

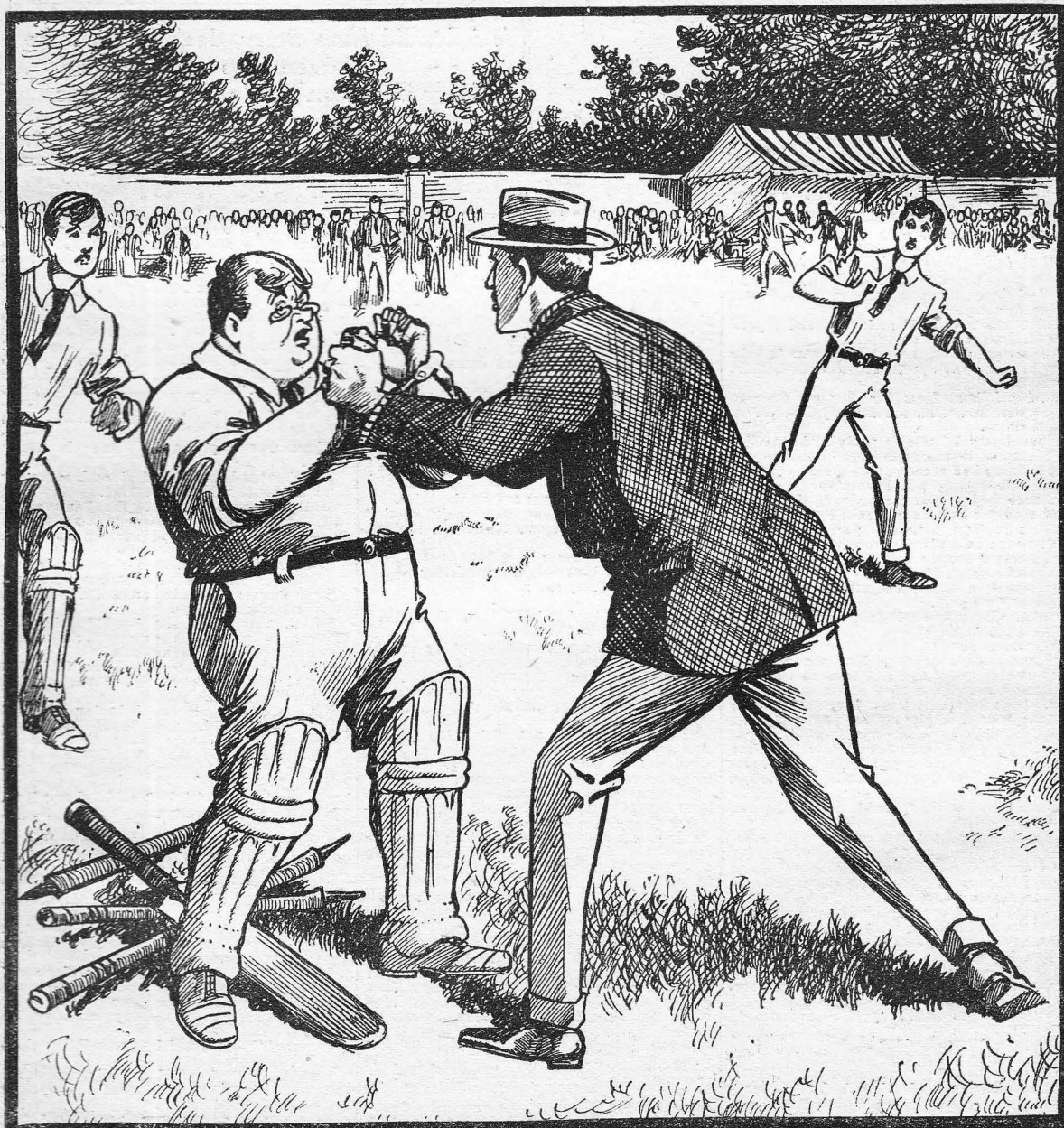
THREE NEW SCHOOL TALES!

The Penny $1\frac{1}{2}$ Popular

Week Ending
June 7th, 1919.

No. 20.
New Series.

Three Original Complete Stories of—
HARRY WHARTON & CO.—JIMMY SILVER & CO.—TOM MERRY & CO.



THE INTERRUPTED CRICKET MATCH!

(An Exciting Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale of Greyfriars in this Issue.)



School versus County!

A Splendid New Story, dealing with the
Adventures of
Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars.
By **FRANK RICHARDS.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Twelfth Man.

WHO'S it to be?" Harry Wharton, the captain of Greyfriars Remove, glanced inquiringly at the other members of the Famous Five.

There was a puzzled and perplexed expression on Harry Wharton's face.

He was compiling the list of players to take part in the great Sports Tournament against Kent.

Twelve fellows from the Remove were to be chosen, and Wharton already had eleven names down.

When Harry Wharton's party had travelled to Blackpool to meet the boys of Lancashire, Piet Delarey had accompanied them as twelfth man. But Delarey was down with 'flu, and it was necessary to select a substitute.

"I vote for Bulstrode!" said Bob Cherry. "He's in Vernon-Smith's party, ass! We can't poach on Smithy's preserves."

"I suggest Kippis," said Frank Nugent. Wharton shook his head.

"Kippis is a better conunger than he is a cricketer," he said.

"What about Trevor?" said Johnny Bull. "He's too feeble."

"Treluce, then?"

"Same remark applies. You see, we shall want twelve good men and true to go down to Folkestone. Kent have got a tremendous side. Dick Trumper, from Courtfield County Council School, is playing for them; likewise Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar, of Highcliffe; and the rest of the fellows are drawn from the finest schools in the county. We mustn't have a weak spot in our armour. It's true that the twelfth man might not be wanted. On the other hand, he might; and we're not going to run any risks."

Bob Cherry nodded. "It's the dickens of a problem," he said. "We mustn't touch Smithy's twelve, so it doesn't leave us many fellows to choose from. There's Skinner—"

"My hat! I'd sooner play Gosling! Skinner would walk out to the wickets smoking a fat cigar."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's Snoopy—"

"N.G.," said Wharton. "Snoopey's thrown off his bad old ways to a certain extent; but he's not an all-round sportsman, by long chalks!"

"There's Alonzo Todd!"

"Oh, help!"

"And Fishy—"

"I sorter guess and calculate he'll have to take a back seat."

"What price Wun Lung?"

"Me no savvy!" chuckled Nugent.

"You've forgotten Tom Redwing!" said Johnny Bull suddenly.

"No, I haven't," said Wharton. "Redwing can't turn out. He's got some people coming to see him this week."

"Perhaps Mauly could walk in his sleep and do something," suggested Bob Cherry.

"I shouldn't like to try the experiment."

"Well, I give it up," said Bob. "It's a giddy poser, and no mistake! Hallo, hallo, hallo! Come in, fathead!"

The "fathead" proved to be Sampson Quincy Iffley Field—chopped down to Squiff, life being short.

Squiff was panting for breath, and he looked very flushed and excited.

He carried a newspaper in his hand. "What's the latest?" said Nugent. "War broken out again?"

"Something more surprising than that."

"My hat!"

Squiff spread the paper out on the table. It was a local paper, and Squiff pointed dramatically to a report under the heading of "Cricket."

"Read it!" he gasped.

The Famous Five obeyed, wondering.

This is what they saw:

"COURTFIELD ATHLETIC v. WAPSHOT WANDERERS.

"This match was played yesterday on the Courtfield Recreation Ground, and resulted in a decisive victory for the home side.

"The brilliant batting and bowling of W. G. Bunter were mainly responsible for Courtfield's fine win.

"Bunter, although not giving the impression, from his personal appearance, of being a cricketer, scored a wonderful century and took the whole of the Wapshot wickets.

"Such a feat has seldom been surpassed in local cricket, and Bunter richly deserved the storm of applause he received.

"Although only fifteen years of age, Bunter has a mature style, and we venture to prophesy that before many years have elapsed he will figure in the Kent County XI.

"The following scores fully emphasise his great value:

COURTFIELD ATHLETIC.

W. G. Bunter, not out.....	105
T. Jenkins, b Brown.....	2
H. Wood, c & b Brown.....	6
R. Lindsay, b Roberts.....	0
B. Coleman, c & b Brown.....	8
T. Harris, c Wright, b Brown.....	17
F. Jones, b Roberts.....	7
H. E. Scott, b Roberts.....	12
G. Fletcher, b Brown.....	9
P. White c Barker, b Brown.....	5
R. Lee, b Roberts.....	6
Extras.....	2

Total..... 170

WAPSHOT WANDERERS.

J. J. Brown, b Bunter.....	0
P. Hickson, b Bunter.....	0
F. Jorkins, b Bunter.....	6
H. Wilkinson, b Bunter.....	5
S. Wright, b Bunter.....	0
R. Hawker, b Bunter.....	0
D. F. Coombes, b Bunter.....	0
F. Roberts, b Bunter.....	8
G. Griffiths, b Bunter.....	2
A. J. Barker, b Bunter.....	0
P. Hume, not out.....	0
Extras.....	3

Total..... 24

There was a prolonged silence in Study No. 1.

The Famous Five blinked at each other for some moments without speaking.

William George Bunter of the Remove had caused a good many surprises in the past, but this—as Bob Cherry said as soon as words would come—fairly capped the lot!

"Bunter!" gasped Wharton helplessly.

"Bunter!" echoed Johnny Bull and Nugent.

"The esteemed and ludicrous fat Bunter!" mumbled Hurree Singh.

"Well, this beats the band!" said Bob Cherry. "Bunter—the coming Kent champion! My only Aunt Sempronia!"

"He scored a century, and he took ten wickets," said Nugent feebly. "Who said the age of miracles was past?"

"It can't be true!" said Wharton. "It's a mistake—it must be a mistake! Who ever heard of Billy Bunter doing this sort of thing? His cousin Wally's a fine cricketer, but even Wally wouldn't put up a performance like this!"

"It can't be a mistake," said Johnny Bull.

"It's there in black and white—W. G. Bunter."

"And it says that Bunter hasn't the appearance of a cricketer," said Nugent. "Well, he hasn't!"

"What's more," said Squiff, "Bunter actually went to Courtfield yesterday in his flannels."

"I simply can't swallow it," said Wharton.

"Ask Wingate, then. Bunter says Wingate gave him a pass out of gates."

"Good!" said Bob Cherry. "Go along and ask old Wingate, Harry, and then we shall know whether there's anything in it or not."

Harry Wharton went along to Wingate's study.

The captain of Greyfriars was there, chatting to Gwynne.

"Hallo, kid!" he said genially, as Harry entered. "Ready for Folkestone to-morrow?"

"Yes, rather, Wingate!"

"I'm coming with you, as you know," said Wingate. "It's necessary that you should have the fatherly eye. Do you wish to know anything about the tour?"

"Not exactly," said Wharton. "I just wanted to ask you if you gave Bunter a pass out of gates yesterday, Wingate."
 "Certainly!"
 "You—you did?"
 "Yes. He wanted permission to go over to Courtfield to play cricket."
 "My hat!"
 "Anything wrong?" asked Gwynne.
 "No; but it's jolly queer. Bunter made a century and bagged ten wickets."
 "The dickens he did!" exclaimed Wingate, opening his eyes wide. "In that case, you'd better bring him along to Folkestone. You're wanting a twelfth man, I understand?"
 "Ye-e-es; but—"
 "What are you butting about now?"
 "It seems so jolly strange, Wingate! Bunter's about the last man to put up records in the athletic line."
 "Well, he seems to have done it," said Wingate. "You'd better bring him along. He'll come in useful against Kent, at this rate."
 Harry Wharton left Wingate's study with his head in a whirl.
 He felt that he must be dreaming.
 Billy Bunter was the worst cricketer in the Remove, bar none. He was too shortsighted to time a ball correctly; he was too fat to run; and as for bowling—well, most of the fellows would have fled for their lives if Bunter were about to deliver a ball. He would be a source of danger to anyone in the vicinity.
 Was it possible that Bunter had been spoofing the school? Was it likely that he had been hiding his light under a bushel—that he was a great performer with bat and ball, but had chosen to keep it dark?
 These thoughts raced through Wharton's mind as he returned to Study No. 1.
 "Well," said Nugent, "what did Wingate say?"
 "It's true enough," said Wharton. "Bunter was given permission to go over to Courtfield and play cricket."
 "My hat!"
 "The fat idiot must have been spoofing us all the time!"
 "I say, you fellows!"
 "Talk of angels!" said Bob Cherry. "Come right in, Darrel!"
 Billy Bunter rolled into the study. Wharton gave him a searching glance.
 "What were you doing yesterday afternoon, Bunter?"
 "Oh, really, Wharton! That's no concern of yours. If you want to know, I was playing cricket."
 "At Courtfield?"
 "Yes."
 "How many runs did you make?"
 "A hundred and five, not out."
 "Did you bowl?"
 "Certainly! I took ten wickets."
 "You weren't playing against a blind school, by any chance?" said Johnny Bull.
 "No jolly fear! Wapshot Wanderers are one of the best teams for miles around. But, of course, they couldn't stand up to my bowling. Nobody could."
 Harry Wharton turned to his chums.
 "I can't believe it yet," he said, "but—truth is stranger than fiction," observed Squiff.
 Billy Bunter chipped in.
 "You fellows have always misjudged me," he said. "You've thought me a hopeless duffer at the game, and you wouldn't take me up to Blackpool to play against Lancashire. Smithy wouldn't take me down to Surrey, either. I've a jolly good mind to refuse to play for the Remove, after the shameful way I've been treated. But I'll give you one more chance. Will you put me down to play against Kent, Wharton?"
 Wharton hesitated.
 He had ample evidence as to Bunter's cricketering abilities—the report in the paper and the statement by Wingate, both confirmed by Bunter himself. And yet he could not feel convinced.
 It was not often that Wharton had to appeal to others for a decision, but he did so now.
 "Shall I count Bunter in?" he asked.
 "Well, in the light of what's happened, you can't very well leave him out," said Nugent.
 "No, rather not!" said Bob Cherry.
 So Harry Wharton yielded.
 And when the announcement of the forthcoming tussle with Kent appeared on the notice-board that evening it was discovered, to the unbounded astonishment of all Greyfriars, that the twelfth name on the list was W. G. Bunter!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
 The Hope of His Side.

"HERE we are!"
 "Tumble out, everybody!"
 The train rumbled to a standstill when it arrived at the Central Station at Folkestone.
 Harry Wharton & Co., armed with cricket-bags, joined the bustling throng of holiday-makers on the platform.
 Billy Bunter, looking very pompous and important, was with them.
 The fat junior had been chattering all the way down about his performances, past and to come. He pointed out to his school-fellows that he was the axle on which the team revolved—that without him they would be dished, diddled, and done!
 "I hope the cricket-ground isn't too near the sea," he remarked, as the cricketers moved towards the station exit.
 "Why, porpoise?" demanded Bob Cherry.
 "Because I'm afraid a good many balls will be lost!" chuckled Bunter. "He, he, he!"
 "Oh, dry up!"
 Just then Peter Todd sighted three familiar faces.
 "Hallo!" he exclaimed. "There's Courtenay and the Caterpillar and Dick Trumper!"
 "Welcome, little strangers!" said the Caterpillar, as he and his companions joined the Greyfriars crowd. "You've got a tough nut to crack this time, begad! There's Franky and Dick Trumper from Courtfield, and little me!"
 "You've not always been on the winning side," said Wharton, "and you won't be this time!"
 But the Caterpillar was confident.
 "We shall knock spots off you!" he declared. "I didn't want to come at first. Cricket's a frightfully faggin' and exhaustin' game, by Jove! And as for swimmin' and runnin'—well, they're too strenuous for a delicate, flower-like constitution like mine. Now that Franky's dragged me down here, however, I'm goin' all out."
 "You won't do very much against Bunter," grinned Wharton.
 "Bunter!" ejaculated Frank Courtenay. "You don't mean to say you've brought that fat clam along?"
 "We has—we have!" chuckled Bob Cherry.
 "Oh, my hat! I can't think what made you bring him. Still, he'll come in useful for rolling the pitch."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I say, you fellows, I'm feeling awfully peckish!"
 "Rats!"
 "But I am!" persisted Bunter. "I only had eight sausages and half a dozen ham-rolls for brekkar, and the ham-rolls were undersized."
 "Great Scott!"
 "Matter of fact," said the Caterpillar, "I'm feelin' rather famished myself. I haven't got such a cravin' as this tame boa-constrictor, but I think we ought to stagger round in search of light refreshments. Lead the way, Wharton, old bean!"
 Wingate intervened.
 "We're going along to the hotel first," he said. "It's in Sandgate Road. Anybody know the way?"
 "Fall in and follow me!" said Peter Todd. "I know every inch of this place."
 The party proceeded along Castle Hill Avenue to the hotel, where they left their bags.
 Some of them remained at the hotel for lunch; but Harry Wharton & Co., with Billy Bunter following closely in the rear, sallied forth to a popular restaurant on the front.
 "I say, you fellows," said Bunter, as the juniors gave their orders, "there's no reason why I shouldn't go the whole hog, is there?"
 "You always do!" growled Johnny Bull.
 "Oh, really, Bull! It's no use expecting me to knock up a century on an empty stomach, or take goals, either."
 "Goals!" said Wharton sharply.
 "Ahem! I—I meant wickets, of course!"
 "You ought to have stayed at the hotel, porpoise," said Nugent. "Wingate is paying for the grub out of the funds. But we're paying for our own here."
 Bunter's jaw dropped.
 "I—I say! We left Greyfriars jolly early this morning—before the postman arrived, in fact. Consequently I didn't get the postal-order I was expecting."
 "So you want us to stand treat—what?" said Bob Cherry.
 "Well, you ought to feel honoured to foot the bill on behalf of an old pal, you know!"
 "Br-r-r!"
 "Unless I'm well fed," said Bunter peev-

ishly, "I sha'n't touch the top of my form. Give me as much grub as I want, and I'll win the cricket-match for you this afternoon! That's a fair bargain."
 Harry Wharton grunted.
 "I suppose we'd better have a whip-round for the fat beast," he said. "But this is the only time we shall treat you, Bunter. You must get the rest of your grub with Wingate, out of the funds."
 Billy Bunter gave his order. Its dimensions made the waitress gasp.
 Harry Wharton & Co. did not gasp. They groaned. They were only too familiar with Billy Bunter's tremendous appetite.
 There was roast chicken on the menu. Bunter had some. Then, while the Famous Five were still engaged on the first course, Bunter ordered rabbit-pie.
 "This is prime!" he mumbled. "Best snack I've had for ages!"
 "Snack!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Whatever must it be like when Bunter has a good, square meal?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 Billy Bunter bolted the rabbit-pie, and started on the sweets.
 He disposed of apple turnovers and boiled puddings with lightning speed, and the waitress was kept busy.
 "Ah!" said Bunter at length, crossing his hands in the region of his waistcoat. "That's better!"
 "Finished?" asked Wharton.
 "Not quite, old chap. Hi, waitress! Bring me a currant cake, will you? Half a jiffy; I'll have some doughnuts instead. No, I won't. I'll have both!"
 "Great jumping crackers!" gasped Bob Cherry.
 Bunter had reached alarming proportions by the time he had finished, and so had the bill!
 The Famous Five paid up and walked out into the bright sunshine. They felt like dribbling Bunter along the front.
 After a brief stroll the party proceeded to the cricket-ground near the Radnor Cliff.
 The rest of the Greyfriar fellows were already there, and the boys of Kent had put in an appearance.
 Very fit and capable they looked as they practised at the nets. Dick Trumper was batting, and Courtenay and the Caterpillar were taking it in turns to bowl.
 The rest of the Kent boys were fielding, and each one looked every inch a cricketer. From the famous Kentish schools they had come, determined to do their utmost to uphold the high traditions of the hop county.
 Peter Todd came up to the Famous Five as they approached.
 "Bad news," he said. "Monty Newland's not feeling up to the mark, and we've left him at the hotel to rest."
 "That means we've got to play Bunter, whether we like it or not," said Wharton. "I guessed the twelfth man would be wanted before we'd gone very far."
 "You'll find me a much better man than Newland!" said Billy Bunter. "I'm going in first with you, Wharton."
 "Not if I know it! Why, you fat barrel, you can hardly walk! You've stuffed yourself so much that you're useless! If we bat first you'd better sleep it off, and go in last."
 This suited Bunter very well. There were some cushions in the pavilion, and he made himself quite comfortable.
 Within a few minutes his trumpeting snore—the snore which usually shook the Remove dormitory—could be heard.
 "Disgusting beast!" growled Nugent. "I reckon we shall be sorry we brought Bunter with us, in spite of his record as a batsman and a bowler!"
 Harry Wharton tossed with the Kent captain—a curly-headed boy named Dalton—and won. He took Frank Nugent in with him to open the innings.
 From the outset it was obvious that the Remove would have all their work cut out.
 The bowling was good, and the fielding was amazingly smart and accurate.
 In the first minute Harry Wharton came very near to being run out, and after that he played very cautiously.
 The Caterpillar was bowling at one end. He sent down the most innocent-looking balls, which usually wound up with a wicked swerve and baffled the batsman.
 Assisted by good luck, however, Wharton and Nugent took the score to 40 before they were separated.
 Then wickets began to fall freely.
 Peter Todd mistimed an extra-fast ball

from the Caterpillar, and his middle-stump was uprooted.

Bob Cherry made the fur fly for a few moments, banging every other ball to the boundary; but at length he was caught in the long field.

The only other batsman to do anything noteworthy was Mark Linley, who rattled up a brilliant 20.

When the ninth wicket fell, the score was 96.

"Man in!" said Bob Cherry.

"Bunter!"

"Where's Bunter?"

Harry Wharton ran into the pavilion.

Billy Bunter was still snoring loudly and unmusically on the cushions.

Summoning the aid of Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh, Wharton yanked the fat junior to his feet.

"Get a move on, you fat idiot! It's your innings!"

"Yaw-aw-aw! Oh, really, Wharton! I—I'd rather finish my snooze, if it's all the same to you!"

Wharton looked grim.

"If you're not at the wickets in two minutes," he said, "you'll get the bumping of your life!"

"The bumpfulness will be terrific!"

Billy Bunter allowed Johnny Bull to strap on his pads. Wharton pushed a bat into his hand, and fairly bundled him out of the pavilion.

The Caterpillar chuckled as Bunter rolled to the pitch.

"Who is this comin' forth now?" he said. "Bunter, or me old eyes deceive me! Well, walkin' is a fine, exhilaratin' pastime. He'll be walkin' back again in a minute."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked sleepily at the fieldsmen, and took his stand at the wicket.

The Removites watched him rather breathlessly.

Would Bunter justify his sudden reputation as a cricketer, or would he fail?

The Caterpillar settled the question with his next ball!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Rise and Fall of Billy Bunter!

"HOW'S that?"

"Out!"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter made a tremendous swipe at the ball as it came down.

His bat met with no resistance, and Bunter whirled round and round like a gigantic catherine-wheel.

Meanwhile, the stumps were spread-eagled.

"Here, hold on!" said Bunter, as the players began to troop off the field. "That was only a trial ball, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It ain't fair!" howled Bunter. "I should have swiped that ball to the boundary, only—"

"Only you didn't!" chuckled Dick Trumper.

"Poor old Bunter! Out first ball!"

"How are the mighty fallen!" sighed the Caterpillar. "Bunter—not for the first time in his amazing career—has been bowled out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The boys of Kent were in high spirits. Not so Harry Wharton & Co., who glared at Bunter as if they would eat him.

"You fat young fraud!" said Nugent wrathfully. "I guessed this would happen! You can't play cricket any more than an infant in arms!"

"Let's bump the silly spoofer!" growled Johnny Bull, in disgust.

Wharton shook his head.

"Can't do it in front of the Kent fellows," he said. "Bunter shall have his dose afterwards!"

"Oh, really, you fellows! Even Jack Hobbs makes a duck sometimes, you know!"

"Yes; but he doesn't give a comic turn in front of the wickets, like you did!" growled Bob Cherry. "If you don't do better in the field, we'll scalp you!"

Dalton and Frank Courtenay opened the innings for Kent.

Both were sound batsmen; and Hurree Singh and Squiff, who shared the bowling, were given food for thought.

Billy Bunter was in the long-field. Wharton had sent him there so that he would be as far away as possible. The presence of Bunter obviously spelt disaster to his own side.

After half an hour's brisk batting, Dalton ran out at a half-volley from Squiff, and sent the ball soaring into the long-field.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 20.

There was a catch going begging. Everybody saw that.

"Bunter!"

"Now then, Bunter!"

But the Owl of the Remove, overcome either by the heat of the sun or by the tremendous feed he had consumed, had curled himself up in the grass like a fat dormouse, and was sleeping soundly.

The ball landed a yard beyond him, and trickled to the boundary.

"Oh!"

There was a groan of dismay from the Greyfriars fieldsmen.

Their feelings towards Bunter were becoming almost homicidal.

Bob Cherry ran to recover the ball.

He paused on reaching Bunter, and inserted a large cricket-boot in the fat junior's ribs.

"Ow! Gerraway, you fathead! 'Tain't rising-bell yet!"

"I don't know about rising-bell," growled Bob; "but we shall be playing Last Post over your fat carcass in a minute! You're losing the match for us, you fat chump!"

Bob Cherry gathered up the ball, and threw it in.

Dalton, delighted at his escape, continued to hit out merrily.

He did so much damage that it was necessary, after a time, to change the bowlers.

Harry Wharton went on at one end, and Mark Linley at the other.

At length Dalton played a fast ball from the Lancashire lad on to his own wicket; and the fieldsmen were greatly relieved as they watched him wend his way to the pavilion.

But his place was taken by the Caterpillar, who, though usually a prince of slackers, could exert himself when he chose.

And he chose now!

In the long run, he was brilliantly caught by Squiff, but not before he had added materially to the score.

The Greyfriars fellows expected a collapse after this; but they were disappointed. For the boys of Kent, batting in great style, took the score to 150 before the side was finally disposed of.

"We're 54 behind on the first innings," said Bob Cherry. "Cheerful outlook, isn't it? Let's go and drown our sorrows in tea!"

Tea had been provided on tables in a corner of the ground.

Wingate had arranged the spread, which was a particularly handsome one.

But it looked anything but handsome when the cricketers got there.

A row of dishes, which originally contained a choice assortment of cakes and pastries, had been cleared; and nothing remained but an uninviting pile of bread-and-butter.

Wingate, who had been umpiring, was the first to notice what was amiss.

The captain of Greyfriars frowned.

"Someone's been at the grub!" he said darkly. "My hat! If I get hold of the rotter—"

"Atishoo!"

It was a sneeze—a loud and violent sneeze—and it came from beneath one of the tables.

Wingate promptly dived in the direction of the sound, and his hand came into contact with a fat and squirming junior.

"Bunter!"

"Yarooooop! Lemme alone, Bolsover, you beast!"

"I'm not Bolsover, ass!" said Wingate, dragging the unfortunate Owl into the light of day. "What do you mean by wolting all this grub?"

"Yow-ow-ow! D-d-don't shake me like that, Wingate, or you'll break my glasses, and then you'll have to pip-pip-pay for them!"

"You fat young toad!" said Wingate angrily. "I've a jolly good mind to send you packing!"

"It was a mistake to bring him along," said Harry Wharton. "Shall we pop into the town and get some grub, Wingate?"

"I should be awfully obliged to you, Wharton!"

So the Famous Five hurried away, and returned in a few moments laden with good things.

When the meal was over, Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent opened the Remove's second innings.

They walked out to the wickets with grim expressions on their faces.

Besides being 54 runs to the bad, they had, to all intents and purposes, only ten men.

Bunter was not merely an ornament to his side, he was a positive menace.

"Hit hard and often, Franky!" said Harry Wharton. "Keep the field on the run. That's the only game to play now."

Nugent nodded; and a very lively partnership followed.

When Wharton left, a prey to mid-wicket, 50 runs were registered on the board; and Bob Cherry helped Nugent to take the score to 90 before the next wicket fell.

The Kent boys lost their smiles of self-assurance, and began to look glum.

The Greyfriars Remove would take a good deal of beating, after all!

The bowling was good, but the batting was better.

There were several big scores this time. Peter Todd, Tom Brown, Squiff, and Bolsover major all got into double figures.

When the last wicket but one fell the score stood at 170.

"That's jolly good!" said Johnny Bull.

"Bunter's not likely to add to it, though."

"No, rather not!"

"It's hardly worth while sending him in," said Wharton. "The spectators will wonder what we're doing with a performing pig in the eleven. Still, he'd better take his turn, I suppose."

Billy Bunter emerged from the pavilion.

"I got out before because of the bat, you fellows," he explained. "It didn't suit me at all. But I've got a decent one now, so you'd better mind your heads. I should warn those old ladies to sit farther back, if I were you!"

"Rats!"

"Buzz off to the slaughter!" growled Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter advanced on to the pitch with a dignified swagger.

The crowd, small at first, had now swollen to big proportions; and so had Bunter's chest!

Like a very fat cock-sparrow, he strutted to the wicket.

"This is where cricket degenerates into marbles," murmured the Caterpillar, who was bowling. "It isn't necessary to send down a lightning delivery to Bunter. A gentle roll along the turf ought to do the trick."

Billy Bunter took his stand.

The fellows in the slips came in close, watching the fat junior's antics with muffled laughter.

"I should get back out of range, if I were you!" warned Bunter. "I'm a dangerous sort of fellow when I let myself go!"

"It's all right," said Dalton. "There's an ambulance just outside the ground."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The ball came down, and Bunter came down, too.

He struck out wildly, lost his balance, and came crashing down on to the wicket, making the wreck complete!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What a frightfully funny beggar, begad!" sobbed the Caterpillar.

"Ow! Oh dear! Oh crumbs! Where's my glasses?"

Billy Bunter groped wildly in the grass, and then struggled to his feet.

Scarcely had he done so, when a young and athletic-looking man—whom no one had noticed in the general excitement—strode up to the fat junior.

Click!

Billy Bunter gave a jump.

He was handcuffed!

"Mum-mum-my hat!" gasped the fat junior dazedly. "You beast! What sort of game do you think you're playing?"

Billy Bunter's captor eyed him sternly.

"You are W. G. Bunter?" he said.

"Of course!"

"Then I arrest you, in the King's name!"

"W-w-what for?"

"For stealing a silver cup, the property of the Courtfield Cricket Club!"

"A—a k-k-k-k-cup?" stammered Bunter.

"Exactly! I will trouble you to come with me!"

There was quite a commotion on the cricket-ground.

Harry Wharton & Co. dashed up to see what was going on, and they nearly fell down when they heard the news.

"Bunter—under arrest!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Oh, my hat!"

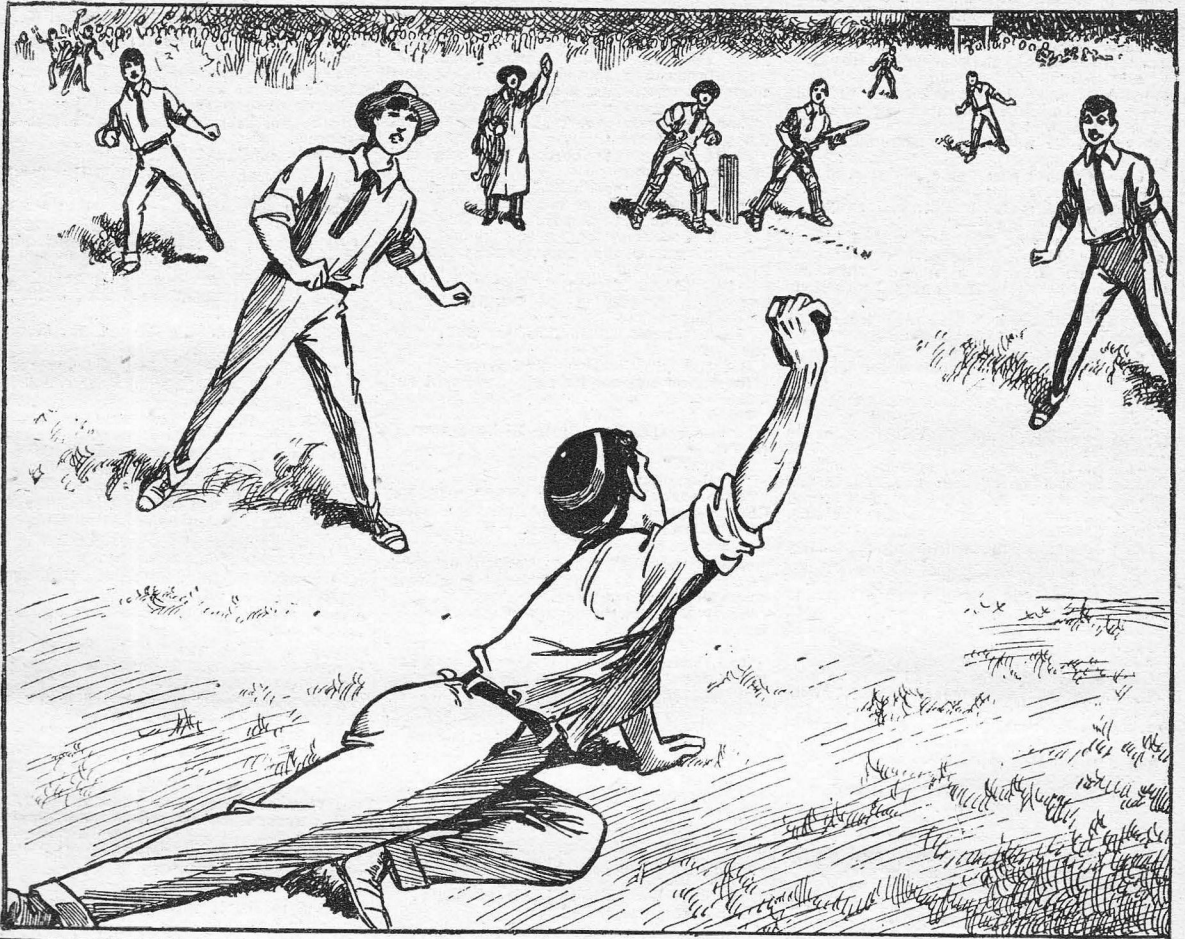
"Poor old Bunter!" said the Caterpillar. "I always said it would come to this. He couldn't keep his hands from pickin' and stealin', and now he's goin' to do pickin' of another sort—oakum-pickin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Many of the fellows laughed. But the Famous Five were looking grave.

Bunter had brought disgrace upon his school by being arrested, in a public place, on a serious charge!

How was it all going to end?



With a last desperate burst, Mark Linley fairly flung himself at the ball. Then he pitched forward on his face. But his right arm was uplifted, and the ball rested in his grasp! (See p. 6.)

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Exit Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER writhed and squirmed. He looked a pathetic figure in his flannels, with the handcuffs upon his wrists.

Wingate strode forward.

"What is all this nonsense?" he exclaimed.

The detective explained.

"A few days ago," he said, "Bunter played cricket for Courtfield Athletic. He was unknown to the Courtfield players, but they were a man short, and he offered to fill the vacancy."

"Well?"

"After the match," said the detective, "a silver cup, which had been placed temporarily in the pavilion, was found to be missing—and so was Bunter!"

"My hat!"

"From information received, I ascertained that Bunter was a Greyfriars boy, and that he was at Folkestone. I hold a warrant for his arrest."

Wingate turned sharply upon the quaking Owl of the Remove.

"You fat young worm! What do you mean by disgracing Greyfriars like this?"

"I wasn't—I never—I didn't!" stammered Bunter wildly. "It's all a mistake—a horrible mistake! I swear it, Wingate!"

"You played for Courtfield the other day—"

"I didn't!"

"What!"

There was a yell from the Removites.

"I—I— It was only a joke, you know," said Bunter feebly. "I wasn't playing at all. The fellow who scored the century and bagged all the wickets was a chap called Hunter—W. G. Hunter. Come to think of it, there was something jolly fishy about his behaviour. He came off the pitch before all the others, and I saw him dodge into the pavilion, and come out with something under his arm."

"A likely story!" said the detective drily. "How do you explain that the newspaper report mentioned your own name—W. G. Bunter?"

"Ahem! There was a reporter fellow hanging around, and when he asked me if I knew who the brilliant batsman was, I said 'W. G. Bunter.'"

"Why on earth did you tell him that?"

"Because I—I wanted to make an impression at Greyfriars!" said Bunter. "I wanted the fellows to think that I was a jolly fine cricketer, so that they would take me on this tour. It's a fact!" concluded Bunter. "I never tell a whopper!"

"An ardent disciple of Georgie Washington, begad!" drawled the Caterpillar.

The detective became impatient.

"I am afraid your story cuts no ice with me," he said. "It's my duty to take you along to the police-station."

"Ow! Can't it wait till after the match?" pleaded Bunter. "I want to bowl these Kent bowlers out first."

"You'll come with me at once!"

"Hold on!" said Wingate. "The evidence against Bunter doesn't seem quite clear enough, to my mind."

"It's perfectly clear to me!" said the detective gruffly.

"I suggest that you send for the captain of the Courtfield team," said Wingate. "He will say whether Bunter really took part in the match or not. That will settle the matter, one way or the other."

The detective nodded.

"I'm quite willing to do that," he said.

"I know the captain of Courtfield Athletic very well. He's a fellow named Harris. I'll get through to him on the telephone, and he'll be here in an hour. It isn't a long journey."

"Meanwhile," said Dick Trumper, "what about the game?"

"I vote we postpone it till Harris comes," said Harry Wharton.

With such a cloud hanging over Billy Bunter, and over Greyfriars in general, Harry Wharton & Co. did not feel in the humour for a continuation of the cricket.

Bunter was marched away, and dumped down on to a seat near the pavilion.

The detective, confident that he had captured the right man, instructed the juniors to mount guard over Bunter while he went to the telephone.

After what seemed an age—though, in reality, it was but an hour and a quarter—Harris turned up. He was a hefty-looking youth, the proprietor of a cycle-repair shop in Courtfield.

The detective rose to greet him.

"I sent for you, Harris," he said, "for purposes of identification."

"You've caught the fellow who bagged our cup?" said Harris.

"I think so. Would you recognise the person who played for you as eleventh man the other day?"

"Of course!"

The detective pointed dramatically at Billy Bunter.

"Is that the merchant?" he asked.

Harry Wharton & Co. hung on the Courtfield captain's answer.

Harris looked hard at Bunter, and shook his head.

"No," he said. "The fellow who played for us didn't wear glasses, and he didn't carry so much overweight. Come to think of it, I saw this fat chap at the match, among the spectators, but he's not the cove who walked off with our cup."

"There you are!" said Billy Bunter triumphantly. "I've a jolly good mind to claim heavy damages for wrongful arrest."

Reluctantly, the young detective relieved Bunter of the handcuffs.

"No go!" he said. "I've tracked down the wrong man. Mistakes of this sort do occur, even in our profession. We're not infallible!"

Harry Wharton & Co. drew a deep breath of relief, and so did Wingate.

Bunter was innocent!

The evidence of the Courtfield captain had turned the scales in the fat junior's favour.

"I am sorry to have made a scene," said the detective, addressing Wingate. "If this young fool hadn't told lies to the reporter, his name wouldn't have appeared in the paper, and he would never have been suspected. He has only himself to blame."

"I quite realise that," said Wingate. "You can leave the fat toad to me."

The detective smiled and strolled away.

"I say, you fellows—"

Billy Bunter fully expected to find himself in the limelight. Now that his innocence was proved, he anticipated being regarded as a sort of hero who had emerged victorious from a trying ordeal.

But the Greyfriars fellows didn't seem to regard Bunter in this light at all.

"You silly young ass!" said Wingate sternly.

"You deserve to be sacked from the school!"

"Me?" said Bunter, in tones of reproach. "What have I done? I didn't touch the mouldy cup!"

"No; but you came on this tour under false pretences," said Wingate. "You lied when you told me that you were going to Courtfield to play cricket; you lied to the newspaper man, and you lied to Wharton afterwards. You've lied all along the line. You've let the Remove down, and you've caused the game to be held up for nearly an hour."

"Oh, really, you know—"

"I've a good mind to give you a lamming with a cricket-stump, here and now!" said the captain of Greyfriars. "As it is, you will return to the school at once."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"I shall send you back, and write a note to your Form-master explaining why," Wingate went on. "If the Remove lose the cricket-match it will be your fault. It would have served you jolly well right if you had been planked into the police-station!"

"Ow!"

"Here's the money for your fare," said Wingate, handing it over. "I've no doubt Mr. Harris will be good enough to see you safely back as far as Courtfield."

"It'll give me much pleasure," said Harris. And there was a glint in his eyes which showed that the pleasure would be all on his side. Billy Bunter would find the return journey far from pleasant.

"I—I say, you fellows!" said Bunter desperately. "I believe Wingate's off his rocker, you know!"

"What?" roared Wingate.

"It—it's just a temporary form of insanity," said Bunter. "The hot weather, you know."

Wingate picked up a stump with such a businesslike air that Billy Bunter promptly turned and fled.

Harris stalked after him, and, placing an iron grip on his shoulder, hustled him off the cricket-ground.

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" sang out Bob Cherry. "Don't forget to tell the newspaper man you made a couple of duck's eggs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter turned, and shook his fist at the grinning juniors; and then, the iron grip tightening on his shoulder, he disappeared from view, still vigorously protesting that Greyfriars didn't know how to treat its heroes!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Close Finish.

THE boys of Kent opened their second innings in style.

They wanted 117 runs to win.

It was an open question whether they would succeed in getting them. On the one hand, they had some sterling batsmen; but, on the other hand, a valuable period of time had been wasted, and the light would be bad in the closing stages.

Harry Wharton had mustered his men for a brief council of war.

"We're going to win," he said, "and there's only one way to do it—good bowling, backed up by smart fielding, Squiff and Inky will take on the bowling, and the rest of us have got to be as active as giddy squirrels. Don't give the beggars a chance to settle down!"

Excellent advice, this; but the Remove, although they put it into practice, noticed no immediate success.

Frank Courtenay and Dalton were batting, THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 20.

and they hit with such fine judgment and certainty, that it seemed as if they would get the necessary total of runs on their own.

All sorts of deep, dark schemes were working in the dusky head of Hurree Singh.

He always varied his bowling, sending down a lob one minute and a deadly leg-break the next; but the wickets seemed impregnable.

Twenty—30—40, were registered in turn on the telegraph-board.

The hearts of the Remove fieldsmen sank into their boots.

"Try a full-toss, Inky," murmured Bob Cherry, "and see what happens."

What did happen was this.

Frank Courtenay opened his shoulders to the ball, and it went soaring away into the long-field.

Micky Desmond was fielding hereabouts, and he raced hard in the direction of the descending ball.

"He won't get it," said Johnny Bull. "It's too far."

But the Irish junior never faltered.

He ran on and on—his right hand shot out, and—

Smack!

The ball reposed safely in Micky Desmond's palm.

"Hurrah!"

"Well caught, sir!"

"Sometimes a full-toss pays," said Bob Cherry sagely. "You might introduce a few more at odd moments, Inky. We'll get the beggars out somehow!"

A long pause followed Frank Courtenay's departure. No batsman seemed to be forthcoming from the pavilion.

Harry Wharton made a megaphone of his hands.

"Man in!" he shouted.

And then, after a still further delay, a fanned figure lounged on to the pitch.

It was the Caterpillar. He had been enjoying forty winks in the pavilion, and had not noticed the passage of time.

"Buck up, Caterpillar!"

"Awfully sorry!" mumbled the Highcliffe junior, as he came on. "I was seein' visions, and dreamin' dreams. Cricket's a fearfully exhaustin' game, begad!"

"You didn't dream that your middle stump was knocked out of the ground, by any chance?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"No. Why?"

"Because it's going to be, in a minute!"

The Caterpillar smiled.

"That, as the schoolboy said when he made a blot on his impot, remains to be seen!"

Hurree Singh, stimulated to fresh efforts by the downfall of Courtenay, sent down a ball which he himself would have described as "terrific."

The Caterpillar coolly tapped the ball back to him.

And then started a partnership which was destined to live long in the annals of junior cricket.

Everything came alike to the two batsmen. They piled up runs at an amazing rate; and, but for the keen fielding, the match would have been over and won long before sundown.

As it was, the 100 had been reached long before Bob Cherry, fielding the ball and hurling it in with one movement, wrecked Dalton's wicket.

The Kent fellow made his way back to the pavilion amid a tempest of applause.

"A 100 for two wickets!" said Wharton, with a groan.

"They want 17 to win—and they've got eight men to get 'em!" said Nugent. "It's all over, bar shouting!"

The Caterpillar threw himself down to rest.

He had battled fiercely and strenuously for an hour on end. He had scored many runs, but it had been necessary to fight for every one of them.

He—the slacker and dandy of the Highcliffe Fourth—had borne the heat and burden of the day; and the Greyfriars fellows, even in that moment of seeming defeat, could not help admiring him.

The Remove were indeed in a sad plight; but they did not give up.

Hurree Singh and Squiff bowled as well now as they had bowled in the beginning, and their luck turned.

Bowling with deadly accuracy, Hurree Singh performed the "hat-trick." He took three wickets with three consecutive balls.

Bob Cherry slapped the Nabob of Bhanipur heartily on the back.

"Inky, you treasure!" he exclaimed. "You're great!"

"Yow! You have snapfully broken my esteemed spinal column!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Things are looking up!" said Wharton hopefully. "A 100 for five wickets is a very different story to a 100 for two. We've a sporting chance yet!"

The next man in played cautious and careful cricket. But as soon as he had settled down he attempted to run 3 when 2 would have sufficed, and he was smartly run out in consequence.

Wickets continued to fall.

The fieldsmen were tired, but they worked like niggers. Wharton, Nugent, and Tom Brown, in the slips, were particularly fine.

Presently a strange hush came over the scene, and the spectators stirred restlessly in their seats.

The last man was coming in to join the Caterpillar. Five runs were needed to give Kent the victory!

Only 5 runs—and the Caterpillar still going strong!

Surely Kent, who had held the upper hand practically all through the game, would win!

The last man in was a meek-looking youngster. He gave the impression that he could not say "Boo!" to a goose.

But he was all there. He took his stand full of confidence in the ultimate result. Kent teaches her sons how to play cricket.

Hurree Singh was bowling, and the ball whizzed along the turf like a live thing.

But the batsman put a straight bat before it, and he survived the over.

And now came the Caterpillar's turn again!

The crowd sat strangely silent, as if under a spell. Pipes and cigarettes went out in the excitement.

Only one voice was raised—that of Frank Courtenay from the pavilion.

"Play up, Caterpillar!"

Squiff looked grim as he started to run. He realised that it was now or never!

The Caterpillar cut the first ball to point. It was smartly fielded, and a run was impossible.

The second and third balls were beauties—not from the batsman's point of view. He just managed to stop them, and that was all.

The fourth ball just cleared the Caterpillar's wicket. The fifth was slashed back at the bowler with great force.

Squiff fielded it with his foot. There was no other way.

But he had hurt himself in stopping the ball; and his sixth and last delivery was not so good as his predecessors.

It pitched short; and the Caterpillar, leaping out of his crease, sent it soaring away to the boundary.

Then the pent-up feelings of the crowd found expression in a shout of unrestrained applause.

"Hurrah!"

"It's 6, by Jove!"

"Kent wins!" shouted everybody.

But the words died on their lips as a figure in white, hitherto unnoticed, raced hard towards the boundary.

It was Mark Linley.

The rest of the Remove players watched breathlessly.

Would the Lancashire lad get to the ball in time? Would he get to it at all?

The question was answered the next instant.

With a last desperate burst, Mark Linley fairly flung himself at the ball. Then he pitched forward on his face.

But his right arm was uplifted—and the ball rested in his grasp!

Greyfriars had won!

The school had defeated the county by the narrow margin of 4 runs!

Before Mark Linley could faintly realise what was happening, he was seized in many hands and borne in triumph to the pavilion.

It was a happy moment for Harry Wharton & Co. The wiles of Billy Bunter had not, after all, prevented the Friars from winning the match.

At the eleventh hour, when the prospect had looked anything but rosy, they had wrung victory from defeat.

When the juniors reached the pavilion, Dalton came forward with outstretched hand. "A great game!" he said.

Wharton nodded breathlessly as his hand met that of the Kent captain in a tight grip.

"Best I've ever played in!" he said. "Hallo! Is an earthquake happening, or what?"

But it was only Bob Cherry engaged in waltzing Mark Linley round and round the pavilion!

**THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Home Again!**

AMID the general excitement, the Caterpillar was not forgotten. He was on the losing side; but he had played a game worthy of the Greek athletes of old.

His innings of 75 had been one of the best seen on the Folkestone ground.

The other fellows duly appreciated the fact. The Caterpillar's slim hand was seized and shaken like a pump-handle.

Kent had put up a plucky game, and lost narrowly. But they more than atoned for their defeat in the events which followed.

Early next morning Harry Wharton & Co. took a stroll along the famous Folkestone thoroughfare known as the Lees.

"If we can only do well in the running races to-day," said Bob Cherry, "everything in the garden will be lovely. Do you feel equal to winning a Marathon, Marky?"

Mark Linley smiled. "I don't!" he said frankly. "I haven't got over the effects of yesterday yet."

"Then we shall have to rely on Harry."

"Don't!" said Wharton, laughing. "I feel just as fagged as Linley. It strikes me that Kent will score pretty heavily in the running races."

Wharton was right. Somehow, the boys of Kent had lasted better than the 'Friars, by comparison with whom they were as fresh as daisies.

Dalton set the ball rolling for them by winning the hundred yards.

Shortly afterwards the agile Caterpillar surprised even his chum Courtenay by romping home first in the obstacle race.

The high jump fell to Dick Trumper; and Greyfriars did not seem to be getting a look-in.

"Alas! Alack!" murmured Bob Cherry. "This is too awful for words! Let's put our little backs into it and see if we can bag the tug-of-war."

The two teams lined up on the rope—eight on each side.

The Kent boys looked heftier than their opponents; but Harry Wharton & Co. were beginning to get alarmed at the way things were going, and they resolved to do their level best.

"Pull, you beggars—pull!" said Frank Nugent, who was not taking part in the contest.

There were three pulls. The first went to Kent, who had the 'Friars over the line in a twinkling.

The second, after a great deal of tugging and straining on the rope, went to Greyfriars.

And now came the third and final pull.

There was a cheer as the two teams, having taken a breather, faced each other again.

"Come along, Kent!"

"Now, then, 'Friars!"

The boys of Kent, at a signal from their leader, threw their whole energies into one tremendous pull.

Harry Wharton & Co. yielded ground. But they recovered it again a moment later.

They rallied. And now it was their turn to come into the limelight.

"Strong and steady does it!" muttered Johnny Bull between his clenched teeth.

"Stick it out, you fellows!" said Nugent.

First one side, then the other claimed the advantage.

But neither team would yield to defeat.

For quite ten minutes that grim tussle continued.

The perspiration stood out in beads on the foreheads of the Friars.

They were almost exhausted now.

Harry Wharton rallied them for a big, final effort.

Slowly, inch by inch, the boys of Kent were compelled to give ground.

Slowly they moved forward, unable to withstand that desperate burst on the part of their opponents, until finally they came sprawling over the line, gasping and beaten.

Bob Cherry flung himself full-length in the long grass.

"Jove, that was hot, while it lasted!" he murmured. "I wouldn't go through those ten minutes again—not for all the wealth of Golconda!"

And Bob's chums agreed with him.

After a long interval the half-mile took place.

Harry Wharton came very near to winning this; but he was beaten on the tape by Dalton, who possessed a fine turn of speed.

Then came the mile.

The Caterpillar had registered a solemn resolve to win this event.

As a rule, De Courcy was the complete slacker. But when he did bestir himself his rivals had to look to their laurels.

This was a case in point.

The Caterpillar ran hard from the outset, and his stamina and speed never failed him.

Not only did he win the mile, but he won it hands down. No other competitor had a look-in.

When the races were over the boys of Kent had won five events and Greyfriars two.

"It's up to you, Bob," said Harry Wharton, "to pull off the boxing. If you don't we shall be left fairly in the cart."

"Who is boxing for Kent?" asked Johnny Bull. "If it's Frank Courtenay you'll have all your work cut out."

"It isn't Courtenay," said the Highcliffe captain, with a smile. "But it's somebody who knows a jolly sight more about boxing than I do!"

"You mean to say you're putting up the Caterpillar?"

"No. Trumper's our man."

"Oh!"

The Greyfriars fellows knew that Bob Cherry would have a tough nut to crack. But they had full confidence in their man, and believed he would triumph over the Courtfield junior.

The six-rounds boxing contest between Bob Cherry and Dick Trumper, which took place later in the day, formed one of the titbits of the tour.

Dick Trumper had often met Bob Cherry in fistic encounter during the feud between Greyfriars and the Courtfield County Council School.

But this was a very different affair. Bob Cherry held the upper hand throughout. There were times when he seemed to be playing with the Courtfield junior; but Trumper stuck to him like a leech, and there was no knock-out.

Bob Cherry was awarded the verdict on points.

The swimming races took place before a large crowd of interested sightseers, and honours were easy.

The rival athletes had made a considerable stir in Folkestone, and reports of the various contests appeared in all the local papers.

These reports were cut out by Wingate and sent to Dr. Locke. The headmaster of Greyfriars, for reasons of his own, was making a collection of these cuttings. They would come in very useful later on.

The sports ended all too soon; and Harry Wharton & Co., not without a longing, lingering look behind at the charming town of Folkestone, turned their faces towards Greyfriars.

Frank Courtenay, the Caterpillar, and Dick Trumper accompanied them on the homeward journey.

"It's been a toppin' time!" murmured the Caterpillar from his corner seat in the railway-carriage. "Very exhilaratin', an' all that; but, in a way, I'm not sorry that it's all over. Cricket's a great game, but it's killin'—positively killin'! Too much wear an' tear to the nervous system, begad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, Bunter's cricket was killing, anyway!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Poor old Bunter! Wonder if they've caught the merry thief yet?"

Inquiries at Courtfield showed that W. G. Hunter, that amazing youth who had played the role of cricketer and crackman combined, had not been captured. Like the silver cup, he had taken unto himself wings.

The Greyfriars tourists met with a rousing reception on their arrival at the old school.

Vernon-Smith, the leader of the rival party, was the first to congratulate Harry Wharton.

"You were up against one of the strongest counties in England," he said, "and you've come through with flying colours. Frankly, I thought you were booked for a series of lickings."

"That will never happen, Smithy, while the Famous Five have got a kick left in 'em!" said Bob Cherry. "We're out to win; and we mean to make these tours a thumping success."

"Hear, hear!"

"There's a spread in the Common-room," said Peter Todd.

"Oh, good!" said Johnny Bull. "I've been living for six hours on a railway sandwich!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The hour was late when Harry Wharton & Co. trooped up to the Remove dormitory; and, fagged out though they were with the exertions of the past week, they were made to recount in detail to their eager school-fellows every exciting episode in the memorable meeting of School versus County!

THE END.

Next Friday's
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Complete Tale of
Harry Wharton
& Co. is entitled

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of JIMMY SILVER & Co., the
Chums of Rookwood.

By OWEN CONQUEST.



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Jimmy Silver's Anger.

"STOP that!"
Jimmy Silver, of the Fourth Form at Rookwood, uttered that remark in a very angry tone of voice. He had secured permission to go down to Coombe, the little village near the school, for the purpose of posting a very urgent letter, and was on his way back to Rookwood, when he came across that which brought forth his angry remark.

A lad of about fifteen years of age, whom Jimmy Silver recognised as Lester Brooks, son of a neighbouring farmer, was the cause.

He held a horse by a tight grip on the nose, and he was belabouring the animal with a heavy whip. The horse was prancing madly in its pain, and the sight made Jimmy Silver's blood boil.

Brooks looked round as Jimmy Silver called to him.

"Stop that, you brute!" said Silver angrily. "You ought to know better at your time of life than to thrash a defenceless creature like that!"

Brooks scowled.

"What the dickens has it got to do with you?" he demanded coarsely. "Mind your own business!"

Jimmy Silver's lip curled scornfully.

"It is everybody's business to stop cowardly brutes like you!" he snapped. "How would you like to be served like that?"

"Rats!" said Brooks, with a sneer. Jimmy Silver flushed. He was one of the best-tempered fellows at Rookwood, but he possessed a temper which, when roused, made him an opponent not to be trifled with.

"Well, just you stop that," he said hotly, "or I'll jolly well deal with you!" Brooks laughed scornfully.

"Rats!" he said again.

Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders, and walked past Brooks, and proceeded slowly down the lane.

But he had not gone very far before the mad squeals of the frightened horse told him that Brooks was continuing his brutal act. Jimmy Silver turned, and hurriedly retraced his steps.

Brooks, still gripping the horse by the nose, thus rendering it practically helpless, was wielding the whip harder than ever.

But not more than one blow fell.

Jimmy Silver dashed forward, and caught the brute's arm as it descended, and, with a powerful wrench, forced the whip from Brooks' hand.

He gripped it himself, and, without a moment's hesitation, or one word of warning, he commenced to lay the whip about Brooks' shoulders in a manner that made the farmer's son shriek.

"Ow! Yow! Stoppit! Groogh!"

"You brute—"

Slash, slash, slash!

"Yoop! Ow-w-w-w-w!"

"You coward—"

Slash, slash, slash!

"Stoppit! Ow! I'll tell my— Ow! Father!"

Not till his arm ached did Jimmy Silver stop. Then he flung the whimpering coward from him with a scornful gesture.

"There—that'll teach you a lesson, you brute!" said Jimmy.

Brooks lay on the dusty lane, crying with pain. He was a bigger fellow than Silver, but evidently did not entertain the idea of trying conclusions with the Rookwood fellow with fists as weapons.

Jimmy Silver looked down upon him with eyes that blazed with anger.

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"Get up!" he said hotly. "Get up—and I'll thrash you with my fists!"

But Brooks stopped where he was.

"Ow! I'll tell my father!" he cried, moaning in pain. "He'll come up to Rookwood and thrash you!"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Let him come!" he said cheerfully. "And we'll show him how Rookwood deals with cowardly brutes! Lucky for you I am alone, or you would find yourself in the nearest pond!"

He went over to the panting, sweating horse. The animal was trembling, and its eyes were glazed with terror.

Jimmy Silver patted its neck, and murmured caressingly to it. In a very few minutes he had managed to calm it.

Brooks sat up, and wiped his eyes. He looked towards the whip, which Silver had thrown down, and for the moment thought of renewing the fight by using the whip on Jimmy Silver.

But, fortunately for him, he thought better of it.

With a final friendly pat, Jimmy Silver left the horse and turned to Brooks.

"Mind you this," he said quietly and firmly. "If ever I hear you've been ill-treating that horse, I'll come over with half a dozen chaps, and we'll rag the life out of you!"

Brooks did not reply verbally, but the venomous light in his eyes made up for what he left unsaid.

And Jimmy Silver continued his journey back to the school.

He flushed with anger every time he thought of the helpless animal straining to get free from the grip on its nose and the cruel strokes of the whip.

He was still angry when he entered the end study, which he occupied with Raby, Newcome, and Arthur Edward Lovell.

His chums were there, deep in their prep. They looked up as he entered, and noticed at once his ruffled clothes and flushed face.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Lovell. "Been in the wars, Jimmy?"

Jimmy Silver snorted.

"No!" he growled. "But somebody else has!"

"Tommy Dodd & Co.?" asked Raby.

Tommy Dodd & Co. were their rivals of the Modern House at Rookwood.

"No; young Brooks, the farmer's son," explained Silver. "I saw him thrashing a horse with a heavy whip, and—"

"And you gave him a taste of it himself?"

"Yes. And a mighty 'stiff taste, too—the brute!"

"Well, get on with your prep, old scout, or old Bootles will be lashing out with the cane in the morning!"

Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders. He was in a mood that did not care for anything—not even the cane that Raby suggested would be wielded by Mr. Bootles, their Form-master.

He was still decidedly ruffled in mind when he went up to bed that night, and the result was that he dreamt of thrashing, not one, but hundreds, of youths who were ill-treating horses.

But he had recovered his usual sunny temper in the morning, and he went down to breakfast without further thought of the incident of the previous evening.

But he was destined to hear more of the affair than he had bargained for.

It was during morning lessons that the page came into the Fourth Form class-room.

"If you please, sir—"

Mr. Bootles looked up from his desk.

"Yes—what is it?"

"Master Silver is wanted at once, sir."

And the page hurried away.

Mr. Bootles shouted after him.

"Come here, you silly boy! Who wants Silver?"

"Oh, the Head, sir, please!"

Jimmy Silver started. The Head did not very often send for juniors in class-time. He looked at Raby questioningly.

"Found out one of your old games, Jimmy," whispered Raby. "And it's a licking, for sure!"

Jimmy Silver glared.

"You jolly cheerful old chump!" he whispered indignantly.

"Silver!"

"Y-y-yes, sir?"

"You heard the message? Dr. Chisholm requires your presence—presumably in his study. You may go."

And Mr. Bootles resumed studying the books on his desk.

Jimmy Silver got up from his place in the class, and, amidst the curious glances of the Fourth, left the room.

He tried to decide what it was the Head wanted him for, as he made his way along the silent corridors. It is to be feared he was turning over in his mind the many little things—harmless enough—that he had done, and to which the Head could take exception.

But he could think of nothing that would call for such drastic action as Dr. Chisholm sending for him in the middle of morning lessons.

He tapped timidly on the Head's door, and was immediately commanded to enter.

The very instant Jimmy Silver opened the door he saw the reason for the Head's summons.

Mr. Brooks, the farmer, was standing opposite the Head, his hat in his hand, and a grim look on his face.

Dr. Chisholm peered at Silver through his glasses, and signed to him to take his stand opposite him—next to the farmer.

"Ah, Silver, I am very sorry indeed to hear that you have committed a very serious assault on this gentleman's son!" said Dr. Chisholm very slowly.

Silver started.

"Assault, sir?" he echoed. "I have not committed assault on anybody!"

"You thrashed my son, young man!" interposed the farmer hotly. "Not only thrashed him, sir, but most foully kicked him when he was on the ground!"

Jimmy Silver clenched his fists in anger, and his face flushed.

"You lie!" he shouted, turning fiercely round so that he faced the farmer.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Accusation.

"SILVER!"

Dr. Chisholm's voice cut the air as if with a knife.

Silver turned to him almost angrily.

"It's a lie, sir!" he said hotly. "I've never kicked a fellow in my life when he was on the ground!"

Dr. Chisholm held up his hand.

"Remain calm, Silver," he commanded quietly. "This burst of temper will not help you."

"Well, sir—"

"Wait a moment, Silver. Mr. Brooks here said that you thrashed his son yesterday evening. Is that true?"

"Yes, sir; and I'd do it again under the same circumstances!"

The farmer took a step forward.

"You admit thrashing my son, then. You said it was a lie just now."

"I said nothing of the kind. I denied kicking your son—I wish—"

"Silver! Will you keep calm?"

"It wants some doing, sir, when one is accused of such an action. I did thrash Lester Brooks, sir, and I repeat—I would thrash him again under the same circumstances!"

"What were the circumstances of which you speak, Silver?"

The Head's tones were cool and even, but distress was on his face. He was a kindly old gentleman, and troubles of this kind greatly affected him.

"I caught him thrashing a horse, sir," said Silver; and his fists clenched again as he mentally pictured the incident. "He held it by the nose—a grip which renders the animal practically helpless, sir. And the whip he was using was a very heavy one, with a thick thong of hide."

"What has that got to do with you?" demanded the farmer.

Silver faced him angrily. "It's got to do with every decent chap!" he snapped. "If you think I was going to let your son whack that horse like he was, you're jolly well mistaken. I gave him a taste of the whip—"

"Silver—"

"Sorry, sir, but my blood boils when I think about it!"

The Head looked more distressed than ever. He could not help but admire the spirit in which Silver had taken the part of the defenceless horse.

"There were extenuating circumstances," said the farmer.

Jimmy Silver snorted. "That is rot!" he growled. "There's—"

The Head rapped on his desk, and frowned. "Silver, I will not have you making use of such expressions in my study!" he said. "You must keep calm!"

"There are no extenuating circumstances, sir," said Silver, striving to keep calm. "There's nothing in the world that can justify absolute cruelty!"

Dr. Chisholm looked towards the farmer, evidently pointing out to him that it was up to him to substantiate the charge he had brought against Silver.

The farmer understood.

"There were marks of the whip on my boy's back, Dr. Chisholm," he said. "But they did not cause the injury from which he is now confined to his bed. He was kicked, sir—kicked in the stomach! And he says that Silver kicked him!"

"Then he lies!" snapped Silver.

"I prefer to take my son's word!" said Mr. Brooks coolly. "The doctor says that he has been kicked in the stomach—and very hard, too. I've brought a certificate to that effect. Here it is, sir."

Dr. Chisholm took the proffered certificate, and read it slowly. He looked up when he had finished, and his lips grew set and firm.

"Silver, you admit thrashing Lester Brooks?"

"Yes, sir."

"And with the whip?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you kick him?"

"Most certainly not, sir. I wouldn't think of such a thing!"

The Head hesitated.

"But—this certificate, Silver, is from a well-known medical man in the district. I know him personally. It distinctly states that the boy was kicked in the stomach."

"I can't—"

"He was found groaning in the very spot where he was thrashed," said the farmer.

Silver turned on him like a flash.

"How do you know that?" he demanded.

"There were marks of the whip on the dusty road—they showed plainly," replied the farmer coolly. "You missed him once or twice, I expect."

"Not many times, believe me!" growled Silver. "Well, what does that prove?"

"Not a deal, admitted. But the doctor came at the request of the man that found him lying in the road. He examined him where he lay, groaning, and then took him home in his car."

Jimmy Silver started.

"By Jove! I—"

"Ah, that makes you jump, young man!"

"Well, I didn't kick him, and that's the end of it!"

"This isn't the end!" said the farmer hotly, and turned to the Head. "Am I going to receive any satisfaction here, sir, or am I to go to the police for assistance?"

The Head almost gasped. The idea of the police being called in to settle the case was too awful to think of.

"My dear sir—"

"I am going to have this lad punished!"

Interrupted Mr. Brooks coldly.

"But the honour of Rookwood—"

"Has nothing to do with me, sir. My son is lying in bed—suffering from a kick in the stomach, as certified by a doctor whom you know personally. If you doubt the accuracy of his examination—"

"No, no—I'm sure— Bless my soul, I do not know what to do!" said the Head, in dismay.

It was plain that he did not know whom to believe. Jimmy Silver he knew to be a perfectly truthful junior, whose ideas of what was right and wrong were as they should be.

But the farmer's evidence was strongly supported by the doctor's certificate, and he could not see how he was able to go beyond it.

The idea of the police being called in shook the kind old gentleman.

"Silver, I cannot believe it—"

"No, sir; and I don't think anybody who knows me would!" interrupted Silver warmly.

"I admit there seems to be doubt—"

"There's no doubt!" snapped the farmer.

"You did it!"

"I didn't!" shouted Silver, but became calmer as the Head rapped impatiently on his desk. "I tell you you're making a mistake!"

"My son says you kicked him—"

"Then your son lies!"

"I prefer to think otherwise. I have little time to waste, Dr. Chisholm. I ask you, please, to say what you are going to do in the matter?"

Dr. Chisholm polished his glasses feverishly.

"I do not know—"

"Then I shall go to the—"

"Pray stop, Mr. Brooks!" interposed the Head hastily. "Silver, the evidence against you is very black. It is your fine character that makes me hesitate to accept—ahem!—to believe that you have committed this great wrong. But—but I fear I shall have to consider that you are not telling the truth—"

"Sir!"

Silver's tone was frantically appealing.

"I'm sorry to believe that one who has held my high esteem—I believe you are captain of the Classical Fourth, too—could stoop to such a low and brutal act. But the doctor makes no mistake, Silver. I cannot imagine anybody who passed Lester Brooks after you thrashed him yesterday evening kicking him for the—fun of the thing."

"Exactly!" said the farmer.

Silver glared at him, but did not speak.

"So I think a flogging will meet the case, Mr. Brooks," went on Dr. Chisholm. "The school shall be assembled—"

"I am satisfied, sir," said the farmer.

Jimmy Silver stood, white as a sheet, and with tightly-clenched fists. He could not but admit that the evidence was black—very black.

"Then—then—" began the Head.

"Good-morning, sir!" said the farmer.

And he bowed slightly towards the Head, passed Silver without so much as a glance, and left the study.

When the door had closed behind him, Silver stepped quickly up to the Head's desk.

"Sir, you do not believe I—"

"What else am I to believe, Silver? You have heard the evidence of the farmer—the declaration of his son—your admission of having thrashed him—the doctor's certificate—what other conclusion can I arrive at?"

"I—I—I—"

"You have heard my decision, Silver. I cannot alter it now!"

Silver bit his lips hard.

He was almost dazed by the shock. Never for one moment had the thought entered his head that his thrashing Lester Brooks would lead to his own disgrace.

"I am sorry, sir—"

"That is too late, Silver. There is no more to be said!"

And Silver, realising the hopelessness of arguing further, turned on his heel and left the study, with his head held high, but his face white and tense.

When he had gone, Dr. Chisholm sat deep in thought. He shook his head frequently, as if in great distress. The venerable old gentleman felt the disgrace as keenly as Jimmy Silver did.

Silver did not return to the class-room. He simply could not have faced the Fourth.

He went to his own study at the end of the Classical Fourth corridor, and flung himself into the arm-chair, and buried his face in his hands.

Never in his life had he felt so utterly down; his spirit was almost crushed. Dully he turned over the events of the last few hours in his mind, but before his eyes there would come the picture of himself—Jimmy Silver, captain of the Classical Fourth—being flogged before the assembled school.

And the story of the wrong he had never

committed would be told to the school, and they would believe all the circumstantial evidence, as the Head had done!

Disgrace—utter disgrace! And never again would he be able to face the school—an honourable junior of Rookwood!

"He was still in that position when Raby and Newcome and Lovell burst into the study after morning lessons. They stopped, and the cheery grins died from their faces.

"Jimmy!" said Raby anxiously.

"Silver! What—" began Newcome.

"Good—good—" muttered Lovell in sheer surprise.

Jimmy Silver looked up with such a crushed expression that the juniors shut the door with a bang, and rushed forward.

Newcome thrust his arm round his leader's shoulders, and Raby and Lovell knelt at his feet.

"Good heavens! What on earth is the matter, Jimmy?" ejaculated Raby. "You're looking like a ghost, man!"

"Yes, rather—"

Silver gulped in his throat.

"I—I—I'm to be flogged!" he said, so softly that his chums hardly heard him.

Raby and Newcome and Lovell jumped.

"What!"

"Fi-f-flogged!"

"M-my—my hat!"

Lester Brooks is in bed—kicked in the stomach—doctor says so. And the—the Head believes I did it!" explained Silver dully.

Raby's eyes fairly blazed.

"The fools!" he hooted. "The blessed idiots! Just as if you'd do a thing like that!"

"I'm going to the Head!" roared Newcome.

"The—the—"

Silver smiled wanly.

"What's the good of that?" he asked quietly.

"We'll jolly well see!" declared Lovell hotly. "Jimmy! Good— You couldn't have done it!"

The faithful chums looked at one another in dismay. No wonder Jimmy Silver had not returned to the class!

They went about the school during the dinner-time with such doleful expressions that the whole Form knew that there was something radically wrong with the Co.

Tubby Muffin suggested that they had quarrelled amongst themselves, a remark which brought him such a hefty punch from Lovell that he and others of the same kidney thereafter wisely remained silent.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Out Into the World.

"SILVER!"

Mr. Bootles, the master of the

Fourth Form at Rookwood, called out the name.

There was no answer.

"Silver!"

Still no answer.

The master looked over the class before him.

"Is Silver not there?" he asked in his smooth and quiet manner.

"No, sir."

It was Raby who ventured that information.

"Indeed! Can anybody tell me where he is?" asked Mr. Bootles in surprise.

Raby rose to his feet. The eyes of the Form turned in his direction.

"I—I—I don't think he's very well, sir," said Raby slowly.

Mr. Bootles looked sympathetic.

"I am sorry to hear that, Raby," he said.

"Perhaps I had better go and see him."

And the kindly Form-master left the class-room.

Instantly there broke out a murmur of voices, and all remarks were addressed to Raby or Newcome or Lovell. But neither of the famous Co. ventured to satisfy the curiosity of their class-mates.

Mr. Bootles returned in a very few minutes, and he looked considerably mystified.

"Raby!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Have you any idea where Silver is? He's not in his study."

Raby, Newcome, and Lovell jumped.

"We—we left him there, sir!" said Raby.

"May I—may we go and see if he is all right, sir?"

Mr. Bootles hesitated.

"I think perhaps you'd better," he said at last.

The Co. hurriedly left the Form-room.

They came back in a very few minutes, their eyes blazing with excitement. The Form literally "sat up" expectantly.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 20.

"Sir—" gasped Raby.
Mr. Bootles peered anxiously through his glasses.
"I hope Silver is not very bad!" he said quickly.
"No, sir—he's gone!" stammered Raby.
"Gone!"
The whole Form gasped.
"Gone!" repeated Mr. Bootles in surprise.
"Gone where?"
"He's hopped it, sir—bunked from the school!" said Newcome excitedly.
"Are you sure? Dear me!"
"He's left a note, sir, for us."
"Pray show it to me, my boy!"
Raby handed Mr. Bootles a piece of paper, and the Form-master perused it quickly.
It was short, but very effective.

"If anybody thinks I am going to be flogged for something I've never done, they're jolly well mistaken! I've hopped it.—JIMMY."

Mr. Bootles read the missive in dismay.
"Does—does this mean that Silver was flogged—no, I mean, is to be flogged, Raby?"
"Was to be, sir," said Raby laconically.
"He's gone now, sir, so that he won't be flogged. And I don't blame him!"
"S'sh! You must not speak like that!" murmured Mr. Bootles reprovingly. "I think I'd—I'd better go to the Head. Pray keep order while I am away, my boys."
The boys remained orderly enough, but Mr. Bootles' appeal could not keep them from excitedly discussing the amazing happening. Jimmy Silver had run away from Rookwood!

That was something like a sensation! But what was he to be flogged for?

That was a question Raby & Co. would not answer. Threats were used to endeavour to force them to impart the desired information, and some of them would doubtless have been carried out had not the Head suddenly appeared.

"Where is Silver, Raby?" demanded Dr. Chisholm at once.

"I don't know, sir."
"Did he have dinner with you?"

"No, sir. He said he wasn't feeling up to it."
"Then where is he?"

That was a question which puzzled the distressed Head for many days, and which Raby and Newcome and Lovell would have given a term's pocket-money to have answered for them.

But Jimmy Silver was miles away. Immediately the classes had assembled for afternoon lessons Jimmy Silver had sat down in his study to think over the dilemma in which he found himself.

Gradually the injustice of the whole affair dawned upon him, and he came to a resolve that was to cause great uneasiness to many minds.

He resolved, in fact, to run from the school rather than face the disgrace of a public flogging for something he had never done.

So it was that, no sooner had he made up his mind, than he wrote a hurried note to his chums, and had hurried away down to Coombe station.

Why he went to London he could never afterwards explain, but go he did. There was a train up to the great city less than ten minutes after he had arrived at the station, and an hour later found him walking aimlessly on the railway terminus in London.

He looked about him, and the humming of many voices, the roaring of the traffic,

and the shrill shrieks of the engine whistles, overwhelmed him.

He sat down to think matters over. He was safe for a time, but Dr. Chisholm was sure to do everything in his power to bring the runaway back to Rookwood. The question was, what was he to do now that he was out in the world alone?

He would have to work for a living, there was no doubt about that. People can't live on air, and he had only enough money to last him for a month at the outside.

"May as well see something of London," he muttered. "I am going to have a good time before I start working for a living!"

He wandered out of the station, and, without knowing where he was going, paced the streets of the great city. The traffic, and the marvellous way in which it was handled by the police, amazed and interested him.

He found considerable pleasure in the shops, in the beautiful green parks. In one of the big restaurants he had a feed which, at any other time, would have sent him into raptures of delight.

After the meal he resumed his walk, and found himself crossing Blackfriars Bridge. He stopped for a time to watch the craft on the river and the swirling waters.

"My hat!" he said to himself. "If only old Raby and Newcome and Lovell—yes, and Tommy Dodd & Co. were here! What a time we'd have!"

On again, and he began to feel tired. The evening was sultry and hot, and he thought of the playing-fields and the swimming-baths at Rookwood.

Suddenly he stopped. He was outside the Ring, a famous boxing-hall, and, always keen on the noble art, he paid for a ticket and went inside the great hall.

A huge crowd had assembled, and were heartily cheering the two boxers as they shook hands for the first round. A big numeral at the ringside supplied this information to the runaway.

His eyes grew brighter and brighter as he watched the fight proceed through round after round. One of the combatants was a singularly clever and nimble lad, but what the other lacked in speed he made up for in power of punch.

Jimmy Silver found his fists clenching and unclenching in the excitement of the fight.

"My hat!" he murmured. "I'd like to have the gloves on with that chap!"

The man who sat next to him chuckled. "You'd last half a round," he said, surveying the junior's slight form.

Jimmy Silver's eyes gleamed. "Don't be too sure of that," he said. "They teach us to box at Rookwood, you know."

He flushed as he realised his mistake. But the name was nothing to the man next to him, and he merely chuckled again, and fixed his eyes on the roped ring.

After the tenth round the referee announced the result to be a draw, and there was a mighty cheering and clapping of hands.

When silence had once more asserted itself, a man in evening-dress walked into the ring, and with his hand on the shoulder of the boxer whose quickness had appealed to Jimmy, addressed the audience.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you have witnessed my protegee's first fight. He has borne himself well, and on his behalf I challenge all comers at his weight!"

Jimmy Silver started.

There flashed into his mind the fact that he had got to make his living; he was no longer able to get his food at Rookwood with the regularity of clockwork.

Almost before he had made up his mind he stood up, and, with the eyes of the audience on him, he called out in a clear and steady voice:

"I accept that challenge!"
The man in the ring looked up and beckoned to him.

Willing hands pointed out the way down, and a minute later Jimmy Silver found himself under the glaring lights of the ring.

"What's your name?" asked the challenger. Jimmy Silver hesitated.

"Jimmy—just Jimmy will do!" he said hastily.

The man looked at his school cap, smiled, and publicly declared his willingness to provide a purse of fifty pounds.

Jimmy flushed as he suddenly remembered that he could not train anywhere—he had nowhere to go!

The man saw his discomfort, and jokingly passed a remark.

But the arrival of two more boxers saved Jimmy Silver from further trouble, and when he left the ring it was to the cheers and encouraging remarks of the audience.

Jimmy Silver found himself standing by the dressing-rooms, and he looked and felt completely at a loss.

A kindly-faced man, a boxer to the fingertips, as Jimmy Silver rightly guessed, came over to him.

"What's the matter, sonny?" he asked. "Not sorry you've accepted already, are you?"

"No," answered Silver instantly. "But—but—"

"Anything I can do?" asked the other quietly.

Jimmy hesitated.

"Well, look here," he said, in a whisper. "I don't know who you are, sir, but I'm in a fix. I've nowhere to train for the fight!"

The other stared. "Bless my uncle!" he ejaculated. "What on earth did you accept the challenge for?"

"I'll tell you!" said Jimmy.

And, making his listener promise not to repeat a word of what was said, or give him away, Jimmy Silver hurriedly narrated the story of his misfortunes.

When he had finished, the other laughed and slapped him on the back.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he said. "Do you know, I was once at a school like yours; but—but I came down with a bump, and I had to run away, too! I've been a professional boxer ever since—at least, until the last few years, when I've been training."

"Oh!" was all Silver could say.

"So your little secret is safe for a time," said the other. "My name is Kemp—Harry Kemp, sonny. And I'm willing to help you over the stile for a bit, because—because I know Rookwood a bit myself."

Silver mixed his torrent of thanks with incredulous demands for further information as to Kemp's association with Rookwood. But he ascertained nothing more.

Thus it was that, whilst all Coombe and Rookwood were discussing the runaway, and whilst Raby, Newcome, and Lovell were nearly frantic with anxiety for their chum, Jimmy Silver was training for his first fight as a professional boxer!

THE END.

(Another Story of Rookwood next week.)

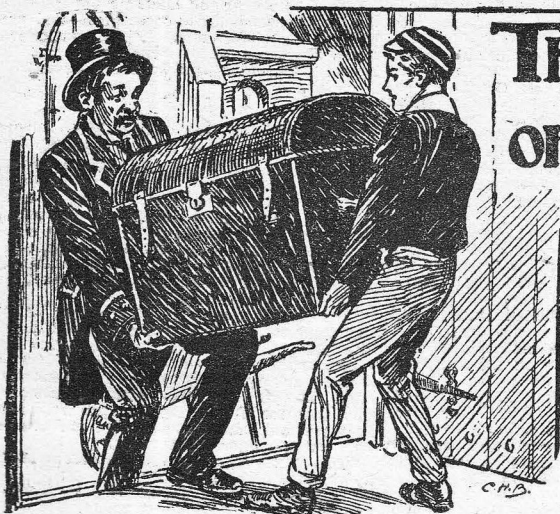
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THE FIRST CHAPTER. Frank's Kind Uncles!

"HALLO, kid! What on earth are you doin' here?"

It was Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth Form of St. Jim's who addressed that query to the younger brother of his chum, Levison major.

Clive was with Cardew. Levison major was not, though, as a rule, the three were almost inseparable.

Frank Levison started in alarm as Cardew's hand fell upon his shoulder. He had been wandering dejectedly along the High Street of the old market-town of Wayland, a few miles from St. Jim's, troubled in mind, and almost despairing.

Levison minor was hard up against it, in all truth.

Something that might have been a tragedy had happened at St. Jim's, and he was supposed to be the cause of it. Mr. Selby, the Third Form-master, had been knocked down and badly injured in his study by a chandelier which hung over his chair. It was plain that there had been foul play, for a file had been employed upon the chains by which the weights of the chandelier depended.

And Frank Levison was believed by almost everybody to have been guilty of that foul play!

He had been treated with gross injustice by the tyrant of the Third, and he had vowed vengeance. But he had not tried to take vengeance; he would never have tried to do that. Within an hour he had thought better of his furious imaginings.

Then his elder brother, Ernest, had stepped in. Taking matters into his own hands, he had trotted Frank off to Rylcombe Station, and had put him into the train, expecting that he would go home.

After which Ernest Levison had marched back with uplifted chin and set lips, to take what punishment the Head might mete out to him.

"Oh, it's you, Cardew!" said Frank now, evidently relieved.

The hand upon his shoulder had, quite naturally, frightened him for the moment.

"C'est moi, mon enfant!" replied Cardew. "But is it really you, or is it your ghost? You ought to be at home by this time, y'know!"

Clive stood silent, but sympathetic. Levison major's chums were very fond of Levison minor, and even in this bad hour both of them had complete faith in him.

It seemed best to Clive to keep silence at first. Cardew's whimsical way was more likely to put Frank at ease than his own graver manner, he knew.

"I couldn't go—I couldn't bear it!" said Frank wretchedly. "I got as far as this—"

"It isn't far, Frank—but a small fraction of the way home, dear boy," put in Cardew. "I know. But I had to change here, and—and when I thought of the people at home—my father and mother and Doris—and Ernie at St. Jim's—getting into a row for me, you know—I—I just couldn't stand it, Cardew!"

The youngster spoke brokenly, and his lips quivered. Cardew and Clive could guess something of what he felt.

He was innocent, and he hated leaving St. Jim's like that. He hated the thought of the trouble that must have fallen upon his brother's head for smuggling him out. But most of all he hated facing the people at home with a cloud such as this hanging over him.

"Don't you worry about Ernie, Frank," said Clive, speaking for the first time. "Ernie's all right. The Head was more than decent. Said that he wasn't at all sure that the best thing hadn't been done, even if it had been done in the wrong way."

"Oh, I am glad! I'm glad!" said Frank, with something like a sob of relief.

There was a lump in Clive's throat. Even now, with all this trouble upon him, the loyal youngster was thinking at least as much of his brother as of himself.

Then Frank's face fell. "The Head said I'd—I'd better go home?" he faltered.

"Yes, he said that," admitted Clive.

"But I—I can't! Don't you fellows see that I can't?"

"Franky, dear boy," said Cardew, "you really should not attach too much weight to the Head's opinion. I don't, I assure you. The old bird is a worthy old top, a dear old fossil, a nice old bean! But he is not infallible."

"Question is, though, what Frank's going to do?" said Clive gravely.

"The answer is—Frank's comin' along with his kind uncles to have some grub," replied Cardew gaily.

"I— How did you know that I hadn't had any?" asked Frank, with wide-open eyes.

"I cannot reveal to you, Franky, all the inscrutable workin's of my wondrous mind. But I'll tell you this much—he doesn't look as if he has, does he, Sidney, dear boy?"

"No, he doesn't," said Clive.

"I haven't," Frank confessed. "I couldn't eat anything, and I didn't like to go in anywhere, either. But I'll go with you fellows."

"That's good of you, dear boy!" Cardew said heartily. "Uncles like appreciation, you know."

"Come along, Frank!" Clive said. "There's quite a decent place along here. We've had dinner, and it's a bit early for tea, but—"

"But we'll toy with a dish of steaks, or a sirloin of beef or two, just to keep you in countenance, old top!" Cardew finished for him.

Frank laughed. It was not his usual hearty laugh, but it showed that already he was feeling somewhat better.

"Where's Ernie?" he asked. "When I saw you two, and not him, I was afraid he'd got into a frightful row about me. And—I say, how is it you're over here, and not at classes this afternoon? What about classes?"

"We don't usually have classes on Wednesday afternoon, my child."

"Oh, I'd forgotten what day it was! But Ernie?"

"Ernest is in demand elsewhere. Livin' up to his name, he is now endeavourin' to help the cricket eleven to victory. He wanted to cry off, but Tom Merry wouldn't hear of it."

"Tom Merry was right," said Clive. "But I don't fancy poor old Ernie will be able to do much this afternoon."

"If anything will make him forget, cricket

will," said Frank simply. "But I don't think anything can," he added.

They had reached the restaurant now. It was not a dish of steaks or a sirloin of beef that Cardew ordered; but Frank had ham and tongue, with other things to follow, and the two older boys ate buns and tarts, and all drank tea.

Frank was fairly famished. He had eaten scarcely anything during the past twenty-four hours. They said little to him while he ate buns and tarts; but when he had finished, except for the last cup of tea in the big pot, Cardew said:

"Now then, Frank, my son, let's face the worst of it, and decide what we're goin' to do."

He spoke with unusual seriousness.

Frank stirred his tea, and sat thinking hard for a minute or two before he answered.

"I don't know what I'm going to do, Cardew," he said at length. "I don't know a bit. I can't think what to do!"

His face worked, and his eyes filled with tears.

"Call me Uncle Ralph," said Cardew. "That may help you to feel better."

"What a silly ass you are, Cardew!" snorted Clive.

But a wan smile flickered across Frank's face; and Clive wondered whether, after all, his chum was such a silly ass. Cardew had a way with him that was almost irresistible by his friends, and Frank was very fond of him.

"I don't see what I can do," said Frank, more firmly. "I tried to plan things out, but they won't come right. What do you think?"

"That's the style, dear boy!" smiled Cardew. "Trust to your Uncle Ralph an' your Uncle Sidney. They'll put you in the right path, by gad!"

"Not so sure that I know what it is," said Clive doubtfully.

"I don't, either; but, dash it all, we can find it, can't we? In the first place, you've made up your mind not to go home, Franky?"

"I couldn't, Cardew—I couldn't! But—"

"I won't press that course, then. The less am I inclined to do so because I don't particularly approve of it myself. You're best nearer St. Jim's."

"What for?" demanded Clive.

"For the soon-to-come day of the sure-to-come vindication of Franky's character, old top, of course!"

"Oh, well! Yes, it's bound to come out who did it, I suppose, and that will clear Frank, of course."

"I know you two don't think I did it," Frank said slowly. "But—"

"We know you didn't!" Clive rapped out.

"I don't see how you can know, but—"

"You being you, Franky, it's imposs—clean imposs!" Cardew said.

Again Frank smiled, this time more brightly.

"Is there anyone else who believes in me?" he asked.

"Lots, dear boy! Tom Merry, for one, Talbot for another, the noble D'Arcy—even the great, the grand, the magnificent Grundy!"

"I'm glad! They're good chaps. Old

Grund's a real good chap, though he's an ass. But—what about the Third?"

"Oh, I didn't think it necessary to mention your own Form. My dear chap, Wally & Co. wouldn't have believed you guilty even if they had seen you doing it! Is that good enough for you?"

Frank beamed now. A great load had been lifted from his mind. Perhaps Cardew had exaggerated slightly. But it was true that Wally & Co. were loyal, one and all, to their chum in disgrace.

"Shall we clear out?" said Cardew. "There are several things to talk about, an' this isn't quite the place for some of them. We might stroll down by the river; less likely to run against any of our crowd there."

He beckoned to the waitress, got the bill, and paid at the cash desk. Then the three went out.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Cardew Asks Questions.

IT was a beautiful day in June, and the Ryl glistened like silver under the sun's rays as they passed down by the old bridge and into the meadows beyond.

"Uncle Sidney will now assume a thinkin' part," said Cardew, when they had settled down on the trunk of a fallen tree a couple of hundred yards or so down-stream. "It is his business to think what is to be done with you while I interrogate you."

"Oh, all right!" Clive said. "Have it your own way. But I can't promise that I'll think out anything clever."

"Cleverness is not expected of Uncle Sidney. Common-sense—solid, robust, truly British, rather stogy common-sense—is his role. Let him think hard on those lines, an' let him keep his clapper still, by gad! Sidney, my boy, you talk too much!"

"Well, I like that!" gasped Clive. "You don't, do you?"

"Not too much! Some, but never too much. Franky, who do you think did the trick? Who was it wanted to make dear old Selby into a nice dead Selby, with all his faults forgotten, and all his good qualities, if any, remembered?"

It was Frank's turn to gasp now.

"I don't know, Cardew!" he said. "How should I?"

"You haven't the ghost of a glimmer of an idea?"

"No."

"You couldn't mention anybody who might have done it?"

"They say that I might—that I did it," said Frank, with a wan smile.

"Rats! That theory's out of court for us. Isn't there any young dog in your Form who has a down on Selby?"

"There isn't anyone who hasn't!" Frank answered. "But—oh, I say, how is he?"

"Prepare to weep, Franky! He is ever so much better! They say that there is no chance of his turnin' up his dear old tootsies to the daisies."

"You are an ass, Ralph!" snapped Clive. "Oh, I know that Cardew doesn't mean that he's sorry," said Frank.

"Then," murmured Cardew, "you know a bit more than I do!"

"None of our fellows would do such a thing," said Frank.

"I don't like to mention names, kid, but Piggott isn't exactly—well, if Piggott didn't like me, an' got a chance to damage me, I shouldn't be overcome by any amazement if he did it, y'know!"

"He wouldn't do anything so bad as this," Frank said. "I bar Piggy—we all do! He's a rotter! I had a fight with him on the day when—why, it must have been yesterday. But it seems ever so long ago."

"Oh, you had a fight with Piggott, had you! Was that at the bottom of your trouble with dear old, nice old Selby?"

Frank nodded.

"I see. Did Piggott also get into trouble?"

"No—at least—no, he didn't. He got fifty lines. Everybody else had five hundred except me—I got it worse than that."

"Whew! Do you hear, Uncle Sidney? Fifty lines for one principal—the utmost rigour of the law for the other—and five hundred for each of the spectators! Doesn't it sound like the judgment of Aristides the Second? But it hardly affords grounds for suspicion of Piggott."

"Piggy didn't do it," said Frank.

"Was he in the lion's den yesterday even?"

"The which, Cardew?"

"Dear old, nice old Selby's study, I mean, Franky."

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"Yes. He came in while I was there, and went out when I did."

"He wasn't by any chance lurkin' about before you came in?"

"It wasn't Piggy, I tell you, Cardew!"

"But the very dickens of it all is that there isn't anybody else one can put it on to," said Cardew dolefully. "One hasn't heard that Selby had any visitors."

"Have you asked?" put in Clive.

"Well, no. I can ask, of course. I shall ask. But I haven't started in on my investigations yet."

"I say, Cardew, are you going to take up the case?" asked Frank eagerly.

"Yaas, dear lad. Such is my intention."

"Oh, I am glad! I'm sure you'll clear me."

"Hearken to that unsolicited testimonial, Sidney!"

Clive sniffed. But Clive believed in Cardew's detective ability for all his apparent implied contempt for it.

"I shall have to interview Taggles," said Cardew. "Taggles is stony soil, but I have noted that half-dollars can be sown in it."

"Someone said something about somebody coming to see young Piggott during prep last night," said Clive thoughtfully.

"Some story!" commented Cardew.

"I say, Cardew, why do you think so much about Piggy?" inquired Frank.

"I don't, my child. At ordinary times I am but dimly aware of that youth's unnecessary existence."

"Now, I mean."

"Franky, some enemy of yours must have put that file in your desk, y'know," Cardew said, quite gravely. "It must have been someone in the Third, I fancy. Have you an enemy in the Third except Piggott?"

"No, I haven't. I never thought—"

"Your Uncle Sidney never did, either. He can't, unfortunately. But your Uncle Ralph is a terror at it—a positive terror! Franky, if you stood on Selby's table—"

"But I didn't, Cardew!"

"I mean, supposing you stood on Selby's table, could you reach the weights of the chandelier? You know that den of torture better than I do. I have never but once entered it."

Frank thought it out.

"I'm not sure, but I don't believe I could," he said. "The ceiling's high, you know."

"I'm not sure, either; but I don't believe you could, or that Piggott could. Ergo, you an' Piggott are alike innocent of the filin'."

"But someone reached them—someone taller than either of you. Query—who?"

"I've got it!" exclaimed Clive.

"By gad! Have you? Sidney, this is too great a shock! Why, I've only just started in on the problem."

"I don't mean I've solved that, fathead! I mean that I've thought of a place for Franky!"

"Oh, I say, Clive, where?" asked Frank eagerly.

"Nobody's Study!"

"Good! Oh, dashed good, by gad!"

"I don't know," said Frank. "What would Ernie say?"

"Never mind Ernie for the moment, dear infant. If it comes to that, Ernie needn't know. It's that, or Pepper's barn, Clive, I think, an' I must say I consider yours the better notion."

"That fat bouncer of a Bunter hid there," said the South African junior. "I suppose that was what made me think of it, really."

"Why discount your own ideas like that, Sidney? Do you think, Franky, you could stand a day or two in Nobody's Study? You could creep out at night, y'know, and we would bring you everything needful."

"I could stand it all serene," Frank answered confidently. "But Ernie would have to be told, Cardew."

"Right-ho! Ernie shall be told, in due course. How are you goin' to smuggle the kid in, Sidney?"

"Haven't you an idea?"

"Heaps! I'm fairly hummin' with them. But this is your department."

"All serene. I can work it. Frank can hide in the woods till after dark, and come in over the wall—I'll meet him there, and help him over—and slip in during supper-time. Of course, there's a risk. But we can take that. The kid hasn't been expelled, after all, and no one can say that he hasn't a right at St. Jims!"

"You fellows are good to me!" said Frank, with shining eyes.

"Are we not your kind uncles?" replied Cardew. "Let us now return to the High Street, and lay in some provender. Frank can back over the moor on your bike step, Sidney dear—you're energetic. He will drop

him in the woods—with some grub—and proceed to make the necessary preparations in Nobody's Study before the crowd returns from the match at Westwood. Come on!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Levison Major Sees a Ghost.

"YOU haven't told him, Cardew?" said Clive.

It was nearly bedtime. Clive and Cardew had contrived to secure the key of Nobody's Study, to make up a bed there with cushions, travelling-rugs, and greatcoats, to get in food and drink, and—greatest feat of all—to contrive Frank Levison's entry unobserved.

"I haven't, dear boy. I'm almost afraid to," confessed Cardew. "The poor old chap's in a bad way. He shaped in rotten form this afternoon, they say—a duck, not a blessed wicket, an' two easy catches put on the floor. Tommy was kind about it, but it was easy for Tommy to be kind about it, as Wynn an' Talbot came off in the bowlin' line, an' our crowd won easily."

"Tom Merry would have been decent about it, anyway," Clive said.

"Agreed! Fact of the matter is, Tommy was born an' brought up decently, and can't help bein' so, no credit therefore attachin' to him. When I'm decent, it's with lots of difficulty an' lots of credit!"

"Levison's ill, if you ask me," said Clive, abruptly dismissing the subject of Cardew's decency as compared with Tom Merry's.

"He's beastly feverish, and no end pale, and he admits that his head aches as if it would split. He's worrying himself half to death about Frank."

"Question is, will he be relieved or otherwise when he knows that Frank is under this roof?"

"Otherwise, I fancy, Cardew. He's said two or three times that there's one consolation—the kid is safe with his own people by this time."

"Yaas; but that's a consolation that won't last, dear boy. The Head will have written to their pater to-day, if he hasn't wired, and will come the answer that Frank is non est inventus. Then the cat will be out of the fryin'-pan, and the bag will bubble over into the apple-cart, an'—in short, there'll be ructions."

"How long is it going to take you to work out this case? Can't you do it by to-morrow?"

"Sweet Sidney, be not so ingeniously childish! I really haven't a clue worth mentionin' as yet."

"Yes, you have, duffer! There's the chap to see Piggott—"

"Said to have been a relation of his, y'know."

"I don't believe that yarn. There are marks in the soft earth near Selby's window, and you say you've twigged some traces near the wall. Don't they count?"

"They would count no end, by gad, if Taggles had only been thoughtful enough to have asked Piggott's visitor to leave a boot as a souvenir, an' if the boot an' the traces corresponded. I wonder Ephraim didn't think of it. Shockin'ly remiss chap, Ephraim!"

"Oh, you do rot!" said Clive crossly.

Cardew glanced at him.

He saw that Ernest Levison was not the only one of the brotherhood who showed nerve-strain.

Clive was showing it, too. Cardew loved intrigue and mystery for their own sake, though what he was doing now was for Frank Levison's sake. But Clive was all for the open and everything square and above-board. Secrecy worried him.

"I'll do my best, old fellow," said Cardew, putting his hand on Clive's shoulder, and speaking with more feeling than usual. "We'll say nothin' to Ernest to-night. An' don't you worry more than you can help. It will all come out in the wash, by gad!"

The clues Cardew had discovered as yet were apparently insignificant.

He had peeped into Mr. Selby's study, and had come to the conclusion that either Piggott or Frank might have reached the weights when they were at their lowest.

But he had seen on the blotting-paper the faint impression of a boot that was larger than either Piggott's or Frank's. And he was inclined to think that Piggott's visitor might be in the affair.

If nothing else could be done for it, he meant bluffing Piggott into a confession of all he knew.

But it would be better to find out more before he tried that on.

Ernest Levison tossed uneasily in his bed

that night. His mind was full of trouble, and it almost maddened him to think that he could do so little to help his brother.

There was a full moon in the sky, and the light gleamed in through the blinds of the dormitory-windows. Levison closed his eyes, and tried hard to keep them closed. But trying to do that makes minutes seem like hours.

He opened them suddenly, with the feeling that someone was bending over him, looking into his face.

And there was a face close to his—Frank's! It glimmered palely in the half-light, and the eyes were strange and wistful.

Levison major gasped. He was not in the least superstitious. He would have laughed had anyone asked him whether he believed in ghosts.

But he knew—or he thought he knew—that Frank was away. And yet there was Frank bending over him!

What could he think—what believe? The half-light gave a peculiarly weird effect to Frank's face. Ernest Levison felt sure that what he saw was the ghost of his brother. "Frank!" he faltered.

"Hallo, there! What are you burbling about, Levison?" came the voice of Mellish, the sneak of the Fourth.

Levison major had closed his eyes, involuntarily this time.

He opened them again quickly. But the face had disappeared.

Utterly frightened and completely taken aback, Levison hid his face under the bed-clothes, and trembled like one in a palsy.

There might have been fellows at St. Jim's who had more of the courage that manifests itself in action than Levison. There was hardly a fellow in the whole school who was harder than he, keener of mind. But he was quite knocked out now.

He could not answer Mellish. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

But if he had answered Mellish, that pleasant youth would not have heard him.

For Mellish had got out of bed and was following Frank Levison downstairs!

He did not think Frank a ghost. He had seen the youngster steal away from his brother's bed, which was only two away from Mellish's.

There was nothing in the least heroic about Percy Mellish. If the notion that had come into Levison's mind had come into his, he would have been far more frightened than Levison was.

But that notion did not occur to him. He had heard Levison's exclamation, and, turning his head, had seen Frank. When the youngster stole away, Mellish had expected Levison to follow at once. As he did not do that, Mellish, full of curiosity, followed on his own account.

Frank heard the soft pad of slipped feet behind him, and stepped into a dark corner, his heart beating wildly.

Mellish went past. Frank could not see who it was, but he was quite sure that it was not Ernest.

Best to wait!

He waited.

The sneak halted, completely puzzled.

Frank had been ahead of him, he knew. On one of the landings, where the moon shone in through an uncurtained window, Mellish had seen him quite plainly.

But he had lost him now. He stood listening, but could hear nothing but the thumping of his own heart. He had begun to feel afraid; and, when once Percy Mellish began to feel fear, panic was not long in following it.

A sudden sound, that was half a groan and half a gurgle, came from him; and he scuttled away like a frightened rabbit.

Past Frank he went, in a desperate hurry, and the Third-Former held his breath for a moment, and then breathed freely again, knowing that he was safe.

He hurried on to the Shell passage, and thence to Nobody's Study in its lonely corner, passed in and locked the door on the inside.

"I startled poor old Ernie!" he muttered. "I wish I hadn't gone now. But I couldn't help just going along and having a look at him. Cardew and Clive were wrong. I'm sure. They meant well, but they ought to have told Ernie that I was back here."

He crept into his improvised bed.

Nobody's Study struck cold and clammy even on this warm June night. The moonlight did not shine in there. It was an eerie sort of place for a youngster of thirteen. But Frank was plucky, and the faith his brother's chums were showing in him bucked him up no end. Moreover, it was a comfort to him to be near Ernie.

His brother knew, understood, would not

believe him guilty in any case. But those at home—yes, he could be sure of them, too, as far as faith went. What he could not stand was the thought of having to tell them the wretched story—to confess that the Head and Mr. Railton and most of the rest of St. Jim's held the guilt certain!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Mellish Takes News.

NOT another wink of sleep did Ernest Levison get that night. He lay awake arguing miserably with himself.

It was not Frank's ghost. There were no such things as ghosts. Besides, what reason was there to think Frank dead? And if he were still alive, how could his ghost be seen?

But it was certainly not Frank himself! Had not Frank gone home? He could not doubt that Frank had gone. The youngster had not actually promised; but he had made no demur at going, and he was such a docile, reliable kid that the thought of his kicking at the plan after he had once started scarcely occurred to Ernest.

Could it have been imagination?

That thought came with the dawn, and strengthened with the strengthening of the light.

Broad daylight makes things seem different. Phantoms of the night become things to be laughed at.

Ernest Levison could not quite laugh at what he had seen, or thought he had seen; and he could not stand the thought of having others laugh at him.

So he kept silence. He did not even speak of it to his chums.

Cardew and Clive also kept silence. They saw Levison looking pale and haggard, and they fancied that to know that Frank was under the roof of the School House would only add to his worries.

But Mellish did not keep silence.

After breakfast he sought out Racke and Crooke.

Mellish had a grudge against Levison major, and was always ready to do him an ill turn. But the grudge that Mellish cherished, in his weak, unstable way, was as nothing to the poisonous hatred of Aubrey Racke and George Gerald Crooke.

There had been a time when Ernest Levison was the constant companion of those three, glad to borrow money of Racke—when Racke would lend—eager to share their dingy dissipations.

That time was past. The Levison major of to-day was a straight-going fellow, athletic, with a ruddy tinge of health in his erstwhile sallow face, well-liked by most decent fellows, though Cardew and Clive were his only close chums, and perhaps Talbot was the only other fellow for whom he had any real feeling.

Racke and Crooke had never forgiven him for shaking them off. They had tried several times to get even with him, and Mellish was sure they would be only too glad to snap at another chance.

So he took his yarn along to their study.

The two sweet youths were enjoying an after-breakfast, before-classes smoke. When Mellish put his crafty face in at the door Racke waved a hand at him to begone, and little curls of smoke came from the Egyptian cigarette that he held between the first and second fingers of that hand.

"Outside!" snorted Racke.

"Oh, I say, old chap! I've something to tell you, you know—something important!"

"That you want to borrow a quid?" sneered Crooke.

"To be repaid when Good Friday comes on a Sunday?" added Crooke.

"It's nothing of the sort, then! It's about that sweep Levison. We've got him, Racke—got him on the hop!"

Racke started.

"Levison's up to his neck in this dashed trouble of his minor's, I know," he said slowly. "An' I'm dashed glad of it! I enjoy seein' the bouncer go about with that miserable look on his face."

"So do I, by gad!" chuckled Crooke.

"He couldn't eat a scrap of breakfast—not a giddy mouthful! He, he, he! Serve him right!" sniggered Mellish.

"But I don't see where we come in. No need to move a dashed finger," Racke said. "Let him stew in his own juice. That's the safest plan. If we meddle we can't make matters worse for him."

"Though why he should make all this dashed fuss over his silly kid minor's bashin' old Selby's napper in I can't see," said Crooke.

"If it had done for the old Tartar, an' dear little Franky was goin' to be hanged for it—"

"Even then, I don't see that it would be worth worryin' about," said Racke cynically.

"But we can make it worse for him. That's what I've come to tell you."

"What do you mean, Mellish?" snapped Racke.

Mellish drew closer to the two, and whispered:

"Young Levison's here!"

"Rats!" snorted Racke.

"You've been dreamin'!" said Crooke contemptuously. "The kid stunk off home!"

"If he did, he's come back. I saw him in our dorm last night, and so did his blessed brother."

"It can't be true!"

"You're pullin' our legs, you worm!"

"I'm not! It's true, I tell you!"

Percy Mellish was a known liar. There were times when Racke and Crooke would not have believed him on oath. They had come to know fairly well when he was lying, and when—more rarely—he was speaking truly.

He certainly seemed to be speaking truly now.

"Let's hear all about it."

"Why on earth didn't you follow the kid up and see where he went?" asked Crooke disgustedly. "It's just like you, Mellish—half a dashed tale!"

"I couldn't help that, could I? I tell you I lost him on the stairs!"

"Got funky, and cut back, you mean!" sneered Racke.

"Well, I didn't feel very comfortable; I own that. You fellows may think you would have done, but I'm not so jolly sure!"

"Where can the kid be hidden?" asked Crooke.

"Might be in No. 9," Racke replied.

"That would mean that both Cardew and Clive were in the know."

"Well, they would be."

Crooke shook his head.

"Cardew likely enough," he said; "not Clive."

"Clive, too!" Racke answered positively.

"Those three hang together in everythin'!"

"There's the bell for classes," said Mellish. "I say, what are you chaps going to do about it?"

"We'll think that out," replied Racke. "But if this isn't the straight goods, Mellish—"

"It is—I swear it is, Racke! I say, will you lend me a quid?"

"I won't! But if this turns out to be O.K., by gad, I'll give you one!" Mellish went off to the Fourth Form classroom in high delight at Aubrey Racke's unwonted generosity. He felt that that quid was as good as in his pocket.

But that was where Percy Mellish slipped up!

It was about ten o'clock when the Head sent for Levison major.

Dr. Holmes' face was very grave when the Fourth-Former entered his study.

"Levison," he said abruptly, "I wrote to your father last night, telling him all about the terrible affair of the night before last. I could not wire. It was too difficult a story to condense into a telegram."

"Yes, sir," spoke Levison dully, as the Head paused.

"I have just received a wire from him. Your brother has not reached home!"

Levison staggered, and his pale face went paler still.

"My boy, you are ill!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes.

"No, sir, not ill. It—it was a shock to me. I—I don't know quite what to make of it."

And he did not. Back upon him flooded the doubts of the night before.

Frank—or Frank's ghost?

Either way, not to be spoken of to the Head. If Frank, the kid must not be given away. If his ghost—well, it wasn't a bit likely that the Head would believe that!

"Nor do I know what to make of it, Levison. Take a seat, my boy; you are not fit to stand. This is a heavy triab to you, I know."

Levison sat down. He put his elbow on his knee, and propped up his aching head with his right hand.

"I am not doubting your word, Levison. I am sure you did take your brother to the station. Did you see him into the train?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he gave you no reason to suppose that he had any other notion but that of going home, as you had arranged he should do?"

"No, sir."

"But he has not gone home. It is very strange—very strange, and most troublesome. I feel extremely anxious. What can have become of the boy?"

He did not ask that question so much of

Levison as of himself, it seemed. And the Fourth-Former made no answer to it.

His great anxiety now was to get away before the Head inquired whether he could tell any more. The question he dreaded meant either lying or giving Frank away—if Frank were still alive—if that had not been his ghost!

The Head did not put that question. "You may go, Levison," he said. "It seemed only right you should know, and just possible you might be able to throw some light on the mystery. You need not return to classes to-day."

But Levison went back to the Fourth Form-room. He dreaded being alone, and he wanted a chance to speak to Cardew and Clive.

He did not get that chance during classes, though Mr. Lathom was very kind and considerate to him, passed him over in construing, and paid no heed to his obvious inattention to work.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Seekers for Trouble Find It.

"I WANT to speak to you fellows," said Levison to his chums as they came out of the Form-room together.

"Now we're in for it!" whispered Cardew to Clive.

But not another word was spoken until they were in Study No. 9 together.

Then Levison faced the other two with eyes that gleamed wildly in a haggard face.

"Do you two know anything about Frank?" he demanded.

As he spoke the door was flung open, and Racke and Crooke appeared on the threshold.

Behind them were Mellish, looking nervous, Baggy Trimble, puffing out his podgy cheeks and blowing like a grampus, and Scrope of the Shell.

"That's just precisely what we'd like to know!" said Racke exultantly. "Our notion's that he's here, by gad!"

"Get out!" roared Levison.

"What extraordinary notions you do get, Racke!" drawled Cardew. "Don't kick them out, Ernest, old bean. Let them search."

"Get out!" repeated Levison, paying no heed to Cardew.

"Not likely!" retorted Racke.

"We're not goin' to have you hidin' that murderous young sweep of a brother of yours here!" sneered Crooke.

"It's a disgrace to the School House!" remarked Scrope loftily.

"Oh, rather! An awful disgrace!" squeaked Baggy Trimble.

Mellish said nothing, and rather wished he had not come.

"Are you going?" snapped Levison.

"Here, what's this?" asked Tom Merry, coming up with Lowther, Manners, and Talbot.

"Yaas, wathah! What is all this wov about?" inquired Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, appearing on the scene with Blake, Herries, and Digby.

"If Racke's coming here, worrying Levison, I shall have something to say about it!" said Dick Julian, at whose heels were Reilly, Hammond, and Kerruish.

The crowd thickened every second. Lumley-Lumley came up with Durrance, Roylance, and Smith minor. Gore and Noble appeared. Dane and Glyn and Grundy and Gunn and Wilkins followed them.

Crooke drew back a bit, but he found Tom Merry's hand on his collar. Baggy tried to make a modest exit, but Gore seized him by the ear and held him tightly. Mellish, cornered, bit his lip and changed colour. Scrope contrived to sneak away, but Racke stood firm.

"I heard you say something about Levison minor, Crooke," said Tom Merry.

"I dare say you did. I said—"

"Better not repeat it! Frank Levison happens to be a pal of mine."

Frank Levison's brother flashed Tom a grateful glance. Then he sank into a chair, feeling faint and sick.

But it did not matter. There were plenty present to uphold his brother's cause.

"Racke, I'd strongly advise you to go easy," said Talbot quietly.

"Thanks! When I want your dashed advice I'll ask for it! Till then you can keep it to yourself!"

"You take it as a warning, if you prefer it," Talbot replied coldly.

"Hang your warnin's! I don't care a snap of the fingers for the whole dashed gang of you! I've heard that Levison minor's hidden somewhere at St. Jim's, an I believe he's in this study. An' what I say is that it's a confounded disgrace to the school, after what he's done!"

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 20.

"I agree with Racke that there's somebody in this study who shouldn't be here, an' that, considerin' what he's done, it's a disgrace to the school that he should be here at all!" drawled Cardew. "But his name's not Frank Levison. His name's Aubrey Racke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A good many of the crowd laughed at that, but the faces of the others remained grave. Clive's was one of the gravest.

The South African junior stepped up to Racke.

"You're not wanted here!" he said. "Better clear out!"

"I dare say I'm not wanted," sneered Racke. "You don't exactly fancy havin' that murderous young ruffin found—"

"Steady!" rapped out Clive.

"Go easy!" snapped Talbot.

"Let go of my collar!" snarled Crooke.

"So that you can search the study for Levison minor?" said Tom.

"We've a right to do that, by gad, I suppose?" snorted Racke.

"What a supposer you have!" drawled Cardew.

"How on earth did the yarn get about that the kid was here?" asked Kangaroo.

"Mellish saw him last night," replied Crooke sulkily.

Levison major looked up. For some minutes he had been sitting with his eyes bent on the floor, as though nothing that was said interested him. But plainly this statement aroused his interest.

"Mellish is a beastly liar! Everybody knows that," said Clive.

"I'm not lying about this, anyhow," said Mellish, licking his dry lips. "I saw him stooping over his major's bed in the dorm, and I followed him out."

"What did you follow him out for?" demanded Levison major hotly.

"Why shouldn't I? But I lost him on the stairs," went on Mellish in some confusion.

"Better have the staircase up and look for him, hadn't we?" asked Cardew blandly.

"Korah, Dathan, and the other gentlemen really weren't a circumstance compared with Levison minor," remarked Lowther.

"Don't know them. Friends of yours, dear boy?" said Cardew.

"Oh, stop that rot!" thundered the great George Alfred Grundy.

Grundy had shown quite unusual patience. He had played the part of spectator and member of the audience for fully five minutes without speaking a word.

Other fellows had done the same, even the great Augustus D'Arcy, who must have found it difficult. But to Grundy, who loved to be in the centre of the stage, it had become more than difficult—it had become impossible.

"Stop that rot!" he repeated. "I'm not going to put up with it, you know!"

"What business is it of yours?" demanded Clive.

But Cardew whispered in his chum's ear:

"Despise not proffered aid, Sidney! The lion may help the mouse. An' Grundy is simply itching for a slap at Racke. Let him rip!"

"Just you listen to me, all of you! Mellish, you can't speak the truth even if you try! And you never try, so what you say goes for nothing at all!"

"Thanks!" said Mellish, with a feeble attempt to brazen out his position.

"That settles you!" said Grundy. "Racke and Crooke, I suppose you're fools enough to believe that worm's yarn?"

"Look here, Grundy, who do you imagine you are?" returned Racke.

"I'll soon show you that— Shut up, Crooke! I don't want any of your cheek! Just squeeze the back of his neck a bit, Merry, if he starts being cheeky!"

"Right-ho!" said Tom cheerily.

"Now, I'm pretty sure Levison minor's innocent. I've thought the matter out, and I've come to the conclusion that he didn't do it. Therefore it must have been someone else."

"There's a massive brain for you!" murmured Lowther. "Who says that Grundy can't think?"

"And I'm going to find out who it was! So that part of it's as good as settled. Meanwhile, Levison minor hasn't any right to be here, and I don't a bit believe he's here. But, merely as a matter of form, I put this question to Levison major and Cardew and Clive—is Frank here?"

"Go and eat coke!" snapped Levison major.

"No bizney of yours!" growled Clive.

"Merely as a matter of form, my reply to Grundy is that young Frank is not here," replied Cardew politely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see what you silly asses are cackling at!" hooted Grundy. "I'm quite satisfied with the answer."

It seemed to others that Cardew's reply meant nothing at all, which was exactly what Cardew had intended it to mean. But Grundy saw it otherwise.

"There you are, you rotters!" he said triumphantly. "You can't go behind that, I suppose?"

"Leggo of me, Gore!" burbled Baggy. "I haven't done anything, I tell you! I only came here with Racke and Crooke because they asked me as a pal—"

"You deserve a good deal worse than having your ear pulled for being a pal of theirs!" grunted Gore.

"Can't go behind that?" demanded Racke warmly. "Can't we, though? What do you think we care what Cardew says—especially when what he says means nothing at all, by gad! We're goin' to search the study!"

"An' find that spiteful young—"

"Go easy, Crooke!" said Tom Merry, giving Crooke's collar a twist.

"An' if we're not allowed to do that we'll jolly well go to Railton, an' see what he says about it!" squeaked Mellish, also plucking up courage.

For Mellish knew that he had seen Frank, and believed that the Third Former must be hidden in the study, though it was not quite easy to imagine where he could be hidden.

You take a single step further into this room, any one of you, and I'll attend to you!" roared Grundy.

A brief hush fell upon the crowd.

Racke mistook the feeling behind that hush. He did not realise that practically every one there, except himself, believed firmly that Frank was innocent.

They had had time to think it out, and had come to the conclusion that Frank simply could not have conceived such a plan, or have carried it out even if he had conceived it.

But Racke fancied that he had had only to assert himself to gain support.

He broke the silence.

"Oh, rats to you, Grundy!" he snapped. "I'm goin' to search!"

And he stepped forward.

Levison major arose. Clive moved towards Racke. Cardew stood still, with his shoulders against the mantelpiece, and smiled.

There was no need for Levison major or Clive. Grundy was before them.

With a roar like the bellow of a bull he seized Racke.

"Stand out of the way, you fellows!" he hooted.

And he fairly swept Racke out of the study and into the passage.

"Go and tell Railton!" he shouted, thrusting the cad of the Shell from him, and giving him a kick to quicken his going.

The thrust sent Racke against Roylance, who promptly gave him his shoulder and barged him into Julian.

Julian tumbled him against Kerruish, who passed him on to Kangaroo, who transferred him, getting a trifle the worse for wear, to Herries. Herries promptly dropped him on the floor with a thud.

"We jolly well will!" squealed Mellish.

"Bump him!" cried Blake. And a dozen hands seized Mellish.

"If you don't let me go, Merry, I'll kick!" threatened Crooke.

"Bump that wotah, too!" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I say, Gore, let me go, there's a good chap!" burbled Baggy. "I—I—I don't want to be bumped, you know! I haven't done anything—not a thing! Yarooooogh!"

The bumping had fairly begun. It was unlucky for Racke that he happened to be upon the floor, for Mellish was bumped upon him. This may have been slightly less painful for Mellish, Racke being less hard than the floor, but it was rough on Racke.

"Yooop! Yow! Stoppit!" howled Crooke.

"Oh, don't! Lemme off! I didn't, I won't— Yowwwwp!" roared Baggy.

It was lucky for Scrope that he had made himself scarce!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Interrogation of Piggott.

THE bumping had been well and truly done. The bumped had beaten a retreat.

George Alfred Grundy had marched magnificently away, feeling that, for once, his authority had been properly recognised.

Wilkins and Gunn had followed him, grinning. They did not take the great Grundy quite as seriously as he took himself.

The crowd had melted away, and the chums of Study No. 9 were left to themselves.

Ernest Levison turned the key in the lock. "I'm going to know the truth, you fellows!" he said, with quivering nostrils and glowering eyes, as he faced his chums.

"My dear man, would Sidney or I think of telling you anythin' but the truth?" returned Cardew lightly.

Clive was silent, breathing a little hard, in some distress. He hated quarrels in No. 9, and he thought he saw one coming now.

"Don't give me any of your rot, Cardew! Frank's here!"

"I assure you he isn't, dear boy! An' it isn't like you to agree with Racke!"

"Oh, chuck that, Ralph!" said Clive, in low tones.

"I know he's not in this study," said Levison slowly, making a visible effort to control his anger. "But I'm sure he's somewhere about the place, and I'm sure you fellows know where! I don't want to quarrel with you. We've been good chums. I—I—I'd do anything for you two—"

"And we'd do anything for you, Ernest," struck in Clive, really distressed. "That's wrong—"

"But Frank's my affair," went on Levison, unheeding. "You can't take Frank out of my hands! You ought not to try!"

"You tell him, Cardew," said Clive. "We did it for the best, really, old chap!"

"Ernest, dear boy, we're your pals. We're also Frank's pals; but we know that you have first claim on the kid," Cardew said gravely. "What were we to do, though? We found him wanderin' about Wayland. He couldn't make up his mind to go home. We took him up, fed him, and smuggled him in here. He wanted you to be told at once—"

"He was right!" snapped Levison.

"Yaas, I suppose so. Frank's got rather a way of bein' right—comes of the possession of a workin' conscience, I take it. But we didn't feel quite the same about it."

"I ought to have been told!" Levison persisted. "But never mind that now. You did what you thought best, I suppose. Where's Frank?"

"In Nobody's Study," replied Clive.

"Oh, I say! He'll be nabbed, for a dead cert! Why, it isn't long ago since that fat bouncer Bunter hid up there, and—"

"Just why, dear boy," chipped in Cardew. "The safest place is often the place that nobody thinks of because it would be so dead easy to think of it—see?"

"That's clever enough, I dare say. But now that those cads are on the track—"

"Racke and Crooke certainly do complicate matters, Ernest. Never mind; I'll think out a way of dealin' with them."

"But what use do you think it is having Frank here?" asked Levison.

"Cardew thinks he's going to clear him. Then he'll be ready to show up directly he's cleared," explained Clive.

"Drama, by gad, old top! Scene spoiled if Frank didn't put in an appearance at the critical moment. Can't bear to have scene spoiled in my drama—that's me, y'know!"

"There was truth in it. Cardew knew his own weaknesses as well as his chums knew them. But it was a long way from being the whole truth."

"How do you think you're going to clear Frank?" inquired Levison.

"As the mighty brain of Grundy has perceived, somebody else must have done the thing, since it's certain Frank didn't do it. So all that needs to be done is to find that someone else."

"That's all, is it?" asked Levison, half scoffingly.

"That's all, dear boy," replied Cardew coolly.

"And where are you going to start?"

"I propose to start on Piggott."

"Piggott? What's he got to do with it?"

"That I am not sure of—as yet. But something; I feel certain of that. An' I think that if I can corner him, I can wring it out of him—if I have to wring his dashed young neck to get it out!"

"Oh, we'll corner Piggott all right, if that can do any good!" said Levison, brightening up a bit at the prospect of doing something.

"But Frank isn't safe where he is."

"Look here, Ernest," said Clive. "Frank hasn't been sacked."

"But he will be, like a shot, if he's caught here!"

"I'm not sure of that," Cardew replied. "But if you are, then he musn't be caught, that's all."

"Those sweeps will be on the watch," Levison said thoughtfully. "I can't go near Frank without their twiggling. You fellows can't go either. Racke and Crooke are nearer his

hiding-place than we are, too. It makes everything so jolly awkward."

"We could get someone else to go," suggested Cardew.

"Who?"

"Tom Merry—Talbot—D'Arcy— No, not D'Arcy—his dashed tact and judgment would spoil everything!"

"If the worst comes to the worst, Talbot, I think," Levison said. "I don't like mixing anyone else up in it, but he won't mind. He thinks a dashed lot of Frank."

"So we all do," Clive put in.

"Yes, I know. It—it makes me think better of lots of fellows. If they see what a good little chap my brother is, I don't care a dashed rap what they think of me! But we were talking of Piggott. I can corner him, I fancy, and I know a thing or two about him. That may help him to see that he's got to toe the line."

"Could you get him here?" asked Clive.

"I might; but I fancy that it would be a better plan to catch him in one of his lurking-places. Shouldn't wonder if we could get him now. Come along!"

Levison led the way to a remote box-room—the same one in which Billy Bunter, while at St. Jim's under his cousin's name, had pretended to take up his quarters when rejected by everyone as a study-mate.

The door was shut. Levison tried it, and found it fastened.

He did not hesitate. He bent down, put his mouth close to the keyhole, and breathed:

"Piggy!"

"Is that you, Mellish?" asked Piggott.

"It's me," replied Levison.

There followed the sound of trunks being moved, and then the door opened.

"Oh!"

As he uttered that ejaculation, Piggott made a frantic attempt to slam the door in the faces of the three.

But he was too late. Levison had got a foot inside.

Next moment the trio were in the box-room. A haze of smoke hung about the place, and the hangdog-looking Third-Former had the smaller half of a lighted cigarette between his yellowed fingers.

Clive proceeded, in businesslike fashion, to pile the trunks against the door again.

"Here, I say! What are you doing? What do you want with me?" squeaked Piggott.

"We're going to have a talk with you, you young rotter!" snapped Ernest.

"Don't be brutal, Ernest! Say, rather, that we are drawn hither by the charms of Piggy's conversation. Much nicer way of putting it, y'know."

But Cardew's way of putting it failed to remove the scowl from Piggott's face.

"I don't want to have anything to do with you chaps," said the Third-Former sullenly.

"Don't be unkind, sweet youth!" murmured Cardew.

"You'll have to talk to him, Ralph," said Levison. "I can't stand the young black-guard!"

"That will be much pleasanter for Piggott, an', on the whole, more interestin' for me. So I agree. Piggott, my ingenious child, can you lend me a file?"

Piggott's face went very nearly sea-green, and his eyes goggled with fear.

"A fu-fu-fu-fu-file!" he stammered.

"No, no," replied Cardew cheerily. "Just an ordinary file."

Clive grinned, but Levison's face was set and smileless, and his eyes, fixed on Piggott's face, were like the eyes of a hawk.

"What do you want a file for?" asked Piggott shakily.

"I don't, as a matter of fact. What did you want one for?"

"Me? A file? I—I never had one! What do you mean, Cardew?"

"You had one, I know. That's nothin' much. Any fellow may have a file. But why did you keep it in another chap's desk?"

"I didn't! I don't know what you are talking about!" persisted Piggott.

"Don't tell 'em too fast. It won't do you any good," said Clive scornfully.

All three were certain now that Piggott could throw light upon the mystery if he chose.

"That was revenge, of course," said Cardew. "Levison minor had given you a hiding, and you've got the sort of noble pride that makes a chap consider a stab in the back a proper answer to a punch or two on the dial. I do hope they won't abolish capital punishment before it comes to your turn to be hanged, Piggott!"

"I—I—"

"We'll let all that go!" said Cardew, waving a hand. "It won't convince any of us. We're dead sure you wangled that file into

Levison-minor's desk. What we want to know is, was that the file dear old Selby's well-wisher used, or wasn't it?"

"I don't know anything about any file," Piggott said stubbornly.

"Where did you find it?"

"I don't know anything about it!"

"An' when did you find it? When did you sneak it in?"

"I tell you I don't—"

"That's enough! We shall have to report it to Ralton, you fellows."

"Here, I say! If you do that, I shall—"

Piggott paused, his hands shaking, his lips trembling, his eyes full of fear and spite.

"What shall you do, sweet youth?"

"I shall tell Ralton where Levison minor is!"

"Ernest, he knows where your minor is! Now is the chance for you to find out. Where is he, Piggott?"

"Oh, it's easy to pretend you don't know—"

Clive took him by the collar and shook him as a terrier does a rat.

"Out with it!" he snapped.

"I—I—I— He's in Nobody's Study!"

"Impossible!" said Cardew, with a fine affectation of surprise.

But the faces of Clive and Levison showed the cunning fag that he had guessed the truth.

"That's where he is!" he panted. "And, I'll tell— Ow! Stoppit, Clive!"

"Better stop it, Sidney! Where did you find that file, Piggott?"

For a moment the fag was taken off his guard.

"Down by the wall— I mean, I never found it at all! I don't know anything about any file!"

"Who dropped it?"

"I don't know who dropped it. I don't know anything about it, I tell you."

"Levison, dear boy, we had better shunt Piggott up here for a while. If your minor's hidden himself in Nobody's Study, we must get him out of that and into some safer cover," said Cardew.

"I won't be shut up here! I'll shout!" squealed Piggott.

"You'll have to do a bit of explainin' if that becomes necessary, sweet youth!"

Piggott groaned.

"I'm going down to Rylcombe," said Levison. "You'll come with me!"

"I jolly well won't!" snarled Piggott.

"Oh, yes, you will, you young sweep! Don't forget that there's a sure and safe sacking for the fellow who put that file in my brother's desk last night, if it's ever found out."

Piggott yielded sullenly. He wanted time to think out his course of action.

"I'm going to wire to my pater that Frank's all right," whispered Levison to Cardew.

"I'll keep my eye on this young cad. You two see what you can do to make things safe for Frank. You'll most likely be spied on, but I should be for a dead cert."

"Right-ho!" said Cardew aloud. "Sidney, Levison's goin' to take Piggy dear for a nice bike ride before dinner. They'll just have time to scoot down to the post-office and back. We'll go an' look up Kerr!"

"What the Dickens for?" asked Clive.

"Entertainin' fellow, Kerr! And my mind needs entertainin'. My heart's sad within me on account of files and Piggies and things."

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Flown!

CLIVE was rather surprised when he found that Cardew had gone to Kerr.

Cardew was usually self-confident. It showed how seriously he took this affair, when he was ready to ask advice.

They had the rare luck to find the New House Scots junior alone. Not that anyone minded George Higgins and Fatty Wynn, his inseparable chums, with him at an ordinary time. But just now it did save time that those two should not be there, to ask questions and make remarks.

"We're all sure that young Levison didn't do it," Kerr said. "He's much too decent a kid. Besides, that was no kid's trick. It was done by somebody who really wanted to finish off old Selby. And that means that it wasn't done by anyone at St. Jim's, though goodness knows there are enough here who hate the old hunks! Glad it didn't happen to Ratty—they might have put it down to Figgy or me!"

"We know Frank didn't," said Clive. "But the evidence—"

"The evidence be hanged!" retorted Kerr.

"There's not a scrap of evidence against the kid that can be seen not to be against him at all directly you can fit the crime and some-

one else together. Nothing direct, I mean. The file was the worst, and now it turns out that Piggott supplied that!"

"But you don't think Piggott—"
"Pretty sure he didn't, Clive. I think he may know something, though."

"About the fellow who did it, by gad!" said Cardew. "That's my notion, too. And I carry suspicions a bit farther. A mysterious visitor for Piggott after the young sweep had begged off prep—dashed queer, that! Looks as if Piggy knew he was coming—eh?"

"I haven't heard about that," said Kerr, interested at once. "Let's have the yarn, Cardew."

Cardew told what he knew, and Kerr listened attentively.

They were getting near the heart of the mystery.

But Cardew was wrong in supposing that Piggott was in willing collusion with the man who had plotted against Mr. Selby's life. There was collusion in a sense; but Piggott had been forced into it by his fears. Until after it was done he had had no notion as to what was in the wind. His keeping dark his knowledge then was due to his fears of what the criminal might tell about him; while his attempt to incriminate Frank Levison was partly out of revenge, partly lest his own guilty share in the business should come out if the man were nabbed.

"You've got all you can from Taggles?" asked Kerr.

Cardew nodded.

"Then we must see what we can find out otherwise. There's Piggott, of course."

"Yaas, there's Piggott."

"And there's Selby himself; he ought to know if he has an enemy about."

"Dashed if I ever thought of that!"

"But he's made up his mind that it's Levison minor, and he's an obstinate old bouncer!" remarked Clive.

"He might change his mind if it could be made clear to him that the person owing him a grudge was able to get into St. Jim's, and had actually been here. And if that person was young Piggott's visitor—"

"My hat, Kerr, you do think things out!"

"Yaas, doesn't he Sidney? I take it, Kerr, old bean, that you are in this with us?"

"You may take it so, Cardew."

"Tha-anks! Tha-anks no end! Now, what about Levison minor?"

Kerr stared.

"Surely that yarn I've heard about you chaps having that kid hidden over there isn't true?" he said sharply.

"True as gospel, dear boy."

"My hat! You've got a nerve!"

"I haven't much left," confessed Clive.

"Frank may be bowled out any minute now. Some of our cads are on to it. I don't care much about the row myself, but the kid will feel it horribly if he's lugged out and sacked."

"He isn't safe there—that's a sure thing," answered Kerr. "Let me think for a moment!"

He turned and gazed out of the window for several minutes.

"I've got it," he said, swinging round on them with a gleam in his eyes. "We must smuggle him over here, that's all about it. I know of a hidey-hole here for him."

"You'd help us to do that, Kerr?"

"I guess so, Cardew. I like that kid; he's one of the best. And I like his major, too, though there was a time when I didn't. Figgy and Patty will help, too."

"But how's it to be done?" asked Clive.

"Leave that to me. Better you shouldn't know. I say, which of you fellows over there could lend a chap a biggish trunk?"

"Racke's got one half as big as a house," Clive said.

"Racke won't do. I wouldn't borrow anything from Racke, and he wouldn't lend me anything."

"Walkley's got a biggish one, too."

"Nunno, not Walkley. I don't know Walkley very well."

"There's Gussy—"

"It had better be a Shell chap, I think."

Cardew grinned; he understood. But Clive was quite mystified.

"Tom Merry," suggested Cardew, grinning. "That's the man! You wouldn't mind those three—"

"Blessed if I can make head or tail of this!" said Clive impatiently.

But Cardew whispered a word in his ear, and he understood.

"It shall be done, my lord!" said Cardew.

"When's the best time?"

"At once, I should say," Clive answered.

Kerr shook his head.

"The thing's got to be done when there aren't too many people about," he said.

"And it mustn't be done by any of us. I did think that Figgy or I could carry the trunk across, or that you might be able to do it—"

"Too dashed fatiguin' for me," drawled Cardew.

"But, either way, it would look too suspicious. Taggles had better do it."

"I say, Kerr, Taggles can't be trusted, you know."

"We're not going to trust him a yard. Somebody over here borrows a trunk from Tom Merry, and Taggles gets a bob for taking it across—simple enough. If it's done during dinner-time, no one will know anything about it."

"Taggy will groan and grumble about the weight of it," said Clive.

"He always does make a giddy fuss about the weight of things, so even if anyone hears him that won't matter. You can kid him that it's got something special inside for a joke. That will mean half-a-dollar instead of a bob. He must leave it inside the side-door over at our show, and Piggy and I will carry it up. You fellows will have to carry it down for him, I guess."

"Tommy and Manners will do that," said Cardew. "It will look suspicious if we lend a hand. Besides, it would make me dashed tired, y'know."

"And there's not a scrap of time to waste if it's to be done while we're at dinner," Clive said.

"Wait a moment! It had better be done just before afternoon classes," Kerr suggested. "Everybody's cleared out of our House then. I'll be last, and unlock the thing. Then— But there's no necessity to explain all that."

"Right-ho! Will you see Taggy?" answered Clive. "Better than us doing it. We'll get Talbot or Tommy to put the kid up to the game; they'll stand in all serene, I know."

Kerr made for the porter's lodge. Taggles, who was always to be bought at a price, rose to the idea of helping in a jape, and getting half-a-crown for his help. Taggles had very little interest in japes, but a very considerable interest in gin. And a half-crown to Taggles represented gin—though not much gin.

Meanwhile Racke & Co. had not been idle. They had despatched Mellish to listen at the door of Nobody's Study. He had come back with the tidings that the keyhole was blocked, presumably by a key in it, but he was sure he had heard sounds.

"It's no dashed good goin' to Railton," growled Crooke. "He went over to Wayland directly after classes, and he may not be back before half-past two."

"What about the Head?" asked Mellish.

"Are you willin' to go to him?" snarled Crooke.

"No; I'm blessed if I am! Or to Railton, either. I think I've done my bit."

Racke and Crooke looked at one another. They had hoped to make Mellish a tool for this revenge. Mellish wanted revenge himself, but he was not prepared to face the Head or the Housemaster to get it.

"Are you on, Crooke?"

"No dashed fear! Are you, Aubrey?"

"I'm not, by gad! See here, an anonymous letter's the dodge. Slip it under Railton's door. He's bound to get it some time this afternoon. An' if we steer clear of Nobody's Study they'll never guess that we've smelt a rat about that. It was pretty wide of young Piggott to tip you the wink as to where the little sweep is, Mellish."

"Piggy's playing his own game, you bet," said Mellish charitably.

Racke sat down and composed the anonymous letter. He wrote it in printed characters on a sheet of exercise-paper, so that detection of the writer's identity seemed impossible. Mellish undertook to thrust it under the Housemaster's door, and did so.

And while they were at this congenial work Talbot, who had been taken into the secret as well as the Terrible Three, slipped into Nobody's Study and had a little talk with Frank Levison.

Racke and Crooke were lounging outside the School House when Taggles came puffing up with a wheelbarrow, a few minutes before classes.

"What's up, Taggles?" queried Crooke.

"Which I've come for a trunk, Master Crooke."

"Whose? Oh, I know! I suppose they're sendin' that little cad Levison's clobber home—eh?"

And Crooke nudged his chum and chuckled.

"Which I says is this 'ere, Master Crooke—least said soonest mended, an' mindin' a party's own business ain't 'ari a bad move for any party. Ah! The trunk's 'ere, I see."

Taggles, growling on, went in, and at that moment the bell for afternoon classes rang. Racke and Crooke departed without suspicion that the contents of that trunk contained not only some of Levison minor's clobber, but Levison minor wearing it!

"Aren't you coming, Kerr?" called Figgy to his chum at the side-door of the New House. "We shall be late, you know!"

"Don't you wait, Figgy! I've got to settle up with Taggles. Here comes the old slow-coach, I see. Trot along!"

Figgy and Patty Wynn went. Kerr waited, helped Taggles to lift the trunk inside the door, paid him his fee, and unlocked the trunk as he went off.

"I must do a bunk!" he whispered. "But the coast is clear, kid. Shin up to our study, and stay there till we come in."

He bolted. Frank Levison slipped out of the trunk and hurried upstairs.

"Come with me!" ordered Mr. Railton at the door of Study No. 9 on the Fourth passage.

Levison major, Cardew, and Clive followed him. He led the way without further comment round the corner into the Shell quarters, went straight to Nobody's Study, thrust a key into the lock, turned it, and threw open the door.

Then he gasped.

For Nobody's Study was empty!

He turned upon the three. For a moment he seemed at a loss what to say. Then his eyes fell upon a few crumbs on the floor. Everything Frank had used had been carried away in secret, but those crumbs had been overlooked.

"Levison," said Mr. Railton sternly, "I have received information that your brother was hidden here. That he is not here I see; but I think there is no doubt he has been here. Where is he now?"

"That I can't tell you, sir."

"Do you mean that you refuse, or that you do not know?"

"I don't know exactly. If I did—well, yes, I should refuse!"

Mr. Railton looked hard at Cardew and Clive. Cardew's face was bland, Clive's dogged. The master knew that he would get nothing from them.

"Very well!" he snapped. "I must see the Head about this. What view he will take of it I cannot say. I hardly know what view to take of it myself. But you, Levison, are obviously guilty of insubordination, and I cannot hold your friends innocent."

"We're as much in it as Levison, sir," said Clive.

"Rather more, I should say!" added Cardew.

Mr. Railton did not understand that, and he would not argue. He waved them out of the deserted study, locked the door, and strode away.

"We've got you into a jolly fine mess, Ernest!" said Clive.

"No, you haven't! You've backed me up like real good pals, and I begin to see daylight now."

Cardew slapped him on the back.

"Trust to Kerr an' me to solve this mystery, and to give the beaks a mystery, a puzzle, to solve while we're on this one. We say—who killed Cock Robin? I should say—who set out to kill poor old Selby? They say—where's Levison minor? Theirs is the easiest one, really; but I fancy we'll get the answer first!"

THE END.

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