Newcome followed behind, and they all moved towards the gates.

Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle had disappeared.

Jimmy Silver roughly counted the proceeds in the hat as they went down to the gate, a curious crowd following them. His face was a study when he had finished.

"How much do you think?" he asked.

"Fifty pounds?" asked Raby vaguely.

"Ass! Just ten shillings—just enough to pay for the hire of the costumes!"

"My hat!" said Lovell, in dismay. "It hasn't panned out quite so well as we expected!"

"I reckon——"

Jimmy broke off. They had reached the gateway, and they found it crammed with grinning juniors.

Dodd, Cook, and Doyle were there, grinning like Cheshire cats, and each of them had his hand behind him.

"Let us pass, please!" said Jimmy Silver.

Tommy Dodd shook his head.

"Just a minute, Snowball! There's a little black on your face."

The juniors howled with laughter.

"Let us pass——"

"Clean 'em!" shouted Tommy Dodd.

Three hands came out from behind three juniors, and three dripping wet sponges were revealed. They were squeezing upon the faces of the nigger minstrels the next moment.

Jimmy Silver gave a yell, and his banjo crashed upon Tommy Dodd's head and shivered into twenty pieces. But resistance was too late, and it was futile, for a dozen juniors, let into the secret by Tommy Dodd & Co. hurled themselves upon the nigger minstrels and held them fast while their faces were rubbed with the sponges.

In a few seconds the white came out through the black, and the Fistical Four were shown up, literally, in their true colours.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Saved!

"HA, ha, ha!"

The Rookwood juniors were yelling with laughter.

"Good old Silver!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four struggled desperately in the grasp of their assailants. Their wigs came off in the struggle, and the black was nearly all rubbed off their faces. Further disguise was hopeless.

Nearly all Rookwood seemed to be crowded round them, laughing hysterically, and at last the four chums incontinently bolted, and did not stop till they were safely locked up in their own study. Even then the passage without rang with endless laughter.

"My only hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "This has been a time! We shall never, never hear the end of it!"

"If this is a sample of your ideas——"

"It would have worked all right but for those beastly Modern kids."

"They've done us this time."

"They must have spotted the wheeze in Coombe, after all," said Jimmy ruefully. "It was decent of them to let us send round the hat before they jumped on us. But we're done for now, and we shall be chipped to death. Let's get these horrible things off, and make ourselves look decent again."

The juniors changed their clothes and washed off the remnants of the colouring. Then they felt rather better. They had tea in the study, to the accompaniment of some allusion to their adventure shouted every few minutes through the keyhole. But Jimmy Silver was grave now—he was thinking of Topham. The scheme of raising the wind had been carried out, and it had raised just enough money to pay its own expenses. The sum wanted for the saving of Topham was as far off as ever.

There was a knock at the locked door.

"Can I come in?" It was Topham's voice.

Jimmy Silver made a grimace, and unlocked the door. Topham came into the study, his face almost as haggard as when the chums had seen it last. He fixed his eyes on Jimmy Silver.

"Have you any news yet, Silver?"

The leader of the Fistical Four shook his head.

"Not yet, Topham."

"Remember," said Topham, licking his dry lips feverishly—"remember I rely on you. I have your word to save me."

There was a knock at the door.

"Oh, go away, fathead!" roared Jimmy.

"Packet for Silver from the post-office," said Toots, the Rookwood page, entering the study.

Jimmy Silver gave a jump. He tossed the lad sixpence, and opened the packet. Topham watched him with burning eyes.

Jimmy Silver gave a sudden whoop.

"Hoorah! Pater's turned up trumps, after all!"

Topham gave a choking cry.

"The—the money! You have the money?"

"Here it is! Take it, and buzz off! And don't forget your promise to chuck up being a cad and a blackguard! Now's your chance, too—Beaumont's in the quad!"

Without a word Topham seized the notes and tore out of the study.

Jimmy Silver gave a gasp of relief.

"We've saved him, kids! I wonder if he was worth saving, and whether we have a right to shield him? But I suppose it's always right to help a lame dog over a stile. I think it will be a lesson to him, anyway. But, oh—oh, kids, when shall we hear the end of the nigger minstrel business!"

Needless to say, it was long, long before Rookwood, and especially the Modern side, ceased to chuckle over the adventure of the Rookwood Minstrels!

THE END.

THE SCHOOL DANCE!

A Magnificent Long Complete Story, dealing with the Early Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Welcomers.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Here comes Nugent!"

Bob Cherry uttered the words as Frank Nugent came scorching up the road on his bicycle, in a cloud of dust.

It was a bright, sunny May afternoon. Nearly a dozen juniors belonging to Greyfriars School were gathered in a goup on the road that lay between Greyfriars and the sea, winding round the rugged slopes of the Black Pike. They were all looking anxiously down the road towards the village of Friardale, when the dusty cyclist came in sight.

Harry Wharton, who was seated upon a boulder by the roadside, reading the latest number of the "Boys' Friend," jumped up at once. The group of juniors all belonged to the Remove—the Lower Fourth at Greyfriars. Their expectant looks showed that they were out that sunny half-holiday upon an important mission. Nugent dashed up on his machine, and jumped to the ground.

"They're coming!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Have you seen them?"

"Yes; saw 'em come out of the station!" gasped Nugent, who had evidently been acting the part of a scout. "They are coming along, two and two, with Miss Penelope at the head."

"Good!"

"They'll be in sight in a few minutes," said Nugent, leaning his machine against a tree. "There's no time to waste."

"Well, we've got it all cut and dried," said Bob Cherry. "Stand in order there, and look as orderly as you can."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter! Don't all of you start blushing when they come in sight," went on Bob Cherry; "that will spoil the effect."

"Faith, and it's yerself that's blushing already," said Micky Desmond.

"And don't you begin to argue, Micky Desmond, when we've no time to waste in jaw," said Bob hastily. "They'll be coming round the corner in a minute——"

"And we must be ready," said Harry Wharton. "No, don't you talk, Bunter; there's no time to listen to you now. You're to stand in order, and raise your caps just at the same moment when I give the signal—and don't look self-conscious!"

"I'm not looking self-conscious!" grinned Hazeldene.

"You've got a sister among them!" growled Trevor. "That makes a difference. I can't help thinking that they will—will—will——"

"They won't eat us."

"They'll—they'll grin."

"Well, suppose they do?" said Nugent. "That won't hurt us! Besides, they won't grin; they'll smile."

"I say, Wharton——"

"Will you shut up, Bunter?"

"But it's just occurred to me——"

"You can tell us afterwards. Now, look here, as soon as they come round the corner, turn on your sweetest smiles, so as to be ready, and prepare to raise your caps as soon as I raise mine."

Wharton rapped out orders, and the Greyfriars juniors obeyed. In spite of repeated warnings, most of them were blushing now.

It was an important and really unprecedented occasion.

The Greyfriars juniors had received with mingled feelings the news that a girls' school was to be opened at Cliff House, almost within a stone's throw of Greyfriars. Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove, had declared his intention of making things unpleasant for the new neighbours of Greyfriars, but the greater part of the Lower Fourth followed Wharton's lead, feeling that they were called upon to be civil, at least, to the new-comers.

The discovery that Hazeldene's sister Marjorie was one of the pupils of Miss Penelope Primrose made a difference, too.

Marjorie was very popular with Harry Wharton & Co.

After much discussion, the leaders of the Remove had agreed that the proper "caper" was to give a public welcome to the girls' school.

Bulstrode and his friends had scoffed, but scoffing made no difference to Harry Wharton. As it fortunately happened that Miss Penelope and her pupils were to arrive on Wednesday, the half-holiday, Wharton had a good opportunity of carrying out his scheme.

Hence the party of blushing juniors waiting on the Friardale road.

Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Upper Fourth, had thought of something of the kind, too; but the Remove were first in the field, as they generally were.

Nearly all the Remove had joined in the scheme, but on Wednesday afternoon many of them found their courage fail.

There was really no danger, as Wharton patiently pointed out. They knew Marjorie Hazeldene and the other girls were probably quite harmless. But the bashfulness of some of the fellows was too strong. From over thirty adherents, Wharton's party dwindled to less than a dozen by the time he took up his stand on the Friardale road.

And now, as the pink-faced juniors stood waiting, some of them showed signs of a decided inclination to bolt.

Before them the road made a sweeping curve towards the village. Up the road and round the corner the girls were to come, two and two, walking from the the station to their new home.

And as the seconds passed, the uneasiness of the Removites grew keener. One might have fancied from their unquiet looks that they expected a herd of buffaloes to come prancing round the corner, instead of about thirty demure young damsels with their hair down their backs.

"That's right," said Harry Wharton, who was the coolest there, though there was a slight colour in his cheeks. "Keep steady! There's nothing to be afraid of."

"I say, Wharton——"

"Well, what is it, Bunter?" said Harry.

"It's occurred to me——"

"Buck up!"

"It's occurred to me what Bulstrode wanted the fireworks for."

"Bulstrode! Fireworks! What are you talking about?"

"Bulstrode made Mrs. Mimble look over her old stock of what she had left over from the last Fifth," explained Bunter. "I was in the tuck-shop, and I saw him. He bought a lot—as many as if it were Fifth of November to-day, I should think. I wondered what he wanted them for at the time."

Wharton's face became suddenly grave.

"The—the cad!" he muttered. "He can't mean to——"

"By Jove, but he does!" exclaimed Nugent. "Bulstrode was among the trees up the road when I came by a couple of minutes ago. I saw him there."

Wharton gritted his teeth.

In a moment he divined Bulstrode's scheme; and whether the girls were frightened or not by the fireworks, it would be an act of rudeness that would very likely lead to strained relations from the start between Greyfriars and Cliff House.

But was there time to intervene?

At any moment now they expected to see Miss Penelope Primrose and her pupils appear round the bend in the road. It was there that Nugent had seen Bulstrode in the trees by the roadside.

There was not a second to lose.

"Stay here, you chaps!" exclaimed Wharton quickly. "Don't shift! I'll just buzz along and see Bulstrode. If I'm not back by the time they arrive you can take my place, Nugent."

"I—I—— Oh, all right," said Nugent. "But—but perhaps I'd better come and show you where Bulstrode is."

"Right! You can take my place, Bob."

Bob Cherry was too dismayed to reply. Wharton and Nugent raced down the road, and ran into the trees at the bend. There was a sharp exclamation, and Bulstrode started up before them.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Hard Cheese!

BULSTRODE was startled, and his breath came quick and short as he looked at the chums of the Remove. He had been kneeling on the ground, and the reason was apparent at a glance.

A bicycle lantern was lighted there, hidden in the thick grass among the trees, and beside it was a cardboard box crammed with fireworks. The lantern was evidently placed in readiness for lighting the fuses, so that there should be no delay over matches when the time for action arrived.

"What—what do you want?" stuttered Bulstrode.

Wharton fixed his eyes sternly upon him.

"What are you going to do with those fireworks?"

"Mind your own business!"

"You were going to throw them into the road to explode when Miss Primrose came by, and frighten the girls."

"Well, suppose I was?"

"Well, you are a rotten cad to think of such a thing, that's all," said Wharton, between his teeth, "and you sha'n't do it!"

"Who'll stop me?" demanded Bulstrode fiercely.

"I will."

"Look here, you can mind your own business. If I choose to jape the girls' school it's no affair of yours. I'm not asking you to join in. What are you doing?" roared Bulstrode.

The question was somewhat superfluous. Harry Wharton had brought his foot down on the lighted lantern, smashing it, and, of course, extinguishing it at once.

"That's for a start," said Wharton. "Pick up those fireworks, will you, Frank?"

"Yes, rather!"

"I'll knock you flying if you touch them!" shouted Bulstrode.

"I'll see about that, Frank. Take them."

Nugent stooped and picked up the fireworks. Bulstrode, red with rage, lunged forward to strike him, but found Wharton in his way. Harry seized the bully by the shoulders, swung him round, and hurled him bodily into the thickets.

Bulstrode, badly scratched and half dazed, stared at him blankly.

"Cut off, Frank!" said Wharton quietly, but breathing hard. "Take the fireworks with you!"

"They're mine!" howled Bulstrode. "I——"

"You shall have them back presently," said Wharton disdainfully. "They'll be returned to you at Greyfriars later."

"I'm going to have them now."

"Off you go, Nugent!"

Nugent nodded, and hurried away with the box of fireworks under his arm. Bulstrode made a motion to follow him, and Wharton faced the bully of the Remove with flashing eyes and clenched fists.

"Now," he said quietly, "if you've got anything to say about the matter say it now and quickly. I've no time to waste."

"You've—you've gone too far this time," said Bulstrode thickly. "Put up your fists!"

Wharton obeyed. He was thinking uneasily of the girls' school walking up the road from the station and due on the scene any moment now. There was but a thin screen of bushes between the spot where the two juniors stood and the road. Harry had no desire to avoid a fight, but he would have given a great deal to leave it for another time and place.

Bulstrode guessed as much, too, and hence was determined.

"You—you interfering cad!" he hissed. "I'll give you a licking, at least, and you shall have a swelled nose to show Miss Marjorie when she comes along."

"Come on!" said Wharton quietly.

And Bulstrode came on, and under the trees, fresh in their spring green, the two juniors were soon at it, hammer and tongs.

Frank Nugent had hurried back to the rest, and he tossed the box of fireworks to the ground, where it lay beside the large cardboard box containing the bouquet Harry Wharton was to present to Miss Penelope.

The plans of the captain of the Remove had been carefully laid. The juniors were to smile sweetly and raise their caps or hats at the same moment, and then Wharton was to step forward, and, with a neat speech, present the bouquet to Miss Primrose on behalf of the juniors of Greyfriars.

It certainly ought to have been an effective scene, if all went well.

The bouquet was one of the finest that could be obtained at the Friardale florist's, and the speech had been composed by all the Remove putting their heads together over it. Wharton, with his musical voice and his excellent elocution, was just the fellow to deliver the speech effectively.

Unfortunately, Wharton was unavoidably off the scene now.

"Where's Harry?" asked Bob Cherry nervously.

Nugent jerked his thumb towards the thicket at the bend of the road.

"Talking to Bulstrode."

"I—I hope he'll be back for—for——"

"Well, if he isn't, you can take his place. You know the speech by heart."

"I—I—I think you had better take his place, Nugent," stammered Bob. "You—you are much better at that sort of thing."

"Not at all, Bob; your elocution is better than mine."

"Well, suppose Trevor does it."

"No fear!" said Trevor.

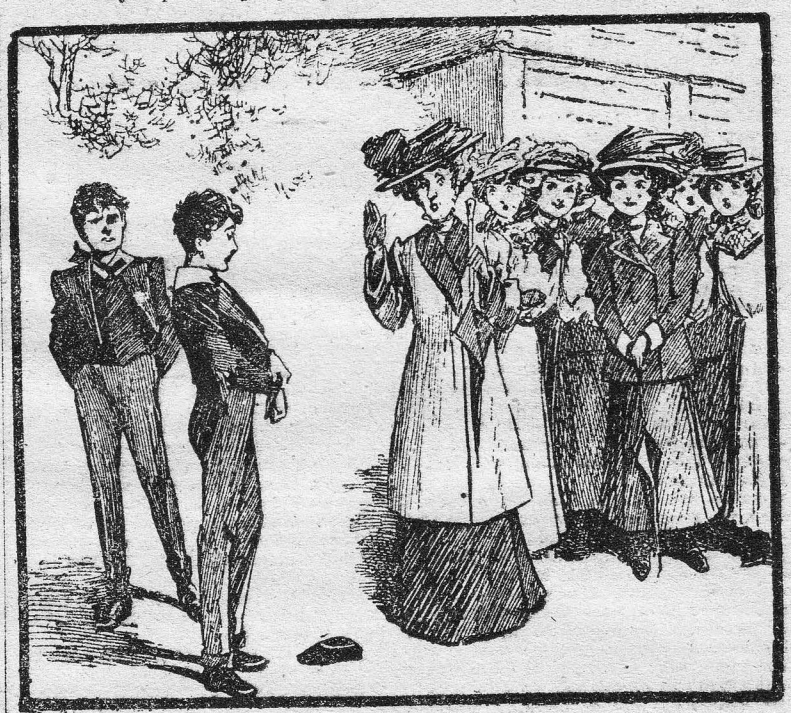
"Russell is jolly good at delivering a speech," said Nugent persuasively.

"Yes, at a football concert, if you like," said Russell. "You're not going to get, me addressing a giddy schoolmistress though."

"Look here——"

"I'll look as long as you like, Cherry, but you're not going to shove it off on to me. Wharton left it to you."

Bob Cherry wiped his perspiring brow.



"Boy," said Miss Primrose, regarding Harry Wharton reproachfully, "how can you fight in this savage fashion?"

There was a sudden exclamation from Billy Bunter.

"I say you fellows, look there!"

There was no need for Bunter to speak. The fellows were looking, in utter dismay. Down the road two figures, clasped in deadly combat, had reeled out from the trees, and Wharton and Bulstrode were fighting like tigers in the full glare of the sun, in the middle of the dusty road.

"My only hat!" gasped Nugent. "Look, there come the girls!"

They were only a hundred yards or so from the bend of the road, and all was plain in their sight. Round the curve came the head of the column. Up from the village, walking two and two in regular order, came the future pupils of Cliff House.

Very fresh and pretty they looked, too, and freshest and prettiest of all was Marjorie Hazeldene. There was something pleasant, too, though severe in the features of Miss Penelope Primrose, the head-mistress of Cliff House, who walked beside the foremost two—Marjorie and a stoutly-built girl with German features.

Miss Primrose was speaking to Marjorie, discoursing upon the beauties of nature, and Marjorie was listening with dutiful attention, when suddenly Miss Penelope broke off with a gasp.

"Goodness gracious!"

Right in front of the startled girls appeared two desperately-fighting forms, and the Cliff House pupils came to a halt in dismay, and looked spellbound at Harry Wharton and Bulstrode.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Reception.

MISS PENELOPE put up her glasses, and looked at the combatants as though she could scarcely believe her eyes. Some of the girls shrieked. Wharton and Bulstrode, too deeply engrossed in the combat to notice anything else, remained unconscious of the new spectators on the scene for some moments.

"Boys!" said Miss Penelope, in an awful voice.

Wharton started, and suddenly dropped his hands.

"Hold on!" he muttered. "Stop!"

Bulstrode grinned savagely.

"I don't care for the old cat. I'll stop f you give me best, not otherwise."

"I don't—I——"

"Then come on!"

Wharton gritted his teeth hard. To fight before the horrified lady and the startled girls was impossible. Already Marjorie's Hazeldene's eyes were fixed upon him with recoguition—and was it disgust?

"Very well, Bulstrode, I give you best."

"Good!"

Bulstrode stepped back. Wharton faced Miss Penelope. His cap was gone, his hair untidy; there was a cut on his

cheek, and a trickle of red from the corner of his mouth.

"Boy," said Miss Primrose, "how can you fight in this savage fashion?"

"I am sorry, madam——"

"I am glad," said Miss Primrose, "that you are sorry. Look at him, my dears—look at him! Is it not dreadful?"

"Dreadful!" said the dears, with one voice.

Wharton turned crimson. Bulstrode, grinning, shoved his hands into his pockets and whistled as he strode away through the trees, to show that he at least did not care for the opinion of Miss Primrose and her pupils.

Wharton would gladly have escaped, but he could not walk away rudely while Miss Penelope was talking to him.

"My dear little fellow," went on Miss Penelope, apparently unconscious of the fact that Harry was not a little fellow, but a sturdy junior and a distinguished footballer in the Remove—"my dear little fellow, how can you fight in this dreadful way? What would your dear mother say?"

As Harry Wharton did not remember his mother, who had died when he was a baby, he could not very well answer the question.

"Yes, indeed!" said some of the girls, who did not, however, seem quite so grave as Miss Penelope about the matter. Perhaps it occurred to them that there was a comical side to the scene.

"What would your kind teachers say?" resumed Miss Penelope, who evidently felt herself called upon to improve the shining hour by administering a little moral instruction to the culprit.

"Yes, indeed!" repeated the girls dutifully.

Some of them had become aware now of the group of Greyfriars juniors watching them from a distance, but Miss Penelope had not noticed.

"Do you not know, my dear child," went on Miss Penelope tenderly, "that it is wrong to raise the hand in anger against a fellow-creature?"

Wharton was crimson. He would have given a term's pocket-money for the earth to open and swallow him up.

"'Let dogs,'" continued Miss Penelope—"'let dogs delight to bark and bite,' my dear boy. But you—— Repeat those touching lines, Clara, and they may have a softening effect upon this unfortunate boy."

The young lady addressed as Clara was a golden-haired, blue-eyed, rather mischievous-looking young person. There was a glimmer of fun in her eyes as she recited the lines in a sing-song voice for the edification of the unhappy Removite.

"'Let dogs delight to bark and bite,
It is their nature to;
Let bears and lions growl at night'"

"'And fight,' my dear," corrected Miss Penelope.

"'Let bears and lions growl at night and fight,'" went on Miss Clara demurely; "'They've nothing else to do.'"

There was a slight sound of laughter among the pupils of Cliff House as Clara concluded her somewhat original version, but a glance from Miss Penelope restored an almost preternatural gravity.

"Remember those lines, my little fellow," said Miss Penelope, patting Wharton on the head. Wharton wriggled. "When you are tempted to raise your hand in anger, remember those lines, and instead of smiting your fellow-creature on the nose, throw your arms round his neck, and take him to your heart. Marjorie, I am surprised at your smiling at such a moment!"

"I—I—I am sorry!" stammered Marjorie.

"I hope so. Remember my words, my little man. And now run away."

Wharton stood aside for the girls to pass. He looked as if the whole of the blood in his body had been pumped into his face. Marjorie gave him a compassionate glance, but most of the frivolous young persons were smiling.

The school walked on.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Miss Penelope, a few minutes later. "What—what does this mean?"

The school halted again.

The Greyfriars juniors were in the road. The reception planned by Wharton would probably have gone off very well if he had been there; but with the bashful Bob at the head of it, there were certain to be troubles.

"They're coming, Nugent!" whispered Bob, in great anguish. "Take the bouquet ready——"

"You're to take it!"

"But you're going to make the speech."

"I can't; I've forgotten the words!"

"I say, you fellows, suppose we cut, as Wharton isn't here——"

"Good idea!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I—I don't think it's a good idea to go on—without Wharton, you know. Let's——"

"Rats!" said Trevor. "They've seen us!"

"Yes, but——"

"Lot of idiots we should look, running off like a lot of startled rabbits!"

"Here they are, Bob! Buck up!"

"I—I—I——"

"It's all right—easy as anything!"

And Nugent pushed the crimson junior forward as Miss Penelope majestically halted.

Under the eyes of the Cliff House procession the juniors felt less at their ease than ever.

The girls looked surprised and amused. The blushes in the juniors' faces were a confession of weakness, and the weaker the position of the boys, the stronger, of course, the position of the girls.

The fair pupils felt themselves on a vantage ground, surveying the blushing lads, as it were, from a superior standpoint. They smiled, and their smiling was the last straw. The Removites—loud enough and assertive enough in Greyfriars—stood dumb and crimson, their eyes fixed on the ground.

Bob Cherry hardly dared even to look at Miss Penelope as he advanced hesitatingly towards her.

He raised his cap, and all the juniors raised their caps as if by clockwork.

"Goodness gracious!" said Miss Penelope.

"If you please, ma'am," stammered Bob Cherry, trying to recollect the speech. He knew it by heart—when he was self-possessed. Now the words seemed to escape him. "If you please, ma'am, we are grey juniors——"

"Juniors of Greyfriars," whispered Nugent.

"I—I mean, juniors of Greyfriars, ma'am. As our school—I mean, your school—is being opened to-day, we—we—we thought—— What, on earth did we think, Nugent, you beast?" whispered Bob Cherry shrilly.

"Thought we ought to give 'em a welcome."

"We—we thought we ought to give you a welcome, ma'am, and your pupils," said Bob Cherry. "The opening of a girls' school in the neighbourhood of Greyfriars is a most suspicious circumstance——"

"Auspicious occasion, you ass!" muttered Trevor.

"I—I mean, a most auspicious occasion, ma'am, and I beg to present you with a girls' school—I—I mean, a bouquet——"

Words failed Bob Cherry, and he held out the box. The bouquet ought to have been taken out to be presented, but Bob was too confused to think of it. Nugent tried to whisper that he had picked up the wrong box, but Bob was deaf to everything.

"Goodness gracious!" said Miss Penelope, putting up her glass and surveying the packet of Bulstrode's fireworks that Bob Cherry was generously offering her. "I—I—I am amazed! What use can I possibly have for—for Roman candles and crackers?"

"My—my hat!" gasped the unhappy Bob.

He dropped the box to the ground. He was evidently at the end of his resources, and Nugent had to rush to the rescue. He picked up the bouquet.

"If you please, ma'am, will you accept this bouquet with the love—I—I mean, the kind regards, of the juniors of Greyfriars?"

Miss Penelope beamed.

"Yes, certainly. I think this is very charming of these dear boys—so different from the brutal exhibition we have just witnessed, my dears."

"Oh, yes, Miss Primrose!" said the dears.

"I thank you from my heart!" said Miss Penelope. "I accept the bouquet with pleasure—in the spirit in which it is presented. I am glad to see so much really proper feeling among you, dear boys. Are you not also glad, my dears?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Primrose!"

"We are charmed—quite charmed!"

"Oh, yes, Miss Primrose!"

"We have just passed two unhappy boys who were striking one another violently upon the countenance," said Miss Penelope. "If those unhappy boys are schoolmates of yours, may I beg you as a personal favour to remonstrate with them, and point out gently but firmly the error of their ways?"

"Yes, certainly!" gasped Nugent.

"Oh, thank you! You are a good, kind boy! We will now proceed, my dears!"

They proceeded.

Hazeldene grinned at his sister, but the rest of the Removites stood cap in hand, with downcast eyes while the procession walked on.

Bob Cherry drew a deep breath as the last of the smiling girls vanished round a turn in the road.

"My—my hat! This is the last time I shall be chiselled into presenting bouquets to a girls' school! Br-r-r-r!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bulstrode is Startled.

HARRY WHARTON had not waited to see the presentation. He was at Greyfriars, bathing the bruises on his face under a tap in a bathroom, when the juniors came in. He turned a glowing countenance, streaming with water, towards Bob Cherry and Nugent as they looked in at the door.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "It was rotten bad luck for you."

"Yes," growled Wharton. "I had a lecture from Miss Primrose—nice, after interfering with that brute to save her from a shock!"

"We've promised to remonstrate with you," said Bob.

"Eh?"

"And to point out the error of your ways."

"Oh, don't be funny!"

"We're only keeping our word to Miss Primrose. Beloved youth, think upon the error of your ways—turn from the downward path while yet there is time. O my 'earers—— Oh——"

Bob Cherry broke off as a cake of soap caught him in the mouth.

"Ow! Beast!"

"Will you have the sponge next?" asked Wharton, laughing.

"Ow! Pax! I suppose we've remonstrated enough to redeem our promise. I wonder what Marjorie thought of you, doing a fisticuff turn in the high road?"

Wharton flushed.

"I shall explain to Marjorie when I see her."

"Of course. You might explain to Miss Primrose, too, if you get a chance. She must have had quite a wrong impression of you," grinned Bob Cherry. "I hope you gave Bulstrode a good hiding?"

"I don't know; we both seem to have had some hard knocks. Did the presentation go off all right?"

"Ripping!" said Bob Cherry confidently. "I made the speech pretty well."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent.

"What are you cackling at, you ass?"

"I am thinking of the way you made the speech."

"Oh, rats! Miss Primrose seemed pleased, anyway! By the way, I've told Bunter to take those fireworks back to Bulstrode, Harry!"

"That's right!"

Wharton dried his face, and the chums of the Remove strolled away together. Billy Bunter met them, with the cardboard box full of fireworks in his hand. The fat junior blinked at them.

"I can't find Bulstrode, you fellows. He hasn't come in yet."

"Shove 'em into his study, then."

"Can't you shove 'em in?" said Bunter aggressively. "You know I don't like going upstairs when I can avoid it."

"How can I take them when I've got my hands in my pockets," demanded Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Besides, it will bring down your fat—a little exercise!" said Bob kindly. "Run upstairs at top speed, and——"

"I'm not going to do anything of the sort! I think—— I say, you fellows, I wish you wouldn't walk away while I'm talking! Blessed if I'm going up to Bulstrode's study!" murmured Billy Bunter, as he found himself alone. "Here I say, Wun Lung, will you take these fireworks up to Bulstrode's room?"

Wun Lung, the Chinese junior, paused with his sleepy smile.

"You're a lighter weight than I am," said Bunter persuasively. "Look here, I'm expecting a postal order this evening. I'll stand you a bit of a feed when it comes. Will you take this to Bulstrode's study?"

"Me takee!"

And the little Celestial cheerfully took the packet, and went upstairs with it. He was some little time in Bulstrode's study, but Bunter did not know that or care—the fat junior was busy thinking about other matters. When Wun Lung came out of the study, he seemed to be doubled up in a paroxysm of silent mirth. He became suddenly grave as a burly form came along the passage, and Bulstrode scowled at him.

Wun Lung scuttled off. It was not safe for him to get within reach of the bully of the Remove. There were two fellows at Greyfriars with whom Wun Lung was always at daggers drawn—Bulstrode, of the Remove, and Ionides, of the Sixth.

Bulstrode went into his study. He was feeling somewhat sore from his encounter with Harry Wharton. The hero of the Remove was a hard hitter. But there was great satisfaction in the thought that he had forced Wharton to give him best. If Harry renewed the contest, it would end differently, and Bulstrode knew that. Still, for the present there was satisfaction in the thought.

The bully lighted the fire. A quaint little face looked in for a moment at the door as he did so, and grinned. But it vanished as Bulstrode rose to his feet.

The paper stuffed in the grate under the sticks flared, and a thick smoke went up the chimney. There was a sound of fizzing in the fire, but Bulstrode did not notice it.

He picked up his kettle to fill it with water for tea. Hazeldene, who shared his study, came to the door at that moment to come in. Bulstrode held out the kettle towards him.

"Fill this!" he said.

"Oh, rats!" said Hazeldene. "I didn't come here to fag."

"Did you come to get a thick ear?" asked Bulstrode unpleasantly. "If you did, you're going the right way to work. I—— Oh! What's — that — the —— Ow!"

Bulstrode broke off as a terrific explosion came from the fire.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Bang! Bang!

Fiz-z-z-z-z-z-z-z!

Hazeldene jumped clear of the floor in startled amazement.

"What the—— Who—— How——"

Crack! Bang! Fizz!

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The fragments of the fire were hurled in all directions. Exploding crackers jumped about the room, and squibs and rockets and Roman candles added merrily to the din and confusion.

Bulstrode staggered away from the grate in amazement and terror. With an almost stupefied look, he stood with his back against the furthest wall, watching the explosions from the fire.

Hazeldene scuttled out into the passage.

"Help!" he yelled. "Fire!"

A youth with a pigtail and a grinning yellow countenance came rushing up. He had one of the fire-buckets from the row at the end of the passage in his hands, and it was full of water.

Wun Lung was ready for the alarm.

"Fire!" shouted Bulstrode in the study.

"Fire!"

"Me helpee!" panted Wun Lung.

He rushed into the room with the bucket of water.

To swamp half of it on the fire was the work of a second, and a thick cloud of smoke careered around the study. Then, with a swing of the arm, Wun Lung sent the rest of the water over Bulstrode.

The Remove bully gave a roar.

"Me savee you!"

"You—you—you mad beast!"

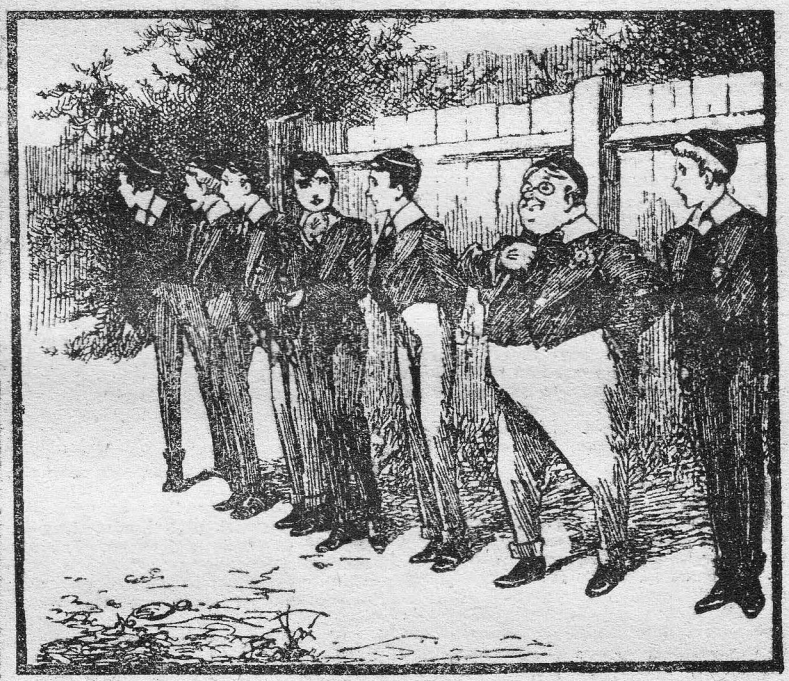
"Me savee you lifee!" beamed Wun Lung. "No tlouble to tankee. Me know you jolly glateful."

"You—you heathen beast! I'll—I'll ——"

Bulstrode rushed at the Chinee, who dodged out of the study.

The dripping bully of the Remove followed him furiously. In the passage Wun Lung was sprinting along as if on the cinder-path; but Bulstrode's long legs covered the ground rapidly. The little Chinee threw the fire-bucket behind him at the psychological moment, and Bulstrode stumbled over it and measured his length on the linoleum. Before he could gain his feet the little Celestial had vanished.

Bulstrode limped back to his study. The fire had gone out, and the grate was swimming with water. Smoke and blacks were everywhere. Bulstrode looked round the study, and then stamped out of it, and went down to the common-room.



"They're coming!" exclaimed Nugent breathlessly. "They are coming along, two and two, with Miss Penelope at the head!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Great News!

"HURRAH!"

Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh—the famous Four of the Remove at Greyfriars—were seated in their study, finishing their preparation.

Billy Bunter was reclining in the easy-chair, having done his work, as well as he ever did it. He had had his tea, and a small loan from Wharton had enabled him to follow it up with a feed in the tuck-shop; and so just now the fat junior was feeling especially contented and satisfied with himself and things generally.

He was just sinking into a pleasant doze, and beginning to dream that he was a pork butcher with an unlimited stock of pork sausages, when Hazeldene burst into the study, waving a letter in his hand, and shouting like a football enthusiast over a goal at a Cup-tie.

"Hurrah!"

Bob Cherry dropped five or six blots, and looked round ferociously. Wharton rose to his feet.

"Off your rocker?" he asked.

"Hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!" chanted Hazeldene.

"I've just had this letter——"

"From Marjorie?" asked Bob Cherry eagerly.

"No; from the headmistress of Cliff House—Miss Penelope Primrose."

"Oh!"

"But it's a ripping letter. She says she much appreciates the kindness shown by the juniors of Greyfriars in extending a hearty welcome to the new school——"

"Good!" said Wharton. "I'm glad she's pleased, though my part of the performance didn't seem to go down very well."

"Ha, ha, ha! She's thinking, of course, of the graceful way Bob Cherry presented her with a box of fireworks."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Bob, turning red. "Get on with the washing!"

"Very well. Miss Penelope is giving a sort of celebration at the new school, to celebrate the opening, you know."

Billy Bunter was upright at once.

"A feed, I suppose?" he asked. "That's a ripping idea. If Miss Primrose wanted any expert advice, I'd go over and help with pleasure."

"I dare say there'll be a feed," assented Hazeldene. "There's generally something to eat at a dance."

"A dance!" exclaimed three or four voices.

Hazeldene nodded.

"That's the wheeze. Miss Primrose is giving a little dance to-morrow night to celebrate the opening of the school, and we're invited."

"Hurrah!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Thought you'd say that," grinned Hazeldene. "Of course, lots of us don't dance, but there's bound to be a good feed. That's the thing, you know."

"Yes, rather," said Billy Bunter, with emphasis. "I suppose I'm on the list, Vaseline?"

"I suppose so," said Hazeldene, with a disparaging look at the fat junior. "Miss Primrose has asked all who were connected with the plan of giving her a public welcome. You were with us?"

"Of course I was. It was really my idea——"

"Oh, cheese it! It was Wharton's idea, and a blessed hard job he had to get us to back him up and carry it out," said Hazeldene. "But it's turned out jolly well. It was worth the trouble. But I haven't told you all. The affair is to be fancy dress, that's the beauty of it. I'm going to wire home for my toga and things."

"Your which?"

"My toga. I've done Brutus, you know, in amateur theatricals. I shall go as Brutus. Bunter had better go as the Fat Boy of Peckham. He won't have to make up then."

"Oh, really, Vaseline!"

"Miss Primrose has written to me because I'm Marjorie's brother," explained Hazeldene. "But she says I'm to bring all the fellows who had a hand in the welcome, it they care to come, and any others I think suitable. There's really no limit; but, of course, it's understood that only juniors are going."

The chums of the Remove looked very cheerful.

A fancy-dress ball was a little out of the common, and was a welcome break in the even tenor of their way.

Dancing, of course, did not appeal to boys so much as it would have appealed to girls; but the idea of going in costume and mask was attractive. And there was the supper for those who cared for it, and their name, of course, would be legion.

Free chocolates and ices for youths who were mostly our of pocket-money towards the end of the week—there was something very enticing in the mere thought! Billy Bunter was already dreaming dreams of the supper-room.

"We'll all go," said Wharton. "We're much obliged to Miss Primrose. We must write her a really nice letter in return."

"Yes, rather. She says she's sorry it's such a short notice, but she has only just decided to let the celebration take the form of a dance to which gentlemen can be invited," explained Hazeldene.

"As a matter of fact, I believe the giddy festival was going to be the usual girls' school affair—weak tea and cake, you know, and simpering, and no boys or dogs admitted. Then this stunning wheeze about giving 'em a public welcome made her think of us. Shows she's a jolly good sort."

"Ripping!"

"Blessed if I know how I shall get on with the dancing," said Bob Cherry dubiously. "I can waltz——"

"Ha, ha!" Most of us will be a little bit wanting there, but a fellow's not bound to dance, you know."

"Of course not," said Bunter. "I shall be in the supper-room most of the time."

"Of course a fellow's expected to dance at a dance," remarked Wharton. "It's rather piggish to go to a dance and lounge about after the refreshments, and leave the ball-room full of wallflowers, as lots of chaps do. It doesn't matter if you don't dance well."

"Yes, that's all very well," grunted Bob Cherry. "You're a good dancer."

"Yes; but look here—a girl would rather have a bad dancer than a silly chump who doesn't dance at all," said Harry. "We can get up a little practice to-day and to-morrow, too, and every chap ought to do his best."

"Yes, rather!" said Nugent.

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"Oh, all right," said Bob. "You'll have to put me through my paces, that's all. Are you going to answer the letter, Vaseline?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Fill it up with best thanks, then, and delighted to come, and so on. Let Miss Primrose see we're grateful. It's really awfully good of her to think of us. When this gets out, all the Remove will want to come."

"Well, I suppose we can take most of the Form?" said Hazeldene. "It's a good idea to have more boys than girls. It makes a dance a success, as every girl is asked, then; and the fellows who miss dances don't mind it so much as girls would. We'll take nearly all the Form."

"Yes, After all, they were nearly all in the welcoming business, but they ran away betore the girls came along," Nugent remarked. "It's only fair, but I think we shall have a tussle to keep the seniors out."

"Yes, rather. There's the Upper Fourth—Temple, Dabney & Co.—will be ready to tear their hair about it."

"Let 'em tear it!"

"And there's Ionides, of the Sixth. He fancies himself awfully in dress clothes. He would live in 'em if he could."

"Sixth-Formers are barred, of course. We're not going to take along big chaps who would patronise us, and put us in the shade."

"Rather not."

"Thought I'd come and tell you first," said Hazeldene. "I'll get along now, and let the others into it. There'll be a rush on the costumier's in Friardale. Most of us who belong to the Operatic Society have some togs already, luckily."

And Hazeldene left the study. During the next day or so there was great excitement in the Remove. The juniors were anxiously looking forward to the dance, and for many of them the time would not go quick enough.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Dance.

At last the night of the dance arrived. Cliff House was in a blaze of light.

From the windows the light shone out far over the shadowed sea, visible to the fishermen in the bay and mariners in passing vessels. Cliff House was en fete.

The building was large and well-planned. Round the handsome house were wide gardens, with pleasant paths and alleys, already looking green and growing in the spring.

Fairy-lamps lighted the conservatory, and Chinese lanterns glimmered among the trees. It was a very mild and soft evening, and a breath of a pleasant south wind came over the sea. The large school-room had been prepared for the dance, and the state of the floor had cost Miss Primrose and her fair assistants much thought.

The large school-room presented a scene of great animation.

Besides the boys and girls, there were some half-dozen grown-ups present, but these were mainly directing their efforts to make things go smoothly, and add to the enjoyment of the young people, without thinking of themselves.

Miss Primrose, with a blush that made her kind old face look twenty years younger, had allowed Harry Wharton to take her round once, "pour encourager les autres."

Wharton danced to perfection, and in the garb of a courtier of Queen Bess, with the mask partly concealing his face, was not to be recognised as the lad Miss Penelope had read such a lecture to the previous day on the Friardale road.

Miss Primrose thought him a very nice lad indeed, and never connected him in her mind with the boy who had been fighting Bulstrode.

In a short while nearly everybody was dancing, and every girl who cared to do so had a partner, and everyone was enjoying himself or herself thoroughly.

Some of the dancing, on the part of the gentlemen, was a little clumsy, perhaps; but the girls were patient. Bob Cherry seemed to imagine at times that he was on the football-field, making a desperate run for goal, and he had a weakness for regarding other people's feet as proper resting-places for his own. But for the mask which he fondly imagined concealed his identity, he would never have dared to dance at all.

As a matter of fact, he was perfectly well known. Skinner remarked—out of Bob's hearing—that his feet would serve to identify him anywhere. And, indeed, Bob's feet were several times very much in evidence. Still, he was having a good time, and what he wanted in skill he made up in good temper and willingness to please.

There was no doubt that Wharton was the partner liked best of all the Greyfriars fellows; but Bob would have been the last to feel envious of him. He regarded that as a matter of course.

Probably next to Wharton in popularity came Mark Linley, the lad from Lancashire. Linley danced as if born to it in the dances he knew, and those he did not know he did not venture upon. There were plenty of fellows to take the required places, and so it did not matter to anybody but himself.

A dance was ending, and Harry and Marjorie, Bob and Clara, found themselves together, and sat down near a cluster of ferns a short distance from Miss Primrose, just as a new arrival entered the room,

Bob caught sight of him, and uttered a low ejaculation, which caused Harry to look round.

"Ionides!"

Wharton's brow contracted a little.

"Confound him!" he murmured. "What's he want?"

"He's not in fancy dress. I suppose he didn't know—or else he doesn't care. He looks as if he thought the place belonged to him!" growled Bob Cherry.

Ionides certainly did look quite satisfied with himself. Whether he had known or not that it was a fancy-dress affair, he had not taken the trouble to come in costume. He was in ordinary evening-dress, and it could not be denied that he looked very elegant.

Some of the girls glanced at him with approval—a fact that was not lost on the juniors, and which did not make their feelings any the more pleasant towards the cad of the Sixth.

Ionides came up to where Miss Primrose sat, after a glance about the room. Although he seemed to regard himself as monarch of all he surveyed, he condescended to pay his respects to his hostess.

But Miss Primrose was far from observing that she was receiving a distinguished guest.

All the guests at the dance were in fancy dress, and Miss Primrose, seeing a young man in ordinary evening clothes advancing towards her, fell into the excusable error that it was one of the hired waiters from Friardale.

The waiters were the only persons there in dress clothes, and so the mistake was quite excusable. Miss Primrose was a trifle short-sighted, and she did not look very closely at the Greek.

"You may bring me an ice!" she said.

Ionides stared a little. He had no objection to getting an ice for his hostess, but Miss Primrose's tone was hardly what he would have expected.

However, as the good lady turned away her head and began to speak to one of the girls after addressing him, he turned a little pink, and moved away to obey.

Bob Cherry gripped Harry Wharton's arm in ecstasy.

"Did you hear that, Harry?"

"No; what was it?"

"Miss Primrose takes him for a waiter."

"My hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors looked on with great interest as Heracles Ionides reappeared with the ice, which he carried very gingerly.

"Ahem, madam! You requested——"

Miss Primrose turned her head towards him.

"Ah, yes, my ice. Thank you!"

"I have the pleasure——"

"Yes, thank you; you may go."

"Permit me to——"

"Eh? Did you speak? Stay! You may fetch an ice for this young lady."

"If you will permit me to——"

"Pray do as I tell you!"

Ionides' teeth came together hard, but he obeyed. He brought the second ice.

The next dance was beginning now, and the couples were taking their places. The Greek was red with anger. He wanted to introduce himself to Miss Primrose, and it was impossible now. Miss Locke seated herself beside the principal, and Ionides made almost an appealing gesture to her.

Miss Locke did not acknowledge him.

She had a faint remembrance of having seen the Greek at Greyfriars, but that was all; and as she knew seniors were not invited to the dance, she did not know what to make of Ionides' presence there, and wasn't in the least inclined to come to his help. His air of superiority was quite enough to make Miss Locke ignore him.

It was the last dance before the interval, and the juniors and the girls enjoyed it immensely, while the Greek stood looking on with eyes like lightning.

When it was over, a general move was made to the refreshment-room.

Billy Bunter was there, half-way through a tremendous feed, and too busy even to look up when the rest came in.

Bob Cherry, to his great delight, found himself in possession of Marjorie. He had not planned it, but it had worked out like that; and he did not know that he owed the last dance to the skilful management of Harry Wharton, who would gladly have had it himself, but denied himself the pleasure for the sake of friendship.

Harry was with Clara, and that cheerful girl was prattling away at express speed on every subject under the sun. The masks were removed at supper, and Clara gave a little shriek of surprise on discovering that the handsome Elizabethan courtier was the youth who had been pommelling Bulstrode on the Friardale road the previous afternoon.

Wharton coloured as he saw that he was recognised.

"Don't give me away to Miss Primrose," he said pleadingly. "You see, I was forced into that—that row against my will, really."

"And Miss Primrose lectured you severely."

"Yes, didn't she? If she had known the facts——"

"What were they?"

Wharton hesitated, but Bob Cherry, who had brought Marjorie to the same table, chimed in.

"The other chap was going to chuck fireworks to make you scream, and Wharton stopped him."

"How good of you!" said Clara, beaming. "Do you know, I thought you were rather a nice boy, though you did look horrid with so much dust on your face, and one of your eyes closed up. Were you much hurt?"

"Not a bit."

"Weren't you much surprised to find it was I?" asked Bob Cherry, looking bashfully at Marjorie when he was unmasked.

Marjorie smiled.

"I had a suspicion whom it was," she said.

"You know, I knew you all the time," said Bob. "As a matter of fact, I knew Miss Clara too, from seeing her yesterday. And, by Jove, there's Ionides again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors subdued their laughter, but they could not quite help it.

Heracles Ionides was passing them with two plates full of sandwiches to place on a table, having been directed by Miss Primrose to do so.

The Greek was puzzled and angry.

Miss Primrose's mistake had not yet dawned upon him, but he could not quite make her out. He had had no opportunity at all of introducing himself, being kept too busy waiting on the guests.

The juniors, naturally, were not slow to enter into the spirit of the thing. Orders rained on Ionides from all sides.

"Here, my man," said Nugent, "bring me some ginger-pop, sharp!"

Ionides, scarcely believing his ears, glared at him.

"Buck up, my man; make yourself useful!"

"You let my waiter alone!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "This chap is looking after me. Here, Johnny, here's a tanner for you. You stick to this table."

"Ah!" muttered the Greek, livid with rage. "Ah! I will—I will make you smart——"

"Don't bother about that," said Bob Cherry coolly; "look smart yourself. I suppose you're being paid for this?"

Ionides almost choked.

"Paid! Paid! What do you mean?"

"I suppose you're not waiting at table for nothing?" said Bob innocently. "Anyway, buck up and get us some sandwiches."

"You—you—you——"

"Deaf? Sandwiches—I said sandwiches!"

Ionides hurried away. He could not trust himself near Bob Cherry, or he would have thrown etiquette to the winds and hurled himself upon the junior in full sight of Miss Primrose and her guests.

Miss Penelope's mistake dawned upon him at last, and the humiliation of it made his cheeks burn with rage.

He made his way to the hostess, with the intention of explaining, but he found her busy. He insisted upon attracting her intention, however.

"Yes, yes, my good man—what do you want?" exclaimed Miss Primrose, surprised and annoyed. "Please go and wait on my guests!"

The Greek gritted his teeth.

"Madame——"

"Yes, yes, my good man, pray go!"

"Madame——"

"Pray go!" said Miss Primrose, greatly distressed. "Pray calm yourself and go!"

Ionides was stuttering with rage. He seemed to be about to lose control of his temper entirely, and in that case the juniors would have been only too glad to throw him out.

He was saved from that by the sight of the Head, advancing to the spot with Miss Locke. Dr. Locke had accepted Miss Primrose's pressing invitation, being, as a matter of fact, somewhat uneasy as to the behaviour of thirty-five Removites taken out of his immediate care. He started as he saw the Greek.

"Ionides! What are you doing here?"

"I—I came——"

"I understood that only juniors were invited by Miss Primrose."

Miss Primrose almost fainted.

"Dr. Locke, is—is—is this one of your boys?"

"Yes, madam—a senior of the Sixth Form. I understood——"

"Goodness gracious, I took him for a waiter!"

"Ha, ha! I mean—ahem!—Ionides, you have yourself to thank for this. I presume your coming here was due to some misunderstanding, but you should have been more careful. You had better retire at once."

And Ionides retired. He caught the laughing looks of the juniors turned upon him, and hardly restrained his rage till he was safe in the silence of the garden. There he gave free rein to his passion, and clenched his fists and brandished them in the air, and hissed out strong expressions in Greek till he was somewhat calmed.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
Bunter Thinks it a Success.

HARRY WHARTON restrained his laughter as well as he could. Clara was laughing, too, and Marjorie could not subdue a smile. Bob Cherry would have given worlds to jump up and execute a war-dance in the middle of the room.

"Oh, it was too gorgeous!" he murmured. "How are the mighty fallen! Fancy Ionides the Great being taken for a common or garden waiter! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not much of a compliment to the waiters."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Me tinkee me findee loom hele."

It was the voice of Wung Lung, the Chinee. He found room at a table next to Wharton's, with a sunny-faced girl whom Clara immediately addressed as Milly.

Marjorie knew Wun Lung, of course, but to the rest he was a stranger, and there was not one who did not think that his Chinese aspect was a disguise got up for the occasion.

"Isn't it marvellous?" said Clara, looking at him.

"What's marvellous?" asked Wharton.

"Why, his make-up. He speaks just like a Chinaman, too. I danced with him, and if it had not been a fancy-dress ball, you know, I should have taken him for a real Chinaman."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"He's been taken for a real Chinaman before now," he remarked.

"Me tinkee Bob Chelly jokee," said Wun Lung, looking round. "Me leal Chinee."

Clara clasped her hands ecstatically.

"Isn't it wonderful?"

"Amazing," said Bob Cherry. "You wouldn't think how well that pigtail is fixed on, too. It would be a joke to jerk it off."

"My goodness! How funny!"

"Me leal Chinee," said Wun Lung. "No savvy. No disguise. Me leal."

"Oh, come off!" said Bob Cherry. "Don't keep it up with us, you know."

"No savvy!"

Wun Lung turned his head away to look after his partner.

Bob Cherry whispered to Clara:

"Fancy his keeping it up like that!"

"Yes; he deserves to have his pigtail pulled off," said that lively young lady, with a longing glance at that ornament of Wun Lung's head.

"Give it just a jerk—it's close to you—and watch results."

"Oh, I dare not!"

"It's all right; serve him right, you know."

Clara hesitated. But the spirit of mischief was too strong for her, and she suddenly took hold of the pigtail and gave it a sharp jerk.

There was a yell from Wun Lung.

The pigtail was firmly attached to his head, having grown there, and the jerk on it hurt. He jumped, and dropped a cup into his saucer. Then he looked round, his almond eyes wide open, at the dismayed Clara.

"Me hultee. Ow!"

Clara seemed unable to believe her eyes.

So far from coming off, the pigtail had proved its genuineness by standing the strain, and she realised that she was dealing with a real Chinaman.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

Wun Lung smiled sweetly.

"All jokee," he said. "Alleo light. Me savvy."

And he turned away placably enough. Clara gave Bob Cherry a reproachful look.

Bob looked as if he were on the verge of apoplexy.

A movement was being made for the dancing-room again.

The second half, as Bob Cherry termed it, was even more animated and enjoyable than the first, all the remains of shyness and constraint having passed away.

The evening passed all too quickly, and the happiness in the young faces was reflected in those of Dr. Locke and Miss Primrose, as they watched the dancers.

Billy Bunter did not reappear, however. He had eaten of the hearty supper not wisely, but too well, and he felt much too sleepy to seek the crowded room again. Instead of that, he wandered out into the conservatory, found a comfortable seat, and went to sleep.

His musical snore was the only sound heard in the conservatory, till two young persons seated themselves close at hand. Bunter's snore was for the moment suspended, and they did not observe him in the dusky light.

"No, I won't forgive you," said Clara, "and I won't have any chocolates. So there!"

"But it was only a joke," pleaded Bob Cherry.

"The poor Chinaman was hurt," said Miss Clara primly. "Besides, it was silly."

Bob Cherry rubbed his chin. His little joke had been quite a harmless one, but he felt that perhaps it had been more suitable for boys than girls.

"How would you like to have your hair pulled?" said Clara severely.

"You can pull my hair if you like," said Bob Cherry. "Pull it as hard as you like, and call it square."

Clara broke into an irrepressible ripple of laughter at this scheme for setting the matter right.

Sn-o-o-o-ore!

The girl started in affright.

"My goodness! There is some animal in the ferns!" she exclaimed.

Bob Cherry pushed through the ferns, the girl looking after him nervously. The junior uttered an exclamation.

There was Billy Bunter in a seat on the other side, leaning back with his mouth wide open, snoring away as if for a wager.

Bob Cherry gave a sniff of disgust.

"It's only Bunter!"

Clara's laugh rippled again. Bob Cherry carefully took a chunk of chocolate from a packet.

"Shall I?" he asked.

"He trod on my foot," said Clara, "and tore my sash. He is a conceited fellow."

Taking this as permission, Bob Cherry skilfully dropped the chocolate into Billy Bunter's mouth, and stepped back quickly behind the ferns.

"Gr-r-r-r-r! Br-r-r-r-r-r! Ow-w-w-w-w! Gr-r-r!"

"Let's go," whispered Clara hurriedly.

They vanished. Billy Bunter put his spectacles straight and came peering round, but he found no one. Bob Cherry and Clara, the best of friends now, walked off together, and the fat junior was left grumbling alone. But he ate the chocolate!

The enjoyable evening was drawing to a close now. The last waltz was waltzed, and the last strains of the band died away, and then came the leave-taking.

Sorry enough were both boys and girls to part. The evening had been a very happy one, and they could have wished it to continue till the small hours of the morning. But they were not even allowed Cinderella limits. At half-past ten came the close, and the Greyfriars juniors took their leave.

"What a beautiful evening!" said Marjorie to Clara, after the guests were gone. "Hasn't it been lovely?"

"Splendid!" said Clara ecstatically.

Similar opinions were being exchanged by the Greyfriars lads as they walked home, following the stately form of the Head.

"Ripping!" said Bob Cherry. "I never thought an evening spent with girls could be half so ripping."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Yes, it was ripping," said Harry Wharton: "We shall have to return the compliment some time—somehow. It will be fun, if we can manage it."

"I say, you fellows, it was ripping; but you didn't enjoy it so much as I did. I got a good start in the supper-room. You can say what you like, but the best part of a dance is the feed. I know!"

And the chums laughed. They marched home, and turned in, somewhat fatigued, but quite happy, to sleep a dreamless sleep after the night of the party.

THE END.

BETWEEN OURSELVES.

A Weekly Chat between The Editor and His Readers.

RESULT OF THE "CHUMS OF GREYFRIARS" PICTURE COMPETITION.

I have much pleasure in announcing the result of our recent competition. The First Prize, consisting of the original painting of that famous presentation plate entitled "The Chums of Greyfriars," framed in suitable style, has been awarded to the following competitor who sent in no less than 374 coupons:

Master Willie Jess,
55, Brownlow Street,
Belfast.

I offer Master Jess my heartiest congratulations on his success, and I am sure that every reader will agree with me that this reader must have worked extremely hard to have collected so many coupons in such a short space of time.

The following twenty competitors, next in order of merit, have each been awarded a splendid framed photogravure of the above-mentioned plate:

R. H. Marlow, Lowestoft; F. Johnson, Nunhead; Elsa Skey, Manchester Square, W.; Charles Rourke, Ashton-under-Lyne; H. Fountain, Hampstead; R. Gerrard, Cardiff; H. Hermiston, Ashington; W. Venables, Liverpool; Miss M. O'Brien, Dublin; W. Macdonald, Salford; T. E. Bull, London, N.; W. F. Tyson, Barrow-in-Furness; Harry Shaw, Nunhead; Harry Bacon, Canterbury; Gilbert Thomas, Cardiff; William Branney, Liverpool; James Rich, Swindon; Harvey Pickance, Brixton Hill; Albert Poll, Paddington; Adam Young, Paisley.

FOR NEXT FRIDAY.

Space will not permit of my giving a long description of the stories due to appear in next Friday's PENNY POPULAR. However, my chums can rest assured that they will be of the highest quality. First and foremost is the tale dealing with the adventures of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled:

"The Greyfriars Cricketers!"

This story deals with the election of the Remove captain, and also introduces a match between Harry Wharton & Co. and the Cliff House girls. Needless to say this yarn is full of fun.

The story of Tom Merry & Co. is entitled:

"In Another's Power!"

There is an element of mystery in this story which will, I am sure, greatly interest you all.

The title of the tale dealing with the adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. is:

"The Rookwood Wheelers!"

The rivalry between The Fistical Four and Tommy Dodd & Co. is very much to the fore in this yarn.

Don't forget, my chums, that in order to avoid disappointment you must order your copies in advance.

YOUR EDITOR.

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