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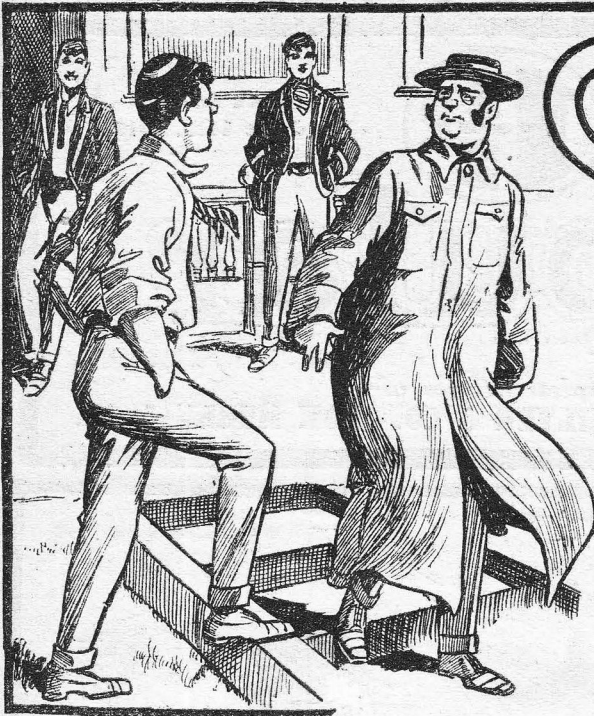
No. 21.  
New Series.

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



**"AM I IN TIME, SIR?"**

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



# Champions of ESSEX!

A Grand Story of a Brilliant  
New Series, dealing with the  
Adventures of the Boys of  
Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

### Trouble in the Form-room!

"DUTTON!"

The voice of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, was like the rumble of thunder.

Mr. Quelch's eyes—which the juniors usually compared to gimlets, on account of their penetrating powers—were fixed sternly upon Tom Dutton, the deaf junior.

"Dutton, you were talking!"

"Impossible, sir!" said Dutton.

"What?"

"I've been sitting here all the time, sir. How could I possibly be walking?"

Mr. Quelch gasped.

"I said 'talking,' you stupid fellow——"

"Well, if you want to bellow, sir," said Dutton, "go ahead! Never mind me. If you'd like to relieve your feelings at all——"

Mr. Quelch breathed hard.

"Dutton! I have a good mind to cane you——"

The deaf junior shrank back in his seat. He was pale and trembling.

The rest of the fellows could not quite understand this, for Dutton wasn't the sort of fellow who funked a caning.

"Why are you shrinking from me in that ridiculous fashion?" demanded Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, I know you're in a passion, sir," said Dutton. "You threatened to brain me! That shows you must be awfully waxy, sir."

An irrepressible ripple of laughter went up from the class.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence, boys!" rapped out Mr. Quelch.

And then, raising his voice to a roar, the Remove-master continued to cross-examine Tom Dutton.

"You were talking to Ogilvy, Dutton!"

"Yes, sir," said Dutton, meekly.

"What were you saying to him?"

"Eh?"

"What was the import of your conversation?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! I—I asked Ogilvy what he thought of my pen-and-ink sketch, sir."

"You have been wasting your time in drawing an absurd sketch!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"I'm not a wretch, sir!" said Dutton warmly.

Mr. Quelch began to mop his brow.

He was a very patient man, as a rule, where Tom Dutton was concerned.

In view of the junior's affliction, Mr. Quelch gave him an easier time in class than the majority of the fellows had.

But he could not overlook the fact that Dutton had been chatting to Ogilvy, and, on

his own confession, executing a pen-and-ink sketch.

Mr. Quelch turned again to Tom Dutton.

"Bring that drawing here!" he commanded.

"And a jolly good thing, too!" said Tom Dutton.

"What!"

"It's ripping to know that the end of lessons is drawing near!"

"Oh, dear!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

He felt that he could not stand much more of this.

Striding forward, the Form-master picked up the work of art which lay on the desk in front of Dutton.

Then Mr. Quelch gave a jump.

Tom Dutton had drawn an elaborate cartoon of his Form-master.

Mr. Quelch had no doubt as to whom the drawing was supposed to represent, for underneath appeared the words:

"QUELCHY ON THE WAR-PATH!"

The Remove-master compressed his lips.

"Whilst I admit that this is a wonderful work of art, Dutton," he said, "I must check this very dangerous hobby of yours. You will hold out your hand!"

"Don't you, sir?" said Dutton, in surprise.

"Boy!"

"If you don't understand, I'll soon explain," said the deaf junior. "That picture's meant to represent you, sir. I haven't quite finished the eyebrows——"

Mr. Quelch fairly exploded.

"Hold out your hand at once!" he roared.

"Oh, crumbs!"

Tom Dutton reluctantly obeyed.

Swish, swish, swish!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Now tear that absurd drawing up, and throw it into the wastepaper-basket!"

Tom Dutton obeyed, and returned to his place.

After this little eruption was over, morning lessons proceeded fairly smoothly.

But there was something in the atmosphere which suggested that the storm would burst with renewed violence before long.

The Remove found it very difficult to concentrate on their work—particularly the twelve juniors who were shortly to proceed on a sporting tour to Essex.

The tour was to commence next day, and it was not surprising that Vernon-Smith & Co. felt disinclined for work.

Ogilvy was the next junior to be caught napping.

The Scottish junior rather fancied himself as a poet.

He was scribbling away industriously when Mr. Quelch's gimlet eyes singled him out.

"Ogilvy!"

"Ye-es, sir?"

"What are you doing?"

"Writing, sir."

"I am aware of that. What are you writing?"

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Ogilvy.

There was no time to conceal the poem under the desk.

Ogilvy was fairly caught.

Mr. Quelch swooped down upon him like a hawk, and snatched up the incriminating document.

The first verse caused the Form-master's eyes to bulge out of his head.

"I do not love thee, Quelchy dear.

The reason why is pretty clear.

Because your methods are severe.

I do not love thee, Quelchy dear!"

"Ogilvy! This is gross impertinence——"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"You have dared to libel your Form-master in this reprehensible manner?"

"I didn't mean you to take it seriously, sir."

But Mr. Quelch, when he read the second verse, could hardly take it otherwise.

"Your countenance is like a boot.

It causes us to swiftly scoot.

Your eyes, like gimlets, pierce and peer,

We do not love them, Quelchy dear!"

Mr. Quelch looked for a moment as if he were on the verge of an apoplectic fit.

"Ogilvy!"

"Yes, sir?"

"I am astounded that you should make such insulting references to me—your Form-master!"

"They're not insulting, really, sir," said Ogilvy. "It's just a little joke."

"Then I, too, will enjoy a little joke!" said Mr. Quelch grimly. "Hold out your hand!"

And the amateur poet received a licking, compared with which Tom Dutton's had been a picnic.

"There!" panted Mr. Quelch, as he laid down the cane. "I will see if I can restore some sort of order in the Form-room. I have seldom known my class to be so unruly as it is this morning."

Bulstrode was the next offender.

From his seat in the back row Bulstrode happened to get a good glimpse of Billy Bunter, who occupied one of the front seats.

Bulstrode saw a fly settle on the back of Billy Bunter's head. A mischievous impulse urged him to take aim with a paper pellet.

Bulstrode did so.



Unfortunately, however, his aim was a little erratic.

The paper pellet sailed over Billy Bunter's head, and, making a bee-line for the Form-master's desk, struck Mr. Quelch fairly and squarely on the chin.

There was a gasp from the class.

"That's done it!" murmured Vernon-Smith. It had!

Mr. Quelch sprang to his feet with a brow like thunder.

"Who—who did that?" he exclaimed.

"I did, sir!" said Bulstrode.

Mr. Quelch could scarcely believe his ears. "You deliberately hurled a missile at me, Bulstrode?" he exclaimed.

"Nunno, sir! It was intended for Billy Bunter, but it somehow missed fire!"

"So you have nothing better to do than to throw paper pellets about in the Form-room, Bulstrode?"

"I—I couldn't resist that one, sir!"

"Very well. This is the third time I have had trouble this morning. I will endeavour to teach you a lesson. I shall prevail upon the headmaster to cancel the forthcoming sports tour to Essex!"

"Oh!"

"My only aunt!"

Vernon-Smith was on his feet in an instant. "You can't mean that, sir?" he said breathlessly.

"I do mean it, Vernon-Smith. I will not tolerate this outrageous behaviour in class!"

"But—but we've made all arrangements for the tour, sir!" gasped the Bounder.

"I cannot help that, Vernon-Smith. I am determined to preserve law and order in my class, and to cancel the tour seems to be the most effective way."

"Shame!"

"Who said that?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch angrily.

"I did, sir!"

Dick Rake's voice rang out fearlessly.

"You will take five hundred lines, Rake!"

"Oh!"

"You may sit down, Vernon-Smith—"

"But about that tour, sir!" said the Bounder desperately. "Can't you punish us in some other way, sir—"

"How dare you presume to teach me my duty, Vernon-Smith? Sit down!"

And the Bounder sat.

For the rest of the morning a cloud hung over the Remove.

The sword of Damocles had descended, with a vengeance!

Mr. Quelch could not have chosen a more cutting punishment.

The tour of the English counties, which Harry Wharton & Co. and Vernon-Smith & Co. undertook on alternate weeks, had been progressing merrily.

Harry Wharton & Co. had visited Lancashire, Vernon-Smith & Co. had put up a very good show against Surrey, and Harry Wharton & Co. had then met the boys of Kent in a series of sporting contests.

It was now the turn of Vernon-Smith & Co. to travel down to Southend, in order to meet—and, if possible, defeat—the boys of Essex.

But the fiat had gone forth, and the tour was "off!"

Not for one moment had the juniors suspected that Mr. Quelch would take so drastic a step.

Had they suspected it, they would have been as good as gold.

But there was still a faint chance that Mr. Quelch would think better of it as the morning advanced.

There were no more disturbances in class; and the juniors hoped that Mr. Quelch would stay his hand.

But their hopes were ill-founded.

After dinner that day, the following announcement, dramatic in its simple brevity and directness, appeared on the school notice-board:

"The Remove's tour to Essex is cancelled.

(Signed) HERBERT H. LOCKE,

"Headmaster."

"This is where we weep tears of blood!" said Peter Todd. "Fancy old Quelch being such a giddy Tartar!"

"It's beastly!" said Dick Penfold. "I was feeling in topping form, too!"

"I suppose it's no use sending a petition to the Head, asking him to reconsider his decision?" suggested Dick Russell.

"Not a scrap!" said Vernon-Smith. "It's jolly awful; but we shall have to grin and bear it!"

And the Removites accordingly made up their minds to bear it—though it was not so easy to grin!

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### The Usurpers.

"IT'S up to us!" Blundell of the Fifth uttered the remark with great emphasis. He and Bland were having tea in their study—a substantial tea, for the captain of the Fifth was in funds.

"What's up to us?" asked Bland drowsily. "Why, to take on this merry tour, of course!"

"What!"

"Why should the Remove kids be allowed to bag all the privileges? They only abuse them. It's high time the Fifth took a hand."

"But—"

"There's no earthly reason why we shouldn't go down to Essex, now that the Head has cancelled the Remove's tour," said Blundell. "A team of Fifth-Formers would perform a jolly sight better than the Remove; and a week's outing isn't to be sniffed at!"

"True, O King!" said Bland. "But I don't quite see—"

"You never do!" said Blundell scathingly. "You're as blind as a blessed bat! All we've got to do is to put the matter nicely to old Prout, and get him to take it to the Head."

"Do you think the Head would agree?"

"Like a shot! He knows the Fifth can be trusted to give a good account of themselves."

"By Jove!" said Bland. "I'm beginning to think you're right, old man!"

"Only just beginning!" scoffed Blundell. "From your past experience of me, you ought to know that I'm always right. Look here, you might step along and ask Hilton and Tomlinson and Fitzgerald to come in and see me. We'll see what they've got to say about the idea."

In a few moments several sturdy Fifth-Formers stamped into Blundell's study.

"Faith, an' what's it all about?" asked Fitzgerald.

Blundell explained.

"We've got a golden opportunity of a week's holiday!" he said. "As you know, the Remove's tour to Essex has been knocked on the head; and I don't see why the Fifth shouldn't fill the breach!"

"My hat!" said Hilton. "Do you really think—"

"Of course I do!" snapped Blundell. "If I didn't, this glorious, gilt-edged eighteen-carat idea would never have seen the light of day! What do you say to putting it to old Prout, and getting him to tackle the Head?"

"There's just one thing," said Tomlinson.

"Well?"

"If this stunt works out all right, we shall have to keep Coker out of it. Coker would wreck the whole show. No team, however brilliant, could hope to win a match if Coker were playing for them. He's always worth a clear hundred runs to the opposition."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By Jove, I hadn't thought of that!" said Blundell. "Of course, he will want a place in the team."

"He'll want more than that," said Bland. "He'll want to skipper the side."

"Oh, will he?" growled Blundell. "Then I rather fancy he'll be disappointed!"

"Hadn't you better go along and see Prout at once?" suggested Hilton.

Blundell nodded.

"I'm going now," he said.

Mr. Prout was engaged in the task—the dangerous task—of cleaning his Winchester repeater.

Blundell gave an involuntary shudder as he entered the Form-master's study.

That repeater repeated a good deal too much for the personal comfort of most people.

"Ah! Come in Blundell!" said Mr. Prout. "Why do you hesitate?"

"I—I— Was I hesitating, sir?"

"Yes, you were!" snapped Mr. Prout.

The reason for Blundell's hesitation was obvious to Blundell himself, if not to Mr. Prout.

The master of the Fifth was cleaning his rifle, without knowing whether it was loaded or not!

"You wish to speak to me, Blundell?" said Mr. Prout.

"Yes, sir," said Blundell, advancing gingerly into the study. "As you are aware, the Remove have been deprived of their tour to Essex. I was thinking that the Fifth might take on the job, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

"You see, we're far superior to the Remove in every branch of sport, and we should make a big success of the affair, sir."

"But think of the valuable Form-room tuition you would miss—"

"We would work twice as hard when we got back, sir."

"Ahem!" murmured Mr. Prout, rubbing away industriously at his rifle. "I am rather glad you mentioned this little matter to me, Blundell. As a matter of fact, I am not averse to taking a week's holiday myself. The bracing air of the East Coast would be beneficial to my rather overwrought constitution. I will speak to Dr. Locke on the subject, Blundell."

"Oh, good, sir!"

"Of course, Coker will be the leader of the expedition?"

"Ahem! I—I wasn't thinking of including Coker at all, sir."

"But he is an excellent sportsman!"

Blundell chuckled.

"Do not laugh at me, Blundell!"

"Ah—no, sir!" gasped Blundell, jumping quickly out of range as Mr. Prout inadvertently levelled the Winchester repeater at him.

"If I know anything about boys," said Mr. Prout, "Coker is an ideal leader. I do not suggest for one moment that he should be captain of the Form, Blundell. In class, I find Coker somewhat dull of intelligence. But so far as sport is concerned, I certainly think Coker should take the lead. In fact, I shall only give my consent to the tour on the express condition that Coker captains the side."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"It strikes me, Blundell," said Mr. Prout severely, "that you and your friends are inclined to be down on Coker. He seems to be boycotted. This absurd nonsense must cease!"

"But—but you don't understand, sir!" faltered Blundell. "Coker's a hopeless duffer, and—"

"Silence, Blundell! I—"

Bang!

There was a terrific report in Mr. Prout's study, followed by the shattering of glass.

"Oh dear!" gasped Mr. Prout. "What ever has happened?"

"Your—your rifle was loaded, sir!" said Blundell reproachfully.

"Bless my soul! I cannot understand why that should be so. I trust no damage has been done."

When the atmosphere had cleared a little, Mr. Prout saw that a pane of glass in the window had been smashed to smithereens, and the fragments had clattered down into the Close.

There was a quick footstep in the passage, and Mr. Quelch looked in.

"What ever is the matter, Prout? I distinctly heard a sound like that of a firearm being discharged!"

"It is of no consequence," said Mr. Prout, turning a flushed face to his colleague.

"I wish you would be more careful, Prout! It is my constant fear that you will one day cause a fatality in this school!"

"Nonsense!" snapped Mr. Prout.

And he turned again to the task of cleaning his rifle.

Mr. Quelch hesitated on the threshold, as if he were about to make a slashing verbal attack on the master of the Fifth.

But he realised that it would not be judicious to make a scene in front of Blundell; and, with a final glare at Mr. Prout, the Remove-master withdrew.

"You will speak to the Head about our tour, sir?" said Blundell, anxious to get away before Mr. Prout caused any further trouble.

"Yes, yes! I have no doubt it will be all right, Blundell. I shall come to Southend in charge of the party; and Coker will act as captain throughout the sports."

"Very well, sir."

And Blundell departed, to break the news to his chums.

It was a strange mixture of good news and bad.

It was good to know that the Fifth would probably be allowed to undertake the tour.

It was heartrending to know that Horace Coker was to take command.

Even Potter and Greene, Coker's two study-mates, saw that Coker's leadership would spell disaster.

"There's only one thing for it," said Bland desperately.

"Namely?" said Blundell.

"We must get rid of Coker."

"My hat! Do you mean kidnap him?"

"Not exactly. But we might manage to put him in the wrong train, or something. It's easily done."

"Whatever happens," said Hilton, "we must make the Remove look small by winning every event against those Essex fellows! If

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we do that, the chances are that we shall be allowed to take on all the future tours."

"That would be ripping!" said Tomblinson.

Late that evening another announcement appeared on the school notice-board—an announcement which provoked great rejoicing in the Fifth, and great consternation in the Remove.

#### "NOTICE!"

"The series of sporting contests against the boys of Essex will duly commence to-morrow.

"The Remove have been forbidden to participate, and their place will be taken by twelve members of the Fifth Form.

"Mr. Prout will be in charge of the party.

"(Signed) HERBERT H. LOCKE,  
"Headmaster."

"That's adding insult to injury!" growled Peter Todd. "It's bad enough to be forbidden to go on tour; but to let the Fifth take our places is—"

"Sheer Bolshevism!" said Morgan.

"Exactly!"

"In the words of the poet, something will have to be done about it," said Dick Penfold.

"But what?"

"That, as the immortal Hamlet said, was the question.

The high-handed action of the authorities in sending the Fifth on tour in place of the Remove aroused intense anger among Vernon-Smith & Co.

But they could do nothing.

To run away from school for the purpose of taking part in the sports was too wild an idea to be entertained for a single moment.

And, after holding various meetings and councils of war, the Removites decided that there was nothing for it but to bow their heads to the inevitable.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### Getting Rid of Coker!

"SHAKE a leg, you slackers!"

"Yaw-aw-aw!"

"Tumble out—sharp!" said Coker. The Fifth-Formers sat up in bed and blinked sleepily at Coker.

"You silly chump!" roared Blundell. "It's only five o'clock! What do you want to wake us up in the middle of the night for?"

"Practice!" said Coker briefly.

"What sort of practice, fathead?"

"Well, you're going to have a dip in the Sark first; then we're going for a gentle sprint of six miles or so; after which, we shall put in an hour at the nets."

"Speak for yourself!" growled Hilton. "Dashed if I'm going to turn out! You must be off your rocker!"

Coker scowled.

"Any fellow who fails to turn out," he said, "will be liable to be chucked out of the team!"

"My hat!"

"I mean business, mind!" said Coker. "I'm bossing the show, and I'm not going to have any slacking. Do you want a sponge squeezed over your ugly chivvy, George Potter?"

"Nunno!" said Potter hastily.

"Well, get a move on, then!"

Reluctantly, the Fifth-Formers turned out. It exasperated them to have to take orders from a clown like Coker; but they either had to submit or run the risk of being banished from the team.

It was a very sleepy procession that made its way to the shining waters of the Sark. True, it was summer-time. But five o'clock in the morning in summer is sometimes suggestive of November.

A chilly breeze blew across the river.

The Fifth-Formers shivered as they undressed.

"Coker, you chump—"

"Coker, you prize idiot—"

"Coker, you boot-faced candidate for Hanwell—"

"That's enough!" said Coker imperiously. "If I have any more of your cheek I shall come down heavy!"

"Grog!" gasped Blundell, as he came to the surface after taking a header from the bank. "It's like a blessed refrigerator!"

Potter and Greene plunged in the next moment, and their faces turned blue with cold.

"Aren't you kik-kik-coming in, Coker?" said Potter, with chattering teeth.

"No fear!"

"What!" roared Hilton. "You're making all this fuss, and yet you're not going in yourself?"

"Why should I?" said Coker. "I'm here to see that you fellows get some practice. I don't need any myself."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Finished already?" asked Coker, as Blundell crawled out on to the bank.

"Yes!" grunted Blundell. "I'm not giving an exhibition of an Arctic explorer just now."

Within a few minutes the bathers had all had enough.

They towelled themselves briskly on the bank.

"Now for the gentle sprint!" said Coker, when his Form-fellows had finished dressing.

"Look here—" began Blundell.

"Don't argue! You may be Form-captain, Blundell, but I'm in charge of this tour. Old Prout's shown some real savvy for once."

Blundell and the others exchanged grim glances.

They felt like bundling Horace Coker, clothes and all, into the river.

But they controlled themselves with an effort.

After all, perhaps they would succeed in getting rid of Coker later on.

The six-mile sprint was endured in silence. Running was one of Coker's few accomplishments.

On one memorable occasion he had finished first in a Marathon race.

He ran awkwardly and heavily, lurching from side to side like a Tank, but he certainly got over the ground.

When the run was over Coker directed operations at the nets.

It was more than flesh and blood could stand to take orders from Coker, whose own cricket was of the kind which neither gods nor men permit.

How Blundell & Co. managed to restrain themselves from bumping Coker they never knew.

Shortly after breakfast the tour commenced.

A number of fellows saw the Fifth-Formers off at the gates.

But Vernon-Smith & Co. did not venture forth to wish them luck. They felt too sick at the whole sorry business.

Vernon-Smith was a sound sportsman, and so were Peter Todd and the others, but they could not sincerely wish Blundell & Co. the best of luck.

They felt that the Fifth had stolen a march on them.

They regarded Mr. Prout as an interloper.

The Fifth-Formers, escorted by Mr. Prout, proceeded by train from Friardale to Courtfield, where a change was necessary.

There a train was running right through from Courtfield to Southend.

Mr. Prout stepped into it, as also did Potter and Greene, and several others.

Blundell and Bland, however, remained behind with Coker.

They were leading him, although he did not know it, to the wrong train!

"Which is our platform?" asked Coker, who had not seen Mr. Prout and the others board the train.

"This way, old chap!" said Blundell.

Having decoyed Coker to the wrong platform, they bundled him into the train which was waiting there, and then stepped in after him.

"Where are the others?" asked Coker.

"Up in front, I expect!" said Bland carelessly.

"This train's just going to start!" said Coker, noting the guard about to wave his flag.

"So it is, by Jove!" said Blundell. "I must nip out and get some chocolates while there's time!"

"Same here!" said Bland. "Excuse me a jiffy, Coker."

"There isn't time, you silly asses—" began Coker.

And then the train began to glide out of the platform.

"The precious pair of idiots!" muttered Coker. "They've gone and missed the train now! That's just like Blundell!"

"So far no suspicion had begun to dawn upon Coker.

The great Horace fondly imagined that the whole party, with the exception of Blundell and Bland, were in one of the front carriages.

It was not until the train flashed through a station that Coker began to grow alarmed.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I thought I saw Rochester!"

The train flashed on through the sunny fields, gathering speed as it went.

And then, after a few more stations had been passed, the awful truth dawned upon Coker.

He was in a non-stop to Folkestone!

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Coker. "I've been fairly done this journey!"

He had!

The train did not slow up until it reached the Central Station at Folkestone.

Blundell and Bland had, of course, boarded the correct train, and it was not until Southend was reached that Mr. Prout noted the absence of Coker.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "Does anyone know where Coker is?"

Blundell and Bland made a point of not hearing that question.

"This is extraordinary!" murmured Mr. Prout. "We cannot possibly play the cricket-match against the Essex boys until Coker arrives!"

"We shall get on tons better without Coker, sir!" said Hilton.

"Be silent, Hilton! We will proceed to our hotel, and wait there until Coker puts in an appearance."

The Fifth-Formers groaned.

Their little plot to get rid of Coker was not of much avail, after all.

So great was Mr. Prout's faith in Coker that he did not intend to make a start with the sports until the mighty Horace turned up.

The party proceeded along the High Street, and the fresh wind of the sea beat into their faces.

They turned off into the Marine Parade, where Mr. Prout had booked rooms at an hotel.

The master of the Fifth left instructions with one of the railway officials to direct Coker to the hotel on his arrival.

Meanwhile, the Essex boys had turned up on the cricket-ground near Prittlewell, and were waiting for the arrival of the Greyfriars fellows.

They did not have to wait very long.

It so happened that Coker, being in funds, had chartered a car to convey him from Folkestone to Southend.

The railway official was unable to deliver his message; but, fortunately, Coker caught sight of Mr. Prout taking a stroll on the Eastern Esplanade, and he promptly jumped out of the car.

"Am I in time, sir?"

Mr. Prout frowned.

"You are late, Coker! Why did you not come here by train, in the orthodox manner?"

"Ahem!"

Horace Coker, although a duffer, and a dunce—and many other things besides—was the soul of honour.

He would not have given his schoolfellows away for worlds.

"I—I rather fancied a car-ride, sir," he said.

"You should have asked my permission in the first instance!" said Mr. Prout. "However, you are here, and that is all that matters. I will summon the others, and we will proceed to the cricket-ground."

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"You should have asked my permission in the first instance!" said Mr. Prout. "However, you are here, and that is all that matters. I will summon the others, and we will proceed to the cricket-ground."

"Ahem!"

Horace Coker, although a duffer, and a dunce—and many other things besides—was the soul of honour.

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Bang! There was a terrific report in Mr. Prout's study, followed by the shattering of glass. "Oh, dear!" gasped Mr. Prout. "What ever has happened?" (See page 3.)

**THE FOURTH CHAPTER.  
Not a Success.**

**C**OKER took the first ball. As a rule, the first ball took Coker—or, rather, Coker's wicket. But on this occasion, the great Horace managed to get his bat in the way, and the ball trickled towards point. "Come on!" yelled Coker, plunging down the pitch. "No—go back!" hissed Blundell. "There's no run there, ass!" But Coker came charging down like a wolf on the fold, so to speak. Blundell, in desperation, started to run. He was too late. Point whipped up the ball and hurled it in. "How's that?" "I regret to say that Blundell is run out!" said Mr. Prout. Blundell glared at Coker as if he would eat him. "You prize maniac! There wasn't the ghost of a chance there!" "Look here—" began Coker. "Oh, dry up! You want pulverising!" "Silence, Blundell!" rapped out Mr. Prout. "I will not have such opprobrious expressions used on the field of play! Go back to the pavilion at once!" And Blundell went, breathing threatenings and slaughter. "Rough luck!" said Bland, as he passed on his way to the wicket. "Coker again!" growled Blundell. "Mind your eye!" Bland kept his end up for a few moments, and then Coker did unto him as he had done unto Blundell. Bland was run out by yards; and he felt like braining Coker with his bat. The Essex boys chuckled gaily. They had anticipated a big uphill struggle.

Instead of which they were being treated to a pantomime. Coker stayed at the wickets exactly ten minutes—which was quite a record for him. During that time he had managed to score 2 runs. How he did it he could not have explained himself. And then Merton, bowling swiftly and surely, shattered Coker's middle-stump. Mr. Prout looked sympathetic. "I rather fear, Coker," he said, "that you are—er—slightly out!" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the fieldsmen. "Of course, sir," said Coker, turning to go. "I had to give these kids a bit of encouragement." "Quite so," said Mr. Prout. Coker walked back to the pavilion amid the ironical cheers of his schoolfellows. The telegraph-board registered 3 runs for three wickets—last man, 2! "A pretty mess you've landed us in!" said Blundell, scowling at Coker. "You've absolutely scotched our chances!" "Rats! And, look here, George Blundell, just you stop criticising your skipper!" "Br-r-r!" The fellows who followed on fared badly. They had been given a bad start, and, with Coker in the team, all their enthusiasm had been damped. They scratched an occasional single, and that was all. The Friars were eventually dismissed for the anything but grand total of 20. This was bad enough. But worse remained behind. Merton and Terry opened the Essex innings. They found Blundell a very difficult bowler to deal with. But Coker, at the other end, sent down balls which fairly pleaded to be driven to the boundary. The score rose apace.

Thanks to Coker, the boys of Essex were enabled to do pretty much as they liked. Under the hot sun, the Fifth-Formers chafed and writhed. They began to wish that they had never started on the tour. With Coker in the team they wouldn't stand an earthly. And to be licked by fellows smaller than themselves— How could they possibly face their schoolfellows when they got back? "It's awful!" groaned Hilton, as one of the Essex batsmen smote a miserable delivery of Coker's clean out of the ground. "We shall never hear the end of this!" growled Tomlinson. "Faith, an' I feel like slaughtering Coker, entirely!" said Fitzgerald. Essex were all out at last, with a score of 226. Coker had not taken a single wicket; and over 150 runs had been scored off his bowling! "Now, buck up, you fellows!" said Coker, lecturing his men as they returned to the pavilion. "You've been putting up a very poor show. I refer particularly to you, Blundell!" "Why, you—you—" stuttered Blundell. "It's necessary that we should all pull together, for the sake of the school!" Coker went on. "I don't want to skipper a team of slackers!" It was lucky for Coker that Mr. Prout happened to be hovering near, or his fed-up schoolfellows would certainly have smitten him hip and thigh. Rather a big crowd had collected on the ground when the Friars opened their second innings. The spectators could scarcely conceal their disgust at the sorry show the Greyfriars fellows were putting up. They wanted Essex to win, of course; but there was nothing exciting in a complete walk-over.

Blundell managed to start off in style for Greyfriars.

He hit two 4's and a 6—rather recklessly, for Blundell was feeling reckless.

And then Coker, in his own inimitable manner, caused his Form-fellow to be run out for the second time.

"Really, Blundell," observed Mr. Prout, "you seem to be performing very badly!"

Blundell's self-control was in rags.

"How can I help it," he hooted, "when I've got a dashed fog like that for a partner?"

And he pointed savagely at Coker.

"Blundell!" gasped Mr. Prout. "You forget yourself, sir—"

"Oh, rats!" growled the incensed Blundell. And he strode back to the pavilion, chopping off the heads of dandelions as he went.

The hopes of the Friars—if they had ever had any hopes—were dead and buried now.

Coker's presence in the team spoilt everything.

To give Blundell and the others credit, they could have defeated the boys of Essex on their own.

With Coker's assistance, however, they could hardly have defeated a team of white mice.

Hilton and Potter each put up a plucky innings; but the Friars were all out at length for 50.

The boys of Essex had defeated them by an innings and 158 runs.

As the Fifth-Formers left the field, the crowd hooted them.

"Yah!"

"Call that cricket?"

"Why don't you bring your boys up to play properly, you goggle-eyed old gaffer?"

Mr. Prout passed on with burning cheeks.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "Was that insulting epithet intended for me, I wonder?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Some of the fellows could not help laughing, even in that moment of defeat.

"Really," said Mr. Prout, "this is too bad! I am sure that Harry Wharton and the others fared better in Lancashire, and that Vernon-Smith's party put up a good fight against Surrey. Why is it, I wonder, that my own Form has failed so completely?"

"The reason," said Blundell, "may be summed up in one word, sir—"

"Name!"

"Coker!"

Mr. Prout glared at Blundell.

"That is a most ungenerous statement to make, Blundell," he said. "Coker has worked hard all the afternoon. He bowled untriflingly, and his batting would have left nothing to be desired had there been somebody to back him up. Unfortunately, the rest of you were weak—woefully weak!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"To-morrow," said Mr. Prout. "The swimming contests will take place. I hope to see a big improvement."

The Fifth-Formers groaned.

Coker would, of course, insist upon being a member of the swimming team. And this would mean another victory for Essex.

After a bath and a square meal at their hotel, Blundell & Co. brightened up a little.

They spent the evening in a visit to the Kursaal, which they greatly enjoyed.

It was late when they returned to their hotel.

They found Mr. Prout in the lounge, in a very distracted state.

"My boys," he exclaimed, "I have been the victim of a dastardly attack!"

"Sir!"

"I was walking by the shore in the twilight," said Mr. Prout poetically, "when a couple of evilly-disposed persons set upon me from behind, and, whilst one held me down, the other rifled my pockets!"

"My hat!"

"The money which was to pay for the expenses of this tour has been stolen!"

"Great Scott!"

"I am sick of the whole sorry business!" said Mr. Prout wearily. "I regret I ever volunteered to conduct such a tour. We will spend the night here, and return to Greyfriars by an early train in the morning."

"Oh, my aunt!"

"You—you must be mad, sir!" exclaimed Coker.

"Coker! How dare you suggest to your Form-master that he is of unsound mind!"

"But—but we shall look such asses, sir—"

"Enough, Coker! My mind is made up! This tour has been disastrous from the beginning. I am sorry I yielded to Blundell's suggestion in the first place. We will return to Greyfriars in the morning."

"Oh, crumbs!"

Most of the fellows didn't mind very much.

They could not have hoped to win a single event, with Coker spoiling everything.

Coker himself was the only person who was really upset by the sudden turn events had taken.

And he was more upset still when, before retiring for the night, his Form-fellows bumped him soundly and repeatedly on the floor of his bed-room.

The Fifth were fed up with their temporary leader.

And it was a sadder, if not wiser, Coker who crawled between the sheets that night, at the end of a far from perfect day!

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### The Remove Take a Hand.

EARLY next morning Mr. Prout rang up Dr. Locke of Greyfriars on the telephone.

The Head had just entered his study when the 'phone rang.

He took up the receiver, with an exclamation of annoyance.

"Really, this is too bad!" he murmured. "If people wish to speak to me on the telephone, why cannot they choose a more convenient time? Hallo!"

"Hallo! Is that Dr. Locke?"

"Yes!"

"Prout speaking, sir."

"Oh, yes, Prout!"

"I have some news to impart to you, Dr. Locke—"

"Splendid! Our boys won the cricket match, I presume?"

There was a short from the other end of the wires.

"The cricket match, sir," said Mr. Prout, "was a failure—a ghastly, dismal failure!"

"Bless my soul!"

"So much so, sir, that we were mocked by the mob! I myself was subjected to bitter insults, sir!"

"Dear me!"

"As if this were not enough," continued Mr. Prout, in a strangled voice, "I was set upon late last evening by two ruffians, who dispossessed me of the funds which were in my possession."

"My dear Prout—"

"Had my Winchester repeater been handy, I should have winged them, sir! I might even have shot to kill! They were very desperate ruffians, and—"

"What do you propose to do, Prout?"

"It is my intention, sir, to return to Greyfriars at once. I do not feel equal to the task of conducting a tour of this description."

"I can despatch to you some more money if—"

"Of which I should probably be robbed this evening!" said Mr. Prout. "No, sir! I refuse to run the risk of being molested again by footpads! We are returning to Greyfriars by the train reaching Friardale at nine-thirty."

"Very well, Prout."

The Head replaced the receiver on its hooks.

As he did so Mr. Quelch entered.

"Is anything the matter, sir?" he asked, noting the Head's troubled look.

"Something is very much the matter, Quelch. Prout has decided to abandon the tour he was conducting in Essex."

"For what reason, sir?"

"He appears to have met with a chapter of accidents. The cricket match ended disastrously for Greyfriars, and Prout was subsequently attacked by a couple of ruffians, who appropriated his money."

"How very unfortunate!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Can you suggest what steps should now be taken, Quelch, in order not to disappoint the boys of Essex?"

"I suggest, sir—in fact, that is why I have come to see you—that Vernon-Smith and his party be allowed to undertake the tour, after all. Since you punished them by cancelling the tour their work in the class has shown considerable improvement. Instead of being sullen and sulky, as might have been expected, they have worked hard and well. In the circumstances, I think they ought to be allowed the privilege of which we originally deprived them."

Dr. Locke nodded.

"Very well," he said. "Will you inform Vernon-Smith that his party may leave for Southend at once? I will send a telegram to the captain of the Essex team, explaining the situation."

Mr. Quelch withdrew.

He met Vernon-Smith in the Close.

"Good-morning, sir!" said the Bouncer respectfully.

"Good-morning, Vernon-Smith! I have

some good news for you. Owing to the general improvement in class, Dr. Locke has decided, on my recommendation, to allow you to proceed on tour to Essex."

"Oh, good!" murmured Vernon-Smith.

"But—but what about the Fifth, sir?"

The ghost of a smile flickered on Mr. Quelch's features as he replied:

"The Fifth have failed."

"Oh!"

"You may start for Southend as soon as you wish, Vernon-Smith."

And the Bouncer dashed away to acquaint his followers with the good tidings.

There was great rejoicing when the situation was explained; and within half an hour cricket-bags were packed, and everything was in readiness for the tour—the real tour, as Peter Todd explained, with a chuckle.

"I had a sort of suspicion that the Fifth would come a cropper," said Dick Rake. "The Essex fellows had the invaluable aid of Coker, you see."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

On their way to Friardale Station the juniors encountered Coker & Co.

The Fifth-Formers looked very sheepish.

Mr. Prout, still very annoyed, brought up the rear.

"Vernon-Smith!" he exclaimed sternly. "What does this mean?"

"We're going down to Southend, sir," said the Bouncer cheerfully.

"For what purpose?"

"To see if we can put the kybosh on Essex, sir."

Mr. Prout snorted.

"Where my own boys have failed, it is hardly likely that the Remove will succeed!" he said.

"We shall see."

"Do not talk to me in that insolent manner, Vernon-Smith! Have you Dr. Locke's permission to proceed on this tour?"

"Of course, sir!"

"Oh, of course!" chorused the rest of the juniors.

Mr. Prout gave another snort—more emphatic than the previous one, and passed on his way.

"Poor old Prout!" said Bulstrode. "He thought he'd caught us tripping that time!"

"Yes, rather!"

In great spirits, the Removites proceeded to the station.

It seemed almost too good to be true that the tour was theirs, after all.

The Fifth had failed.

It was up to the Greyfriars Remove to prove themselves equal, if not superior to, the boys of Essex.

When the juniors stepped out at Southend Station, they found Merton, of Essex, awaiting them.

"I'm the Essex skipper," said Merton, advancing to meet Vernon-Smith. "We've just had a peculiar sort of wire from your headmaster. It appears we played your Fifth Form yesterday instead of the Remove."

"That's so," said the Bouncer. "You're up against the real thing now. The Fifth always make a hash of things."

"They had a very fine comedian called Croker, or something."

The Removites grinned.

"George Robey has to take a back seat when Coker gets going!" chuckled Peter Todd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Merton led the way to the cricket-ground, where the other members of the Essex team were at practice.

The easy manner in which they had defeated the Greyfriars Fifth caused the Essex boys to imagine that they would have very little trouble in getting the better of the Remove.

But they were soon made to realise that Vernon-Smith & Co. were fomen worthy of their steel.

The Remove batted first; and they were in excellent trim.

Vernon-Smith himself scored 30. Peter Todd, Dick Penfold, and Dick Russell all got into double figures; and Rake and Ogilvy made a brilliant stand towards the close.

The first innings yielded 144 runs.

"We're up against the real goods this time!" said Merton.

"We are!" agreed his chum Terry. "If these fellows can bowl as well as they can bat, methinks our number's up!"

The Essex team received a rude shock after this.

In their first innings they compiled only 54; and they were sent in again, requiring 90 runs to stave off an innings defeat.

Merton & Co. had made the fatal mistake



at the commencement of supposing that, because they had smaller fellows to deal with than they had the day before, they would win handsomely.

They realised this mistake when their wickets fell like ninepins before the deadly attack of Dick Penfold and Vernon-Smith.

The Remove, rejoicing in their unexpected freedom, infused plenty of dash into their fielding; and they gained a walk-over victory by an innings and 24 runs.

"This," murmured Peter Todd, as the juniors wended their way back to their hotel—"this is life, with a capital 'L.' If we go on in the way we've begun, we shall romp home in every giddy event!"

But Peter Todd was too optimistic.

The boys of Essex had learnt their lesson. They were not likely to underrate the abilities of their opponents again.

Whilst the Greyfriars fellows were refreshing themselves at the hotel, Merton and his followers were holding a council of war; and they resolved to show the Greyfriars sportsmen that Essex could hold its head high among the counties of Old England.

They had lost the cricket-match, and by a big margin.

But there were other events to come. And the boys of the Eastern county resolved to leave no stone unturned to avenge that early reverse!

**THE SIXTH CHAPTER.**  
**Sportsmen AH!**

**S**OUTHEND basked in the bright summer sunshine.

Early next morning the Removites were up and doing.

They would have been wiser, perhaps, to stay in bed and recruit their energies.

As it was, they put out to sea in rowing-boats, and went for long tramps beside the shore, and some of them were feeling a trifle fagged when the swimming-races commenced at ten o'clock.

The Essex boys seemed to have mastered the whole art of swimming.

Terry was their star man. He won the first three events off his own bat.

The only event which fell to Greyfriars was the long-distance swim, which Vernon-Smith pulled off, after a neck-and-neck race with Merton.

"We've fallen right behind now," said Ogilvy. "But Dick Russell will win the boxing. That's one blessing!"

"Dick Russell isn't quite so sure about that," said that youth. "Do you know who I'm up against?"

"A chap called Phillips," said Peter Todd. "Yes; and he's the best junior boxer in the county. Merton told me that the fellow hasn't been licked yet."

"In that case, he'll meet his Waterloo to-day," said Dick Rake.

But Russell had his doubts.

Good boxer though he was, he felt that he was meeting more than his match in Ivor

Phillips—a fellow who was described by the sporting Press as a coming champion.

Not that Russell was faint-hearted. That was not one of his failings. But he knew that he would need luck as well as pluck to defeat Phillips.

And the luck went against him.

The bout took place in the afternoon before a packed house.

The first round was lively enough, and Russell more than held his own.

But in the second round he became suddenly dizzy.

Try as he would, he could not rid himself of the feeling.

Everything seemed to be swimming round him.

He had received no heavy punishment as yet, but in spite of this fact he could scarcely keep his feet.

"What's wrong with him?" exclaimed Hazeldene. "Surely he's not whacked?"

"Afraid so," murmured Ogilvy. "That Essex fellow's all over him this round."

Russell strove desperately to keep his feet. He had never felt so weak and impotent in his life.

All the stamina seemed to have oozed out of him. All his expert knowledge of ring-craft seemed to have been forgotten.

Phillips spoke to him once during a brief lull in the fighting.

"Are you ill, old man?"

"No!" panted Russell, though he felt decidedly groggy. "Carry on!"

Phillips carried on, with such good effect that before the end of the second round he had flogged his man.

"Russell's down!" gasped Peter Todd.

"He'll be up again like a merry Jack-in-the-box in a minute!" said Vernon-Smith confidently.

But the Bounder was wrong.

Dick Russell did not rise, neither did he appear to make any effort to do so.

He lay prone on the boards while the referee counted him out.

The Greyfriars fellows could scarcely conceal their disappointment.

They looked upon Dick Russell as one of the Remove's best boxers—probably with no superior in his own Form, save Bob Cherry.

Yet here he was counted out in the second round!

Russell explained afterwards.

"I'm beastly sorry, you fellows—"

"Don't apologise!" said Vernon-Smith. "You must expect to strike a bad patch now and again."

"I came over dizzy," said Russell. "Matter of fact, I've still got the feeling. It's the first time I've ever felt like it during a fight. Phillips had me at his mercy."

"I think I know why it is," said the practical Ogilvy. "You didn't eat any lunch. That's what made you feel so awful. Better come along and have a good feed. That ought to put you right."

Ogilvy's summing-up was correct.

Dick Russell had fought on an empty stomach.

In his anxiety to keep fit he had eaten too little, hence the feeling of dizziness which had assailed him and lost him the contest.

The Greyfriars juniors were very gium during tea.

"The cricket-match is the only feather in our cap so far, barring the solitary swimming race Smithy won this morning," said Peter Todd. "Unless we pull off a goodly percentage of the running races to-morrow I sha'n't have the nerve to go back to Greyfriars."

The other fellows were of Toddy's way of thinking.

A great revival was needed if Greyfriars wanted to do themselves justice on the tour.

Vernon-Smith gave them a good lead by winning the hundred yards—a race which was usually a mere scramble.

But on this occasion the Bounder finished with three yards to spare, and hope returned to the Friars in full flush.

Bulstrode captured the high-jump. And although the long-jump fell to an Essex boy, the Friars won the tug-of-war shortly afterwards.

"Things are looking up!" said Dick Rake. "We're making up the leeway a bit now. What's more, I've got designs on the mile."

Dick Rake's designs were successful.

And then, to crown all previous successes, Dick Penfold won the Marathon Race.

It was a long race and a tiring one, and Penfold did not have matters all his own way.

Terry, of Essex, made all the running, and established a good lead, and Penfold was confronted with an almost superhuman task.

But he won the race on the tape, to the unbounded delight of his schoolfellows.

The tour was over, and after an excursion to Canvey Island, and an open-air picnic, the Friars turned their faces homewards.

They had shared the spoils with Essex, which was far more than the Fifth would have done.

As Vernon-Smith & Co. trooped in at the old gateway of Greyfriars they encountered Horace Coker.

"I suppose you've been licked all along the line?" growled the great Horace.

"There's something wrong with your supper, then!" chuckled Peter Todd.

"You mean to say you won the cricket-match?"

Peter nodded.

"Likewise all the running events, bar one," he said.

"Oh, my hat! Were the Essex kids taken ill, or something?"

"They were fit as fiddles," said Vernon-Smith, "and they gave us a good run for our money. But I think we've proved that the Remove can tackle a tour a jolly sight better than the Fifth!"

"Yes, rather!"

Coker strode away scowling.

And the Removites passed on through the Close with radiant faces, to acquaint their schoolfellows with the full details of their campaign against the Champions of Essex!

THE END.

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A New Long, Complete Story  
of JIMMY SILVER & Co., the  
Chums of Rookwood.

BY OWEN CONQUEST.



**THE FIRST CHAPTER.**

Where is Jimmy Silver?

**D**ODD! Tommy Dodd, of the Modern House at Rookwood, paused as he was entering the school tuckshop. With him were Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle, and they turned as they heard their leader's name called.

Raby, Newcome, and Arthur Edward Lovell, their rivals of the Classical House, were making for the tuckshop. They appeared to be in a hurry.

"Hallo!" sang out Tommy Dodd. "What do you want—trouble?"

"Shucks—no!" grunted Raby. "We've trouble enough as it is!"

Tommy Dodd nodded towards the interior of the shop.

"Going inside?" he asked. "I'm dry, and can do with some ginger-pop."

Raby & Co. followed their rivals into the shop, and Sergeant Kettle handed out the required drinks.

"Have you see Jimmy Silver?" asked Newcome.

Tommy Dodd stared. "Do you think we're his blessed keepers?" he demanded. "I admit he and a number of other fellows I could name want leading about by a string, but—"

"Oh, rats!" said Raby crossly. "Can't you fatheads see there's something wrong?"

Tommy Dodd & Co. chuckled.

"Yes, rather!" said Tommy Cook. "There is—or there wouldn't be any need for leads!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Raby & Co. simply glared.

"Shut up, you galoots!" howled Lovell.

"Have you seen Jimmy Silver—don't you understand he's missing?"

"Eh?"

"Missing, fathead! Bunked from the school!" hooted Raby.

Tommy Dodd & Co. became serious. Despite the rivalry which existed between the juniors of the Classical and Modern Houses at Rookwood, in times of trouble they were united.

"Hasn't he turned up yet?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"No."

"Sorry, old top; but we haven't seen him!"

And there was silence—a moody silence which could be felt.

For Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth of Rookwood, had disappeared—run away from school.

All the juniors of both Houses knew the cause, and they sympathised with him.

Lester Brooks, the son of a neighbouring farmer, had been the cause of the whole trouble. Jimmy had caught him cruelly thrashing a horse, and had turned the whip on the farmer's son in a none too gentle manner.

The result was seen the next morning in the Head's study, when Mr. Brooks came round to the school and told the Head that his son was suffering from a kick in the stomach, which, he affirmed, was bestowed by Silver.

His accusation had been backed up by a certificate from the local doctor, with whom Dr. Chisholm was on friendly terms. Despite Jimmy Silver's emphatic denials, the Head had seen fit to believe the farmer's story, and had sentenced Silver to be flogged before the whole school.

But Jimmy Silver was not to be seen when the time came for afternoon lessons, and a note left on his study table informed Mr.

Bootles, his Form-master, that he had run away from the school.

Beyond that, nobody at Rookwood had the faintest idea as to where he had gone.

Raby, Newcome, and Lovell, had searched the school ever since his disappearance, with faces as long as fiddles, as they had been told more than once.

They looked at Tommy Dodd & Co. now with faces glum and miserable.

"The dummy!" growled Raby. "Why the dickens couldn't he take us with him?"

The rest of the juniors stared.

"Why, you—you—" began Newcome.

"Is it likely he would?" asked Tommy Dodd quietly. "When a chap bunks from school, he doesn't generally get a dozen chaps to go with him!"

Newcome frowned dismally, but did not reply.

Tommy Dodd & Co. were all sympathy. At any other time, it was on the books that the meeting in the school tuckshop would have led to a noisy scene—not to mention a rough one.

But the Classical fellows were in trouble, and the rivalry ceased until normal conditions once more prevailed.

"Perhaps he is hiding somewhere about the school?" suggested Tommy Cook.

Raby & Co. shook their heads.

"We've spent hours looking for him," said Raby. "But we can't find any trace of him. I expect the silly ass has gone for good."

"Oh, no—he'll turn up like a bad penny!" said Cook.

Raby glared at him.

"Who's a bad penny?" he demanded wrathfully. "Don't you get calling Jimmy names, or I'll—I'll—"

Cook stepped back a pace.

"All right, old top!" he said hastily. "No offence, you know!"

Evidently the tempers of the Classical juniors had suffered by the unfortunate circumstances attending Jimmy Silver's disappearance.

"Well, I suppose—I suppose we shall have to wait and see!" said Lovell slowly.

"Hang that—I'm going to do something!" snapped Raby.

"But what?" asked Dodd.

"How do I know, fathead? I said something, didn't I?"

"Chin-chin! Keep your hair on, old thing!"

"Oh, rats!"

And Raby stalked out of the tuckshop, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, and walked slowly up to his study. Newcome and Lovell stayed behind a few minutes with Tommy Dodd & Co. to talk the affair over, but they could not see how they were going to do anything.

They joined Raby just in time to hear the page calling for them.

"You young gentlemen are wanted by Dr. Chisholm in his study," said the page. "He wants you at once, he says."

When Dr. Chisholm sent a message of that kind it was as well to obey it quickly. Raby & Co. therefore hurried along to the Head's study.

Lovell tapped timidly on the door.

"Come in!" came the command from the Head.

The Co. went in.

Dr. Chisholm looked up from his papers, and the juniors noticed at once the expression of deep concern on his face.

"Ah! Have you heard anything from Silver, my boys?"

The Head's tone was kind. He probably realised how Jimmy Silver's absence would affect the chums.

"No, sir."

"You are not trying to hide him—I mean,

you are not aware of his place of hiding and keeping the fact from me?"

"No, sir. We wish we did know where the ass—ahem!—I mean we should like to know where he is, sir. He is our chum."

The Head nodded.

"I understand perfectly. You must let me know if you hear or see anything of Silver, my boys. On the other hand, I will communicate any news I receive to you."

"Thank you, sir!" said the juniors gratefully.

And the juniors, realising that the interview was at an end, left the study.

Once outside, they looked at each other in dismay.

"Nothing doing yet—that's obvious!" said Raby. "Where can the ass be?"

"Oh, where and oh where—" chanted Newcome mournfully.

"Rats! Shut up! I've a good mind to—" began Raby angrily.

But he was interrupted. Mr. Bootles, the little Fourth Form master, came hurriedly down the passage towards the Head's study, and stopped as he saw the juniors.

"Any news of Silver yet, my dear boys?" he asked.

The "dear boys" shook their heads.

"No, sir."

Mr. Bootles nodded, and passed on to the Head's study.

He knocked at the door, and, without waiting for an answer, he turned the handle and walked in.

Dr. Chisholm looked up from his desk.

"You have news, Mr. Bootles?" he asked at once.

The Form-master shook his head.

"Alas, no, sir; I have carefully considered the matter, sir, and—"

"Yes?"

"And I have come to the conclusion, sir, that—that—"

"Pray go on, Mr. Bootles!"

"You'll forgive my candour, Dr. Chisholm, I'm sure. But I fear that perhaps you were a little—a little—ahem!"

Mr. Bootles broke off confusedly. But Dr. Chisholm took in the Form-master's meaning at once.

"Yes, I know what you were going to say, Mr. Bootles," he said slowly. "You think I was a trifle hasty in condemning Silver?"

"Yes, sir; although, of course—"

"I admit—between ourselves, Mr. Bootles—that I was loth to believe Silver capable of such a brutal act as kicking a boy when he was on the ground."

"Exactly, sir. Silver was probably the most popular boy in the whole of the Classical House—indeed, he had many friends in the Modern House, in spite of the rivalry that undoubtedly exists. I do not believe for one moment that Silver was guilty, sir!"

The Head started. It was not usual for even Form-masters to be so candid in condemning his decision in matters of this kind.

But Mr. Bootles had a great admiration for the missing junior.

"Indeed, Mr. Bootles! However, I am afraid I cannot alter my decision now. It is too late for that. It was very wrong of Silver to run from the school—very wrong indeed!"

"Might I suggest—ahem!—that—er—you or I might have done the same thing, Dr. Chisholm, if we had been accused of something we had not done, and then condemned to degradation. Ahem! I trust—"

Dr. Chisholm nodded.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Bootles, I fear I was influenced by Mr. Brooks making such a point concerning the bringing in of the police."

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There was silence for a few minutes; then the worthy doctor looked at the Form-master. "Have you any suggestion to put forward as to how we may get Silver back again?" he asked.

"Advertisements might find him, sir. I would suggest that you insert in all the leading newspapers a description of the missing junior. It might have the desired effect."

"Thank you, Mr. Bootles. I will do that." And Dr. Chisholm carried out his word.

All the editions of the principal papers of the country had advertisements in concerning the runaway junior. But the name of the school was not mentioned. Such publicity the Head most desired to avert, a box number of the newspaper offices being the only address given of the advertiser. But nothing came of any of the advertisements, and the mystery surrounding the whereabouts of Jimmy Silver, captain of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood, remained a mystery.

### THE SECOND CHAPTER. Important Discoveries!

#### "RABY!"

Raby looked up from the preparation he was attempting to do for the morning as his name was called.

Newcome and Lovell sat at the same table, and opposite Raby there was an empty chair. It was Jimmy Silver's.

"What's up?" growled Raby. "I'm blessed if I can make head or tail of this rotten stuff to-night!"

Newcome flung down his pen with a gesture of disgust.

"Nor can I. And, what's more, I'm not going to try!" he declared.

Lovell shrugged his shoulders.

"Old Bootles will get ratty if it's not done, you chaps!" he said.

"Let him!" growled Raby. "I'm fed up!" They were downhearted over the non-arrival of any news concerning their missing chum. Work was impossible under those conditions.

Mr. Bootles had been extremely easy-going in the Form-room all day, and had not even lost his temper when Raby informed him that Jimmy Silver succeeded King Henry VIII. to the throne of England.

But there was likely to be a limit to the Form-master's patience.

Raby knew it, but he was in a mood when he did not care for anything.

"I'm going over to see Dobby," he said suddenly.

He did not ask his chums to go with him, but they went, nevertheless.

Tommy Dodd & Co. received them cordially, and there was no suggestion of the violence that would have greeted them under less distressing conditions.

"Hallo, you chaps!" said Tommy Dodd. "Brought some good news?"

Raby flung himself down in the armchair before he answered.

"No. And I'm fed up with sitting still and doing nothing."

"There's your prep to do," hinted Lovell drily.

"Hang the prep! I tell you I'm not going to do any prep to-night—not if the Head goes down on his bended knees and begs me to! So that's that!"

The Head was not likely to do that, so Raby was perfectly safe.

Tommy Dodd looked thoughtful.

"It seems to me, you chaps," he said slowly, "that we might be able to find out something if we went to the station."

Raby & Co. jumped.

"My hat! Why didn't we think of that before? We shall at least know if he's left Coombe," said Raby excitedly. "Come on, you chaps! I'm off!"

And he made for the door. But Lovell pulled him back.

"Don't be in such a hurry. Wait until Tommy Dodd has finished what he was going to say," he said.

Tommy Dodd flushed as he found himself the cynosure of all eyes.

"I—I—I don't know if I've got anything else to say," he murmured. "Still, I think we might go down to the station."

"You mean break bounds?" asked Lovell quickly.

Breaking bounds was a serious offence at Rookwood. But the juniors had done it before.

"Suppose we shall have to—unless we ask old Bulkeley for a pass," said Raby. "Shall we risk it, or shall we ask Bulkeley?"

"Best ask Bulkeley, I think," said Tommy Cook. "He's a decent sort, and will give us one all right."

"All of us?"

"Well, he might."

Bulkeley turned out trumps, and gave the juniors the pass they asked him for. He was, as Tommy Cook said, a decent sort, and he knew that his chums were anxious concerning Silver.

"Don't be too late," he said, as he handed over the pass.

The juniors marched off down to the station in somewhat higher spirits than they had been in for some days. They were, at least, doing their best, and the knowledge was comforting.

They made straight for the station-master's office; and he nodded his head when Tommy Dodd explained their errand.

"Yes, I saw Master Silver leave here the other day," he said. "In fact, I issued him with a ticket myself."

"Where for?" demanded Raby excitedly.

"London."

"Oh, my hat! That's splendid!"

Tommy Dodd looked doubtful.

"London's a mighty big village," he said musingly. "I haven't much hopes of finding Silver in that place."

The irrepressible Raby thrust his hand in his pockets, and pulled out what money he had. The juniors watched him in surprise as he counted it out.

"What's the matter with you, dummy?" demanded Newcome.

"I'm off!" said Raby emphatically.

"I should jolly well think you are!" grinned Tommy Dodd. "Right off—your napper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean I'm off to London, fatheads!" he snorted.

The juniors simply stared.

"You're—you're what?"

"I'm off to London! I'm going to find old Jimmy!"

Newcome and Lovell seized him by the shoulders.

"You're not, my son!" said Newcome grimly. "We're out on pass—and it's not decent to go back on old Bulkeley!"

Raby hesitated.

"Well—well— Oh, hang it!" he growled disconsolately.

And he walked out of the station, leaving Tommy Dodd & Co. to thank the station-master for the information supplied.

There was some satisfaction in knowing where Jimmy Silver had gone. But, as Tommy Dodd remarked, he might have gone anywhere from London, where all the great railway termini were.

Tommy Dodd looked unusually thoughtful as he entered the gates at Rookwood.

"Look here, Raby!" he said suddenly. "I think there's something in what you said, after all."

Raby nodded.

"I knew there was!" he said triumphantly.

"We ought to have gone— No, we didn't, 'cos that would be playing it low on the skipper. Still, there's no reason why we shouldn't go to-morrow."

Tommy Dodd nodded.

"That's so. We'll go to-morrow—carly," he said.

"And you can be sure we'll let you know how we get on," said Tommy Cook affably.

"We know how anxious you are."

Raby & Co. simply glared.

"You—you dummy! Do you think we're going to let you go up to London after our chum?"

"The silly ass!"

Tommy Cook reddened furiously.

"You must admit we'd do the job better than you Classic fellows," he said hotly. "You'd—you'd only stash it up, and—and get run in, or something!"

"Rats!" answered the Classical juniors in unison.

"Look here—"

"Shut up!" snapped Tommy Dodd. "Four of us only can go; any more and we'd be a crowd."

"Then it's we three and you," said Newcome at once.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle demurred for a long time, but in this instance they received no support from their leader. Tommy Dodd could only be fair, and say that Raby & Co. were entitled to go.

Jimmy Silver was essentially their chum. Disgruntled though they were, Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle had perforce to admit that, and made no further attempt to get in the party when the details of the trip were arranged.

Needless to say, Dr. Chisholm was not informed of the intention of the juniors. It was not at all unlikely that he would have

sternly forbidden the enterprise—indeed, he would probably have laid his cane about their shoulders for daring to suggest the idea.

The juniors parted in high spirits, and Newcome and Raby and Lovell made for their own House.

They found Tubby Muffin in their study when they opened the door—fast asleep in the chair. He held a postcard in his hand.

Raby woke him by the simple method of tipping him out of his chair. Tubby Muffin sat down with a bump.

"Ow! I didn't take your cake—nor the biscuits. Ow!"

He sat up, rubbing his eyes, and stared at the juniors. They chuckled at his amazed expression.

"Cheer up, Tubby!" said Raby. "We've not had any cake for days, so you couldn't have pinched it."

Tubby Muffin got upon his feet.

"I—I—I must have been dreaming!" he said. "What did you want to wake me up like that for?"

"The only way, my son," declared Raby solemnly. "But I wouldn't have your conscience for a pension!"

"Eh? Why not?"

"If you think you're getting licked every time you wake up for pinching somebody's cake and biscuits—well, I'd sooner remain awake for ever!"

"It's just petty spite on the part of the fellows," said Muffin. "They're—they're jealous of my good appetite. Every time—"

"Did you come to our study just to tell us that?" inquired Newcome politely.

Muffin handed Raby the postcard he still held.

"No. This came after the post had been delivered," he said. "Sergeant Kettle found it at the gate when the postman had gone. So I fetched it up."

Raby took the card with a word of thanks; and Tubby Muffin, still muttering to himself something about "jealousy," left the study.

"My hat! It's from Jimmy!" exclaimed Raby excitedly.

The three juniors read the card again and again.

"Am all right, you fellows! Not having a bad time, either. Don't worry.—JIMMY."

That was all that was written, but the fact that it came from Jimmy Silver was enough for the juniors. They rushed off to the Modern House to lay the card before Tommy Dodd & Co.

But Tommy Dodd hardly took the trouble to read the inscription. He looked instead for an address, and as there was not one to be seen, he turned the card over and looked at the postmark.

It was surcharged "London, E.C.," which, Tommy Dodd explained, meant that the card was posted in London, East Central district.

"That doesn't help us any," said Raby.

"Why couldn't the silly ass have put his address so that we could go and get hold of him?"

Tommy Dodd chuckled.

"Just because he knew you'd get hold of him, I expect!" he said lightly.

"He's a fathead!" growled Raby.

"Who's calling him names now?" murmured Tommy Cook.

Raby glared, but did not reply.

With a final word about their journey of the morrow, Raby & Co. went back to the Classical House, and as soon as the bell went for bed made their way to the dormitory.

Raby lay awake for some time, and he could not refrain from chuckling as he thought of the sensation that would be caused in the morning when it was found that four more juniors had disappeared from Rookwood!

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### Jimmy Silver, Pro!

#### "READY?"

Raby uttered that one word in a whisper.

Newcome and Lovell nodded. The three juniors were the only ones awake in the whole of the Fourth Form dormitory. That was not surprising, considering that it was only half-past four in the morning!

The great adventure, in fact, had commenced.

According to the prearranged plan, the three Classical House juniors were to rise at four, and meet Tommy Dodd down at the gates at the half-hour.

If they were a bit late, Tommy Dodd was

not. He was waiting for them just outside the huge iron gates.

"All ready?" he asked cheerfully.

"What-ho!" said the Classical juniors heartily.

Together they hurried down the lane towards the station. It was their intention to catch the early morning train to the great city, and start their search for Jimmy Silver before the business crowds began to arrive.

They were in high spirits as they tramped steadily along, and even the irrepresible Raby could not find any cause for complaint at the way matters were progressing.

"What a giddy sensation!" chuckled Newcome suddenly. "Four more juniors disappear from Rookwood!—Is there something wrong with the grand old school?"

"Supposed to be quoting newspaper headlines?" inquired Raby sarcastically.

"I am—I is!" chuckled Newcome.

"Has it occurred to you that the Head might be distressed?" asked Tommy Dodd quietly.

The juniors started, and Lovell stopped.

"M-m-my hat!" stammered Lovell. "I say, you chaps, is—is that fair?"

"Come on, fathead!" said Tommy Dodd. "You don't think I should let the poor old chap worry over us, do you?"

Lovell walked on again, but he was by no means satisfied.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "I think it rotten to worry Dr. Chisholm any more than old Jimmy is already worrying him."

"Yes; but, don't you see, I've arranged all that!" said Dodd calmly. "You want a Modern House chap to look after you. You'd stash the whole game up in about ten minutes without one of us!"

The three Classic juniors glared.

"Look here, Dobby, if you're looking for a row to start off with you're going the right road!" said Raby warningly.

"Hear, hear!" assented Newcome and Lovell.

"I'm not; and if we start rowing, there's an end to finding Jimmy Silver!" replied Dodd evenly.

He did not say that it would be because the expedition had no Modern House chap with it that it would fail; but his words implied that much.

"Rats! You'd better go back, Dobby!" said Raby.

"What! After I've left a note for the Head to say where we've gone?" exclaimed Tommy in surprise.

The Classic juniors looked amazed.

"You've done—how much?"

"Left a note to say we've gone to find Jimmy Silver! Anything wrong in that?"

Raby & Co. had to admit there was nothing wrong in that. In fact, there was something decidedly right in it.

Lovell was pleased that the Head should not have any more worries to add to those already weighing him down. Lovell was a very thoughtful junior, as far as thinking of others was concerned.

The train was signalled when they arrived, and although the stationmaster looked curiously at the four juniors he made no remarks, for which Raby & Co. were heartily thankful.

It would have been awkward if the official had telephoned the Head to the effect that

four of his juniors were proceeding to London by the early morning train.

But he did not telephone, and the juniors arrived in London before the Fourth Form had sat down to breakfast.

It was hardly seven o'clock, yet the great city was already a hive of industry. The streets were literally alive with motor vehicles, quickly moving trams, and pedestrians hurrying to their businesses.

Tommy Dodd looked at his companions and shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

"Blessed if I know where to start!" he said. "I told you that it would be impossible to find him here."

Raby & Co. were amazed at the number of streets there seemed to be even from where they stood, outside the railway-station. Another train arrived and disgorged its crowd of workers.

"M-m-my hat!" stammered Newcome. "This is about the first time I've been in London, and I'm absolutely jiggered!"

"So am I!" admitted Lovell.

"Still, one never knows, you know," said Raby hopefully. "I think the best plan would be to get some grub first. Jimmy might be in the restaurant."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tommy Dodd.

"What are you giggling at, fathead?" demanded Raby wrathfully.

"Do you really think there's only one restaurant in London?" asked Tommy Dodd, wiping the tears of merriment from his eyes. "My dear ass, there's thousands of 'em! So what hopes of finding Jimmy Silver?"

"Oh, gee!"

They had their breakfast in one of the cafes in the Strand. By the time they had finished the meat London was really waking up. The streets teemed with vehicles and people, and the amazement of the juniors who had never seen London during business hours grew and grew as the time went on.

"Where do they all go to?" asked Newcome.

"That's a question that would take years to answer!" replied Tommy Dodd. "There's hundreds and thousands of offices and works here. My dear chap, do you know that millions live in London?"

"And amongst them Jimmy Silver!" murmured Lovell.

They tramped the streets of London the whole of the morning and afternoon, and with the evening the skies grew dark and forbidding. The juniors, forced into the knowledge that theirs was a hopeless task, looked up as the first spot of rain touched them, and shrugged their shoulders hopelessly.

"What a life!" said Raby. "But I'm not going back without Jimmy Silver!"

"Who said you were?" demanded Lovell surlily.

The rain was the last straw, as Tommy Dodd said.

They were on the south side of the river when it first commenced, and their first impulse was to enter the nearest house of amusement. But, as Tommy Dodd assured them, they would get a better "show" if they went northwards again to the City.

They hurried along at a rare pace, but the rain came down harder and harder. In a very few minutes the juniors began to feel distinctly uncomfortable.

"This is rotten!" growled Raby. "Let's jump on a blessed car or something!"

Tommy Dodd shook his head.

"What's the good of doing that?" he said. "We don't know where we shall be getting to then. Not one of us knows London, you must remember."

They passed down Blackfriars Road, and a crowd of men lined up to enter a smart-looking place attracted their attention.

"London's the place for queues!" said Newcome. "I've read about them in the newspapers!"

Tommy Dodd glanced across the road.

"Why, that's the Ring!" he said quickly. "You know—the boxing show!"

The juniors began to get interested. Boxing was a sport that always appealed to them. They looked at one another, hesitated, and then stopped altogether.

"Shall us?" murmured Lovell.

"Let's!" said the others instantly.

And the four juniors crossed the road and fell in behind the shortest queue. They were not long in finding out that they had entered by the door reserved for those desirous of using the best seats.

But, as Raby said, money was no object when one was out for a "bust-up."

They paid the fee demanded, and found four seats that were comfortably near the ringside.

Raby bought a programme, and the juniors peered over it. There were no names there that they recognised.

"Chap there named 'Jimmy,'" said Raby. "They usually have two names—'Fighting Jimmy,' or 'Digger Jimmy,' or something like that, you know."

The juniors nodded, and waited patiently for the first competitors to enter the ring. The lights were already on, so they had not long to wait.

Suddenly a round of hand-claps announced that boxers were coming. For a moment Raby & Co. could not see them, as they came along a passage between rows of spectators before climbing the steps into the ring.

Suddenly they sat bolt upright, and their eyes nearly fell out of their heads.

For one of the boxers they recognised, despite the white, glaring lights that tricked the eyes.

It was Jimmy Silver!

"Jimmy!" roared Raby, and jumped to his feet with excitement.

"Silver!" shouted Newcome, Dodd, and Lovell.

Jimmy Silver started as he heard his name shouted in the well-known voices, and looked in their direction.

Then he waved his hand jauntily, swung round, and held out his hands for the gloves to be fixed.

Jimmy Silver—professional boxer!

No wonder Raby & Co. simply sat in their seats and looked at one another—dumb-founded!

But they had not caught Jimmy Silver yet, and much was to happen before Rookwood was once again to see the runaway juniors.

THE END.



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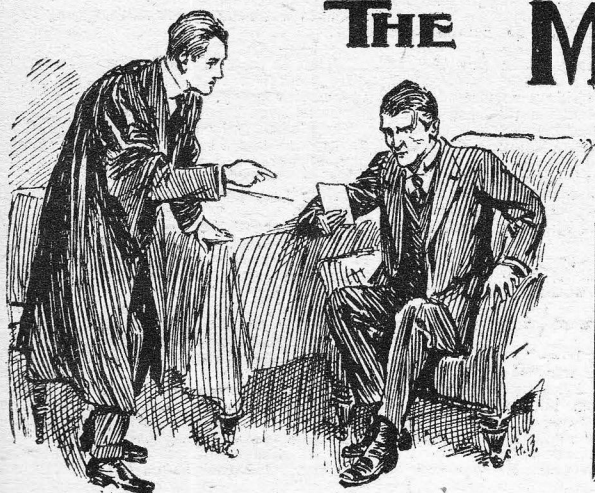
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# THE MYSTERY SOLVED

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## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

### A Council of Six.

**W**HERE'S the kid?" asked Clive. Levison major, Cardew, and Clive had come across to the New House together for a talk with Figgins & Co.—or, rather, with Kerr, the long-headed Scots member of that famous fraternity. But both Figgins and Fatty Wynn were in the secret which was to be discussed, and both were willing to do anything they could for "the kid," as Sidney Clive called Levison minor.

"He's all right!" replied Kerr. "But we think that you fellows had really better not know just exactly where he is. You can keep clearer consciences that way if awkward questions are asked."

"I fancy you're right," said Levison major slowly.

Kerr glanced at him.

Ernest Levison's face was worn and haggard. He was taking his young brother's trouble hard.

"Buck up, old top!" said Kerr, with real kindness.

"That's it, Levison—buck up!" chimed in Fatty Wynn. "It's all right now. Old Kerr's got the case in hand, and we all know how jolly keen and clever he is. You School House duffers—"

"But, after all, Kerr will want some information from us School House duffers before he can do anything!" drawled Cardew.

"Lots!" agreed Kerr.

"And you'd better start on it at once!" Figgott said.

"Am I to relate briefly the cires, or must I endure the endless jaw-music of the dear Sidney?" asked Cardew.

"Oh, get on with the washing!" growled Clive. "I don't gas as much in a day as you do in a year—I mean—"

"Leave it as spoken, Sidney! You will hardly improve upon that as a mild an' calculated statement of fact," Cardew said.

"Now, where shall I start, Kerr?"

"Somewhere as near the end as possible, unless these chaps are prepared for an all-night sitting, old gun!"

"Very well. The end-would seem to be the findin' of the kind person who rigged up the chandelier in old Selby's room so that it should descend upon the dear old bird's napper. There would almost seem to have been some intent to hurt him."

"I should jolly well think so!" said Fatty Wynn, opening to their widest his china-blue eyes.

"You think so, Wynn? Then doubtless it is correct!" Cardew said blandly. "I am glad to be supported in a deduction which took so much brainwork as that. Someone wanted to hurt Selby. Agreed! Ergo, that someone is an enemy of the dear old josses."

"Nothing much in that," remarked Figgott. "Selby must have heaps and heaps of enemies!"

"Dear old Selby! Do you really think so, Figgins? But the rest of the enemies do not matter. What we have to find out is, who the particular enemy about on that day was."

"And we haven't any clue," Figgins said.

"Wrong, dear boy. We have!"

"First I've heard of it. What is it?"

"Figgott knows the enemy. Figgott put the

file with which the chains of the chandelier weights were filed through in our pal Franky's desk. Did he get that file from the criminal?"

"Not a bit likely!" said Kerr. "No fellow who would do such a thing like that would be such a crass ass as to hand over part of the evidence to young Piggott, for it's hardly to be supposed that the doer of the deed had his knife into Frank. That's Piggott."

"Yaas, I think Piggy alone is responsible for gettin'—shall I say our client?—held guilty, for without the file the old files could hardly have thought that Frank did it. But where did Piggott get the file from if not from—shall we call him the assassin?"

"It might not have been the file it was done with," said Kerr. "Or, if it is, Piggott probably found it somewhere."

"True, O King! After all, there's something more like a clue in the supposed relative of Piggy's who visited him on the evenin' of the—er—triffin' incident."

"I think so," said Levison major. "But Taggles doesn't seem to remember anything at all about the fellow."

"Then it's up to us to make inquiries elsewhere," Kerr said.

"I should get young Piggott into a corner and shake what I wanted to know out of the little squeak!" Figgott suggested.

"Hear, hear!" chirped Fatty Wynn.

"Strikes me as quite a good idea," agreed Clive.

"Easier to shake lies than the truth out of that young bouncer," Kerr said.

"We might ask somebody else whether they'd seen anyone about," was Fatty's brilliant suggestion.

"Yes, dear boy. And whom had we better ask?"

"Oh, well, you know more about things like that than I do, Kerr. I don't pretend to be a tec."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Clive and Figgins and Cardew.

"Fatty's notion isn't such a wild one, after all," said Levison gravely. "In a little place like Rylcombe a stranger is twiggled at once. We might really find out something by inquiries in the village."

"Yaas, that's so!" agreed Cardew.

"And we might find out something from Selby himself, if he'd only tell us," Kerr said.

"But I can't see him answering at all politely if we go and inquire of him whether he's been seeing any enemies lately."

"He's so dead certain Frank did it," Levison said gloomily.

"Well, the case seems to stand like this," Cardew summed up. "At about six o'clock both your minor, Ernest, an' Piggott were in Selby's room. But Frank was there before Piggott, an' left with him. Some hours later the chandelier fell on Selby's napper. At some period between six an' the time of its fallin', someone else must have been in the room."

"It might have been done before six," Kerr said.

"Admitted. But it's more likely that it was done after, as the notion seems to be that the chains were so nearly filed through that the least jar would bring the contraption down. An' between six an' the time of its fallin' Piggy, havin' got excused from prep, had a visitor. Nothin' much in that if it really was a relation, but quite a lot if it wasn't. Taggles knows nothin'. Ignorant old

bird, Taggles! Knowin' nothin', he can tell nothin'. But Piggy is not in the same position. He knows somethin'; the problem is how to make him tell it."

"I've got it!" cried Kerr.

"Good egg!" said Piggy.

"I knew old Kerr would do it!" chortled Fatty. "You School House duffers— But as the case is settled never mind about that, especially as you're visitors, and there's sosses for tea. Let's have tea, you chaps!"

"But the case isn't settled! The case hasn't begun to be settled, you pudding-headed porpoise!" hooted Figgins.

"Not settled? Why, I thought Kerr said he had got it?"

"What a jumper you are, Fatty!" said Kerr.

"Me? Not me! I don't care about jumping. Haven't the right build for that."

"A jumper to conclusions, I mean. All that I've got is a dodge for makin' young Piggott tell what he knows."

"Well, that's something!" said Fatty brightly. "More than those School House duffers could do, anyway. I say, Figg, what about those sosses?"

"Blow the sosses!" snapped George Figgins.

"But I don't want to blow them; I want to eat them!" Fatty replied.

"Eat them, then, you gormandising cor-morant!"

"I'll cook them. I don't want to eat them all myself. I'm not so greedy as that, I should hope. But perhaps by the time they're cooked you fellows will be ready."

"Do I understand this as an invitation to tea or a hint to clear out?" asked Cardew.

"Chump! Of course you're staying to tea!" replied Figgins.

"You do us proud! Now, Kerr, what's the wheeze?"

Kerr told them. Fatty got the frying-pan out and put in it a scrap of lard, lighted the spirit-stove, and in a few minutes had the sausages sizzling merrily.

"It may work or it may not," Kerr concluded. "If it does we ought to find out something. If it doesn't—well, we're really no worse off."

"I call it a ripping good notion!" said Figgott.

"It's not so bad," was Clive's comment.

Cardew and Levison thought it quite good. Fatty, it turned out, had no opinion in the matter. He had been too busy with preparations for tea to listen.

"If it's Kerr's notion, it's sure to be all right," he said. "There isn't any need at all for me to think about it. I say, Figg, can't you give a chap a helping hand with the tea? You're no good where you are, you know. You can't think out anything."

"Brrrr!" growled Figgins.

"Take Clive also," said Cardew. "He is no good at thinkin' out things, an' he has a habit of gapin' with surprise when anyone else shows signs of havin' used his brains that fairly gets on my nerves. But the dear Sidney is a really efficient housemaid—I'll say that for him, by gad!"

"Rats! But I'll help, Fatty, old thing!" said Clive.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

## Suspicion Raised.

"COME along, Chowle! The empty box-room is the place for us!" said Clampe, of the Shell and the New House.

Chowle followed him upstairs.

These two were the only thoroughpaced nuts among the Shell and Fourth in the New House, and this fact caused them to be together pretty often, though they were not really chummy.

"Old Ratty's the dashed limit!" grumbled Clampe, referring in this irreverent manner to his housemaster, Mr. Horace Ratcliff. "Over in the School House they never get that sort of thing. Railton wouldn't think of walkin' into a study without tappin' at the door. Racke an' Crooke smoke as much as they blessed well like. But if a fellow takes a whiff or two here, he can expect to see Ratty's death's-head stickin' round the door, an' to get five hundred lines for it, by gad!"

Chowle grinned. But, as Chowle had no use for five hundred lines, he quite agreed that the empty box-room on the dormitory floor was a more eligible place for a quiet smoke than either his own study or Clampe's.

"Dash it all, it's locked!" said Clampe, a moment later, as he tried the door.

"Can't be!" returned Chowle. "It never is, you know!"

"Try it for yourself, then, fathead!" Chowles tried it. Locked or not, it was certainly fast shut.

"Look here," he said. "I believe there's someone in there, Clampe!"

"Rats! Why, hardly anybody else here—except one or two of the Sixth, an' Ratty doesn't pry on them as he does on us—smokes. An' what else should anyone be in that hole for?"

"I heard footsteps inside, I'm sure!" Clampe listened intently.

"Can't hear anything," he said. Inside the box-room Frank Levison stood still, hardly daring to draw breath.

He had not been there many hours. Kerr had found that hiding-place for him, after he had been obliged to leave Nobody's Study, on the Shell passage of the School House, because some sneak had notified Mr. Railton that he was there.

Of course, Levison minor should not have been at St. Jim's at all.

He had practically had sentence of expulsion passed upon him, his guilt in the matter of the attempt to injure Mr. Selby having been considered proved. But before he was expelled his brother had taken him down to Rycombe, and put him on the train for home.

But Frank had not gone home. He had to change at Wayland Junction; and when he had done that he could not make up his mind to go on.

So it had happened that Cardew and Clive had found him wandering about the old market-town, in great distress of mind, and had smuggled him back into St. Jim's, believing that they could establish his innocence before his presence there was discovered.

But he had had to shift over from School House to New House, by the strategy of Kerr, and still things were not cleared up.

Now the hand upon the door of his refuge, the voices outside, gave him alarm.

Frank Levison was a plucky little chap, but he had been through a good deal during the last few days; and he felt almost like screaming as he stood listening to those voices, trying to make out whose they were.

The box-room was just round the corner of a passage, and Fatty Wynn turned that corner at this moment.

Fatty was on an errand of charity. He would not have been allowed to go upon it had Figgins and Kerr known what he intended.

But they did not know. He had slipped off directly after tea, while they were still talking with Levison & Co.

Fatty carried an enamel pie-dish, which had been kept so hot that he had to use a cloth—in point of fact, a duster—to hold it with. Inside this pie-dish were three large sausages, which he had held back when putting the spread upon the table. Fatty had gone easy on the sausages—at least, he thought he had, not having eaten more than seven or eight—in order to save some for Frank.

Balanced on the top of the pie-dish was a rather greasy paper bag. It contained tarts, and the heat from the receptacle beneath it was warming those tarts up again. But Fatty did not think that mattered; it showed that the pastry was all right, he held. And

the chances are that Frank would not have considered that it mattered, either, had those tarts ever come Frank's way.

They were fated to get no nearer than the door, however.

"Hallo!" gasped Fatty, as he saw Clampe and Chowle.

He tried to hide the things he was carrying behind him. But a hot pie-dish, gripped in both hands, with a bag of pastry on top of it, is not quite the easiest thing in the world to hide thus.

"What are you after?" demanded Clampe. In ordinary circumstances Clampe would have been answered in a very off-hand manner. Fatty neither liked nor feared Leslie Clampe.

But just now Clampe and Chowle were really about the last fellows in the New House whom Fatty would have chosen to meet.

His plump face went very red as he gasped:

"Nothing! Only—only—"  
Poor old Fatty! He was not good at lying, and to tell the truth here would never do.

He was badly taken aback, too. What would Kerr and Figgy and the School House trio say if his coming along here resulted in these cads finding out the secret?

Fatty had meant so well. He was sure of that even now. It might be a small thing that Frank Levison should lose the tarts and sausages; it would be a small thing compared with his discovery; but it would seem to Fatty a grievous thing even then.

"Look here, you fat bounder," said Chowle, taking courage from the fact that Fatty's hands were full, "I know what you're after!"

Fatty's heart beat fast.

"I—I'm not after anything!" he said hotly. "And if I hadn't my hands full I'd jolly well punch your ugly head!"

"That's just it!" returned Chowle cunningly. "What have you got in your hands?"

"It's grub of some sort!" gibed Clampe.

"What does Wynn care for but grub?"

"But where's he taking it to?" asked Chowle. "That's the question."

"What do you think? Takin' it along to the box-room to wolf it all on his lonesome," said Clampe.

This suggestion struck Fatty as quite the kind of thing one might adopt as an explanation in the circumstances, though at another time it would have annoyed him.

"Ye-es, that's it!" he said. But he said it unconvincingly, for he had no talent for fiction. "And, as I can't get in, I suppose I may as well go back!"

Clampe looked at him keenly.

"I'm dashed if I believe that yarn!" he said.

"Why, you said so yourself!" gasped Fatty.

"Yes. But if it had been true you'd have denied it, by gad!"

"I'm not a beastly liar, like you!" retorted Fatty indignantly.

"A beastly liar, am I? See here, Chowle; let's have a look at what the grampus has got there!"

"You leave that alone!" protested Fatty, trying to dodge them.

Unencumbered, he would not have feared Clampe and Chowle together. Indeed, he did not fear them now. But he feared the discovery of the secret, and it seemed to him that they had only to see what he was carrying to guess that.

In his agitation he dropped the duster, and the pie-dish still retained enough heat to make it very difficult to hold.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Ow! Yow! Lemme be, you sweenies!"

"What does this mean?" demanded the harsh voice of Mr. Ratcliff.

The Housemaster was fairly upon them before they had the slightest notion that he was near. Mr. Ratcliff had a nasty little habit of sneaking about his House in list slippers.

"I—I—it's nothing, sir—only—Ow!"

Mr. Ratcliff gave him an acid look. There were no other juniors in the New House to whom the tyrant was quite so consistently tyrannical as he was to Figgins & Co.

"I cannot accept that as an explanation, Wynn!"

Clampe winked at Chowle. He saw that they were likely enough to get off scot-free. In fact, they were not doing anything very dreadful. The worst offence that could be alleged against them, unless their pockets were turned out and the cigarettes disclosed, was being on the dormitory floor at an hour at which juniors were not supposed to visit it.

But Fatty could always make a lot out of a very small matter.

The piedish was burning Fatty's fingers worse than ever now. He had got it behind

him; but in doing so he had tilted it a bit, and the gravy he had made to go with the sausages was running out and dripping to the floor.

"I—I—Ow!"

"What is that, Wynn?" rasped Ratty.

He pointed a long, lean finger to the incriminating gravy.

"Ow! Yow!"

The piedish had grown too hot to hold, and Fatty had less fortitude than the Spartan boy, of whom the story is told that he hid a stolen fox under his robe, and suffered the creature to gnaw at him rather than admit his theft.

Fatty dropped the piedish.

He grabbed at it. Mr. Ratcliff grabbed at it in the same instant. As they stooped their heads met. The master staggered back, and came down with a thwack! Fatty staggered back, tried to preserve his balance, struck the piedish with his foot, and sent sausages and gravy flying all over the master.

One sausage struck Mr. Ratcliff in the right eye and burst there, fairly binging up the organ for a moment or two. Another landed right into his mouth, opened to give vent to a yell, and his teeth closed upon it before he realised what he was doing. The fate of the third sausage is uncertain. Fragments that might have belonged to it were afterwards seen upon the linoleum, and there were spots of grease on Ratty's gown next day which might also have been sausage. But next day had not come yet.

Fatty wished it had—or next week! He was in for it now!

"Let me give you a hand, sir," said Clampe smoothly.

"Leave me alone!" fumed Mr. Ratcliff, struggling up.

He would have done better to accept the help offered him.

For, as he rose, he put a hand upon the paper of tarts, and it squashed under the pressure.

"Ugh!" grunted the master disgustedly. "This is atrocious! Unheard of! Abominable!"

"Oh, no, sir!" pleaded Fatty. "It's only tarts!"

"Tarts and sausages! Wynn, your greed is simply disgusting! You have brought these things up here to devour them in solitude and secrecy! Bah!"

Fatty could not reply. The sooner he was walked off to be caned the better, he thought. Every moment Ratty stayed there increased the danger.

Mr. Ratcliff, with his face camouflaged by sausage, and his right hand smothered with jam and grease, assumed as terrible an expression as the circumstances would permit, and ground out:

"You will come with me, Wynn! Clampe and Chowle, go downstairs at once! You have no right to be here!"

He stalked off, without even a glance at the box-room door. Fatty followed, doleful but relieved. Clampe and Chowle waited half a minute or so, and then also went downstairs.

"What do you think is in there, Chowle?" asked Clampe.

"I don't think it's a what at all. I think it's a who."

"Young Levison, do you mean?"

"Yes," said Chowle slowly. "The kid's somewhere, y'know. It wouldn't have been difficult to smuggle him over here."

"Let's go an' have a yarn with Racke about it," suggested Clampe. "He'd like to know."

## THE THIRD CHAPTER.

## Talking in Piggott.

RUBEN PIGGOTT, by long odds the worst black sheep of the Third Form, looked doubtfully at the letter he had just opened.

It was the morning after Fatty Wynn's liberality to the Housemaster in the matter of sausages, gravy, and tarts.

Nothing had happened as yet, in consequence of the suspicions aroused by Fatty's action, and Frank Levison was feeling easier in mind.

But something might have happened but for the fact that Clampe and Chowle had failed to see Aubrey Racke when they had gone across to the School House. Racke was out somewhere with Crooke.

Racke hated Levison major poisonously, and knew that the surest way to get at him was through Frank. The affection of those two for one another went far deeper than that of most brothers.

So it was pretty certain that Racke would make a move of some kind as soon as he knew.

Meanwhile, someone else had made a move,





Crash! went the candlestick upon the floor. The match flickered out. "Ow! Oh! Ow!" yelled Mr. Ratcliff. (See page 16.)

and the result of it was the letter Piggott held in his hand.

It bore no address, and no signature, and it was typewritten. But the absence of address and signature did not surprise Piggott, and the fact of its being typewritten was not in itself suspicious.

He stood in front of the rack staring at it. Wally D'Arcy and his chums—six in all, with Frank Levison away—came up.

"Hallo, Piggy! Got a dunning letter from one of your bookies?" asked Wally.

"Rats!" snarled Piggott.

"Is it Piggy's letter at all?" inquired Jameson. "Can't be mine, because when I get any they are delivered over the way. But if any of you fellows is expecting one, I should advise you to make Piggy show you the envelope of that one."

"Show up, Piggy!" said Hobbs. "We know you aren't above opening someone else's letters!"

"You can see it if you like," answered Piggott sulkily. "There! Does that satisfy you?"

All of them glanced at the envelope he held out for inspection.

"It's Piggy's this time all right," said Reggie Manners.

"But that don't prove that it was last time, or that it will be next time," added Curly Gibson.

"Oh, leave the chap alone!" Joe Frayne said. "E's down in the mouth about something. Can't you see that?"

"You're a liar, Frayne!" said Piggott pleasantly, as he made off.

"Nice boy—eh?" remarked Wally, who had been reading a letter from home which he had found in the rack "No use being civil to him, Joe."

"Well, 'tain't any use kickin' a chap when 'e's down—an' Piggy looked down enough for anythin'," replied the little Cockney. "Franky don't kick chaps when they're down."

"Wonder where the kid's got to?" said Hobbs. "Do you fellows believe the yarn that he's back here?"

"Can't help thinking there's something in it," Wally answered. "But when it's all over Franky will get it in the neck for lying low here, and not letting us know—that's all about it!"

"Is it ever going to be all over?" asked Curly Gibson disconsolately.

"Of course it is!" said Reggie Manners. "Franky didn't do it, so someone else must have done; and as soon as they find out who it was Franky will be cleared. See?"

"I reckon Piggy did it," Hobbs said.

"Tell you what," put in Jameson. "I fancy there's something up in our House, and I wouldn't wonder a bit if Franky was over there."

"Oh, crumbs! How do you make that out?" demanded Wally.

"Well, I can't prove it. But look here! Fatty Wynn was caned by Ratty—it wasn't half a caning, either, they say—for taking grub up to the dormitory floor yesterday evening. What did he do that for?"

"To wolf it, of course," said Reggie. "Just like that fat bounder!"

"That's just what it's not, then! There's nothing to hinder Fatty from eating anything he wants to in his study. He's a bit of a pig; but he's not like Trimble or that awful sweep Bunter. If Fatty's got grub it's his own, or it belongs to Figgins and Kerr, which is just the same thing. And there's an empty box-room up there."

"H'm!" exclaimed Wally. "If anybody on your side would give Franky a helping hand, it's just those three. I must say, Jam-face, that I shouldn't be surprised if there's something in your notion."

"I haven't done yet," said Jameson. "Clampe and Chowle were there when Fatty was nabbed. This morning I've seen those two rotters yarning with Racke and Crooke. All four of them had got their ugly heads

close together. Looks a bit suspish to me, you know."

"We ought to keep our eyes on those four," said Curly.

"And on Piggott," added Hobbs. "I'll bet he's in it, if there's anything shady going on."

"And on Figgins & Co., because they know. And on Levison & Co., because they're sure to know, too. And on Ratty, because if he gets to know it's all up the spout. There are six of us—that's one eye apiece for them," gibed Manners minor.

"Don't you try to be clever, young Reggie!" said Wally, with severe disapproval. "See here, Jam-face, if Franky's there you ought to be able to get a word with him."

"I'll try after classes," replied Jameson. Then the breakfast-bell went, and the six trooped off.

Piggott had not much appetite for breakfast. That letter had alarmed, and was still alarming him. He wished now that he had never got mixed up in the affair.

Thus the letter read:

"Meet me at 12.30 to-morrow by the stile in Rylcombe Lane. It is urgently necessary that I should see you. What have you done with that file?"

That was all. Kerr had chosen his words very carefully. The file had had to go in. Only so could Kerr be sure of making it clear that the letter came—as, of course, it did not come—from the man who had tried to harm Mr. Selby. He could not give the man's name or his initials, for he had not the least idea who he was.

But Piggott never doubted, cunning as he was, that Osbert Deadland, Mr. Selby's nephew, had written those words. He did wonder how Deadland could have found out that he had had the file. But who else could know anything about it?

Kerr, Levison major, and Cardew left the

gates soon after twelve. It was thought best that only three of the six should go, and those three were chosen.

"We shall have to hide ourselves," said Kerr, as they reached the stile. "Piggy would smell a rat if he saw us before he got here, and he'd probably bunk off back."

"Besides which, to spring out upon him suddenly will fluster the sweet youth, an' the truth is more likely to come from Piggy flustered than from the normal Piggy," agreed Cardew.

They hid themselves in the luxuriant hedge-row close to the stile.

Not more than five minutes had passed before a man came along the lane from the Rycombe direction, and took a seat on the stile.

He was a stranger to all three. They had a good view of him, and it struck them all that his face was gloomy and morose, and that his eyes had a very wild look.

But it did not strike them as probable that this was the man they wanted to find. The coincidence would have seemed impossible had it occurred to them.

Yet there was nothing so very unlikely in it, really. If Osbert Deadland had been quite sane he would, no doubt, have put many miles between himself and St. Jim's before this. But Deadland, his mind unbalanced by brooding over his imagined wrongs, had never even thought of bolting. He knew that his attempt had failed, and perhaps he realised that so far no suspicion had attached to him. He had no further plans, and every day the unfortunate fellow's mind was growing less capable of making any.

He sat on the stile, smoking, and drumming his heels against the bars. And presently Reuben Piggott, wearing a very hang-dog look, came into sight.

Deadland glanced up and saw him. He did not appear particularly interested. Until Piggott spoke to him it did not occur to any one of the three watchers that this was their man.

Piggott's words gave them something almost like an electric shock.

"You wrote to me to come here," said the cad of the Third sullenly.

"Did I?" returned Deadland, staring at him vacantly.

"You know you did. And I wish you wouldn't! Tain't safe."

"For you or for me?" asked Deadland, with a look of quickening intelligence in his eyes.

"It isn't safe for either of us. Look here, why don't you hook it?"

"Why should I hook it?" the man inquired, staring at the junior.

"You daren't try anything on again. If you did I should give you away—so here! You got me under your thumb by making out you knew such a jolly lot about me; but I wouldn't have shown you round if I had guessed what you were after. Don't you bother about the file! What I did with that helped to keep suspicion off you, anyway."

"The file? Yes, I missed that—I remember now," said Deadland. "How did you come by it, young—I forget your name?"

Piggott stared at him.

"You knew it yesterday," he said.

"Did I? I don't remember that I did, or that I ever thought about you."

Cardew, Levison, and Kerr had no notion of showing themselves now.

Piggott had become the merest pawn in the game. All that they had meant to force from him had come to them by a sheer stroke of luck. There could be no doubt that this man was he who had made the attempt upon the life of Mr. Selby, though why he should have done it they did not know.

They had no qualms about listening, either. This was not mere eavesdropping.

"Why, you must have done!" returned Piggott, in surprise. "You wrote telling me to come here, you know."

"That I most certainly did not! There was no reason why I should wish to see you again."

A sane man in Deadland's position would have felt curiosity and alarm at Piggott's statement. But this fellow seemed to feel neither.

"Who wrote this, then?"

Piggott dragged out of his pocket the type-written communication which had brought him there.

Deadland glanced at it.

"I really have not the slightest idea," he replied indifferently.

"Here, I say, I must bunk! Here are some of our fellows coming along the lane, and I don't want them to see me with you," said Piggott hastily.

"Do as you like," was the listless reply.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 21.

Piggott bolted.

The Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—did not see him. But they could not fail to see Deadland. He was right in their way.

They halted before him. They were going over the fields, and wanted to cross the stile. But he paid no heed to them; he sat staring into vacancy.

"Excuse us, sir," said Monty Lowther politely.

A slight click was heard. The stranger did not notice it, and neither Tom Merry nor Manners thought of it, though that click was familiar to them. Manners had a small snapshot camera with him.

"Eh? Did you speak?" muttered Deadland.

"We rather want to come over that stile," said Tom Merry patiently.

"Oh! I really beg your pardon."

And the stranger descended at once, and lounged away.

Hardly were the Terrible Three over the stile before Kerr, Levison, and Cardew popped out of the hedge.

"Hallo!" came as in a chorus from the Terrible Three.

"Don't ask questions!" said Kerr hurriedly.

"Manners, old gun, do you think you could get a snapshot of the merchant who moved off the stile for you?"

Manners grinned.

"Don't stand there looking like a Cheshire cat!" snapped Levison. "It's important."

"No hurry," said Manners coolly.

"Why, you silly ass, he'll be gone in a minute, and you can't run after him to get one."

"It's all serene, Ernest, dear boy," said Cardew. "Manners has one."

"How do you know?" inquired Manners, in amazement.

"By the expression upon your speakin' countenance, old top."

"Well, I did get one," said Manners. "I had a reason. And I suppose you fellows had a reason for wanting one?"

"We have," replied Kerr. "What was your reason, Manners?"

"The look on the fellow's face. I've been studying expression lately—taking a good many snapshots of faces to get it. And I never saw before such a queer look as his—not really sane, I fancy."

"Now that you come to mention it, Manners, the fellow certainly looked like a candidate for what the Americans beautifully call the 'foolish house,'" remarked Lowther.

"Looked to me like a chap who had had a lot of trouble and had probably brought most of it on himself," said Tom Merry shrewdly.

"Why did you want a snapshot?" asked Manners.

"Because that merchant is the gentleman who set the booby-trap for our beloved Selby, an' we wanted to see whether the dear old top would recognise his—er—counterfeit presentment," answered Cardew.

"My hat!"

"Rats!"

"You're kidding!"

"It's true," said Kerr gravely. "Really, there's no possible doubt about it."

"But how did you find out?" asked Tom.

"We were even as three Mellishes," answered Cardew. "We listened. He discoursed with Piggott. A file was mentioned. Is that good enough?"

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Racke, Crooke, and Others.

"WE don't want to make a dashed mess of it this time!" growled George Gerald Crooke.

"We sha'n't!" replied Racke.

The cads of the Shell were together in their study.

They had heard the news Clampe and Chowle had imparted, and now they were consulting as to what action they were to take upon it.

The news was really by no means so definite as they would have liked it to be.

It seemed likely enough that Frank Levison was in the box-room in the New House; but it was not absolutely certain, and Racke and Crooke wanted to be sure this time. For an anonymous letter to Mr. Ratcliff was a more dangerous thing than one to Mr. Railton.

The School House master looked upon such things with too much contempt to institute searching inquiries as to their writers; but Mr. Ratcliff was not cast in the same mould as his colleague, and if he felt curious about things, he could put his dignity aside.

"What can we do to make certain?" Crooke asked.

"I've thought of a dodge," answered Racke. "They've had the painters about the last few days, and I noticed a long ladder against the back of the New House. The box-room window is round there. Easy enough to shift the thing so that we can have a peep in."

"An' s'pose someone spots us at it?" growled Crooke.

"Well, an' what then? No great harm in goin' up a ladder, is there?"

"It's not in our usual line; but—no, I shouldn't say that there's anythin' much in it, even if we are seen, Aubrey. I'm on! But what are we goin' to do if we can make sure the little sweep's there?"

"Go straight to Ratty an' tell him!" said Racke boldly.

Crooke gasped.

"By gad, that's hot stuff!" he said.

"I don't see it. We've a duty to perform to the school if we get to know anything, I suppose? An' Ratty's just the sort of old hunk who can be trusted to make matters as nasty for those fellows as they possibly can be made. His wool will be fairly off to think that the kid should have taken refuge in his House. An' Kerr an' that crew will get it in the neck good an' hard!"

"It sounds all right. I'm on!" said Crooke.

"When will be the best time for it?"

"After classes this afternoon, I fancy. Most of the fellows will be at the nets then."

"Right-ho!"

Most of the fellows were at the nets after classes, but not all.

In spite of the gibes of Reggie Manners, Hobbs and Curly Gibson had made up their minds to watch Racke and Crooke.

The two fags had not much experience in the detective role; but they rather fancied themselves in it, and it must be admitted that they did not acquit themselves badly.

First, they made sure that Racke and Crooke were indoors.

Then they went to the door of the School House, and waited there, not looking too much as if they were waiting.

Hobbs and Gibson were small fry, of no account in the lordly eyes of Racke and Crooke. Those two great men hardly noticed their presence when they passed out.

"They're going across the way," said Gibson.

And they look as if they were slinking after something that they knew wasn't straight," returned Hobbs.

The two Third-Formers followed, without hurry.

It looked suspicious to them when Racke and Crooke slipped round to the back of the New House. What could they want there?"

A long ladder stood very conveniently for their project. It was within a few yards of the box-room window.

The cads of the Shell hated any sort of exertion; but they screwed themselves up to as much as was necessary to move the ladder.

"See what they're up to?" breathed Curly, in the ear of Hobbs, as the fags peered round the corner. "They're sneaking up to see if they can spot poor old Franky!"

"The rotters!" answered Hobbs. "What's the kid ever done to them?"

"I say, Hobby, cut off and find Wally and the rest! We'll jolly well rag the sweeps when they come down!"

Hobbs bolted off.

Racke went first up the ladder. Crooke followed at his heels.

It did not occur to either of them that the painters might have been at work on the box-room window, among others, that morning.

But such was the case. Racke found it out when he laid hands on the ledge, and brought them away smeared with yellow paint.

"Oh, dash it all!" he snorted, in disgust.

"Is the young sweep there?" asked Crooke, from behind him.

"I don't know. But there's plenty of paint here, by gad!"

"Never mind a little paint! Surely you can see in?"

"The window hasn't been cleaned for dog's ages, I should say. I can't see the young brute! But there's a screen in one corner; he may be behind that."

"Push the window up," suggested Crooke.

"Push it up yourself!" snapped Racke.

"Can't get at it with you in front of me. Besides, your hands are mucked up already. No use in my makin' mine in a beastly state, too, by gad!"

Racke pushed up the window-sash.



But still they were no nearer finding out. An old screen shut off a corner of the room, and the space behind it was quite big enough to accommodate Frank Levison.

Indeed, it had accommodated him that morning, while the painter was at work on the window. Kerr had noticed that the men were getting round towards it, and had fixed up the screen, brought from the lumber-room hard by.

But Frank was no longer there. During morning classes, while there were few people stirring in the New House, he had slipped off to another place of refuge found for him by Figgins & Co.

Fatty had been jumped upon severely by Kerr and Figgy for his folly, and all three had agreed that the box-room was no safe place now that Clampe and Chowie had their suspicions aroused.

"Get in!" urged Crooke.

"What an' mess up my bags with paint? Likely, isn't it?" returned Racke.

"Put your handkerchief over the ledge—you can have mine, too. What does a hanky or two matter? We shall be dashed fools if we go away without makin' sure, now that we've got so far!"

"Levison minor!" hissed Racke.

No reply.

"Come out of it, you young sweep! We're on to you!"

Still no reply.

"I don't believe he's there," Racke said.

"Would he answer if he was? You bet he's fly enough not to do that! See here, Racke, I'll get in if you will. Here's my hanky."

Racke took the handkerchief. But he still hesitated.

"Go on!" urged Crooke.

His chum laid the two handkerchiefs over the ledge and sill, and then hesitated again.

"Get a move on you, do!"

Racke took the desperate plunge.

Crooke, true to his word for once, followed him. In getting in he displaced the handkerchiefs, and they fluttered down.

"Why, they aren't there!" said Wally D'Arcy, coming up at this moment, with Jameson, Manners minor, and Joe Frayne.

"You bet they are!" replied Gibson.

"They've got inside. I've watched them all the time."

"What was it that fluttered down as we came up?" asked Reggie.

"Their hankies. Can't make out why, though," Gibson answered.

"Duffer! The window's been painted," said Wally. "Can't you see that? They were saving their bags."

"They won't find Franky," Jameson said confidently. "I'm sure of that. I've been in the room. There's no one there, and the key is in the lock outside now."

"Good egg!" chortled Hobbs.

"Let's move the ladder!" suggested Wally.

"Oh, crumbs! That's a wheeze!" cried Jameson.

They moved up the ladder at once—just in time.

Hardly had they lifted it before the faces of Racke and Crooke appeared at the window.

"Here, stop that, you young bouncers!" came from Racke, in a kind of half-stifled shout.

"Eh? Did you say anything, you up there?" asked Manners minor, with a hand to one ear.

"Why, it's Racke!" said Wally, as if in great surprise.

"Can't be!" replied Hobbs. "Racke wouldn't be in the New House, you know. He's smoking or playing cards in his own study. It must be his Australian body, or whatever you call it, that we can see."

"Astral body, you mean, you ignorant young duffer!" said Reggie grandly. "That's what they call the spook of a live person. It's got nothing at all to do with Australia!"

"There's Crooke's astral body as well as Racke's!" chuckled Jameson. "Must feel rummy to be wandering about like that while all the time you're sitting safe and snug, blagging, over the way. Hi, you astrals! What are you after in my House?"

"Put that ladder back!" hissed Racke, in fury.

The ladder had now been restored to its former position, and the six fags stood, hands in trousers-pockets, looking up at the two flushed and angry faces.

"Did you say anything?" inquired Reggie Manner, again pretending deafness.

"Course they didn't." Joe Frayne said.

"Astrals can't talk!"

"These can't!" remarked Wally, with a grin.

"And swear, too!" added Jameson, looking choked.

"They'd better not let Ratty hear them!" Hobbs said.

"Look here, you kids—a lark's a lark, but it can be overdone!" said Crooke, doing his best to be conciliatory.

"It's no lark!" replied Wally. "What on earth could make you think we should play larks with you two? Why, we bar you completely. We wouldn't be seen dead with you!"

"What did you move that ladder for, you young sweeps?" demanded Racke.

"It's no use talkin' to them like that, Aubrey!" protested Crooke. "If we're not civil they'll keep us here!"

"To save the painter-men trouble, Racke," replied Wally, with a winning smile.

"Come to that, what did you move it for?" asked Reggie.

"Well, you're up there. Aren't you satisfied?" Curly Gibson inquired.

"Look here, I'll stand you kids a feed at the tuckshop if you'll put it back!" said Racke desperately.

"But we can't put it back after we've eaten it!" replied Reggie, with a grin that goaded Racke almost to madness.

Reggie Manners had been in Racke's toils once; but he had escaped, thanks to his major. Cheek from Reggie exasperated Racke even more than cheek from any of the other five.

"Put what back, you young fathead?" asked Crooke, never very quick.

"The feed, of course. Racke said we might have one if we put it back. But I don't see the use of having it like that."

"Racke meant the ladder, silly young ass!"

"But we never eat ladders!" said Hobbs gravely.

"Put the ladder back!" roared Racke, forgetting all caution in his rage.

"We have put it back!" said Wally. "Come on, you fellows! Racke's whispering too loud. He'll have Ratty hear him!"

They departed, chortling; and Racke and Crooke fairly gnashed their teeth with ire.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### A Fright for Mr. Ratcliff.

**G**OT that negative developed yet, Manners?" asked Kerr, meeting Manners of the Shell at the gates about tea-time.

Cardew, Levison, Clive, and Figgins were with Kerr. They had been to Rylcombe, with the idea of making inquiries about the stranger, but had not discovered much of importance. Fatty had preferred not to go. He considered that his role was that of cook rather than that of tea.

"You're in a hurry, aren't you?" returned Manners.

"Yes, we are. The sooner old Selby sees that photo the better."

"Who's going to show it to him?"

The five looked at one another. It really was not a job that appealed to any of them.

"The dear Sidney—" began Cardew.

"Count me out!" snapped Clive.

"That was what I was about to do," said Cardew blandly. "You are such a hasty person, Sidney. On the whole, I think—"

"Oh, don't argue!" snorted Levison. "I'll do it. It's up to me, anyway. Seems to me all you fellows have been doing more for young Frank than I have!"

Manners looked at Ernest Levison, and saw that the strain was telling upon him badly. There were dark marks under his eyes, and his face looked like that of a man three times his age.

"It's all right, Levison, old chap!" said Manners softly. "The kid's innocent. We knew that all along. And now you fellows think you know who did it, and I'm not saying you're wrong. Come to that, I wouldn't mind taking the photo to the old hunk myself. It's only to ask him whether he recognises it, and who it is. He can't bite your head off for that."

"Thanks no end, Manners! But I'll take it," replied Levison.

Fatty Wynn came hurrying up as they neared the New House.

"I say, you fellows—"

"It's all serene, Fatty. We're not really late for tea!" said Figgins. "And if we were, it would be our loss and your gain, for you'd have wolfed everything."

"I'm not talking about tea, ass! I'm talking about Racke and Crooke!"

"But surely you would never, never think of havin' Racke an' Crooke for tea, Wynn? If I took to cannibalism, I should prefer to start on somethin' more wholesome!"

"Fathead! They're locked up in the box-room, and can't get out!"

"How very sad!" giped Cardew.

"How did that happen?" inquired Figgins.

"They got up by the ladder the painter-men had left, and Wally D'Arcy and his little lot came along and took the ladder away."

"But what were they doin' in the box-room?" asked Cardew blandly.

"I suppose they thought Fra—"

"Dry up, Fatty, you ass!" snorted Figgy.

"Where is Frank now?" demanded Levison.

"Oh, he's quite safe, old chap!" replied Kerr.

"But I suppose he was in the box-room?"

"Yes. We got him out of that because it wasn't quite the place, with the painters about."

Levison's hands clenched. "Driven from pillar to post like this, when he's done nothing at all to be ashamed of!"

Figgins & Co. were silent. They would have told Levison major that Levison minor really did not mind if they could have said so truthfully. But the fact of the matter was that Frank did mind a good deal, and that he was in as bad a state of strain as his brother.

"Is there any objection to our goin' round by the back an' havin' a look at the animals in the cage?" asked Cardew of Figgins.

"I shouldn't do that, if I were you. Best not to attract attention there. Come up the stairs and speak to them through the door, if you'd like to."

"I'm not coming," said Levison. "I should want to open the door and go for the cads; and a row there wouldn't be a good thing just now. Wait till Frank's cleared, that's all!"

Clive went with Levison; but Cardew accompanied Figgins & Co. up to the door of the box-room.

"Racke, dear boy," spoke Cardew softly.

"Is that you, Cardew? Oh, dash it all, let us out! The key's there!"

"The key is certainly here. Whether it will still be here after we have gone is another matter. As for lettin' you out—really, Racke, I can't see why you took all that trouble to get up there if you want to come down at once!"

"Those beastly kids took the dashed ladder away!" howled Crooke.

"Softly, softly, or the dear Horace may hear! Why not drop, in the absence of the ladder?"

"We should break our dashed necks!" said Crooke.

"Yaas, that's the idea" replied Cardew.

And he and the New House trio departed, but they did not take the key with them.

Racke and Crooke had to endure another hour or so of captivity, during which they made fruitless appeals for release in turn to Redfern & Co., Koumi Rao, Clarke, and Thompson, all of whom happened to pass beneath. But at last Chowie came by, and a few minutes later the door was unlocked, and the cads of the Shell were liberated.

They showed the abundance of gratitude that was within them by abusing Chowie mercilessly for misleading them; and on the way down they encountered Mr. Ratcliff, who booked them for report to their own House-master for being in the New House after the hours during which visits were allowed.

"Do you think young Frank is safe where he is, Kerr?" asked Figgy, as the three chums settled themselves at the tea-table.

"As safe as he can be anywhere in here," answered Kerr. "But I don't mind owning that I shall be glad when we get this bizney settled up, and the kid doesn't have to be shifted about like this."

"Ratty don't often go down there," observed Fatty, putting butter on his haddock.

"But it would be just our luck if he happened to go down to-night," returned Figgy.

"If he does, he may not see the kid," said Kerr.

Frank had been shifted to the wine-cellar of the New House, as being a safer retreat than any place in the boys' quarters could be. The door to the cellar was in a lonely passage; but there was easy communication with the study floor by a back staircase.

Kerr went down there just before bedtime, taking Frank some food and drink.

"Sorry we can't give you better lodgings, old fellow," he said.

"Oh, I don't mind!" returned Frank wearily. "Any place is good enough for me, as long as I'm not caught. Do you think it will be long before you and Cardew find out who really did it, Kerr? I'm not grumbling, you know; but it seems years and years since it happened, and sometimes I dream that I was really the one who did it, and that I am going to be hang'd for it."

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Kerr patted him on the back. "Buck up, kid!" he said. "We as good as know now who did it; and I shouldn't wonder if by to-morrow we can prove it. And don't worry about the chance of old Ratty coming down. If he does, just wrap a blanket round you and give a hollow groan, and he'll bolt like one o'clock!"

Frank smiled wanly. The cellar was not altogether a desirable hiding-place, and he did not want to be caught by Mr. Ratcliff. But what worried him most was his knowledge that Ernest was so worried, and after that, the lying so long under the stigma of guilt. It was a comfort to know that so many believed in his innocence, and so many were willing to help him; but that did not quite make up for it all while those in authority still held him guilty.

He had dozed off to sleep when the opening of the cellar door at the top of the stone steps, fifteen feet above the level of his head, woke him suddenly.

There followed the soft pad of slippers upon the stairs.

Mr. Ratcliff was not by any means a confirmed wine-bibber, but he liked an occasional glass of good port. During the war he had gone slowly on the contents of his bins, for paying war prices for wine would not have suited him. Now that it was all over he took a little more, and that evening he had discovered that the decanter held only one glass.

So he padded down to get another bottle. He did not care to have anyone else handle his wine.

Figgins & Co. did not know much about the wine-cellar, and they were quite unaware that the corner they had chosen for Frank, as being the suggest, was quite close to the bin to which Mr. Ratcliff was certain to come, if he came at all. But so it was.

Frank lay still. The padding footsteps came nearer in the darkness. The master had a candlestick in his hand; but the candle had blown out at the top of the stairs, and he had waited until he got to the bin to relight it.

A match scraped, but did not flare. Ratty gave an exclamation of impatience, and Frank knew that he must be quite close at hand.

He remembered what Kerr had told him. Kerr had not meant it seriously, of course. But Frank, only just awakened from sleep, and overstrained, carried out the suggestion as if it were the one thing to be done.

He wrapped the blanket round him as he stood up.

The second match flared, and Frank gave a hollow groan.

Crash! went the candlestick upon the floor. The match flickered out.

"Ow! Oh! Ow!" yelled Mr. Ratcliff.

Then came the thud of a falling body, and after that silence—an awful silence!

Through it Frank could hear the frightened beating of his own heart.

He had meant to scare Mr. Ratcliff, but not like that—not like that!

Who could have dreamed that the House-master would faint with fright?

Something must be done. Frank's first impulse was to rush for Kerr and Figgins. But he did not act upon it.

To do that meant dragging them into it, and that would not be fair, after all they had done for him.

He found his box of matches, and struck one, with fingers that trembled.

The candle had rolled away, and the candlestick was smashed to atoms.

But Frank retrieved the candle, and stuck it into the neck of an empty bottle.

Then he lifted Mr. Ratcliff's head. The master gave a gasp, and came to himself.

"Where am I? What does this mean?" he asked feebly.

"In the wine-cellar, sir," answered Frank, summoning up all his pluck for the ordeal he had to face. "I—well, I suppose I must have frightened you, popping up like I did, and—

and then you fainted."

"Absurd! I was not frightened. How dare you suggest such a thing! And as for fainting—nothing of the sort! I stumbled—that was all!"

"I'm glad, sir," said Frank simply. "I felt sorry the moment I had done it."

"Why, you are Levison minor!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff. His fright had been so thorough that he had not recognised Frank until that instant.

"Yes, sir."

"And what, pray, are you doing here?"

"I was hiding, sir."

"You grossly unprincipled and reckless boy! But there are those who are even more to blame than you are, and I will see to it that they do not escape punishment—I will see to it! Who put you here?"

Silence.

"This attitude will not serve either yourself or those whom you apparently desire to shield, Levison minor! You will at once give me the names of the boys who are responsible for your presence in my wine-cellar!"

"I'm responsible myself, sir. I don't see why there need be anyone else in that at all."

Mr. Ratcliff was up against a stronger spirit than his own, though it was housed in the body of a small boy of thirteen. Wild horses would not have dragged that secret from Frank. Let Ratty guess! He could not prove anything.

"You will come with me to Mr. Raitton!" snapped the New House master.

"Very well, sir," answered Frank.

He followed Mr. Ratcliff up the cellar steps, through the silent passages, and across the dusky quad. He did not care much now what happened to him; and, anyway, Mr. Raitton was better than Mr. Ratcliff. But Mr. Raitton believed him guilty, and that hurt Frank. He did not care a scrap what Ratty believed.

The master of the School House looked up from his desk at the grim and sour face of his colleague, and the wan, overstrained countenance of the youngster beside him, and there was sympathy for Frank in his kindly eyes.

"Why, Mr. Ratcliff, this is a surprise indeed!" he said. "Where did you find Levison minor?"

"In my wine-cellar!" snorted the New House master. "He deserves the most exemplary punishment, Mr. Raitton, and I trust that it will be administered to him. I will leave him to you now; I wash my hands of him!"

And with that Mr. Ratcliff whisked out, glowering.

"Levison, I think the best thing you can do is to go to bed at once," said the School House master kindly. "I cannot send you to your dormitory, in the circumstances, but you shall sleep in my guests' room."

Half an hour later Frank was fast asleep between snowy sheets, dreaming that his troubles were all over.

And, in fact, they were very nearly over.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

### Cleared!

"IT is disgraceful—abominable!" said Mr. Selby crossly. "I never heard of anything like it! Ratcliff's wine-cellar! Pooh! I take no account of that. The man had no right to possess such a thing. But that Levison minor should have been harboured all this time within the walls of the school—that is beyond words! I consider that everyone mixed up in the affair should be expelled!"

"Selby, you must prepare yourself for an unpleasant surprise," said Mr. Raitton sympathetically. "The discovery of Levison minor in his hiding-place has led to revelations that would not have been made yet had he not been found. His brother has been with me this morning."

"And has confessed to having committed the crime himself?" said Mr. Selby, almost eagerly. "The Levisons are a bad family, I fear, and I am not in the least surprised."

"Levison major is no more guilty than his brother," replied Mr. Raitton warmly. "I consider it high time that the boy's past record should be forgotten, black though it was. I have come to look upon him with the real respect that I think due to anyone who fights down the evil in him and makes good in spite of it."

"His younger brother has as absolutely clean a record as any boy in the school. May I ask whether you have lately seen anyone who had reason to cherish ill-feeling against you, Selby?"

"Certainly not!"

"Do you mean that you object to my asking?"

"I do object to that. I consider it out of place. But what I mean is that there is no one living who has any justification for ill-feeling against me."

Mr. Raitton thought of the Third Form, and he could not quite agree with his master.

"Let me amend my query. Have you lately seen an enemy?" he said.

"I do not see what—"

"Do you know the original of this photo?" Mr. Raitton's patience was exhausted, and he snapped out those words as he held the print of the photograph taken by Manners major before the other master.

Mr. Selby looked at it. His jaw fell, and a curious greenish pallor overspread his face. He did not speak.

"Do you know this man?" persisted Mr. Raitton.

"Yes, I know him."

"Is it not a fact that he has made threats against you?"

"Yes," admitted Mr. Selby reluctantly. He gazed at the photo as if fascinated. Not until that moment had the possibility that the attempt upon his life was the work of his nephew, Osbert Deadland, entered his mind.

It shocked him. He had not believed in the reality of Deadland's threats. Bodily violence from the fellow in his ire he might have dreaded; but it was a far cry from that to such a murderous attempt as the one which had been made upon him.

And yet—was it not far more likely that a reckless unprincipled man like Deadland should have made it than a mere boy, little more than a child, like Frank Levison?

He had to admit to himself that it was. But he would not at once admit it to Mr. Raitton.

"He could not have got inside the school walls," he said weakly. "Even if he did, he would not have known which was my study."

"He has been inside the school walls, and he had your study pointed out to him," replied Mr. Raitton.

"Who did that?" snapped the Third Form master.

"I would rather not say at present. The boy who did it had no notion what this man meditated, I am sure; but in other ways his conduct has been nothing short of wicked, and he may have to be expelled."

"The man is my nephew—my sister's son," moaned Mr. Selby. "What a disgrace to my family! A murderer! For he was that in intention, if not in act."

"Look at that photo again, Selby. Do you notice anything about the face?"

Mr. Selby looked earnestly.

"It is very strange in appearance, certainly," he said. "I recall now that Osbert's face impressed me in much the same way when I saw him."

"To my mind it is not the face of a sane man," said Mr. Raitton. "I do not believe that your nephew was fully responsible for what he did. Dr. Holmes agrees with me. We consider his guilt established, after what we have heard from Piggott—there! I did not mean to let out the name, but it slipped from my tongue—has confessed to us. But there need be no disgrace to your family, Selby. You are probably as near a relative as this unfortunate man has; you can choose to overlook what he has attempted, and merely take the necessary steps to have his mental condition inquired into."

"I will do that," said Mr. Selby heavily. "I certainly do not want the matter to be made public. And, Raitton, am sorry that I was so certain of Levison minor's guilt. I am, indeed!"

There was a sumptuous feed in Study No. 9 on the Fourth Form passage that day. The spread was of Cardew's providing; Cardew was the moneyed man of Study No. 9. But that mattered nothing; as Ralph Reckness said, was he not one of Franky's kind uncles?

All of Frank's special chums were there, with Figgins & Co., and the Terrible Three, and Talbot, for the feed was given to celebrate the complete clearing of Frank from all suspicion, and these fellows had all backed him up.

"Here's to the guest of the evening!" said Cardew, lifting a foaming bumper of ginger-beer. "He's the whitest man at St. Jim's—don't blush, Franky! He couldn't have done the thing they charged him with, an' even if he had done it I'd have made excuses for him—I'm capable of worse deeds myself—"

"Oh, too, Cardew," protested Frank.

"Quite true, dear boy! What did you say, Cousin Walter Adolphus?"

"I say it's a heastly shame Piggy's got off expulsion!" flashed back Wally. "Putting that file in Franky's desk was beyond the limit! And don't you call me Walter Adolphus, Cardew, or you and I will fall out!"

THE END.