

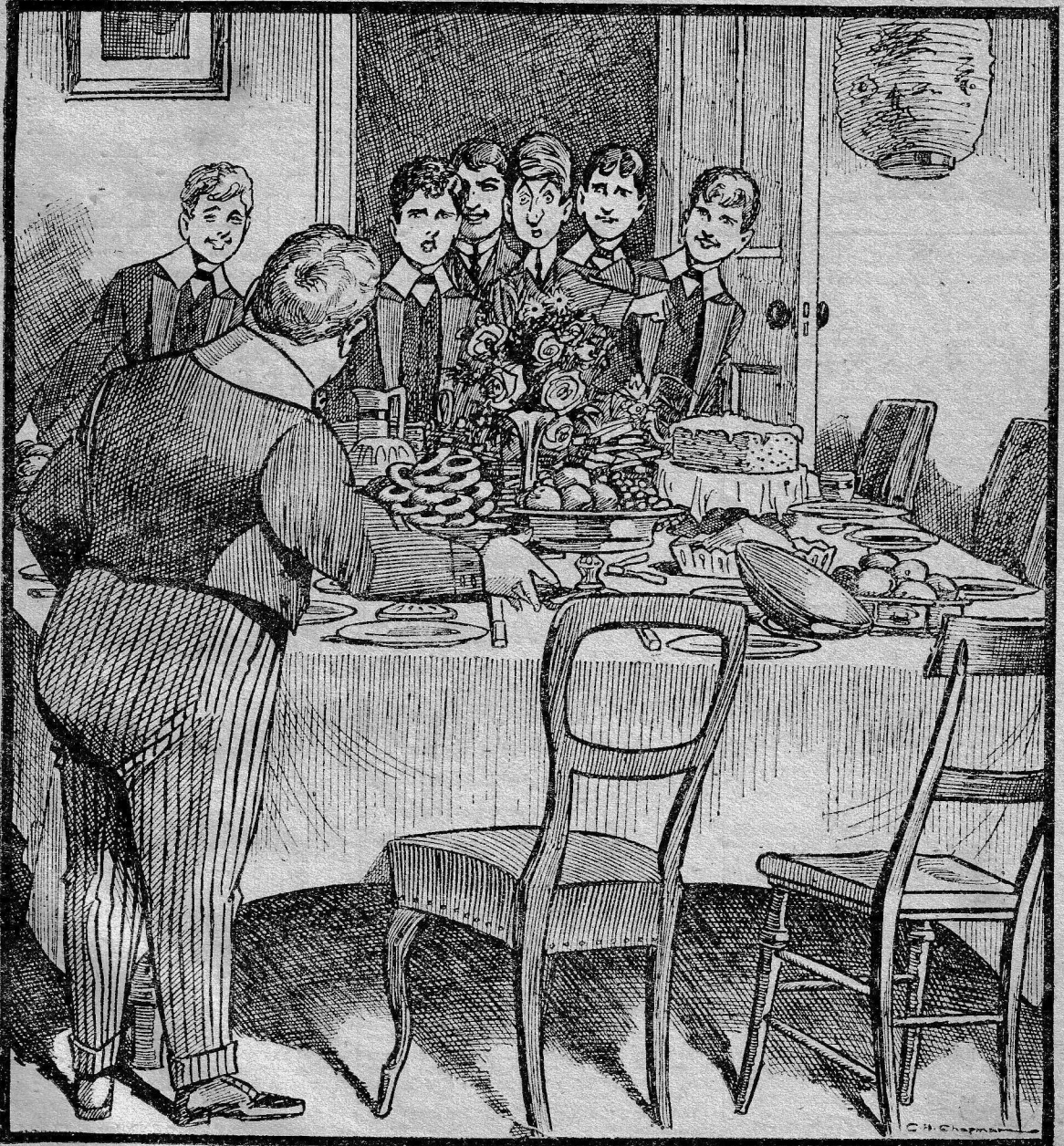
THREE LONG SCHOOL STORIES—20-PAGES!

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

Week Ending
November 22nd, 1919.

No. 44.
New Series.

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



BILLY BUNTER, THE HOST!

(A Remarkable Scene in the Magnificent Long Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)



For One Week Only!

A GRAND NEW COMPLETE STORY OF GREYFRIARS, DESCRIBING BILLY BUNTER'S EXPERIENCES AS CAPTAIN OF THE REMOVE.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Man of the Moment.

BUNTER!" Mr. Quelch, the master of the Greyfriars Remove, rapped out the name as the members of his class trooped out of the Form-room.

Billy Bunter was quaking a little as he rolled towards Mr. Quelch's desk. The Form-master was looking severe, and the fat junior wondered if a storm was brewing.

Harry Wharton & Co. passed out into the passage, and Billy Bunter, with his knees knocking together, stood at the seat of judgment.

"I have summoned you, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, "in connection with—"

"It wasn't me, sir!" said the fat junior promptly.

"What?"

"I don't know anything about it, sir—honest Junjun!"

"Bunter!"

"Somebody else must have exploded the fireworks in your study, sir!"

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"Indeed!" he said drily. "Am I to understand, Bunter, that you were responsible for the pyrotechnic display in my study?"

"Nunno, sir! I assure you, sir, that I wasn't looking in at the door when Skinner buzzed a jumping cracker at you!"

"So it was Skinner?" said Mr. Quelch grimly. "Very well. I will deal with him anon. It was not in connection with that outrage, however, that I wished to speak to you."

"Oh, crumbs!"

Billy Bunter realised that he had been too hasty in jumping to conclusions.

"It was on the subject of the captaincy that I wished to address you, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, good!"

The fat junior began to sit up and take notice, as it were. He had designs on securing the captaincy of the Remove, for which post there were several candidates.

Most of the candidates had already been given a trial week in which to demonstrate their abilities, and Billy Bunter now surmised—correctly, as it happened—that it was his turn.

"For a week from now, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, "you will nominally be Form-captain. I must say that I regard your application for the post as the height of absurdity—"

"Oh, really, sir—"

"However, I promised to give each candidate a fair chance, and you shall have yours."

"Thank you, sir!"

"I trust that during this trial week you will display qualities which have hitherto lain dormant!" concluded Mr. Quelch with crushing sarcasm. "That is all I have to say to you, Bunter."

The fat junior rolled out of the Form-room, with his face beaming like a full-moon. "At last!" he muttered triumphantly. "Captain of the Remove, by Jove! Now I'll make Wharton and all his precious pals sit up!"

"Hallo—hallo—hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, coming along the passage with the other members of the Famous Five. "Wherefore that smiling face, porpoise?"

"Has Quelch given you the O.B.E.?" asked Nugent.

Billy Bunter rolled majestically to a halt. He blinked at the Famous Five through his big spectacles.

"That's enough!" he said sharply. "I don't want any familiarity!"

"Wha-a-t!"

The Famous Five fairly gasped.

"Now that I'm captain of the Remove," Bunter went on, "I shall expect to be treated with proper respect!"

"My hat!" said Johnny Bull. "You mean to say your trial week's started?"

Billy Bunter nodded.

"I'm going to keep you fellows in order!" he said. "What's more, you needn't start falling on my neck for favours now that I'm skipper!"

"Why, you fat toad—" began Harry Wharton wrathfully.

The fat junior wagged a reproving forefinger at his schoolfellows.

"I shall expect you to toe the line, and back me up," he said.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"We prefer to let you down, Bunty," he said. "Here goes!"

And Billy Bunter was bumped without ceremony on the floor of the passage.

"Let us have a repeatful encore, my worthy chums!" said Hurree Singh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The temporary captain of the Remove was bumped a second time, and his yells awakened the echoes. Then the Famous Five passed on, chuckling, leaving Billy Bunter to sort himself out. When that painful process was accomplished, the fat junior went along to his own study—No. 7 in the Remove passage.

The two Todds and Tom Dutton were present in the study, and they looked up in some surprise as their fat study-mate limped in.

"Hallo, Tubby!" said Peter Todd. "Been trying conclusions with a steamroller?"

"Yow! Wharton and those rotters have bumped me—me, the skipper of the Remove!"

Peter Todd started.

"So you've started your trial week—what?" he said.

"Yes."

"Now we shall have some sport! I bet your trial week won't last more than a couple of days. What say you, Lonzy?"

"I am entirely in agreement with you, my dear Peter. I do not regard Bunter as the type of person who desecrates to have greatness thrust upon him. In the words of the common herd, I fear he will come a cropper!"

Billy Bunter blinked indignantly at Alonzo.

"Why, you—you—" he spluttered.

"If you think you're going to get a backing in the Remove, porpoise," said Peter Todd, "you'll find you're mistaken!"

"Where?" asked Tom Dutton, looking round. "I don't see any!"

"See any what?"

"Bacon."

"Chump!" snorted Peter. "Who's talking about bacon? I was saying that if Bunter expected a backing—"

The deaf junior snorted.

"Your own boots look as if they could do with some blacking!" he said.

Peter Todd groaned.

"You're hopeless!" he said. "Every conversation you take part in—"

"Use it yourself!" snapped Dutton.

"Eh?"

"Try a tin of Day & Martin!"

Peter gave it up. He would have bellowed at the deaf junior, but he was afraid of bursting a blood vessel. He turned to Billy Bunter.

"Now that you're skipper of the Remove, how do you propose to open your innings?" he inquired.

"By making myself thoroughly comfortable!" said Bunter promptly. "I want a change of quarters, to begin with. This study's no use to me. I haven't enough elbow-room. Besides, there are too many freaks in it for my liking!"

"Mum-mum-my hat!" gasped Peter. "Not going to borrow Quelch's study, are you, or the Head's?"

"No; I'm going to help myself to Mauly's."

"You—you're going to turn Mauly out of house and home, so that you can bag his study?"

"That's the ideal!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Peter. "I think Mauly will have something to say about that!"

"Mauly will have to understand that my word is law!"

"Great pip!"

With a lofty glance at the occupants of Study No. 7, Billy Bunter withdrew. He had quite made up his mind to take possession of Lord Mauleverer's sumptuously-furnished apartment. Now that he was captain of the Remove, the fat junior saw no reason why he should not have the best of everything. Mauly, a mere member of the rank-and-file, must give way to his wishes.

Billy Bunter rolled into the schoolboy earl's study without knocking.

Lord Mauleverer, overcome by the fatigue of afternoon lessons, was curled up on his couch. His eyes were closed, and it was necessary for Billy Bunter to prod him in the ribs before he was properly awake.

Mauly blinked at his visitor.

"What do you want, my dear fellow?" he asked languidly.

Billy Bunter jerked his thumb in the direction of the door.

"Clear out!" he said.

"Eh?"

"I am taking over this study with effect from now!" said Bunter in peremptory tones.

Lord Mauleverer shot bolt upright.

"What are you burblin' about, begad?" he exclaimed.

"You've got to make way for me," explained Bunter. "I'm captain of the Remove now, you know, and I rather fancy this study as my headquarters. This is rather short notice, but I can't afford to be sentimental. Out you get!"

Mauly did not budge. He stared at Bunter in a curious sort of way.

"Poor old chap!" he said. "I've suspected for a long time that you were potty, an' this confirms it. You'd better look up the next train to Colney Hatch!"

"Look here, you rotter—"

"If you really happen to be sane," continued Mauly, "then this is the biggest piece of cheek I've heard for whole terms! You actually want me to clear out of my own study, an' leave it to the tender mercies of a vandal like you!"

"They'll make you comfy in No. 7," said Bunter.

"I'd prefer to stay where I am, thanks!"

Billy Bunter clenched his plump hands.

"Then you refuse to clear out?" he ejaculated.

"That's the position in a nutshell."

The fat junior advanced grimly towards the couch. He was not a fighting-man, as a rule, but he anticipated little difficulty in dealing with Lord Mauleverer, who was a notorious slacker.

"I'm going to sling you out on your neck!" said Bunter.

"Go ahead, then!" said Mauly cheerfully.

Billy Bunter went ahead, and the next moment he had the surprise of his life.

Lord Mauleverer bounded to his feet, and with a superhuman effort he bundled Billy Bunter through the doorway and into the passage. The fat junior hit the opposite wall with an impact which knocked his spectacles off.

"Yarooooh!" he roared.

Mauly's store of energy was not yet exhausted. He applied his boot to Billy Bunter, and toed him along the passage.

"Get back to your kennel, begad!" he panted.

Several doors opened along the passage, and several pairs of eyes were fixed in astonishment on the schoolboy earl.

"Mauly taking exercise!" gasped Bob Cherry. "My hat!"

"Bunter, the human football!" chuckled Frank Nugent.

Billy Bunter picked himself up at length, and fled as if for dear life. His fat little legs were going like clockwork.

Scent of breath, but triumphant, Lord Mauleverer turned back into his study. It was still Mauly's study, in spite of Billy Bunter's ambitions; and it was likely to remain Mauly's study.

Pinned to the outside of the door, half an hour later, was the following expressive placard:

"BARRELS ARE REQUESTED NOT TO ROLL INTO THIS STUDY, OR THEY WILL BE ROLLED OUT AGAIN!"

The juniors chuckled as they surveyed that announcement.

The new captain of the Remove could hardly be said to have opened his innings in style.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Sight for the Gods.

BILLY BUNTER'S dignity had been ruffled but he was undaunted. He had been forced to abandon his scheme for taking possession of Mauly's study, but he was still keen on throwing his weight about.

Bunter remembered that a football match was due to take place on the morrow against St. Jim's.

The Remove team had not yet been chosen, and the choosing of it rested with Billy Bunter as Form-captain.

The fat junior had his own ideas about selecting a team. He considered that Harry Wharton's eleven had always been chosen by favouritism.

"The same old team week after week!" he muttered. "Cherry and Nugent, Bull and Linley, and that nigger fellow, Hurree Singh! None of them know a goalpost from a referee. I'll select a team that'll lick Wharton's into a cocked hat!"

With this resolve, Billy Bunter drew up a list of the players to meet St. Jim's.

It was a truly amazing document which the fat junior posted up on the school notice-board before bed-time that evening!

"NOTISS!

"A grate match will take place to-morrow between Greyfriars' and St. Jim's." There has been so much petty jellussy in the past that the Remove have lost a lot of matches, but on this okkasion i have selected the best available team. It will line up as follows:

"Gole, Snoop; backs, Trevor and Treluce; $\frac{1}{2}$ -backs, Stott, Skinner, and Kipps; forwards, A. Todd, P. Bolsover, W. G. Bunter, F. T. Fish, and Wun Lung.

"(Sined) W. G. BUNTER,

"Kaptin of the Remove."

"Did you ever?" gasped Bob Cherry, when he read that announcement.

"No, never!" said Nugent solemnly.

"What are you going to do about it, Harry?" inquired Johnny Bull.

"Give Bunter his head," said Wharton.

"You're going to let that team of freaks turn out against St. Jim's?"

Wharton nodded.

"But—but it's unheard-of!" protested Bob Cherry.

"Bunter's captain of the Form for a week, and he can do as he likes," said Wharton. "We can't interfere. If we made trouble, Bunter would be backed up by Quelch."

"But he's left out all the decent players!" hooted Johnny Bull.

"We have all got to take the backseatfulness!" said Hurree Singh.

Harry Wharton grinned.

"The best thing we can do," he said, "is to let Bunter go ahead. After his team has been licked by about twenty goals to nil he'll be fed-up with the captaincy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It'll be great sport!" declared Bob Cherry.

"Pity we can't stop to see it!" said Wharton.

The others stared.

"Why can't we?" asked Nugent.

"Because we've another engagement to-morrow afternoon. We're going to slaughter the Highcliffe cads. You remember that little hut at Pegg, where Ponsonby & Co. make merry? Well, they're going to have another meeting there, and we're going to break it up—see?"

"So we shall miss the footer-match?" said Johnny Bull.

"Yes. It's a pity, but it can't be helped. It's far more important that the Highcliffe rotters should be smashed."

"Hear, hear!"

At that moment Bolsover major pushed his way to the notice-board. His eyes nearly bulged out of his head when he caught sight of his own name in the "freak" eleven.

Bolsover's jaw—always a prominent feature—stuck out still more aggressively.

"My only aunt!" he spluttered. "That—that fat barrel's had the cheek to stick my name alongside his own. I—I'll burst him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But you're chucking away the chance of a lifetime, Bolsover, old man!" said Bob Cherry.

"Brrr!" growled the bully of the Remove. "Where's Bunter?"

The question was soon answered. The temporary captain of the Remove, knowing nothing of the threat which had been uttered, rolled up to the notice-board.

"Come here, you fat rat!" shouted Bolsover.

Billy Bunter backed away in alarm. He showed no signs of going to Bolsover, so the latter went to him. He seized the fat junior by the scruff of the neck, and shook him till his teeth rattled.

"Ow! Yah! Chuckit! Stoppit!" screamed Bunter.

Bolsover major continued to shake the victim until his arms ached. Then he released the groaning owl, and, stepping up to the notice-board, scored out his own name from the list of players.

"Dashed if I'm going to play for a week-kneed collection like that!" he snorted.

"This means that Bunter will have to play ten men," said Bob Cherry. "He can't possibly find anybody to take Bolsover's place."

Billy Bunter turned to the Famous Five. "Would one of you fellows care to turn out?" he inquired.

There was a general shaking of heads.

"Nothing doing!" said Nugent.

"We're not quite up to your weight, you know, Bunt!" said Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!" growled Bunter. "You've got no sense of loyalty to the Form. I shall have to play ten men, that's all."

"Hope it keeps fine for you," said Johnny Bull.

There was a big crowd round the notice-board by this time.

"Bunter knows where to look for talent, and no mistake!" said Skinner. "He knows that I'm a nailing good centre-half."

"And he's had the savvy to put me in goal," said Snoop.

"And to select a rattling good pair of backs!" said Trevor, nudging Treluce.

"I guess Bunter's a brainy galoot," said Fisher T. Fish. "He's given me a show in the forward line."

"I observe that I, too, have been selected to participate in the whole game," murmured Alonzo Todd. "Between us, my dear Bunter, we ought to amass quite a lot of runs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Me muchee likee prospect of playing for Remove!" remarked little Wun Lung, the Chinese.

The only fellow who seemed to have any doubts on the subject of playing was Oliver Kipps. This youth was better known as a conjurer than anything else. He hardly liked being included in a team of hopeless freaks.

"To play or not to play?" he mused.

"Blessed if I know what to do!"

"Play, old chap!" advised Bob Cherry.

"It'll need a conjurer to make the Remove win!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it will be rather a lark," said Kipps thoughtfully. And he decided to turn out under Bunter's banner.

There was a shock in store for Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's, when they arrived next day.

Harry Wharton & Co., who usually met them in footer garb, were absent, and the person who advanced to greet them as they came into the Close was Billy Bunter.

The fat junior's appearance was decidedly comical. He sported a football jersey which fitted him about as neatly as a sack would have done, and he wore socks which persisted in overlapping his boots, revealing several inches of plump calf. His glasses were perched upon his snub nose, and he seemed to be weighed down with the cares and worries of his position.

"How do you do, Merry?" he said, extending a fat hand.

"I—I'm all right, thanks!" gasped the junior captain of St. Jim's.

"You don't look it. You look as if you'd just seen a ghost!"

"Well, this is rather a surprise!" confessed Tom Merry. "Where's Wharton?"

"Oh, he's gone out with a crowd of fellows. You see, I didn't include him in the team. I don't like Wharton's style."

"My hat!"

"Weally, Buntah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "this is wathah sudden! Since when have you been skippah of the team?"

"Since yesterday. And I've made drastic changes already."

"Looks like it!" said Monty Lowther.

"I've got together a team that will smash you to a jelly!" said Bunter, blinking round at the St. Jim's fellows.

Tom Merry & Co. grinned. They had their own ideas about that.

Billy Bunter led the way to Little Side, and the rest of the fellows followed.

Harry Wharton & Co. had set out on their campaign against Ponsoby & Co.; but there was a good sprinkling of spectators all the same.

Coker of the Fifth was referee—a freak to control the freaks, as some wag put it.

There was a cheer—rather an ironical cheer—when the two teams lined up.

The disparity between the elevens was only too painfully obvious. Tom Merry & Co. looked fit and athletic, while the members of Bunter's eleven scarcely knew how to line up.

Then the whistle went, and the ball was set in motion.

The Remove were helpless, and so were Tom Merry & Co. The former were helpless because they hadn't the slightest knowledge of the game, and the St. Jim's players were helpless with laughter.

Billy Bunter's antics on the field of play were too funny for words. He was giving directions at the top of his voice—directions which no one heeded.

"Now, then, Alonzo, swing the ball about! Stop turning somersaults, Wun Lung, and get on with the game! Pass, Fish, you duffer—pass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the crowd—likewise the St. Jim's players.

"Bai Joyce!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "This is the funniest match I ever struck, dear boys!"

"I'm sure I shall burst a boiler in a minute!" said Monty Lowther. "Just look at Bunter! He's a sight for gods and men and little fishes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter was prancing about like a fat war-horse. He rapped out numerous commands, but he himself set a ridiculous example. Whenever the ball came his way he sat on it.

For the first five minutes the game was a pure farce. Even Coker was chuckling, and Coker knew nothing about football, although he prided himself that he knew more than the rest of the Greyfriars fellows put together.

Then Tom Merry, recovering from his merriment, turned to his comrades.

"Better pulverise them, hadn't we?" he said.

And there was a general nodding of heads.

The St. Jim's fellows played up just as they would have played had their opponents been Harry Wharton & Co. And the result was amazing.

Tom Merry drove the ball past Snoop, and a moment later he repeated the performance. Then Talbot got a goal, which was followed by goals from the respective feet of Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Five up!" gurgled Monty Lowther. "Oh, ye gods!"

The St. Jim's players carried everything before them. They made rings round the feeble defence of the home team, and Snoop in goal was simply bombarded with shots.

Billy Bunter glared at his fellow-players.

"You horn-tired slackers!" he shouted. "Do you call this backing up your skipper? Put a jerk in it!"

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Trevor. "We'll frog's-march you off the field in a minute!"

When half-time came Tom Merry & Co. had scored eight goals without reply.

The spectators were in a state bordering on hysterics. Some of them lay back on the grass and kicked their heels in a paroxysm of merriment.

"Keep the pot boiling, you fellows!" said Tom Merry, when the teams lined up for the resumption. "We'll teach these beauties a lesson!"

"Yaas, wataiah!"

If the first half had been a farce, the second half proved trebly so.

Billy Bunter was covered with mud, but not with glory. He still rapped out instructions which everyone ignored.

When Tom Merry & Co. had added three more goals Skimmer, of the Remove, turned on his heel.

"I'm off!" he said promptly.

"Same here," said Trevor. "I've had enough!"

And the pair of them limped off the field. Snoop and Stott and Treluce joined the procession.

Billy Bunter fairly tore his hair.

"Hi! Where are you going?" he yelled.

But the five deserters, although they must have heard, did not heed.

"Better ring down the curtain, hadn't we?" suggested Talbot, of St. Jim's.

"Nonsense!" said Coker, exercising his

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 44.

powers as referee. "Fight it out to a finish!"

"But—they've only got six men, dear boy!" protested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I'm not prepared to argue the point," said Coker. "Carry on!"

So the St. Jim's juniors "carried on," and the concluding stages of that game resembled a pantomime.

The final score was twenty-seven goals to nil in favour of the visiting team, and Tom Merry & Co. were almost sobbing as they staggered off the field.

"Too funny for words!" was Monty Lowther's verdict.

"Almost as funny as a 'Chuckles' front page!" said Jack Blake.

Billy Bunter's countenance showed crimson through the mud. He was usually too stupid to feel the pangs of humiliation and shame, but he experienced them now.

"Twenty-seven to nil!" groaned Fisher T. Fish. "Oh, Jerusalem crickets!"

"Ow! I feel as if I had passed through a mangle!" murmured Alonzo Todd.

The spectators were shaking with laughter as they dispersed, and Billy Bunter came in for plenty of chaff.

"You've opened your innings in style, and no mistake!" said Bolsover major. "Twenty-seven! Oh, my hat!"

"Sounds like the score of a cricket-match!" chuckled Ogilvy. "You needn't look on Bunter as a dangerous rival, Dick!"

Dick Russell, to whom the remark was addressed, grinned. In the contest for the captaincy, he had fared better, so far, than any other candidate. Vernon-Smith had come a cropper, and so had Peter Todd; and Billy Bunter was getting even deeper in the mire. Unless Harry Wharton, the only other candidate, had an exceptionally successful week, Dick Russell would become captain of the Remove.

The St. Jim's footballers waited a little while, in the hope of seeing Harry Wharton & Co. But those cheerful youths did not come in, and so Tom Merry & Co. took their departure, having won one of the most farcical and one-sided matches in the whole history of school football.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Ponsoby's Vow.

HARRY WHARTON & Co. walked briskly in the direction of Pegg. They were out to reap vengeance on the cads of Highcliffe.

There had been trouble with Ponsoby & Co. from the very beginning of things, and the trouble seemed to have grown more acute of late.

The Greyfriars juniors had already smashed up several of Ponsoby's shady haunts; but the Highcliffe nuts, who possessed more pocket-money than sense, persisted in holding their "little flutters." And one of them was booked for this afternoon.

Harry Wharton & Co. were very eager to get to grips with Ponsoby. A week before he had played them a particularly shabby trick. He had intercepted a telephone-call which had been intended for Frank Courtenay, and he and a dozen of his followers had waylaid a small party of Greyfriars juniors. This cowardly action had not yet been avenged; and it was to avenge it that Harry Wharton & Co. were now striding towards Pegg.

"What are we going to do with the cads, Harry?" inquired Bob Cherry. "String them up, and send them marching home to Highcliffe?"

Wharton shook his head.

"They need a sterner lesson than that, Bob!" he said. "We're going to wallop them!"

"With our fists?" asked Nugent.

"No—with Johnny Bull's stick."

"Phew! That's a bit thick, isn't it?" said Mark Linley.

"Not at all!" said Wharton. "Nothing's too thick for Ponsoby."

"Hear, hear!" said Vernon-Smith. "The only language Pon understands is the stick—laid on hard!"

"We'll take it in turns," said Bob Cherry, "and wallop the lot!"

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors at length came in sight of the little fisherman's hut, which Ponsoby had made his headquarters.

From the small window puffs of smoke were seen to emanate.

"Same old game!" said Nugent contemptuously. "Smoking in secret! We'll sling all their precious cigarettes into the sea!"

"Good!"

Ponsoby & Co. were not only smoking.

They were enjoying a game of cards, and they were so absorbed in the game that they failed to notice the approach of the invaders.

"Pile in!" sang out Harry Wharton.

And the Greyfriars juniors dashed into the hut.

Ponsoby & Co. were on their feet in an instant. They were not present in full force, Merton and Drury being absent. There were only four of them—Ponsoby, Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour—and the looks they darted at the Greyfriars fellows were far from friendly.

On the little table in the hut stood several small piles of silver. On the mantelpiece was a box of gold-tipped cigarettes. Cards lay scattered on the table and the floor.

Ponsoby was the first to find his voice.

"Get out!" he said savagely.

"Not just yet, my pippin!" said Bob Cherry sweetly.

Ponsoby spun round upon Harry Wharton.

"It's like your cheek to be always interfering!" he snarled.

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour. "Keep off the grass!"

Harry Wharton addressed the nuts.

"We owe you something for the mean trick you played on us last week," he said. "We've come along to lick you!"

"Easy to talk like that when the odds are three to one!" sneered Ponsoby.

"What about the odd last week?" retorted Johnny Bull. "They were in your favour then, so this makes it quits!"

"Hear, hear!"

Ponsoby scowled his courage to the sticking-point. He was not a coward, although the majority of his cronies were.

"All serene!" he said. "If you've made up your minds to lick us, you can go ahead!"

And he threw himself into a fighting attitude.

"I don't mean that sort of licking," said Harry Wharton. "You're going to be flogged!"

"What!"

"You're going to be slung across this table, one at a time, and whacked!"

Ponsoby flushed. He realised how terribly humiliating such a punishment would be.

"You wouldn't dare!" he exclaimed.

And the faces of the other three, already pale from the effects of smoking, grew paler still.

Harry Wharton wasted no more time in words. He signalled to several juniors to place Ponsoby in position across the table.

The leader of the nuts fought fiercely, but his assailants were too many for him.

"You'll be sorry for this!" hissed Ponsoby, as he was hoisted on to the table.

"Rats!"

"I warn you that I'll make you all sit up!"

"Confound the fellow and his threats!" growled Johnny Bull. "Get on with the washing, Harry!"

Wharton nodded.

Johnny Bull handed over his stick, and the former captain of the Remove proceeded to do great execution.

The stick descended with a mighty thwack on Ponsoby's tight-fitting trousers.

"Yow! Chuck it, you cad!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yarooooh!"

Gadsby and Monson made a sudden dash for the door, but Hurrce Singh stood with his back to it, and he grinned, revealing his white, even teeth.

"No exit this way, my esteemed friends!" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton dealt out six strokes with the stick, and when he had finished Ponsoby rolled off the table, and collapsed on the floor in a groaning heap.

"Gadsby next!" rapped out Wharton.

And the painful process was repeated. It was Bob Cherry who acted as chief executioner this time.

When Gadsby had been dealt with, Frank Nugent tested his strength on Monson, and the howls of that youth might have been heard in Pegg. Indeed, it was surprising that no one looked in to see what all the noise was about.

Vavasour was the next victim. What little pluck he possessed oozed out at his fingertips. He turned a pleading face to Harry Wharton.

"Let me off!" he wailed. "It wasn't my fault that you fellows were trapped last week. Don't blame for everything!"

"You whining cad!" snarled Ponsoby.

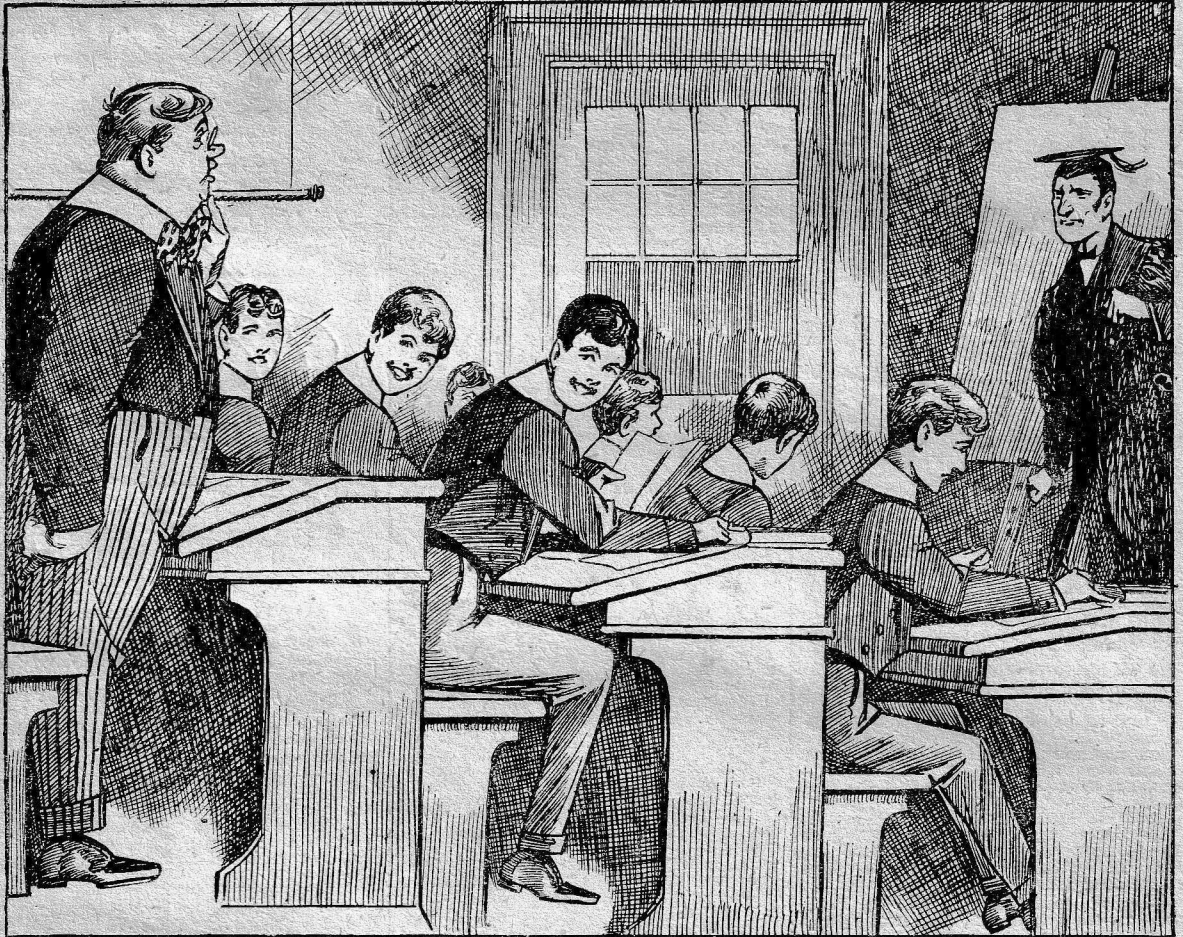
Vavasour continued to plead.

"I'll make it worth your while if you'll let me off!" he said. "I'm simply rollin' in money, as you know. Would you accept a quid, Wharton—"

"Oh, put him across the table!" growled Wharton, in disgust.
 And willing hands did the needful.
 "My turn, I think?" said Johnny Bull, stepping forward.
 "Mine!" said Vernon-Smith.
 "I have not yet got in an esteemed whack!" complained Hurree Singh.
 "Better all take a turn," suggested Bob Cherry.
 "What's left of Vavasour can be sent home to his sorrowing parents in a matchbox!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 It was Johnny Bull who eventually secured the stick; and he was about to bring it down when a startling interruption occurred.
 The door of the hut was thrown open without ceremony, and Loder of the Sixth strode in.

"Stand back!" shouted Wharton. "If you interfere, you'll be licked yourself!"
 The prefect was too furious to heed Wharton's words. He stretched out his hand towards Johnny Bull, and a number of juniors surrounded him on the instant and bore him back.
 Johnny Bull completed the castigation of Vavasour, who joined his squirming companions.
 "I'm ready to give Loder a dose!" said Johnny.
 "You—you—" spluttered Loder.
 "Will you promise to be a good little boy and run away?" said Bob Cherry.
 "No!" snarled Loder.
 "Very well!" said Harry Wharton. "Heave him on to the table!"
 But Loder's heart quailed at the prospect of

said Wharton. "You'll have to admit that we caught you smoking and gambling—"
 "And you'll have to admit layin' into us with a thick stick!" said Ponsonby. "It cuts both ways, you see. Quelch will say that you ought to have reported us, instead of takin' the law into your own hands."
 The Removites were silent. They realised only too well how grave a view Mr. Quelch would take of the matter. He would condemn the Highcliffe fellows for their "flutter"; but he would also condemn his own pupils for their heavy-handed treatment of Ponsonby & Co. On the whole, Ponsonby could not have chosen a better way of making mischief than by sneaking to Mr. Quelch.
 "The cad!" muttered Frank Nugent, at length. "Shall we give him another dose?"
 Wharton shook his head.



"Why have you absented yourself all this time from morning lessons?" thundered Mr. Quelch. Billy Bunter blinked at the angry Form-master. "Oh, really, sir—I consider that, as Captain of the Remove, I am entitled to come into class half an hour later than the others!" Mr. Quelch nearly fell down. "What!" he shouted. (See page 6.)

The prefect's eyes glittered angrily as they lighted upon Harry Wharton & Co. Loder hated Wharton, and liked Ponsonby. And he was ever ready to pounce upon an opportunity of making things warm for the Greyfriars juniors.
 "What does this mean?" he demanded.
 "It means," said Wharton, "that we're punishing a set of cads!"
 "You heastly little bullies! You know very well you're not permitted to lam anybody with a stick. You've taken these Highcliffe fellows at a disadvantage, and you're behaving like a set of young hooligans! Let Vavasour get off that table at once!"
 "Rats!" said Bob Cherry.
 "What?"
 "Rats!" repeated the rest of the juniors, in chorus.
 "Go ahead with the whacking, Johnny!" said Wharton.
 And Johnny Bull went ahead.
 Loder, almost choking with fury, strode towards the table, with the object of wrenching the stick out of Johnny Bull's grasp.

being flogged by a junior. He knew that he would have no redress afterwards. The Head would say that he was in the wrong—that he ought not to have backed up Ponsonby & Co., who had been smoking and gambling.
 "I—I'll get out!" muttered the prefect.
 "Out you go, then!" said Vernon-Smith.
 And Loder's burly form was heaved through the doorway. It was humiliating for him to have to retreat; but it would have been more humiliating still to remain and be thrashed.
 When the prefect had gone, Harry Wharton turned to Ponsonby.
 "I hope this will teach you not to play any mean tricks on us in future!" he said.
 Ponsonby's face was livid.
 "You've gone too far this time!" he said.
 "If you think we're goin' to take this lyn' dapein, you're mistaken!"
 "What can you do?" asked Vernon-Smith derisively.
 "I'm goin' to Greyfriars, an' I shall lay the whole case before Mr. Quelch!"
 "Oh, you sneak!"
 "Why, you won't have a leg to stand on!"

"He's not worth touchin'!" he said. "We'll sly these cigarettes and cards into the sea, and quit."
 The Highcliffe nuts made no resistance as the various articles were collected and carried out of the hut. Ponsonby, however, repeated his threat.
 "You'll find me at Greyfriars to-morrow," he said. "And I hope it means a lickin' for all of you!"
 And, with these words ringing in their ears, the avengers took their departure.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
 Saving the Situation!

"HALLO—hallo—hallo! How goes the captaincy?"
 Bob Cherry asked the question of Billy Bunter in the junior Common-room. The Owl of the Remove was engaged in tenderly caressing his fat person.
 "Wow! Rotten!" was his reply.
 THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 44.

"Were you injured during the match with St. Jim's?" inquired Nugent.

"No," chuckled Skinner. "He was injured afterwards! We've just been bumping him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Didn't he bag enough goals?" asked Harry Wharton.

"No!" grunted Stott. "He left that to the other team. They bagged twenty-seven!"

"How much?" asked Bob Cherry incredulously.

"Twenty-seven!"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"Bunter's sure to be elected to the captaincy, after this—I don't think!" said Johnny Bull.

"It wasn't my fault!" protested the fat junior. "Half the team deserted me—just as I was going to start pulling the game out of the fire, too!"

"Shame!" said Bob Cherry.

"By the way," said Skinner, turning to Harry Wharton & Co., "where have you fellows been?"

"We've been to settle an account with Pensonby," explained Vernon-Smith.

"Did you wallop him?" asked Bolsover major.

"Well, he won't be able to sit down for some days!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He says he's coming here to-morrow to sneak to Quelch about the way we handled him," said Johnny Bull.

Billy Bunter pricked up his ears.

"Coming to Greyfriars, is he?" he said. "He'd better not show himself inside this place while I'm captain of the Remove!"

"How can a bladder of lard like you prevent Pon from coming here?" said Vernon-Smith contemptuously.

Billy Bunter grinned knowingly.

"You leave it to me," he said. "I'll deal with Pon!"

"Oh, rats!"

Harry Wharton & Co., who had no faith whatever in their plump schoolfellow, went along to their respective studies in quest of tea.

Billy Bunter did not spend a pleasant evening. He had intended to do great things—to call a meeting of the entire Form, and to propose all sorts of sweeping changes.

The meeting was duly announced, but it was attended by one person only—William George Bunter! The result was that everything was proposed by Bunter, seconded by Bunter, and carried unanimously by—Bunter! The fat junior had expected a packed house, and he was annoyed to find that no one took his claims to the captaincy seriously.

Bunter attempted to throw his weight about in the dormitory that evening, but he was repeatedly squashed by his Form-fellows. And Bob Cherry, who had no respect whatever for the temporary captain, roused Bunter in the usual manner next morning by squeezing a sponge over his face.

Between rising-bell and breakfast-time Billy Bunter received a good many hard knocks, but he still assumed a dignified attitude, and regarded himself as monarch of all he surveyed.

When the juniors trooped into the Form-room for morning lessons, there was a shock in store for them.

Billy Bunter was missing!

"The silly ass!" muttered Peter Todd. "He's fairly asking for it! He knows that Quelch's the soul of punctuality, and that he expects everybody else to be!"

"What's happened to the fat duffer?" asked Harry Wharton.

"He's had a big breakfast, and I dare say he's sleeping it off," remarked Bolsover major.

"Shush!" murmured Frank Nugent, as Mr. Quelch swept into the Form-room.

The Remove master asked the precise question which all his pupils had been asking:

"Where is Bunter?"

There was a general shaking of heads.

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"Does no one know where Bunter is?" he exclaimed.

There was no reply.

"Can no one suggest where he may be?"

"I should advise dragging the river, sir," said Bolsover major.

Mr. Quelch gasped.

"Dragging the river!" he repeated.

"Yes, sir. Bunter's probably so fed up with the life of a Form captain that he's chucked himself in the Sark."

Mr. Quelch's frown deepened.

"Take a hundred lines, Bolsover, for THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 44.

making such a ridiculous and insolent suggestion!"

"Oh, crumbs!" muttered Bolsover. And he threw out no further suggestions as to Billy Bunter's whereabouts.

"Wharton!" rapped out Mr. Quelch. "Pray step along to Bunter's study, and ascertain if he is within."

"Very good, sir."

There was a buzz from the class while Harry Wharton was gone.

What had become of the Owl of the Remove? Had he been taken ill, and conveyed to a sanatorium, or had he forgotten the passage of time, and failed to hear the bell for morning lessons?

Harry Wharton returned in a few moments. He entered the Form-room alone.

"Bunter's not in his study, sir," he said.

"Thank you, Wharton!" said Mr. Quelch. "You may go to your place. We will now commence lessons."

Evidently the Form-master did not intend to make another move just then.

For nearly half an hour lessons proceeded as usual.

Then, to the utter astonishment of the class, the door opened, and Billy Bunter rolled casually in, as if nothing was wrong.

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

Billy Bunter ignored Mr. Quelch completely, and went to his place. But Mr. Quelch did not ignore him.

"Bunter!"

The Remove-master's voice resembled the rumble of thunder.

"Yessir?"

"You are late, Bunter!"

"Am I, sir?"

"You are!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "Half an hour late, to be precise! I demand an explanation of your conduct at once!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Why have you absented yourself all this time from morning lessons?"

Billy Bunter blinked at the angry Form-master.

"Oh, really, sir! I consider that, as captain of the Remove, I am entitled to come into class half an hour later than the others."

Mr. Quelch nearly fell down.

"What?" he shouted.

"The captain of the Remove is his own master, sir," explained Bunter.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Quelch drily. "Your views seem to be very advanced, Bunter. This is the first intimation I have had that a temporary Form-captain may come and go as he chooses. I will endeavour to impress upon your mind—if you possess one, which is open to doubt—that your privilege is a self-made one, and is not sanctioned by authority. You will stand out before the class!"

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Stand out immediately!"

With a grunt of dismay, Billy Bunter rolled out, and planted himself in the dreaded No Man's Land which stretched from the front row of desks to the Form-master's own.

Mr. Quelch selected a cane from his desk.

"Hold out your hand!" he rapped out.

"Mum-mum-my hand, sir?"

"Yes—at once!"

Billy Bunter reluctantly obeyed, and he received a castigation which almost doubled him up. He was groaning dismally as he went back to his place.

"I hope you will realise in future that neither you, nor any boy here, is his own master!" said Mr. Quelch. "We will now proceed."

Morning lessons were well advanced, when the Removites received a rude shock.

Frank Nugent chanced to look out of the window, and he saw that Pensonby, of Highcliffe, was crossing the Close.

The alarm was whispered to Harry Wharton, and it circulated through the class.

Pensonby was about to carry out his cowardly intention of sneaking!

Harry Wharton & Co. could not help feeling uneasy.

Mr. Quelch was not in a nice mood that morning, and Pensonby's complaint of ill-treatment would mean trouble for the juniors concerned.

"What can we do?" muttered Bob Cherry.

"Nothing," said Wharton helplessly.

"Pon's got us at his mercy."

"The juniors who had played a part in trouncing the Highcliffians resigned themselves to their fate. It seemed that nothing could save them."

But Billy Bunter had no intention of allowing Pensonby to enter the Form-room.

He had said that Pon should keep his distance, and he meant it.

The door stood slightly ajar, and from outside came a voice—presumably the voice of Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth.

"Would you be good enough to step into my Form-room for a moment, Quelch?"

Mr. Quelch clicked his teeth with annoyance. He was not particularly fond of Mr. Prout, and he disliked the prospect of leaving his class to their own devices, even for a brief period.

"Is it urgent, Prout?" he asked, turning to the door.

"Very!" said the voice in the passage.

"Then I will come."

And Mr. Quelch stepped out of the room. He was somewhat surprised to find the passage deserted, but he concluded that the master of the Fifth had already gone back to his own quarters.

When Mr. Quelch had gone, Billy Bunter turned to Harry Wharton.

"Now's your chance!" he said. "Go and collar Pon, and shut him up in a safe place!"

Wharton jumped to his feet.

"You mean to say it was your ventriloquism that got Quelch out of the room?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"My hat!"

"Back up and collar Pon!" said Bunter.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry quitted the Form-room at once. Together they would prove more than a match for Pensonby.

Pon was just emerging from the Close into the passage when he encountered the two juniors.

"Let me pass!" he snapped.

For answer, Wharton and Cherry threw themselves at the would-be sneak, and hauled him across the Close.

"Hold on!" spluttered Pensonby, his struggles growing feebler. "Where are you takin' me?"

"We're going to stick you in a safe place for the remainder of morning lessons, my son!" said Bob Cherry. "Down with him, Harry!"

And Pensonby was bundled down the stairs of the crypt, the stone at the top having first been removed.

In the crypt the Highcliffe junior would be a complete prisoner.

Pensonby found himself alone in the damp, dingy passage, and he shouted and threatened, and entreated, but all to no purpose. The heavy stone was replaced, and Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry went back to the Form-room.

To their amazement, Mr. Quelch was still absent.

"Hasn't Quelch been back yet?" panted Bob Cherry, as he dropped into his seat.

Frank Nugent chuckled.

"He's been back twice, and each time he's been called out of the room again by Bunter's ventriloquism!" he said.

"Quelch and Prouty have been having a fine old row. Quelch declares that Prout keeps calling him, and Prout declares that Quelch's off his rocker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bunter, old son, you're simply topping!" said Bob Cherry. "Come to my watch-chain, and weep!"

Mr. Quelch returned at length, looking very red and flustered, and there was no more ventriloquism that morning.

When the class was dismissed the juniors swarmed out into the Close with excited faces.

"What have you done with Pensonby?" asked Johnny Bull.

"He's in the crypt, brooding over his sinful past!" said Bob Cherry.

There was a rush of juniors to the spot, and the stone was removed.

"Let me out, you cads!" came a voice from below.

"One moment!" said Harry Wharton. "We want you to sign a little document first."

So saying, Wharton tore a sheet from his pocket-book, and wrote as follows:

"This is to certify that I was caught in the act of smoking and gambling by a number of Greyfriars fellows, from whom I received a jolly good licking, which I admit I thoroughly deserved. This also certifies that I am a cad and a sneak, and am unfit to associate with any decent fellows."

"That's the stuff to give 'em!" said Johnny Bull, looking over Wharton's shoulder.

"Make him sign that and then we'll kick him out!"

Harry Wharton descended the stone stairs, switched on his electric torch, and handed

the document to Ponsonby, who scanned it with a savage scowl.

"I won't sign it!" he snarled.
 "Just as you like!" said Wharton. "The longer you refuse to sign, the longer you'll stay down here. It's not exactly a comfortable retreat. There are rats about, and—"
 "Ugh!" gasped Ponsonby.

"As you won't sign now, I'll give you a look-in in a couple of hours' time," said Wharton. And he started to mount the steps.

Ponsonby yelled after him.
 "You've got me in a cleft-stick, you cad! I'll sign!"
 "Good!"

Wharton stepped back into the crypt, and the document was duly signed with a fountain-pen.

"Thanks!" said Wharton, tucking the scrap of paper away in his pocket. "If you sneak to Quelehy after this, I shall produce this written confession. It's hardly likely to do you any good!"

"Hang you!" muttered Ponsonby. "Let me out of this!"

"Up you go, then!"
 And Wharton pushed the Highcliffe junior up the steps.

Quite a crowd was waiting to receive Pon when he came up. And the shouts which went up were far from complimentary.

"Yah! Sneak!"
 "Get out!"

Ponsonby turned, flourished his fist for a brief second, and disappeared.

"That's that!" said Nugent, in tones of satisfaction. "We've got rid of Pon, and he won't show up at Greyfriars again in a hurry!"

"You fellows have got me to thank for this!" chimed in Billy Bunter. "If it hadn't been for my ventriloquism—"

Harry Wharton & Co. were fair-minded enough to give Bunter his due. The fat junior had displayed unusual presence of mind in a crisis. But whether his recent "good turn" would aid him much in the fight for the captaincy remained to be seen.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Finishing Touch!

"CAN I have free use of the study to-night, Toddy?" inquired Billy Bunter.

Peter Todd paused in the act of pumping up a football, and stared at his fat study-mate.

"What on earth for?" he asked.

"I'm standing a free feed to half a dozen of my select pals in the Remove," said Bunter. "Wharton and Cherry and Nugent, Smithy and Bolsover major, and you!"

"But—but you're broke!"

"Not a bit of it, old chap! I'm simply rolling in shekels. And I've come to the conclusion that the best way to become popular, and bag the biggest number of votes, is to stand a free feed. I can't invite the whole Form—that would be rather too tall an order—but there's ample room in this study for seven, including myself. I think I'll send out the invitations right away!"

Peter Todd looked on in blank surprise while Billy Bunter wrote out a number of slips, addressed to the juniors he had mentioned.

The invitation was worded as follows:

"You are requested to turn up in No. 7 Study at eight o'clock sharp, for a free feed. W. G. Bunter will preside, and he will stand the feed."

The occupants of Study No. 1 fairly gasped when they received the invitations.

"A free feed!" gasped Wharton.

"And Bunter's standing it!" exclaimed Nugent.

"The question is, shall we be able to stand it?" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, it's all rot!" growled Johnny Bull, who had not received an invitation. "Bunter's never stood a feed in his life, and he hasn't the wherewithal to stand one now."

"We'll go along, all the same," said Wharton, "and if this is a leg-pulling stunt there will be short shrift for Bunter!"

"Hear, hear!"

Accordingly, at eight o'clock, Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Frank Nugent, went along to Study No. 7. They were joined in the passage by Peter Todd, Vernon-Smith, and Bolsover major.

"This is a joke of Bunter's, of course?" said Bolsover.

"If it is, he'll never live to play another!" said Vernon-Smith grimly.

The juniors trooped into No. 7. Billy Bunter greeted them with a glowing face.

"Good!" he said. "Are we all here?"

Harry Wharton and the others halted on the threshold in sheer astonishment. There could no longer be any doubt that Billy Bunter's invitation was genuine. The table almost groined beneath the weight of cakes and tarts and numerous tempting delicacies. This was no common or garden spread. It was a feast fit for a king.

Billy Bunter waved a fat hand at his guests.

"Sit down," he said, "and pile in!"

"One moment!" said Harry Wharton. "Where did all this stuff come from? Have you been looting the tuckshop?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Or raiding the confectioner's in Friar-dale?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Don't talk rot! I bought this little lot myself, with cash supplied by one of my titled relations!"

"Titled coke!" growled Bolsover major.

"Oh, come on!" said Vernon-Smith. "We won't look a gift horse in the mouth. The feed's here, and we might as well tackle it. Ours not to reason why!"

So the juniors sat down, and Billy Bunter beamed at his guests from the head of the table.

For some moments there was no sound in the study save the steady champing of jaws and the clatter of knives and teaspoons. The feasters said little, but their looks were expressive of utter content. They had not known such a fine feed for weeks.

The good things had nearly all been disposed of, when there was a heavy tread in the passage without.

Billy Bunter's complexion turned a sickly yellow.

"I—I say, hadn't we better lock the door, you fellows?" he faltered.

"Why?" demanded Wharton in surprise.

Bunter opened his mouth to speak, but before he could say anything further the door opened, and an angry bull came charging into the study. The angry bull was Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth.

Mr. Prout's eyes were almost bulging out of their sockets.

"This—is this monstrous!" he thundered, frowning at the seven juniors. "Such conduct is altogether without parallel in the history of this school!"

Several of the juniors jumped to their feet in alarm. They could not understand the

cause of Mr. Prout's terrific anger. The master of the Fifth enlightened them a moment later.

"I laid in a quantity of provisions," he said, "with the intention of inviting a number of my pupils to tea, and you young rascals have wilfully commandeered my supplies!"

"Oh, crumbs!"
 Harry Wharton and the others understood now. Billy Bunter's supplies had been "borrowed" from Mr. Prout!

"This is really a matter for the head-master to deal with," continued the irate Form-master. "However, as I am the victim of this outrage, I intend to inflict condign punishment myself!"

Bob Cherry bristled up at this.

"We had no hand in raiding your stuff, sir!" he said.

Mr. Prout scowled.
 "That may be so," he admitted. "But you are consumers of stolen property, and I shall come you severely. Follow me at once to my study—all of you!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the Form-master.

"If—if you please, sir," he stammered, "I've got an appointment—"

"Come with me at once!" roared Mr. Prout.

In a dejected procession the juniors trooped away in the Form-master's wake.

Mr. Prout might well have been exused for his anger. He had got in quite a tempting feed, for the entertainment of several of the Fifth Form fellows. And not a single crumb remained! Everything had been disposed of by the party in Study No. 7.

Throwing aside his gown, in order to give his arm free play, Mr. Prout picked up a cane.

We will draw a veil, as the novelists say, over the scene which followed. Suffice it to remark that seven juniors crawled out of Mr. Prout's study some moments later squeezing their hands and uttering loud lamentations.

"Oh, dear!" moaned Billy Bunter. "Prout's a beastly Prussian! He nearly cut me in half!"

But the fat junior's troubles were not yet over. When he arrived back at Study No. 7 the others followed him in, and after Bob Cherry had said a few words they bumped the Owl of the Remove, with a severity which he had never before experienced. Then they left him alone in his anguish.

Billy Bunter was feeling much too sore, mentally and physically, to pursue his fight for the captaincy. During the remaining days of his trial week he made no attempt to throw his weight about, but was silent and subdued.

"You fellows don't know a born leader when you see one!" he complained to Peter Todd. "I made Ponsonby keep his distance, and I bagged a ripping feed from old Prout, and invited you to it, but you're not a bit grateful. In fact, you were jolly brutal about it!"

When the election took place, and votes were duly registered on behalf of the various candidates, Billy Bunter was not likely to make a big haul. But, although the game had gone against him, he at least had the consolation of knowing that he had actually held the exalted position of captain of the Remove—for one week only!

THE END.

(Another long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. next week, entitled "Wharton's Last Chance!")

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 44.



**The FELLOW
 who LOVED
 VIOLET HOPSON**

An absolutely original and unique new story—the most stirring love romance of the film ever written—a tale no picture-goer or story-lover should miss. Begin reading it to-day in "CHEERIO!"

It is going to create a big sensation. You will find the opening chapters in this week's issue.

ASK FOR

CHEERIO!
 Every Tuesday. 1½d.

The Cheerful Paper for Cheerful People



THE JAPE OF THE SEASON!

A Magnificent Long
Complete Story of JIMMY
SILVER & CO., the Chums
of Rookwood.

BY
OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Noblesse Oblige!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. had just come in from football practice when they spotted a crowd of juniors round the notice-board in the hall. Judging by the remarks of the Rookwood juniors, there was a notice on the board of unusual interest.

"A giddy farewell concert, by gad!" Smythe of the Shell was remarking. "Those Bagshot bounders again!"

"Jolly glad of the farewell, if not of the concert!" said Jones minor.

"Awful rot, most likely!" said Flynn.

"Like Pankley's cheek! Who's going to listen to his ancient minstrel chestnuts?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. bore down upon the scene. The Fistical Four were interested.

They read the notice over the shoulders of the fellows collected in front of the board. It was quite a large and prominent notice, and it was in the large and somewhat sprawling hand of Cecil Pankley, the more important lines being set out in big and impressive capitals.

Thus it ran:

GRAND FAREWELL CONCERT!

Notice!

Bagshot School being reopened next week, the Bagshot fellows who have been staying at Rookwood desire to express their Harty Thanks for the generous Hospitality they have received from the Rookwood fellows before taking their Departure.

They had quite enjoyed their stay at Rookwood, and congratulate themselves upon the outbreak of Infloenza at Bagshot which provided them with this Grate Opportunity of enjoying Rookwood Hospitality.

They are very glad to think that they have livened up things a little during their brief sojorne in the classic shades of Rookwood, and that they have been able to give the Rookwood fellows some much-needed tips on football.

To testify their Gratitude for the

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 44.

Boundless Hospitality they have received, the Bagshot fellows are giving a Grand Farewell Concert, to which all Rookwood fellows are cordially invited.

THE BAGSHOT DARKEY MINSTREL QUARTETTE

will give a first-class performance on Saturday at six. The performance will be given in the Fourth Form class-room, by kind permission of Mr. Bootles.

No charge for admission. Everybody welcome.

New and original songs with banjo accompaniment. Wheezes guaranteed quite fresh. Rookwooders are requested to roll up in their thousands.

DON'T MISS THE GRAND FAREWELL CONCERT!

Jimmy Silver of the Fourth wrinkled his brows a little over that notice. It seemed to him that he detected sarcasm in it. As the Bagshot juniors, while they had been quartered on the Classical Fourth at Rookwood, had been generally on fighting terms with the Rookwooders, the references to generous hospitality were at least slightly suspicious. Pankley and Poole of Bagshot shared the end study with the Fistical Four, and scarcely a day had passed without "liveliness" of some sort.

"Seems to me that that bounder is pulling our leg," said Jimmy Silver, with a shake of the head.

"Looks like it," said Lovell. "Look at that bit about tips on football! Lots of tips they could give us, the cheeky bounders!"

"Much-needed tips, by Jove!" said Raby. "Why, we've played their heads off!"

"It's blessed sarc!" said Newcome. "Let's go and yank the notice down, and go and stuff it down Pankley's back!"

Jimmy Silver looked very thoughtful. In spite of the unending rows that had followed the Bagshot invasion, Jimmy admitted that the Bagshot bounders weren't really bad chaps in the main. They were cheeky, and they refused to

be kept in their place, and they lacked proper respect for the Fistical Four; but upon the whole, now their stay at Rookwood was coming to an end, Jimmy Silver felt that it would be only the decent thing to give them a peaceful send-off. They ought to be allowed to "testify" their "harty thanks" in peace!

"Kids," said Jimmy Silver, "there's a lot of sarc in that notice—a lot of cheek—but under the circumstances, it's up to us to keep the peace. We'll go to the concert, and cheer 'em. After all, they're going. Panky is only being funny about Rookwood hospitality. I know; but we'll show him that we can be hospitable. We'll back up that concert."

"Oh, my hat!" said Lovell. "I was thinking we might go, and take our peashooters!"

"And an egg or two!" said Raby.

"No!" said Jimmy Silver firmly.

"What about noblesse oblige?"

"Noblesse o' which?" said Lovell.

"Noblesse oblige," said Jimmy Silver.

"That's French."

"You don't say so!" remarked Newcome, with heavy sarcasm. "Sure it isn't German or Dutch or Chinese?"

"It's French," said Jimmy Silver; "and it means that it's up to a chap to play the game. They've been cheeky bounders while they've been planted on us here, but now they're going we're going to treat 'em well. We're going to show 'em that Rookwood can do the right thing. Noblesse oblige is going to be our motto. We'll go to the concert, but we won't take any peashooters or eggs. Even if Pankley sings we'll stand it."

"Oh dear!"

"Even if Poole plays his banjo we'll take it like lambs."

"My aunt!"

"We'll bear it smiling from start to finish, and give 'em a rousing reception," said Jimmy Silver firmly. "It's up to us! Noblesse oblige, you know!"

"Oh, blow noblesse oblige!" said Lovell peevishly. "Look how they're getting at us in that notice!"

"If we take it politely that will be heaping coals of fire on Panky's head."

"I'd rather punch his nose!"

"Oh, don't be a Hun!" said Jimmy Silver. "I tell you, it's up to us. Let's go and see Panky, and tell him we're backing him up."

The Co. looked expressively at Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy was the acknowledged leader of the Fistical Four. Since Jimmy Silver had dawned on Rookwood the Classics had more than kept their end up with the Moderns, their old rivals and foes. But never had the loyalty of Jimmy Silver's faithful followers been nearer to breaking-point than at that moment. The Bagshot concert was really such an excellent opportunity for ragging the Bagshot bounders, and it seemed a sheer waste to let it go.

"I think you're an ass!" said Lovell at last.

"And a fathead!" said Raby.

"And a burbling duffer!" remarked Newcome.

"We could pack the Form-room and rag 'em bald-headed!" said Lovell temptingly.

"Not if they get some of the Sixth there," said Jimmy Silver. "Bet you Panky will get a prefect or two, in case of trouble. Bulkeley's sure to come if he's asked; he'd do anything for anybody."

"Oh!"

"Besides, it's up to us. We'll pack the Form-room all right—we'll get a ripping audience—and cheer!"

"Oh, all right!" said Lovell, with a groan. "I suppose you mean to have your way. But I think you're a silly ass!"

Raby and Newcome corroborated. But Jimmy Silver did not mind. Having gained his point, he proceeded in search of Panky and Poole, to assure those cheerful youths of the hearty support of the Classical Fourth.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. A Friendly Call!

PANKLEY and Poole were in the end study.

The two Bagshot juniors shared that study with the Fistical Four, and, of course, it was a crowd for a junior study. There were a dozen Bagshot juniors quartered on the Classical side at Rookwood, all in the Fourth, so the whole passage was crowded. And as Rookwood and Bagshot had always been rivals, naturally there was trouble when they were in such close quarters.

Panky and Poole seemed in a merry mood just now. Panky was seated at the study table, scribbling on a sheet of impot paper. Poole was standing before the glass daubing his face with black, apparently practising with the make-up for the Bagshot Darkey Minstrel Quartette.

On the chairs in the study were scattered all sorts of "props" for the Bagshot minstrels—red-striped "bags," woolly wigs, gorgeous waistcoats, and flaming ties. The study was, in fact, fully occupied when the Fistical Four looked in.

Poole turned round a black face from the glass, and Jimmy Silver & Co. stared at him.

"Making up already?" asked Jimmy Silver. "The concert isn't till to-morrow."

"Getting my hand in!" explained Poole.

"Seen the notice?" said Panky.

"Yes. This is rather a sudden idea, isn't it?" asked Silver.

Panky grinned.

"We've been planning it for some time," he explained. "But we've put

the notice up at the last moment. Sort of pleasant surprise to you, you know. I hope your fellows will come to the concert?"

"You bet!"

"Bulkeley's agreed to come," remarked Panky, in a casual sort of way. "There won't be any rags."

"We're not thinking of rags," said Jimmy Silver; "we're going to give you our hearty support!"

"Oh!"

"You're going to get a whacking audience, and every fellow will keep order," said Jimmy. "Any chap who talks about rags will get his head punched!"

"What's the little game?"

"Noblesse oblige," explained Jimmy.

"Eh?"

"It's up to us, and we're going to give you a chance," said Silver. "Of course, we know it will be rot! You can't sing—"

"What!"

"And your wheezes will be rot that we were brought up on in our early youth—"

"Why, you ass—"

"But we're going to stand it. Every joke will be laughed at—of course, if we see 'em! You might arrange a kind of signal for the jokes, so that we shall know when to laugh."

"Why, you fathead—"

"Whenever there's a joke, let Poole give a thump on the banjo, and I'll see that there's a good laugh—"

"Look here, you silly ass—"

"We want to do our best for you," explained Jimmy Silver amicably. "Any assistance we can render you are welcome to. You can use this study for a dressing-room, if you like."

"We mean to!" growled Poole.

"If you put it like that, Poole—" began Lovell, with a warlike look.

Jimmy Silver made a chiding gesture.

"Shut up, Lovell! They're going to have this study for a dressing-room. We'll come and help 'em make up, if they like. We'll be dressers for the occasion."

"Oh, my hat!" said Lovell.

"You're jolly obliging," said Panky suspiciously. "No larks, you know."

Jimmy Silver looked pained.

"Larks!" he repeated. "Don't I keep on telling you that it's a case of noblesse oblige!"

"Well, you can come in and lend us a hand if you like," said Panky; "only you mustn't miss the show. The show is going to be good. New and original songs to new and original tunes, and first-class jokes. I'm corner-man. All the jokes will be new and good!"

"We'll help you with them, if you like," said Jimmy Silver generously. "Blessed if I won't make up your songs for you, if you like! Of course, they won't amount to much if you do 'em!"

Panky glanced at the paper before him, and grinned.

"That one of the songs?" asked Silver.

"Yes."

"Let's see it, and I'll give you my opinion."

Panky hastily folded the sheet, and thrust it into his pocket.

"No, thanks! We want the whole thing to come as a surprise. But you can depend on it that they're going to be good, and quite topical."

"Quite!" grinned Poole.

The two Bagshot juniors chuckled. Jimmy Silver looked puzzled.

"What's the little joke?" he demanded.

"We're keeping the little jokes for the farewell concert," said Panky. "Little boys mustn't ask questions! Now run away and play!"

"Why, you cheeky ass—" exclaimed Lovell.

"Run away!" said Panky, waving his hand. "Can't you see I'm in the throes of composition? I can't be interrupted by noisy kids— Why, you ass— Gerroff!"

"Chuck it, Lovell!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

Lovell had made a rush at Panky, and he had that cheery youth's head in Chancery. Lovell's temper was warmer than Jimmy Silver's, and noblesse oblige did not seem to appeal to him. Panky was dragged over the table, and his chair went flying, and his elbow hurled the ink-pot far and wide. Poole gave a fiendish yell as he caught it with his trousers.

"Yaroooh!" roared Panky, hitting out wildly. "You silly ass! You—"

"You Bagshot bounder!" howled Lovell, pommeling away. "Noisy kids—eh? I'll noisy kids you!"

"Stoppit!" yelled Jimmy Silver. "Get off, Lovell! Leggo, Panky! Drag 'em apart!"

Jimmy Silver grasped Lovell by the shoulders, and Raby and Newcome seized Panky by the legs, and they dragged away.

"Leggo!" yelled Lovell.

"Leggo!" bellowed Panky. "I'll squash him—"

"I'll pulverise him! Noisy kids! I'll—"

"All together!" said Jimmy Silver.

The three juniors tugged with all their strength, and the combatants had to come apart. Lovell flew back, and pitched violently into Silver, and knocked him through the study doorway, and rolled on him.

Panky came to the floor with a bump and a roar. Raby and Newcome had taken a leg each, with the best intentions, but rather thoughtlessly, for when Panky was thus dragged apart from his adversary, it was his head that landed on the study carpet.

"O-o-o-o-o-h!" cried Panky.

Jimmy Silver scrambled up in the passage. Panky sat up and rubbed his head. Lovell wished to charge back into the study, but Jimmy Silver grasped him in time.

"Oh! Oh! Ow! Wow!" said Panky. "Yow! You've busted my napper! Oh! Ah! Yah! Oh!"

"Lemme get at him!" roared Lovell.

"Come away, you ass! What about noblesse oblige?" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

"Bust noblesse oblige!"

"Lend a hand, you chaps!" gasped Jimmy.

Lovell was rushed away down the passage in the grasp of his three chums. At the end of the passage they bumped him hard on the floor till he promised to keep the peace, and have a due regard for the claims of noblesse oblige.

In the end study Panky was still groaning. It was an unfortunate end to a friendly visit.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. A Startling Discovery.

THE Grand Farewell Concert of the Bagshot juniors caused a considerable amount of excitement in the Lower School. In spite of noblesse oblige, there were more fellows to share Lovell's opinion of the matter than to share Jimmy Silver's.

The general idea in the Classical Fourth was that it was too good an opportunity to be wasted, and that the concert ought to be ragged. True, Panky had foreseen that possibility, and had arranged for the captain of the school to be present. The hardest raggers in the Fourth would scarcely have ventured

upon a rag in the presence of Bulkeley of the Sixth.

But there were ways and means, as Jones minor declared discontentedly. Jimmy Silver's idea of backing up the concert and giving the Bagshot bounders hearty support was voted rotten.

But Jimmy Silver had his way. His chums backed him up, though dubiously; and the Fistical Four were monarchs of all they surveyed in the Classical Fourth. So it was agreed that there should be no rags.

Tommy Dodds and his friends on the Modern side gave Jimmy Silver their support. The Moderns had not been bothered by the Bagshot invasion, as the new-comers were all quartered on the Classical side. They had, in fact, looked on and smirked at the troubles of the Classics. They agreed with Jimmy Silver that the Bagshot fellows should be given a good send-off, and Tommy Dodd undertook to see that there were no rags by the Moderns.

So Pankley and Poole and the rest went ahead in peace. There was not a whisper of what the programme was to contain. That was being kept a dead secret by the Bagshot fellows. But the new and original songs and jokes must have been very funny, to judge by the way the Bagshot juniors chuckled over them among themselves.

Peace being firmly established by the great efforts of Jimmy Silver, unusual concord reigned in the end study. Lovell appeared to forget that his nose was swollen, and Pankley made no reference to the three bumps on his head. Preparation was done that evening in great cordiality in the end study. It was a case of the lion and the lamb lying down in peace.

The truce was kept the next morning. After morning lessons were over Pankley was very busy making his preparations for the concert.

The Form-room was to be used as a concert-hall, and the Bagshot juniors were early at work getting it ready, and Jimmy Silver & Co. kindly helped them.

There was, indeed, no end to the politeness displayed by Jimmy Silver & Co. It was arranged that they were to act as dressers to the Darkey Quartette in the end study.

The quartette were Pankley, Poole, Putter, and Greene. The rest of the Bagshot fellows were to be in the audience with the Rookwood fellows. Other Bagshot juniors were coming, too, some from a distance. Two or three dozen, at least, would be in the audience when the farewell concert came off.

After lending their aid to their old rivals, the Fistical Four went down to the quad for a little football practice.

They were feeling very well satisfied with themselves and their unusually good behaviour. When the Bagshot bounders departed, they could not help taking away with them a good impression of Rookwood hospitality. That was worth more than a rag, as Jimmy Silver loftily explained to his somewhat doubtful chums.

"What about tea?" grumbled Lovell, when they came away from football. "Those bounders are in the end study making up their fatheaded songs and jokes and things. Awful rot, I expect."

"No doubt about that," said Jimmy Silver. "But we'll stand it all the same. It's up to us. If they're busy there we'll have tea in another study."

"Look here, if you're so jolly polite to the beasts, they'll think you're funking a row with them!" growled Lovell.

"Rats! Noblesse oblige."

"Oh, rot!"

Jimmy Silver looked in at the end

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 44.

study to see how his old enemies were getting on. Pankley and Poole and Putter and Greene and several more of the Bagshot fellows were there, and the table was covered with written sheets. The Bagshot fellows were grinning over their literary labours. They were evidently pleased with their jokes, whatever they were.

As Jimmy Silver opened the door and looked in, the draught from the passage fluttered the literary works on the table, as the window was wide open.

"Here, look out!" exclaimed Pankley, jumping up.

"Sorry!" said Jimmy. "I'll help you pick 'em up."

Pankley jumped in, the way in great alarm. The written sheets were sailing about the study, rough copies and finished copies galore.

"That's all right—you keep out!" exclaimed Pankley.

"But I'll help!"

"Don't you bother."

Pankley fairly shoved Jimmy Silver into the passage, while his comrades made plunges after the scattered sheets, and gathered them up.

Jimmy Silver grinned. The Darkey Quartette were keeping their little jokes to themselves, so that they should come quite fresh to the audience; but really Pankley's anxiety was carried too far.

"All serene, I'll clear!" said Jimmy. "We'll have tea somewhere else if you like."

And he shut the door.

"Do!" said Pankley.

Jimmy Silver rejoined his chums in the quadrangle.

"They're busy, and the study's at sixes and sevens," he said. "Let's have tea with Hooker. We'll take in the grub."

"Oh, all serene!"

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Newcome, as they sauntered across the quad towards Sergeant Kettle's tuck-shop.

It was a sheet of impot paper blowing away in the wind. Newcome picked it up, and glanced at it. Jimmy Silver burst into a chuckle.

"Some of Panky's effusions, most likely," he said. "The draught blew 'em all over the place when I opened the door."

"My hat!" said Newcome, staring at the paper.

"Oh, don't read it!" said Jimmy. "The silly asses want to keep their rotten wheezes dark till the show comes off. I expect we shall know every one of them by heart when we hear them."

"When is a door not a door—and that kind of thing, I expect," snorted Lovell.

"Oh crumbs!" said Newcome, still staring at the paper. "Oh you silly idiot, Jimmy Silver!"

"Eh?"

"You crass ass!"

"What's biting you now, you duffer?"

"You howling jabberwock!" howled Newcome wrathfully. "Nice jape you've let us in for, with your fatheaded noblesse oblige, and the rest of it. Look at this paper, you burbler!"

"But—but what—" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"Look at it, you shrieking fathead!" howled Newcome.

The startled leader of the Fistical Four took the paper, and looked at it. Lovell and Raby looked at it, too. Then there was a howl.

"Oh, the rotters!"

"The spoofing cads!"

"Up against us all the time!"

The Fistical Four stared at the paper, which was in Pankley's sprawling hand. They glared at it. For as they read those

sprawling lines they understood why Pankley was keeping strictly dark the programme for the farewell concert. They understood why Pankley was giving the concert at all, in fact. The deep duplicity of the Machiavellian Pankley dawned upon them at last.

For this is what was on the paper—evidently a leading item of the farewell concert to be sung by the Bagshot Darkey Quartette:

"SONG—THE FATHEADED FOUR!"

"Have you heard of the Fat-Headed Four?"

Oh, lor'!

Have you heard of that wonderful Co?

Oh!

There's Jimmy, the chief, with a face like a kite,

And Lovell, whose nose is a wonderful sight!

And Raby, whose features would frighten a cat,

And Newcome, who always talks out of his hat!

Oh! Oh!

They're at Rookwood just now, but to Bedlam they'll go!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Jimmy Silver Has a Brain Wave.

JIMMY SILVER wanted to kick himself hard.

This was the kind of "farewell concert" the Bagshot fellows were giving.

The song, "The Fat-headed Four," was only one item in an extensive programme. There was no doubt that all the rest was on the same lines. The last scene at Rookwood was to be a general guying of the Classical Fourth under the form of a farewell concert.

"The awful rotters!" said Jimmy Silver at last. "So that's the little game."

Lovell caressed his swollen nose.

"So my nose is a wonderful sight is it?" he growled. "I'll make Pankley's nose a wonderful sight shortly!"

"And my features would frighten a cat, would they?" said Raby wrathfully. "We'll put that blitherer's features into a state to frighten a Hun."

"So we've jolly well found 'em out," said Newcome. "Pulling our leg all the time. Getting up a concert to guy us at the finish. And that howling ass, Silver, is helping 'em to get an audience—to hear us guyed. All Rookwood coming, by Jove, to hear 'em sing songs about the 'Fat-headed Four,' and crack their stale wheezes about us! Us, by Jove!"

"And we're their dressers this evening," said Lovell, with bitter sarcasm. "We're going to help 'em get ready to go on and guy us."

"Oh, you fathead, Silver!"

"You champion ass!"

"This is what comes of your noblesse oblige," howled Lovell. "This! We help 'em with their rot, and get 'em an audience, so that they can poke fun at us. Oh, won't the fellows howl!"

"Kick me, somebody!" said Jimmy Silver. "Of—of course, I—I never suspected it was a jape on us."

"Oh, scat!"

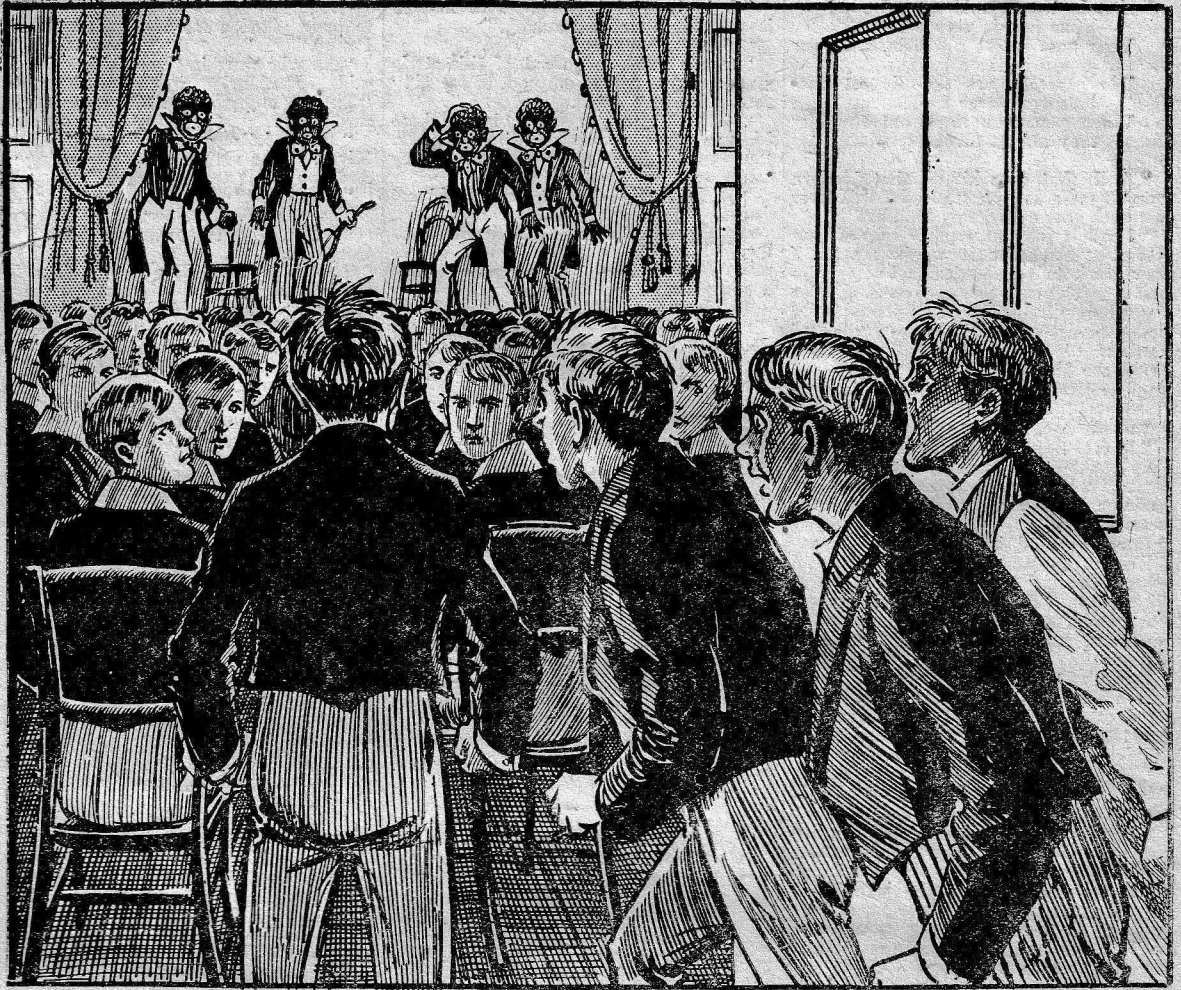
"I—I never thought—"

"Why didn't you?" demanded Lovell.

"You knew they were keeping their programme jolly secret."

"Ye-e-s; but—I thought that was only to keep the jokes fresh, you know, and not spoil it in advance. Panky's rather deep."

"Deeper than you, you ass, anyway," snorted Lovell. "Are you still going to



Four juniors with black faces and furious looks rushed in. They were hardly recognisable, but the audience guessed that they were Pankley & Co. "Here they are!" yelled Bagshot. "Here's Panky!" (see page 14.)

back them up, and help them get a big audience, and stop the chaps from ragging the cads? My hat! There's a crowd of Bagshot bounders coming to the concert. I wondered they'd take the trouble to come and hear those four asses twanging a silly banjo and cackling silly songs. But that isn't what they're coming for. They're coming to see Rookwood guyed."

"Oh, won't they cackle!" said Newcome.

"Serve us right!" said Lovell, with great bitterness. "This is what comes of Jimmy Silver, with his noblesse oblige."

"Rub it in!" said Jimmy despondently.

"Well, you must admit that you're a silly ass!" said Lovell. "But it's not too late; we've found 'em out in time. Let's go to the study now and rag 'em bald-headed, and shove their silly props into the fire!"

"Good egg!" said Raby and Newcome together.

Jimmy Silver rubbed his nose hard. He was thinking.

"There's one comfort," he remarked. "The Modern cads have been taken in as much as us. Tommy Dodd hadn't a suspish."

"Well, that's so," agreed Lovell. "We'll tell Doddy, and he can come with us and help make an example of those cads."

"Hold on!"

"What!"

"Don't be in a hurry!"

Lovell glared at his study-leader.

"Are you still noblesse obliging?" he roared. "Look here, I'm fed up with your rot, Jimmy Silver!"

"Hold on, I tell you!" said Jimmy firmly. "You're too much like a bull at a gate, Lovell!"

"And you're too much like a lunatic in an asylum!" snorted Lovell.

"They're japing us," said Jimmy Silver. "If this blessed concert comes off as they've planned, the whole school will simply howl at us. We can't rag 'em with the prefects there, and they'll guy us as much as they like, and—and we've been helping 'em and backing 'em up! But the concert hasn't come off yet, and now we know the little game we

"We'll jolly well put a stop to it!" said Raby.

"Go easy! I've got an idea!"

"Blow your ideas!"

"A wheeze!"

"Hang your wheezes!"

"A jape!"

"Go and bury it!"

"Look here!" shouted Jimmy Silver. "Have some sense! 'Twasn't my fault they've been planning this blessed jape! I can't help it if Pankley is as deep as a beastly Prussian, can I? I tell you I've

got an idea for turning the tables on them!"

"Well, we'll hear it," said Lovell, with the air of a fellow making a great concession. "We're fed-up with your noblesse oblige! But we'll hear your wheeze; there may be something in it!"

"Jolly good mind to leave you out, and ask the Modern cads to help me!" said Jimmy Silver severely.

"Oh, rats! What's the game?"

"There's something about Doddy on this," said Jimmy Silver, turning over the written sheet. "Look here! They've been using this paper to make rough drafts. I don't suppose they'll miss this. They must have written out fresh copies; this is nearly all scratches and corrections. Look at this!"

On the back of the sheet was another "Song." Jimmy Silver had spotted it in turning the sheet in his hands. They had not noticed it at first. There were so many scratches and corrections on both sides that it was evident that this was merely the rough draft, in which Pankley had jotted down his inspirations, as it were, without giving them time to cool. "I say, that's rather funny!" chuckled Lovell, as the Fistical Four read the second effusion from Pankley's fertile brain.

It ran, evidently to the tune of the old, popular song, "Tommy Atkins," but referring to quite another Tommy:

"Oh, oh, Tommy, Tommy Dodd!
Your face is very odd!
Your nose is like a wrinkle, and your
mouth is like a cod!
Your tootsies are the biggest ones
that ever, ever trod!
When you take them out together
they almost fill the quad!"

"Well, that does hit off that Modern
worm!" said Raby. "Blessed if I ever
saw such feet as Tommy Dodd's!"

"I call it jolly personal!" said Jimmy
Silver. "Not that it would matter if
they stuck to the Moderns; but they're
going to chip us, too. I expect they've
got whole yards of stuff like this about
both Classical and Moderns—yards and
yards of it. Come on! We'll let Tommy
Dodd see this, and those bounders can
help us turn the tables on the Bagshot
bounders!"

"Look here, let's go and rag 'em!"

"Rats! Something a bit more brainy
than that," said Jimmy Silver, with a
sniff. "You never think of anything
brainier than bashing a fellow on the
nose, Lovell!"

Lovell granted, but he followed Jimmy
Silver to the Modern side. The Fistical
Four found the three Tommies at tea in
their study. Tommy Dodd and Tommy
Cook and Tommy Doyle were apparently
in funds, for the table was plentifully
spread.

Tommy Dodd waved a hospitable hand
at the sight of the Classical Four.

"Trot in!" he said. "Sit down and
feed! We're flowing with milk and honey
to-day. It's pax till after the concert!"

"Right-ho!" said Jimmy Silver.
"We've found out something about that
concert. It's a jape to guy us!"

"My hat! What awful cheek, when
we're backing them up!" said Tommy
Dodd indignantly.

"That's the cream of the joke," said
Lovell sarcastically. "Silver was born
to have his leg pulled, you know, and
he'll always lend a chap a hand in pull-
ing it. He calls it noblesse oblige!"

"Oh, do cheese it!" said Silver, pull-
ing a chair to the table. "Fill your
mouth, my son, and then shut it. Look
at that, Tommy Dodd! That's an item
for the concert. We bagged it, and
Pankley doesn't know."

The Modern chums read the song "The
Fat-headed Four," and burst into a
chuckle.

"Well, that's funny," said Tommy
Dodd. "Ha, ha, ha! They seem to
know you chaps jolly well, don't they?"

"Why, you ass—"

"Pankley is an observant chap," said
Cook. "He's got 'em down all right—
especially Silver. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, I know it's excruciatingly
funny!" said Jimmy Silver, with heavy
sarcasm. "Now look at the other side—
that's funnier still!"

Tommy Dodd turned the paper over.

"What's this? Tommy Dodd—face
very odd! Why, the cheeky sweep!
Fill the quad! The silly ass! Why,
I'll—I'll—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Cook and Doyle.

"What are you silly asses cackling
at?" demanded Tommy Dodd. "I call
this silly rot—and jolly bad taste, too!
I don't believe in personal jokes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Fistical Four.
"Only about us—what!"

"Well, those lines about you are funny,
but this is silly rot! My hat! I'll show
him whether my mouth is like a cod!"

"He's seen it already!" chuckled
Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tommy Dodd jumped up.

"Look here, Silver—"

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 44.

"I don't need to look. I've noticed
it already, same as Pankley."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you want to go out of this study
on your neck, you've only got to say so!"
roared Tommy Dodd.

"That's what I like about these
Modern chaps," remarked Jimmy Silver.
"Always so jolly polite to fellows they
ask to tea!"

"Well, I—I—" Tommy Dodd sat
down. "Don't be so jolly funny, then,
you fathead! As for that fathead Pank-
ley, I'll pulverise him! Look at his
mouth—yards long! And his nose—like
a gooseberry-tart! And his feet!"

Words failed the indignant Tommy.

"You see, it's up against all of us,
Moderns and Classics," said Jimmy
Silver. "A rotten jape on all of us, to
guy us before they go. But I've got an
idea—"

"I don't think much of your Classical
ideas," said Tommy Dodds, shaking his
head.

"It's a ripping wheeze—the catch of
the season," said Jimmy Silver. "Look
here! If they can make up personal
poems, so can we. If they can black their
faces and play the giddy ox, so can we.
And they're making up in the end study,
and we're helping them—see?"

For a moment there was silence in
the study, while the juniors thought it
out.

Then Jimmy Silver's idea burst upon
them all together, and there was a roar.
From that moment there was wonderful
harmony in the study—Moderns and
Classicals pulling together with almost
brotherly affection in the great task of
dishing the enemy.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Little Surprise.

PANKLEY grinned and nodded as
the Fistical Four came into the
end study shortly before six. The
Bagshot Quartette were very
busy. They were also very amused. The
sweet and friendly smiles of the Classical
Four showed that they hadn't any suspi-
cion of the real nature of that farewell
concert—at least, so Pankley thought.

Surely, if they had had any suspicion,
they would not have come along in that
friendly way to act as dressers for the
quartette.

Pankley, Poole, Putter, and Greene
were already making up. Two other
Bagshot fellows were in the study help-
ing them.

"Here we are!" said Jimmy Silver.
"Hope we're not late. We've been
having tea with the Moderns, and we
stopped to do some scribbling. We're
ready to help!"

"Thanks!" said Pankley. "You chaps
are always so obliging. But you'll enjoy
the concert; we've got some really funny
songs!"

"Let's see them before you start," said
Jimmy Silver. "We'd really like to have
a look at the programme!"

Pankley shook his head.

"No; excuse me, really, old chap.
Better hear everything fresh at the con-
cert; it's the best way!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled the Bagshot
fellows in chorus.

"What's the cackle about?" asked
Jimmy Silver innocently.

"Only thinking of our jokes," said
Poole blandly. "They're really funny,
you know."

"The audience were going in when we
passed the Form-room," said Jimmy
Silver, changing the subject. "Pretty
nearly all Rookwood will be there."

"The more the merrier," said
Pankley.

"And a good many visitors have

arrived, too," said Raby. "You seem
to have asked a lot of Bagshot fellows,
Pankley."

"All who were in the neighbourhood,"
said Pankley, smiling cheerfully.
"They'll enjoy our little concert, I'm
sure."

"Well, let's get on," said Jimmy
Silver. "I'm rather a dab at making-up.
Are you ready to be blacked?"

"Right-ho!"

The Fistical Four, with great
cordiality, began to make-up the Darkey
Quartette.

The other two Bagshot juniors left
the study, Pankley directing them to
look for visitors, and show them to the
concert-hall. Under four busy hands the
quartette were soon blacked.

The quartette could not help grinning
all the time. It seemed so unusually
rich to them that the Fistical Four
should help them in this polite way in
a jape on themselves. They pictured the
faces of the Rookwood chums when they
learned the real nature of those songs
and those jokes that were being kept so
dead a secret.

Pankley was so satisfied with his
tremendous cunning in taking Jimmy
Silver in that it did not occur to him
for a single moment that Jimmy Silver
might be taking him in in his turn.

But he was destined to make that dis-
covery. A quarter to six had struck
when there were footsteps in the passage.
Tommy Dodd and Cook and Doyle came
into the study smiling.

"Hallo!" said Pankley. "You ought
to be in the concert-room. You won't
get good seats if you're late."

"We've come to help," said Tommy
Dodd blandly.

"Thanks! We've got enough help.
There isn't room in the study for a
crowd," said Pankley. "You run off to
the concert-room, there's a good chap."

Tommy Dodd grinned, and locked the
door.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Poole. "What
are you up to?"

"Locking the door."

"What for?"

"In case any Bagshot bounders might
come along."

"I—I say—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver.
"Panky, old man, this is where you get
it in the neck. Collar 'em!"

"Hold on!" yelled Pankley, in alarm,
dodging round the table. "Here, play
the game, you rotters! You promised
to help us dress!"

"Well, haven't we helped you?"

"Look here! Rags are barred—"

"Are they?" grinned Jimmy Silver.
"What about the song of the 'Fat-
headed Four'?"

"What about the song of Tommy
Dodd, whose face is very odd?" hooted
the Modern leader.

Pankley's jaw dropped.

"You—you—you know!" he stam-
mered. "Some silly ass has been blab-
bering! How did you find out, you
beasts?"

"Oh, we dropped on to it!" said
Jimmy Silver carelessly. "You can't
keep your end up with Rookwood, you
know. Not much good trying to jape
us. We are jolly well going to help you
with your rotten concert."

"Noblesse oblige!" grinned Lovell.

"But now we've found out it's a jape,
we're going to turn the giddy tables—
see?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Pankley, in dis-
may. "It will be a frost, after all,
Poole!"

"No, it won't," said Jimmy Silver.
"The Darkey Quartette are going on just
the same, and they're going to sing some
funny songs, but it will be a different

quartette and different songs. Collar those sweeps!"

"Look here—I say—ah!—oh!—Back up, Bagshot!" yelled Pankley desperately.

For a few minutes there was a wild and whirling struggle in the study.

Bagshot backed up, but it was no use, the odds were too heavy.

Pankley and Poole and Putter and Greene went to the floor, and the Rookwooders pinned them down, panting.

Jimmy Silver whipped a cord from his pocket, and in a marvellously short time the Bagshot quartette were tied up, hands and feet, and lay on the carpet as helpless as trussed turkeys.

Their faces were crimson with rage under the lamplight.

Pankley yelled for help in the faint hope that some of his comrades might hear.

But the Bagshot juniors were all in the concert-room by that time, or showing in the visitors. The quartette and their dressers were left to themselves. And Cecil Pankley hadn't much time for yelling. Jimmy Silver was prepared for that.

The handkerchiefs of the four juniors were crammed into their mouths, their noses being gently pinched till they consented to open their jaws wide for the purpose. Jimmy Silver, who was always thorough, tied twine round their heads to keep the gags in place.

Pankley & Co. lay helpless on the floor, unable to move, unable to speak, only able to glare. They glared like basilisks, but their glares had no effect upon the seven Rookwooders. Those cheery young gentlemen only howled with laughter.

"Time we made up," remarked Jimmy Silver. "Thanks awfully for the loan of this clobber, Panky!"

"Grooooh!" came faintly from the unfortunate Pankley.

"We shall make a ripping Darkey Quartette—what do you think?" chuckled Lovell.

"Gurrng!"

"We've got new songs—quite a good selection," said Raby. "May I borrow your banjo, Poole?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pankley & Co. could only glare in helpless rage and dismay. The Fistical Four stripped off their Etons, and proceeded to don the striking clobber prepared for the Nigger Quartette.

The three Tommies helped them to change, and then helped them to make up, chuckling gleefully the while.

The Bagshot juniors watched them with feelings too deep for words.

Pankley understood Jimmy Silver's wheeze now.

The Darkey Quartette were to appear on the boards all the same, but they would be the Fistical Four. In that minstrel clobber, with black faces and woolly wigs, they could not be recognised. All the audience would suppose that they were Pankley & Co. And Pankley did not need telling what songs they were going to produce. Evidently the tables were to be completely turned, and instead of Rookwood being guyed in that farewell concert, it was Pankley & Co. who were to be guyed.

What the feelings of the Bagshot part of the audience would be when the Darkey Quartette produced satirical songs concerning Bagshot Pankley could not guess.

That song of "The Fat-headed Four" would never be sung. Those personal references to Tommy Dodd would never be made. The rest of the telling jokes the Bagshot Quartette had so carefully prepared would never see the light. There was to be a new quartette, with a new programme.

Pankley groaned inwardly. He could not groan outwardly—the stuffed handkerchief was in the way.

The last tremendous jape on the Rookwood fellows, which was to have been the send-off, as it were, of the Bagshot party, was working out backwards. Pankley thought of the Bagshot crowd that had come from near and far to the concert—fellows he had written to, and who had biked for miles to enjoy that joke against Rookwood. He could have wept. What would they think when the new Darkey Quartette got to work?

Pankley gave a desperate wriggle in his bonds. At any cost he must never let himself be "done" like that. Bagshot would never let him hear the end of it, even if Rookwood did.

Jimmy Silver looked round from the glass, where he was giving the final artistic touches to his make-up.

"That look all right, Panky?"

"Grooooh!"

"So sorry you can't be at the concert," said Jimmy Silver. "But you can think of us, and we'll tell you all about it afterwards."

"Wooooh!"

"And we can assure you that it will be simply ripping—much better than you intended!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pankley wriggled furiously, but he wriggled in vain. Jimmy Silver had done his work too well. He could only watch in anguish till six o'clock boomed from the clock-tower.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
The Concert.

TAP!

"Hallo! Who's there?" called out Jimmy Silver.

"It's six!" called back a Bagshot voice. "When are you coming, Panky?"

"All ready!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Just coming!"

The handle of the door was shaken.

"I say, what have you got the door locked for?" called out the Bagshot junior. "Why don't you speak, Panky?"

Pankley's eyes gleamed with a sudden hope. He made a desperate effort to call out, but only succeeded in uttering a faint "Moo!" something like a cow.

Jimmy Silver sprang to the door. He knew that the Bagshot fellow outside was suspicious already, and he did not mean the alarm to be given.

"Look out and collar him!" he whispered.

He unlocked the door, and the junior outside blinked at him. Jimmy Silver was utterly unrecognisable in red-striped bags, gorgeous waistcoat, woolly wig, and black face.

"That you, Panky? Hallo—Why—what—leggo—yurrooooh!" spluttered the startled youth, as the minstrel seized him suddenly by the collar and yanked him headlong into the study.

The Bagshot junior went spinning across the room, and Jimmy Silver promptly closed the door again. Tommy Dodd and Cook and Doyle were on the trapped junior in a twinkling, and he was bumped on the floor, and tied up and gagged with his handkerchief almost before he knew what was happening.

He lay and blinked at the Rookwood chums and at Pankley & Co. with his eyes almost starting from his head.

"Now we'll get off," said Jimmy Silver. "We don't want any more fellows to come inquiring. Scarry you've got to miss the concert, young Hamley; you shouldn't have come inquiring. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread, you know. You fellows ready?"

"Ready, O king!" chuckled Raby.

"You Modern chaps get off first—

mustn't be seen together, or even those Bagshot duffers might smell a mouse."

The three Tommies, chuckling, quitted the study, and hurried down to the Form-room, which was already crowded. The Fistical Four, in their new guise, followed. Pankley looked after them expressively.

"So sorry to leave you, Panky," murmured Jimmy Silver. "Now I leave you to your meditations, as Shakespeare puts it. You can think what a duffer you were to fancy you could jape us, you know."

"Wooooh!"

"Ta-ta!"

The grinning darkeys quitted the study and closed the door, having carefully turned out the gas. Pankley & Co. were left in the dark, to wriggle and "Moo!" as much as they liked.

The four niggers hurried down the stairs. On the lower landing they met Purkiss of Bagshot, who was coming in search of Pankley. Had he arrived at the study, he would have shared the fate of the unfortunate Hamley.

"Here we are!" he exclaimed, as he caught sight of the four black faces. "You're keeping us waiting. Buck up!"

Jimmy Silver nodded, and they passed into the Form-room, followed by Purkiss. The Form-room was crowded.

All the audience were there, and there were at least twenty Bagshot fellows besides those who were staying at Rookwood. They had come along joyfully to watch the great Pankley "guying" the Rookwooders. All eyes were turned on the Darkey Quartette as they came in, and there was a murmur of applause from the Bagshot section.

"Bravo, Panky!"

"Ripping, old man!"

The quartette made their way to the dais at the upper end of the room, where four chairs had been arranged in a semi-circle. They saluted the audience and sat down. In the front row of seats Bulkeley and Neville of the Sixth were sitting in state; the august presence of the two prefects was understood to imply that there was to be law and order, and that rags were strictly barred.

But nobody wanted to rag. The Bagshot crowd were prepared to enjoy the joke against Rookwood. And by this time a large number of Rookwood juniors, having been apprised in whispers of how the matter stood, were prepared to enjoy the joke against Bagshot. So both sides were satisfied.

Jimmy Silver began twanging his banjo—or rather, Poole's banjo, and there was a preliminary cheer from the Bagshot section.

"Go it, Panky!"

The first item was a song, sung in a sing-song voice by the darkey with the banjo, who twanged his own accompaniment. The Bagshot fellows prepared to enjoy that song, but as it proceeded their faces grew simply extraordinary in expression. For this is how the song ran:

"Have you heard of Pankley & Co?

Oh!
Have you heard of the wonderful three?

He, he!
There's Panky, the chief, with a face like a rake,
Who for first-class fat-headedness collared the cake,
And Poole, whose queer features would frighten a Hun,
And Putter, whose nose is the shape of a bun,

He, he!
That is the three.
The thumpiest duffers you ever did see!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That new version of Pankley's own composition made the Rookwood fellows howl. The Bagshot juniors looked utterly blank.

"Bravo!" roared Tommy Todd. "Go it!"

"Second lap!" shouted Cook. "Pile in!"

"I—I say, they—they're mad!" gasped Purkiss. "They—they were going to sing a song about the Classical chaps

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Twang, twang! Pong, pong! went the banjo.

"They belong to a school that you know, Oh!

Called Bagshot, a place rather low, Oh!

It's a home for incurable duffers and flats,

And fellows who always talk out of their hats.

They can't keep their end up with Rookwood—they've tried—

But at cricket and footer they're licked to the wide!

Ho, ho!

That is the show,

The Bagshot Asylum where lunatics go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Rookwood audience were almost in convulsions. The faces of the Bagshot fellows were pictures by this time. What could possess Pankley to make him sing that absurd song about himself and his school simply beat them. Where was the rag the Bagshot Co. had planned—the jape that was to wind up their stay at Rookwood so triumphantly? Pankley & Co. seemed to have gone out of their senses at the last moment, and turned the joke against themselves!

"Next man in!" shouted Flynn.

"Go it, darkeys!"

"On the bawl!"

It was a dialogue that followed.

"Massa Johnson!" squeaked Newcome from the end of the row.

"Yes, Massa Snowball?" squeaked Jimmy Silver.

"Massa Johnson, can you tell me the difference between changing a shilling and a Bagshot bounder?"

"Give it up, Massa Snowball!"

"Why, one's done by copper, and the other's done by Silver!"

"Bravo!"

Purkiss jumped up in wild excitement. "Tain't Pankley at all!" he roared. "It's those Rookwood bounders japing us! Where's Panky?"

"Tain't Pankley!" yelled the Bagshot crowd, the truth dawning upon them.

"Order! Sit down!"

"Where's Panky? Rush 'em!"

"Collar 'em!"

"Order!"

"Silence!"

"Order there!" shouted Bulkeley, rising in his place. "Keep order, please!"

"We'll make 'em keep order, Bulkeley!" said Tommy Dodd. "Let 'em try to rush anybody, that's all. We'll rush 'em!"

"Sit down at once, all of you!" exclaimed Bulkeley.

The Bagshot juniors sat down, foaming. Pankley's deep and cunning precaution in getting a prefect at the concert was working out in favour of the Fistical Four, like the rest of Panky's unfortunate jape.

Twang, twang! Ping, pong, pong! went the banjo once more. Then came the song to the tune of "Tommy

Atkins"—but it was a new version; poetic genius was evidently as highly developed among the Rookwood juniors as amongst their rivals. Purkiss, boiling with rage, had slipped quietly out of the concert-room, and was dashing away in search of the missing minstrels, whose places now had clearly been taken by the fellows they had intended to jape. Meanwhile, Lovell was chanting the following:

"In the Bagshot Home for Duffers there's an ass,

The greenest chap where all the chaps are green,

His brains are very little, but his feet Are quite the biggest tootsies ever seen!

Whene'er he plans a clever little jape, He's somehow sure to meet a little check,

He's tried it on, in fact, but we caught him in the act,

And Panky's got it fairly in the neck! Oh, Panky, Panky, Pank! You've got yourself to thank!

You shouldn't come to Rookwood, dear, to play your little prank,

You can't expect to score when you're up against us four,

So we'll give your concert for you, while you're tied up on the floor!"

The Rookwooders shrieked with glee. They understood now what had become of Pankley & Co. while the Classical minstrels were giving the concert.

Bulkeley of the Sixth, in spite of his great dignity as a prefect and captain of the school, laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

The juniors were almost in hysterics. Nearly the best part of the show was the expression on the Bagshot faces. Their looks were, as Tommy Dodd remarked, worth a guinea a box.

"Hurray! Ripping!" chorused Rookwood.

"Rotten!" yelled Bagshot. "Chuck it! Go home! Where's Panky?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah! Spoofers! Get off!"

"Order!"

"Silence!"

"Sit down!"

"What have you done with Panky? Where's Panky?"

"Order, you Bagshot bounders!" roared Tommy Dodd. "Bulkeley, speak a word to those noisy kids—do! They can't keep order—after asking a prefect to come here specially for law and order."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pong, pong, pong! went the banjo. But the next item on the programme was destined never to be delivered. "Massa Johnson" was about to begin when the Form-room door was flung suddenly open. Purkiss of Bagshot had found the unhappy minstrels in the end study.

Four juniors with black faces and furious looks rushed in.

They were hardly recognisable, but the audience guessed that they were Pankley and Poole and Putter and Greene, the quartette who should have given that performance. "Here they are!" yelled Bagshot. "Here's Panky!"

"Order there!"

"Kick those hooligans out!"

Not a word did Pankley & Co. utter. They made a rush for the platform. They wanted vengeance, and they wanted it at once.

Bulkeley jumped up.

"Hold on! Stop!" he shouted.

Pankley & Co. did not even hear him. Like a hurricane they swooped down on Massa Johnson & Co.

"Order!" yelled Jimmy Silver indignantly. "What do you mean by interrupting a concert—before your own visitors, too, and the prefect you've invited? Keep off, I tell you! Oh, my hat!"

Pankley fairly jumped at him.

The banjo went to the floor with a crash, and Pankley and Jimmy Silver closed, and crashed down on top of it. Poole was never likely to extract any more sweet music from that banjo.

Crash! Bump!

"Buck up!"

"Yah! Go for the cads!"

"Give 'em socks!"

Eight black-faced and excited juniors were engaged in deadly strife. It was Pankley & Co. who had brought a prefect there to keep order. Now, under the very nose of the prefect they were committing assault and battery upon the Fistical Four.

Tramp, tramp, tramp! Bump! Crash! Yell!

The audience were all on their feet, most of them nearly in convulsions. They yelled encouragement to the combatants according to their sympathies.

"Go it, Panky! Give 'em beans!"

"Back up, Jimmy!"

"Pile in Bagshot!"

"Play up, Rookwood!"

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bulkeley stood gasping for some moments, utterly taken aback. Then he strode on to the platform. Fortunately, he had brought in a cane, in case it should be necessary to keep order. He did not trouble to speak to the infuriated nigger-minstrels. He laid about them on all sides with great impartiality.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yaroooh! Oh! Oh!"

Whack, whack!

"Ha, ha, ha! Go it, Bulkeley!"

Bulkeley was "going it" hot and strong. It was more than the nigger-minstrels could stand. Even the infuriated Pankley cooled off as the cane came thwacking across his back.

The eight darkeys scrambled wildly off the platform and fled. Bulkeley, gasping for breath, shook his cane after them as they bolted.

The Fistical Four did not stop running till they were safe in the end study.

Jimmy Silver sank in the armchair, gasping.

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow! I'm hurt!" growled Lovell. "What did Bulkeley want to chip in for? We could have kicked those cads out and finished the concert."

"Never mind! I think we did enough!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "Ha, ha, ha! We did them brown! It's the last jape, and we've got the best of it. Panky & Co. have been fairly done in the eye this time! Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" chortled the Co.

On Monday the Bagshot crowd departed from Rookwood.

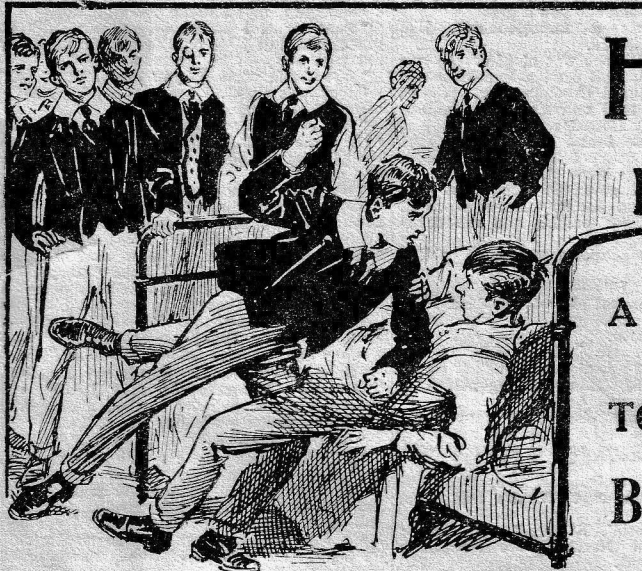
Jimmy Silver & Co. saw them off with genial smiles.

As the Bagshot brake rolled away Jimmy Silver called out to Pankley to be sure to let him know when he was giving another concert. But Pankley made no reply; he only blushed. It was likely to be a long time before Pankley's chums allowed him to forget that concert; and for days after the Bagshot fellows were gone Jimmy Silver & Co. chortled over the way they had succeeded in turning the tables. As Jimmy Silver remarked, it was the "Jape of the Season!"

THE END.

HUNTING FOR DIGBY!

A Magnificent Long Complete
: : School Tale of : :
TOM MERRY & Co. at St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Missing.

"WHY, you haven't got your footers on, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, in surprise, as he met Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on the steps of the School House.

It was Wednesday, and a half-holiday. The School House junior team had a game on with the Third Form. It was hardly an important game, from the point of view of Tom Merry & Co., though doubtless Wally D'Arcy and the rest of the fags regarded it as such. But Gussy had been down to play.

"Deah me, I had weally forgotten all about the match, Tom Mewwy!" said the swell of the Fourth. "I am vewy sowwy, but I weally do not see how I can possibly turn out for you!"

Lowther and Manners came up at this moment. Lowther was in footer-garb; Manners was not.

"What's the trouble?" asked Lowther. "This silly ass says he can't play!" snapped Tom.

"Well, he never could, you know," replied Lowther. "I've often wondered how he scraped into the team. Glad he's discovered at last what everyone but you two have known all along!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Manners. "But Gussy was too heavy of heart even to display resentment at Lowther's unfair jibe. 'I am wowed about Dig,' he said gravely.

"Can't you worry in your off time?" asked Tom. "No need to be standing down from a match to do it."

"Gussy's reason for not playing is the same as mine, really!" Manners said, grinning.

"An' what is yours, deah boy? Oh, I see—you are wowed about Dig, too! I must say it does you credit!"

"No, it's not that. I refused to play because I understood that, whatever position I took, my minor meant to play opposite me, and make a mark of me. I suppose Wally's up to the same game as young Reggie—eh?"

"Wats! I should have a thing or two to say to Wally if he twied any such wotten game as that. An' I do not weally believe that you funk Weggie, Mannahs, whatever you may say!"

"My eye! Who'd have expected such insight from Gussy?" chortled Lowther.

But the grin at his own little joke had faded from the face of Manners, and Tom Merry had grown grave.

"I don't want to ask you to tell secrets, Gussy," said Tom. "But is there anything fresh wrong with Dig?"

"I cannot tell you any secrets if I would, Tom Mewwy. Dig has told me nothin'. If he had done so I should have counselled his confidin' in the west of his chums, includin' you three, for I know well that there is nothin' any of you could do for Dig that you would shy at doin'."

Now Lowther's countenance had grown serious also. For the Terrible Three did think a great deal of Robert Arthur Digby; and, although their concern about him did

not occupy their minds to the extent to which Gussy's did his, they really were deeply concerned.

For during the last week or so Digby had been quite unlike himself. He had shown bad temper as he had never done before. He had paid mysterious visits to the Green Man at Rylcombe, a place shunned by decent fellows. He had kept all his friends but Gussy at arm's-length, and he had told Gussy no more than that his trouble was a family one.

"That's right, old chap!" Tom Merry said. "But is there anything fresh to worry about?"

"Dig was absent iwom dinnah," replied Gussy.

"Well, he can make up for that at tea-time!" said Lowther, unable to resist his propensity to japing whenever possible. "We haven't gathered that what the doctors call malnutrition is his trouble."

"It is not that, Lowthah, as you are vewy well awaah! I do not know where he has gone, an' it wowwies me!"

"Come along and play footer, and forget the worry!" said Tom.

"I positively wufuse to play, Tom Mewwy!"

"Oh, all right! I won't press you any more, though it's not like you to let a fellow down at the last moment. Manners, you'll have to turn out!"

"Nothing doing, Tommy! I bar these kids' matches. Besides, I'm going out to take some photographs!"

"Talbot ahoy!" shouted Tom.

Talbot came across the quad to him.

"Want you for this afternoon. Gussy's thrown me over!"

"Sorry, old fellow! Can't, positively. I've an engagement!"

Levison, Clive, and Cardew came along at that moment, two of them in shirts, shorts, and blazers.

Cardew was the third. Tom tackled him at once.

"Hurry up and get your footer clobber on, Cardew!" he said.

"What for, Thomas?"

"You're playing this afternoon—that's why!"

"My dear chap, you're under some misapprehension. I have not undertaken to play, I assure you!"

"I know you haven't. But you're going to. We're a man short."

"I deeply regret to inform you that you will have to remain a man short as far as I am concerned," replied Cardew coolly.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Cardew!" pleaded Clive. "A game will do you good!"

"I'm not goin' to be an ass," answered Cardew. "In other words, though it's vain repetition, I'm not goin' to play. It's Wayland for me this afternoon!"

"There's Lumley-Lumley—he'll play like a shot," said Manners.

And Lumley-Lumley, hailed and invited, proved more obliging than Cardew.

A minute or two later only Gussy and Cardew were left on the steps.

"Whence the dark cloud that sits upon thy

Joffy brow, kinsman?" asked Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"Don't wet, deah boy! I am howwitty wowed about Dig."

"Been kickin' over the traces lately, I infer?"

"Nothin' of the sort, Cardew!"

"Oh! Sorry I spoke. If you say so, everythin' in the garden is lovely as far as Digby's concerned, of course. But everyone doesn't appear to think so."

"Dig was not at dinnah."

"Well, old top, a hundred lines or so will wipe out that crime!"

"An' I do not know where he is."

"For that he can't even be given fifty more, y'know. Is it at all necessary to your comfort that you should know where he is?"

"Yaas, then, it is!"

Cardew's mocking manner underwent a sudden change as he read the real trouble in D'Arcy's face.

"Look here, old fellow," he said, "is there anythin' seriously wrong with Digby?"

"I am awfraid there is, Cardew."

"Has a blackguard stayin' at the Green Man anythin' to do with it?"

Gussy started in surprise. Digby had told him nothing about the fellow at the Green Man, who had represented himself as his uncle. Three St. Jim's juniors knew a good deal about the fellow—Racke, Crokee, and Mellish.

But it had suited their books to keep dark what they knew. Some of the Shell had seen Digby talking to the man in the Rylcombe Road; but, though they had mentioned the fact to Blake and Herries, they had not told Arthur Augustus.

"I have no reason to suppose—"

"You mean that you don't know anythin' about the chap in question? Well, I do, Levison an' Clive an' I saw Digby talkin' to him one day lately. I don't think he saw us, though. We haven't yarned about it.

For my part, I think Digby about as unlikely a fellow to go to the bow-wows as anyone in our Form; but I fancy the merchant we saw must have some hold over him in some way."

"Then you think he has gone to meet this wascal now, Cardew?"

Ralph Reckness Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't say that. How can I tell? But it seems possible. He wouldn't cut dinner for nothin'. See here, my noble kinsman, I'm goin' into Wayland by rail. Walk with me as far as Rylcombe, an' we'll make some inquiry at the Green Man about Digby's friend—or enemy. Is it a go?"

"I do not caah to entah that place, Cardew!"

Again the characteristic shrug of the shoulders.

"I am not so squeamish," Cardew said lightly. "I go where it suits me to go. You can await me outside."

"No, deah boy! I will go in with you. I cannot have you wunnin' a wisk that I do not shaah. Shall we start at once?"

They called at the Green Man some half an hour or so later.

Joliffe was quite polite. The landlord of the Green Man would have been glad to number those among his customers. He answered their questions readily.

"Yes; gont by the name of Carruthers," he said. "He's gone—left this mornin'. No, he ain't comin' back—not that I know of. Master Digby—yes, Master Digby did come to see him here. I don't know why, no more than the dead! No, Master Digby hasn't been to-day, an' Mr. Carruthers left about half-past ten, while you young gents were all busy at your books."

"Not much change there," said Cardew. "All the same, I think that may be a clue. But no doubt Digby will turn up during the afternoon, so it's rather foolin' to be talkin' about clues, for of course we can't butt into his affairs. Comin' along to Wayland with me, dear boy?"

"No. Yaas, I think I will go," Gussy answered. "I do not suppose that Dig will weally want me if he returns, an' I should onlay loaf about all the afternoon waitin' for him if he does not."

So the two went off to Wayland together, while Tom Merry and a rather scratch side of the School House, Shell, and Fourth beat Wally and his band of fags by five goals to two.

But at call-over Digby did not answer to his name.

"I have a great mind to call 'Adsum!' for him!" whispered Gussy to Herries, in the pause which Mr. Railton made before going on to the next name.

"Ass!" snorted Herries. And on second thoughts Arthur Augustus realised that that course would have been rather silly. It had often been followed before, in cases where fellows knew that a chum had been detained, and that he would soon be along.

But Gussy had not the slightest idea where Digby was, and already his forebodings were so heavy that he was far from being surprised when bed-time arrived without Digby's putting in an appearance.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Reported!

BLAKE, dear boy, Dig has not come back!"

Gussy stopped Blake on the staircase to say that.

"Hasn't he? Why didn't you tell me before, chump? I was a bit afraid of this when he didn't answer to his name at call-over. What's to be done?"

"Let's go an' tell Tom Mewwy, an' see what he thinks about it."

Blake, Herries, and Arthur Augustus made their way to the Shell dormitory, where they found Tom Merry just taking off his jacket.

A dozen or more fellows crowded round. But Racke and Crooke kept aloof. No one paid attention to that fact. The eads of the Shell were rather in the way of holding aloof from what interested their Form generally, and they were not wanted now.

"What's the row?" asked Tom.

"Dig still away," said Blake.

"Blest if I didn't think that was it!" remarked Kangaroo. "Look here, you fellows, I do believe that young donkey has run away!"

"That's the very idea which at once occurred to me!" said George Alfred Grundy.

"I give it up!" groaned the Australian junior. "I thought I had scored a bull there. But Grundy never even gets an outer, so if he thinks so it's sure to be wrong."

"Really, Noble, I do not—"

"I'm afraid it may be right," said Tom dolefully.

"But why should Dig run away?" asked Bernard Glyn, who knew less about what had been going on than some of those around.

"Well, it might be because of that smack of the face he gave Herries. I believe he's been feeling frightfully sick about it. And he's got a silly notion into his head that were all down on him."

"Rats!" said Herries, flushing. "What did that smack matter?"

"You didn't hit him back?" Clifton Dane said.

"Of course I didn't! Dig isn't up to my fighting weight. Besides— Oh, of course I didn't! Any chap with sense would know I wouldn't!"

"That's all right, Herries. I understand," the Canadian junior said.

But Herries turned in wrath as a cackling laugh came from Racke.

"I've nothing about hitting you, Racke!"

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 44.

he said hotly. "And if I do it won't be just a smack of the face you'll get!"

"Shall you use a knuckleduster, like Digby?" sneered Racke.

With a bound Herries was at him. No one believed that Dig had used a knuckleduster when he had injured Crooke's face. It was pretty generally held now that the damage had been done by Crooke's rat-trap pedal as he fell. Both Racke and Crooke knew that it had been so done, but they had never admitted that they knew it.

Herries was not going to stand that gibe at his absent chum. He bore Racke down on to the bed by sheer weight, and raised his right hand to strike.

"You! You're breaking my back!" yelled Racke.

"I don't care! I'll—"

"Chuck it, Herries! Here's Kildare comin'!" hissed Noble, grabbing the burly Fourth-Former's arm.

Herries shifted. He had no right in the Shell dormitory at all, of course; and it would hardly do to have Kildare finding him in a row there.

"Hallo, what's all this about?" rapped out the skipper of St. Jim's. "No one ready for bed yet! Do you think I'm going to wait half an hour to put lights out? And what are you doing here, Herries? Oh, there are Blake and D'Arcy, too! What's this little game mean?"

"Digby is missin', Kildare," said Gussy; while Blake and Herries were hesitating whether to tell that.

"Well, you didn't expect to find him here, did you?" asked Kildare. "He has no more right here than you have, and I should hardly imagine that he is hidden under any of the beds, alive or dead."

No one laughed. Kildare, looking round him, saw many anxious faces, and realised that something was really wrong.

"Why, what is it?" he asked. "Do you know anything about this, Merry?"

"Digby wasn't at dinner, and he didn't answer his name at call-over, Kildare," replied Tom. "I don't half like saying it, but it really looks as if he had run away."

"But why should he run away?" said Kildare, who knew nothing of Digby's trouble. The mighty men of the Sixth were not always aware of what was going on in Shell and Fourth circles.

Nobody answered that. No one quite felt that he had a right to answer.

"Digby's about the last fellow I'd expect that kind of foolishness from," Kildare said. "He's a cheerful young bouncer."

"I'm afraid he really has done a bunk, Kildare," Blake said.

"Well, you ought to know, if anyone does, Blake. What's up with the kid? Wait a moment, though. I'm not keen on conducting this inquiry on my own. Lowther, you don't seem to have realised that it's bed-time. Cut off and ask Mr. Railton whether he will be kind enough to come here. You'll find him in the study, I think."

Monty Lowther, who had not even removed his jacket, hurried off.

"I don't want you to tell me anything that you're not going to tell Mr. Railton," said Kildare, "though, for that matter, I think you'll make a mistake if you keep anything back. But I'm naturally interested, and if there's anything—"

"It will have to come out, I suppose," Tom said. "Dig's been under the weather for a week or more. We don't know why."

"You don't know, but do you guess?" asked Kildare.

"Are our guesses worth anything, Kildare?" asked Talbot quietly.

"They may be."

"It is family twouble, Kildare," put in Gussy.

"Oh, you know that, do you? It's a good thing someone knows something!"

"But that is all I know. I do not know anything whatever about what the twouble is."

At this moment Mr. Railton came in, with Lowther behind him.

"These fellows think young Digby has run away, sir," said Kildare.

"Indeed! But what reason is there for that? The boy is still absent, of course. So much I gather. But why should he run away?"

"D'Arcy, who alone seems to know anything about it, thinks it is family trouble," said the skipper.

"I do not think that would lead him to such a step," Mr. Railton said. "If he were needed at home he would be sent for. I know that his mother has been unwell, but I do not believe that she is in danger. Tell me whatever you feel at liberty to tell."

D'Arcy, I know that you would not betray a confidence, and I don't ask that of you."

"That is all I know, sir, an' I weally do not think that it is on that account Digby has run away—if he has run away."

"Oh! Then what do you put it down to?" Gussy was silent.

But Tom Merry spoke.

"Digby hasn't exactly been on good terms with some of us lately, sir," he said, "and things have happened that might have made him cut."

"Do you mean that the boy has been undergoing the kind of persecution that has made the life of more than one boy here before him unbearable?" asked the Hoastmaster sternly. "Oh, I know that in most cases the boys concerned have transgressed your code, and may be said to have deserved what they got, though, to my mind, it has often been carried too far. But I simply cannot imagine Digby doing anything that would even begin to justify ostracism."

"Good word, that!" murmured Lowther. "And more bouquets for Dig! Really, the chap ought not to have bunked, considering the high opinion everybody has of him!"

"Shurrup, ass!" snorted Manners.

"I don't think we can blame ourselves, sir," Tom said frankly. "There wasn't one of us who wanted to quarrel with Digby. But he—was unlike himself—bad-tempered and—all that. And he smacked one fellow's face without any reason at all; and we think that perhaps that may have preyed on his mind."

"It must have been one of his closest friends, if that was so," said the master acutely. "Such a thing is not apt to prey on a boy's mind in the ordinary way. Your face, possibly, Blake?"

"No, sir," said Blake.

"It was mine," said Herries unwillingly.

"Yours, eh? You are too big for Digby to have any chance against you, Herries. What followed?"

The red flush mantled Herries' face again. He seemed ashamed of what was really to his credit.

"Nothing, sir," he mumbled.

"You did not hit him back at all?"

"Dig isn't up to my weight—you said that yourself, sir. And he's one of my best chums," replied Herries, flushing redder than ever.

But not even Racke dared to cackle now. The stern look that had come upon Mr. Railton's face vanished.

"You were right, Herries; and I am glad to know that you behaved as you did," the master said.

"Look here, sir," said Tom. "There wasn't any of that. There wasn't a single one of Digby's real chums who wanted to be at odds with him. He might have smacked any of our faces, and—well, we'd have tried to be as decent as Herries was about it, anyway. It isn't because of any ill-treatment he's had here that he's gone."

"I accept that assurance, Merry. Well, something will have to be done. Kildare, will you organise search-parties of the Fifth and Sixth?"

"Can't we go and look for him, sir?" asked Blake eagerly.

"Yaas, sir, if you would let us go—"

"If you could, sir!" pleaded Tom.

But all knew what answer to expect. The master's face grew stern again.

"No!" he snapped. "I trusted you in that way last term, and you did not prove worthy of the trust. There were excuses. I know; but that kind of deed naturally brings its own retribution. No member of either the Shell or the Fourth Form will share in to-night's search. And, mark this, if any of you attempt to share in it after my express prohibition, the consequence can only be expulsion!"

He meant it, they knew, and they knew that he was right. There were hanging heads and sullen faces among them; there was hot resentment in some hearts; but they knew he was right. Was Railton ever anything but fair?

"Go back to your dormitory, Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy," he ordered. "The rest of you must get into bed at once. Merry, I trust you to put the light out in ten minutes."

"I wonder he'd trust any of us for anything!" muttered Manners, as master and prefect went.

"Shut up!" snapped Tom. "We asked for it, and we've got it. That's all there is to be said."

Grundy stood by his bed irresolutely.

"Now then, Grundy, look sharp!" said Tom.

"Railton says we shall get the sack if we go and look for Digby," said the great George Alfred slowly. "I don't believe it, and I'm game to go!"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass, old chap!" urged Gunn.

"It's no use, you know, Grundy," said Wilkins.

"Isn't it, though? I don't mind going with Grundy and chancing it!" Manners said.

"You jolly well won't—not if I have to sit on you!" snorted Tom.

"Going to sit on me, too, Tommy?" asked the Kangaroo. "I'm more than half-inclined to go. The only thing that puts me off is that Grundy suggested it, and Grundy's always wrong!"

"I decline to have you with me, Noble!" said Grundy stiffly.

"Thanks, old bird! That's all right, because I should decline to go with you, anyway!"

"You're not going at all, Kangy!" said Tom.

"How do you know, Thomas?"

"You're not such an idiot—that's why!"

"Well, if that's the only reason, it's a middling poor one, for I feel quite foolish enough. But I don't see what we can do in the dark with a chap who's got nine hours or more start of us."

Grundy snorted disdainfully at that argument; but he began slowly to undress, and no one went from the Shell dormitory that night.

But in the Fourth Blake and Herries had to use force to get Arthur Augustus into bed; and they did it against their own feelings, for both badly wanted to risk everything and go. Cardew and Levison would have gone, and so would Reilly and Hammond. But, after all, no one went.

"Fat lot of good it will be to Dig to come back and find his chums sacked because he's been idiot enough to bunk, and they've been idiots enough to go after him!" growled Blake.

"That hardly applies to me, old gun," said Cardew. "I like Digby, but I'm no special chum of his."

"Then you'd be the biggest idiot of the lot!" retorted Blake crushingly.

And there really did seem something in that argument.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Still Missing!

DR. HOLMES and Mr. Railton were waiting up when the seniors came back from their fruitless quest. The Housemaster would himself have gone out, but the Head had specially asked him not to go.

It was past midnight when they tramped in together, a score or more of the Fifth and Sixth. They had split up into squads, but had appointed a rendezvous before returning in order to avoid straggling in. Kildare, Darrel, and Lefevre of the Fifth went straight to the Head's study, and the rest went to bed, after hot coffee and something to eat, which they found ready for them.

"Haven't found out a thing," reported Kildare. "He certainly did not go from Rylcome Station, for we've interrogated the whole staff there. Nobody in the village seems to have set eyes on him. Darrel and Baker rode over to Wayland, and made inquiries at the station there, with no result."

"I will wire to Sir Robert Digby the first thing in the morning," said the Head. "It seems as though the boy must have gone home, possibly taking train from some other station, or getting through at Wayland without being recognised. Do you not think so, Railton?"

"I am not sure that I do, sir," replied Mr. Railton slowly. "If he wanted to go home on account of trouble there, he would hardly have taken this course, I think."

"That's my notion, sir," put in Kildare.

"Young Digby's a level-headed kid, and he would have asked leave. He might have gone without it had it been refused him, but I think he would have asked."

"If it was on account of his mother's illness, I should naturally have waited for some communication from his father before allowing him to go," said Dr. Holmes. "He might have anticipated that, and have refrained from asking for that reason."

But the Head seemed to have small faith in his own theory; and he was as troubled as anyone. More troubled, indeed, for he lacked the elasticity of youth, which can

throw off worries that do not press home too closely as age cannot.

A headmaster's life is never a bed of roses, and Dr. Holmes, high as was the esteem in which St. Jim's generally held him, had had more than his share of trouble. He felt this particular trouble very keenly, and there was no rest for him that night.

One other within the walls of St. Jim's got never a wink of sleep. Arthur Augustus lay awake all night, "wowwying," and was told that he looked like a boiled owl in the morning. He did not resent the doubtful compliment; he felt that it would have been all wrong had the dearest chum of a fellow who had disappeared as mysteriously as Dig had done looked his usual self.

And there was another fellow who slept but badly, and found his sleep broken by horrible dreams. That was Croke.

There was little to choose between Aubrey Racke and George Gerald Croke. Both were utterly unprincipled, treacherous, and spiteful.

But Croke was not as hard as Racke.

And Croke was greatly troubled over Digby's disappearance. Nine-tenths of the trouble was on his own account, but perhaps as much as a tenth might be put down to concern for Digby, or to Croke's possession of something like the remnants of a conscience.

Croke hated Digby, but he did not want anything really dreadful to happen to him, and he especially barred being mixed up in anything of the sort.

But if anything had happened he was mixed up in it; there was no getting away from that fact.

It was not for nothing that those two scoundrels who had been staying at the Green Man had bought from him and Racke that letter from Dig's mother. Croy and Banship had some design against the Fourth-Former, that was certain. Croke had not seen the letter which Banship had forged, and Racke had refused to tell him what was in it; but it was easy to guess that its object had been to lure Dig away.

And Dig had disappeared, and who could tell what might have happened to him?

Racke and Croke had got back the I O E's they had given Croy and Banship after their very disastrous attempt to rook those two worthies with the aid of Jolliffe and Banks—aid which had failed them, the landlord and the bookmaker standing in with the other rascals. Racke seemed to feel quite certain that their share in the business could never be discovered, but Croke found it impossible to share his feeling of security.

"Oh, don't bother me!" snarled Racke. "Croke led him aside after breakfast, and began to pour out his woes and fears. 'It's all right, by gad! Nothin' really to hurt him can happen to Digby, an' as far as I'm concerned anythin' short of doin' him in might happen without troublin' me!'"

"But what do you think has happened?" asked Croke tremulously.

"I rather fancy that those two beauties have carried him off somewhere, an' are holdin' him to ransom," replied Racke.

"But the Head would have heard if—"

"Rot! It's Digby's pater they would go for, not the old man."

"What made you think of that, Aubrey?"

"Well, somethin' a bit like that happened to me, y'know. It was a swizzle in my case; that sweep Cardew worked it. But I've thought several times since that it might be done here in earnest, an' I wouldn't much mind havin' a shot at it myself. I can tell you this—if I got that boulder Cardew where I could levy a ransom on him he wouldn't dashed well get away till his dear old granddad had cashed up pretty heavily!"

Croke thought that Racke might be right—as Racke was. It was not very difficult guessing for a fellow with Racke's type of mind, and with his knowledge of what the two men at the Green Man had done to trap Digby.

But it did not reassure Croke.

Suppose Dig was held to ransom? What would his captors do if Sir Robert Digby refused to shell out? And what might not Sir Robert do to discover how his son had been entrapped?

Croke felt very uncomfortable indeed, and went about looking as he felt.

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with no such weight of guilt upon his mind, was feeling at least as badly as Croke.

His listless air and his haggard face attracted the attention of Mr. Lathom before classes had been in progress long.

The master's eyes were upon Gussy when Blake said to his chum:

"Stop that sniffing, Gustavus! If you've

got a cold you'd better go to sanny; we don't all want to catch it."

"I have no cold, Blake, an' I was not awaah that I—"

"D'Arcy, my boy, are you feeling unwell?" asked little Mr. Lathom kindly.

"I am not feelin' vewy well, sir," answered Gussy quite truthfully.

"You are excused from the rest of this morning's lessons," said the master.

Mr. Lathom was never lacking in sympathy, and doubtless he understood what was really the matter with Gussy. But Blake and Herries felt quite angry with their chum. Why should he get off, and be free to go and search for Dig, when they, who were equally Dig's chums, though they did not sit and sniff because of his absence, were kept at work?

Arthur Augustus felt better the moment he got outside the Form-room. It was not very obvious what he could do, but he was at liberty to do something—if he could only think what!

He got out his bike, and rode over to Wayland. There he started at once on promiscuous inquiries.

It was not really very hopeful. Wayland was not a large town, and, of course, everyone in it knew the St. Jim's colours. But comparatively few of the St. Jim's fellows were known personally there.

Gussy got what only his hopeful disposition enabled him to believe in as a definite clue, though, as a matter of fact, it was really a clue.

A policeman to whom he spoke had seen a boy wearing the St. Jim's red-and-white cap in a motor-car the day before—at least, he was very nearly certain it had been the day before, though it might possibly have been the day before that. He could not describe the boy, except that he was not a big fellow, or the man with him, though he was sure that there was a man with him. He did not recall the identification mark of the car, or its make.

It was little enough. Something might come of it, if Gussy could only make certain that no other St. Jim's fellow had passed through Wayland in a car during those two days. But the likeliest fellows to have done so were shy birds, not much given to rendering account of their doings if they could avoid it.

When the swell of the Fourth was ready to start back he discovered that his front tyre had sprung a leak. There was a difficulty about immediate repairs; so, in a lordly fashion, he left the machine at the shop, ordering that it should be sent along to him as soon as ready, and made his way to the railway-station. He was just in time to catch a train which would land him at Rylcombe with a chance of not being more than a few minutes late for dinner, if he sprinted.

But, as it chanced, he did no sprinting. For, as he was getting into a compartment, a hand descended upon his shoulder, and he turned to see the familiar face of Sir Robert Digby.

"D'Arcy! Well met!" said the baronet heartily. "Has my boy returned?"

"No, sir. At least, I am not awaah that he has. I was excused classes this mornin', an' I have been ovah heah twyin' to find out somethin' about him."

The guard's flag was waving, and man and boy jumped into the slow local train.

"What can it mean?" asked Sir Robert, as the train moved out. "It is a complete puzzle to me. I had no reason to suppose that Bob was not as happy as usual, and I think few boys have been happier at school than he has. You will recall the time when I took him away to send him to France, and how utterly miserable he was until he was allowed to go back to you and Blake and Herries and the rest of them."

"I feah that he has not been vewy happy lately, Sir Robert."

"What has been the matter, then? Has he been quarrelling with any of you? Dr. Holmes' wire naturally did not tell me everything, though it was alarming enough to bring me along here by the earliest possible train. I was in luck, by Jove! I caught the express in town by the skin of my teeth, and saved several hours by catching it."

"He said there was—was family trouble, sir," answered Gussy.

Gussy did not in the least believe that any coolness between Dig and his chums had caused Dig to run away. Somehow he could not believe that Dig had run away. And certainly nothing any of them had done or said to him had been really calculated to make him.

"Family trouble? There is nothing of the sort, beyond his mother's illness. And she is much better, though I dared not tell her what brought me away so suddenly."

"It was not Lady Digby's illness, I am sure, though Dig—though Wobert, I mean—did wowwy about that," replied Gussy gravely.

He and the baronet stared at one another. The mystery really seemed deeper than ever to both. For Gussy was sure that the disappearance of his chum was not due to any trouble at school, and Sir Robert could not account for it by any trouble at home.

"He would have come home if that had been the case," said Sir Robert. "But he would not have left without telling someone. He would have told you, surely D'Arcy? Did he give any hint as to the nature of this family trouble?"

"No, sir. He would not do that, natchawully—not even to me."

"I am utterly at a loss. It seems wild to suggest the idea of foul play, and yet—But an accident is more probable."

Gussy shook his head.

"If there had been an accident," he said, "St. Jim's would have been informed before now, sir. Everyone knows the wed-an'-white cap."

"He might not have been wearing that."

"Dig—Wobert, I mean—always wore it, sir. He does not caah for toppahs. He an' Blake an' Hewwies all wear the school caps ewewhere when they can."

"It is strange—very strange," said Sir Robert. "But I refuse to take a gloomy view of the matter. Ah, here we are at Rylecombe!"

Gussy drove with Dig's pater in the station back to the school. He was not present at the interview between the baronet and Dr. Holmes, of course; but he saw Sir Robert again before he left.

"I should stay here and help in the search but that Lady Digby will be worrying about my unexplained absence, D'Arcy," the baronet said. "The bad news must be broken to her, too, and I cannot have that done by anyone but myself. I have, however, asked—"

"Hallo, Blake, my boy! How do you do, Herries?"

Jack Blake and George Herries had just come up, and the hearty greeting Dig's father gave them put an end to the slight constraint they felt.

"I was just telling D'Arcy that I had asked Dr. Holmes to let your Form and the Shell off classes this afternoon, in order that you may aid in the search for my boy, and that he has agreed to do so."

"Hurrah!" cried Blake and Herries, with one voice.

"Is that for the holiday, or—"

"It's not the holiday, sir," said Blake.

"It's—Oh, you know well enough how we feel about Dig! It isn't only us three, either; there are a score of fellows who would do anything for him."

"I know, my boy—I know! Well, fortune prosper your search! And don't allow yourselves to get despondent. I will not believe that any real harm can have come to Bob. I only wish that I could be sure that his mother will take the same view."

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Hunting High and Low.

MEANWHILE, Digby was a close prisoner in the lonely house in the hollow of the moor a dozen miles or so beyond Wayland, on the London side.

The garret in which he was confined was lighted only by a small skylight, through which he could not hope to pass. The door was kept locked, and one of the two scoundrels who had trapped him seemed always to be on guard below.

It was Crey, the man who had pretended to be his Uncle Justin, who brought him food and drink. Crey was undoubtedly No. 2 in the partnership between himself and Banship. Dig gathered from words that his warder let fall that the house he was in belonged to Banship, as did the motor-car which had brought them thither. But Dig had a shrewd suspicion that the car had been transferred from another owner without the usual formalities of buying and selling, and the house was obviously worth very little.

That his captors were adventurers of the worst type Dig had no doubt at all. But the boy had no fear that they would take his life. Banship in the one interview he had with him during the afternoon of his

first day at the lonely house did vaguely threaten something of the sort. But it seemed to Dig merely silly. What had they to gain by that?

He kept his heart up, though the confinement in the stuffy atmosphere was very irksome. He slept little that night, and his chums at St. Jim's were much in his thoughts.

During the next morning he heard the car drive off, negotiating the steep slope out of the hollow with some difficulty, and he guessed that he was left alone in the house with Crey.

He wondered whether a sudden attack upon the rascal when he unlocked the door next would offer a chance of escape. But he had to give up that idea. He had been pretty badly knocked about in his fight with the fellow the day before.

Tom Merry or Talbot or Kangaroo might have been a match for Crey, but not Dig.

The boy could not imagine his father yielding to the demand for ransom. Otherwise than by that way would his deliverance come, he was sure.

He thought hard about it all, and came to the conclusion that Sir Robert would probably attempt to trap the scoundrel through the demand made. Some place must be appointed for the delivery of the money, or for it to be sent, and Banship would need to be cunning beyond the ordinary if he could elude the men Sir Robert was sure to employ. Digby knew that his father would sooner spend five hundred pounds to rescue him than pay a paltry five as ransom.

And there were the fellows at St. Jim's.

They would be searching, of course; and Dig had high hopes in them.

Away at St. Jim's the hunt was up!

Wally D'Arcy and Frank Levison had waited upon the Head, and had wheedled out of him consent for the Third to share in the search.

Limits that chafed their ardent spirits were imposed upon the fags. They were not to go beyond Wayland on the one side, or the fifth milestone on any other road.

But, as Reggie Manners pointed out, they were not told that they must keep to the roads, and what could they know of milestones if they did not?

"Yes, and how are we likely to find Dig if we go barging about over muddy ploughlands and through soaking woods?" asked Wally, in scorn.

"We shan't find him, anyway!" replied Reggie sulkily. "He isn't likely to be anywhere near."

"Just as likely as not!" Wally said. "I've got a notion, too!"

"Sure to be a rotten one!" snorted Reggie.

"Rats! What is it, Wally?" asked Joe Frayne.

"You know Pongo?"

They all knew Pongo, of course. Pongo was Wally's dog—partly terrier, but chiefly miscellaneous dog. Wally had an amount of faith in Pongo that was far in excess of that which any of his chums cherished. But it was only Reggie who sniffed in derision at the mention of Pongo's name.

"I'll punch your head, young Manners, if you aren't jolly careful!" snapped Wally.

"Oh, don't take any notice of the silly fathead!" said Hobbs. "He's always sniffing at something. Pity his people can't afford to let him have handkerchiefs, like the rest of us!"

"I have got a hanky, and that's more than you can say, Hobbs!" retorted Reggie.

"Oh, well, I used mine to wipe up that spilled ink this morning, so that old Selby shouldn't see, and I haven't had time to get another yet. Rats to you, anyway! What about Pongo, Wally?"

"Well, Herries reckons he can track down Dig with old Towser. I don't. Towser's a silly old ass, you know. Besides, he's a bulldog, not a bloodhound."

"Pongo's a bloodhound, of course!" sneered Reggie. "There's a bit of everything in Pongo, we know."

"He's got strong scent, anyway!"

"Do you mean he niffs? You ought to wash him oftener!"

Frank Levison had to get between Wally and Reggie then to save them from wasting time by fighting. Manners minor was suppressed in the event, and it was voted by six to one that Pongo should be put on the scent of Robert Arthur Digby.

When Wally went to the kennels to fetch Pongo he saw Towser there, and assumed from that fact that Herries had not yet gone, which would mean that Blake and Arthur Augustus had not gone, either.

But the assumption was unfounded, as

D'Arcy minor discovered when he visited Study No. 6 on the Fourth Form passage in order to get something of Digby's that Pongo might smell to set him on the scent.

The three chums were already well outside the school precincts. Towser had been left at home simply because Blake and Gussy had made a determined stand against taking him. Herries had given in to them with great reluctance, but he had given in.

Wally collared a slipper, and went off with it.

"How do you know it's Digby's?" asked Jameson.

"Sure to be. It's the smallest pair there," replied Wally.

"Probably Gussy's!" sniffed Reggie. And, as it chanced, Reggie was right.

"Dig's the smallest chap of the four, and he's bound to have the smallest feet," Wally argued. "Here, Pongo!"

There was no difficulty whatever in getting Pongo to take an interest in the slipper. Pongo seemed never to have grown up. All the puppy craze for destruction was still strong in him.

He seized the slipper, and began to worry it at once.

"Not like that, you silly chump!" protested Wally. "Sniff it! It's Dig's, and you've got to find Dig—see? Sniff it, and then go after him!"

It could hardly have been because Pongo did not understand, for Wally was firm in his faith that that wonderful dog could understand anything said to him. So it must have been that Pongo's interest in finding Dig was less than his interest in the slipper, which did not need finding.

He shook it as if it were a rat, and then settled down to worry it.

"Well, he's getting a good sniff at the thing, anyway," said Wally hopefully.

"Does he sniff with his mouth?" asked Reggie.

"It won't be much of a slipper when he's done with it!" remarked Curly Gibson.

"What's a slipper matter when—Here, Pongo! Come back, you silly coon! Pongo! Pong-go!"

Wally called, and Wally whistled, while Wally's chums laughed, Reggie loudest of them all.

Pongo did not come back. He carried off his prize to his kennel.

"There's a sleuthhound for you!" gibed Reggie.

"Oh, shut up, you young ass!" Jameson said roughly. "If you had a dog it would be a heap worse than Pongo!"

"How do you make that out!" demanded Manners minor.

"Because if it wasn't it wouldn't own you for master—that's why!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jameson's repartee, such as it was, helped to smooth the ruffled plumage of Wally; and the seven rode off on quite decent terms.

Wayland being the limit of distance allowed them, they naturally went to Wayland.

So did quite a number of the other searchers—or supposed searchers.

Among those whom Wally & Co. saw in the market-town were Racke and Crooke.

Racke had at first scornfully rejected the notion of even pretending to play a part in the search. But Crooke was so nervous and worried that his precious pal gave in.

"It will look better, y'know," Crooke said. "If we don't they'll be suspectin' suspectin'!"

"Dashed sight more likely to suspect if we do!" snarled Racke. "Who's goin' to believe that we care twopence about Digby?"

He went, after all, and when Wally & Co. ran against the cads of the Shell, Racke was trying to persuade Crooke that they had done quite enough to save their faces, and might now visit the picture palace, near which they had halted.

They did not see the seven, though Wally and his little band were close behind them, and Crooke turned with a ghastly face when Wally said in his ear on a sudden:

"You won't find Digby in there, Crooke!"

"Why—what— I say, what do you mean, D'Arcy minor?" faltered Crooke.

"He's been found—dead!" said Reggie Manners, winking at Jameson.

"You young ass!" snorted Jameson.

Crooke staggered. But in a moment he saw that the sensational announcement was only due to Reggie's peculiar sense of humour, and he pulled himself together.

"You ought to be dashed well ashamed of yourself for jokin' about a thing like this, Manners minor!" snapped Racke.

Wally & Co. passed on without further

argument. But Crooke's face had impressed Wally.

"I wonder whether those cads know anything about it, Franky?" he said to Levison minor.

"I shouldn't think they can," Frank said. "S'pose not. And yet— I say, there's old Grundy! I'm going to speak to him!"

Gunn and Wilkins were with Grundy, of course. Wally dashed across the street to them, evoking curses from the driver of a car in front of which his rush took him.

"You'll get run over if you're not careful, D'Arcy minor," said the great George Alfred, in majestic rebuke.

"I was in such a hurry to speak to you, Grundy," replied Wally meekly.

"What is it, kid?"

"I say, you know, you're no end of a clever detective, aren't you?"

"It was the impish spirit of mischief which prompted those words, for quite certainly the Hon. Walter Adolphus D'Arcy had no belief in the detective abilities of the egregious Grundy."

"I am," replied Grundy, favouring Wally with quite a beaming look. "Why?"

"Echo answers 'Why?'" murmured Gunn to Wilkins.

"Well, it wouldn't be a bad notion if you looked after Racker and Crooke a bit," answered Wally. "They're here, and when someone said something to them about Digby, Crooke jolly nearly fainted!"

"I don't know what to think, Grundy. But it looks queer to me."

"Where are the screws?"

"I believe they've gone into the picture show," said Wally. "Can't stop—those kids are waiting for me!"

"Here, hold on a moment! I want to hear more about this, D'Arcy minor!"

But Wally paid no heed to Grundy's call. "What does he mean?" asked Grundy.

"He's having you on, of course!" said Wilkins, chuckling.

"It's a wonder to me where you pick up those expressions, Wilkins!" Grundy said severely. "You never hear me say such things. And I am sure you are wrong."

Wally had sown a seed of which he little guessed. Grundy and his pals did not find Racker and Crooke in Wayland, but what the Third-Former had said stuck in Grundy's mind. And when anything did that something was likely to come of it sooner or later.

Everyone was in for a slight over-accuse to report.

The Terrible Three had hunted through Wayland Moor, and on beyond the town. Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn had been out to Westwood. Levison & Co. had taken another direction. Blake and Herries and Gussy, like the fags and Grundy & Co., had spent most of the time in Wayland itself, trying to follow up the slight possible clue that Gussy had obtained when there alone. Figgins & Co. had made a long circuit of their own. Redfern and Owen and Lawrence had covered a lot of ground. Kildare and the rest of the prefects had done their best. Some of the Fifth had been very active, though Cutts and his pals, St. Leger and Gilmore, had not gone outside the gates.

The result was the same in every case—failure.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Grundy Has a Restless Night.

"I DON'T like it—I don't like it a bit!" said Crooke to Racker, as they rode back from Wayland together.

Something like that he had said before, much to Racker's contempt. To Racker it seemed that the only thing that mattered was the question of whether their complicity in what had happened to Digby could come out; and until he saw any indication that such a catastrophe was likely, he had no notion of worrying.

He did not think it likely, but Crooke did. While in the picture show Crooke seemed to have forgotten his trouble. He laughed uproariously at the comic film, which was a Charlie Chaplin, and followed with eager interest the big film, which was exactly to the taste of the precious pair, for the story was a racing one.

But directly they were outside he began to worry again.

Racker was fed up, and told him so plainly. Crooke spent what was left of the evening away from his own study. Prep was off for once, and Crooke gave Seroppe the benefit of his society. Seroppe did not find it a blessing; he had never known Crooke so doleful.

Crooke's mind, when he went to bed, was

full of Digby, and what might happen to himself in consequence of Digby's disappearance. And thereof and of Wally D'Arcy's mischievous hint to Grundy came something.

Nearly every fellow in the Shell was thoroughly fagged, and, though for ten minutes or so there was a buzz of eager talk after lights-out, within half an hour all but two of the inmates of the dormitory were fast asleep.

These two lay side by side. Crooke's bed chanced to be next to that of Grundy. Racker was on the other side of Crooke, while Wilkins was Grundy's neighbour on the left, with Gunn next to Wilkins.

The mighty mind of George Alfred was busy with the problem which had exercised most minds at St. Jim's that day.

What had become of Digby?

It was characteristic of the working of Grundy's brain that a casual hint, with nothing really serious behind it, should develop into something very like certainty.

There was nothing wild in the theory that Racker and Crooke had been concerned in whatever had befallen Dig. They had been mixed up in plenty of things quite as black, and Dig was among the fellows they disliked.

But there was absolutely nothing of which Grundy knew that justified his belief—as yet.

"It will be rather a score for me if I get on to it before anyone else," thought Grundy. "I hope young D'Arcy didn't mention his suspicions to his major. But I shouldn't think he did. The kid seems to have some sense, since he realises that I am the proper person to come to when there's really anything serious up."

Crooke tossed and turned restlessly. He thought the night must have grown warm, and threw off most of the bedclothes. But the feverishness which had led him to do that soon turned to shivering, and he pulled the coverings over him again. As warmth returned he dozed.

But his sleep was fitful and dream-haunted, and he began to murmur in it.

At first there was nothing consecutive or understandable in what he said, and Grundy listened to it almost without knowing he was listening.

But gradually one word, repeated again and again, impressed the brain of George Alfred—never too quick in his workings.

That word was "letter."

The theft of the letter was uppermost in the mind of Crooke, because, he was sure that Digby's absence was in some way connected with it.

"Letter—letter! What letter does he mean?" muttered Grundy.

But now Crooke began to say more. "Digby's mother" came from him more than once.

Grundy's detective ability was equal to the piecing together of as much as that.

"A letter from Digby's mother," he said to himself. "It's got something to do with the business. But what? If Digby had gone home because of it— But he can't have done that, for his pater was here to-day."

Now came more—Green Man, and two names Grundy did not know, Crey and Banship. Racker's name came into the mutterings, too. At times Crooke seemed to be pleading with Racker not to let Crey and Banship have the letter. Then Mellish was mentioned.

Grundy felt that the scent was getting warm.

It was no doubt of his own ability to do all that was necessary which caused him to wake Wilkins and Gunn. It was merely that he deemed it needful to have witnesses. And there, for once, Grundy was quite right. The rest were far more likely to pay heed to what he told them when it was backed up by his chums. Gunn was regarded in the Shell as rather a bookish sort of dreamer, and Wilkins as a common or garden ass; but both were credited with the possession of more sense than their chief had.

They were not exactly pleased to be awakened, but they did not make fuss enough about it to wake anyone else.

"Listen!" said Grundy in an impressive whisper.

They listened.

"Chap's raving!" snorted Wilkins. "Not so sure," said Gunn. "There's something behind what he says. Hold your row, Wilky, and don't let's miss any of it."

For fully a quarter of an hour the trio sat together upon Grundy's bed and paid heed to the sleep-talking of Crooke.

At the end of that time none of them had any doubt that there was a clue. Crook's ramblings had continued to be mere ramblings—broken sentences, references to things that it seemed impossible to fit into the

Digby mystery, talk about I O U's that quite certainly had not been given by or to Robert Arthur Digby. But through it all there persisted the motif of the letter from Dig's mother, a matter that in the ordinary course could not have concerned Crooke; and again and again those two unknown names came in.

Then suddenly he ceased to talk, and his breathing grew regular. Rest had come to his overworked brain, and he had fallen soundly asleep.

"What do you chaps make of it?" whispered Wilkins.

"I'll let you know that in the morning, when I've had the opportunity of an interview with that sweep!" replied Grundy importantly.

"Here, I say, old chap, that won't do!" protested Gunn. "You'll only muck up the whole thing if you try to deal with it on your own!"

"Me! Me! Did you ever know me to muck up anything, William Gunn?" snorted the great man.

Gunn might have answered that he had never known Grundy to do anything else. But Gunn was not wholly without diplomatic tact, and he gave Wilkins a warning nudge as he said:

"That's all very well, old fellow, but I really think some of the others ought to be taken into this—Tom Merry and Talbot, and a few more. You'll get credit enough for having got on to it, you know."

"Nobody else would have done that. I couldn't have made anything out of Crooke's mutterings alone," added Wilkins, backing up Gunn better than Gunn had dared to hope.

But both saw that this was really a serious matter, and that Grundy simply could not be allowed to handle it by himself. And neither really wanted to offend Grundy or to hurt his feelings.

He was mollified.

"I'll think it over," he said. "You two turn in again and get your night's rest. No need to lie awake thinking. I'll attend to that."

Grundy changed his mind at least half a dozen times before he went to sleep. But when he dropped off he had resolved to share the great secret with some of the other fellows, and he awoke with that resolution still in his mind. It had been growing light when he fell asleep, and his rest-time had been very short indeed. But a wakeful night could not affect the powerful frame and mighty brain of George Alfred Grundy.

"You leave it to me!" he told his henchman. "I'll see Merry after breakfast. I have no very high opinion of Merry's intelligence, but if he has only the common sense to be guided by me in this matter it will be all right."

So after breakfast there was a hurried conference in the study of Grundy & Co., to which were invited Tom Merry, Manners, Noble, Talbot, Blake, and Herries. Grundy had positively refused to have Lowther. He said that Lowther's jokes made him feel ill.

"Well, there ought to be something in it, though it is Grundy," Kangaroo said, when the story had been told.

"There must be something in it," said Tom Merry, "and I consider that it's greatly to Grundy's credit to get on to it like this!"

Grundy beamed for once upon the fellow whom he persisted in regarding as his rival.

"I'll bring Crooke and Mellish here after classes," he said.

"Both together?" asked Kangaroo.

"Yes. Why not? I suppose I can handle those two, can't I?"

"Oh, of course you could, old fellow!" answered Tom, winking at the Cornstalk. "But it would be best to get Mellish alone first, scare him out of what he knows, and then tackle Crooke without letting Racker know anything about it."

"And there won't be any classes to-day," added Manners. "I've just heard that we're to be allowed to go on search again."

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Getting on the Scent.

"Oh, look here, I'm quite willing to tell you all I know!" said Percy Mellish in dire alarm. "I would have told it before, only I didn't see how it could help. It was by accident I heard, too, and I wasn't sure that I'd any right to tell."

Mellish had been got into Tom Merry's study without much difficulty, and his only anxiety now was to tell his story in such a manner as to clear himself.

Quite a small crowd was present. To those who had been assembled before breakfast were added Lowther, upon whom Grundy frowned blackly whenever he opened his mouth; Gussar, Levison, Olive, Cardew, Roylance, Dane, and Glyn. Mellish, in the midst of all these, felt himself helpless.

"Digby went to the Green Man to see a chap whose real name is Croy," he said. "But he pretended to be an uncle of Dig's who was a bit of a waster. The uncle's really dead, as far as I can make out. Digby gave Croy money, and settled his bill at the pub. Then another chap named Banship came along, and he and Croy turned out to be old pals. And—and that's all I know."

"And enough, too!" snapped Tom. "Can't you see, Mellish, that all this might have a big bearing upon Digby's disappearance?" asked Talbot, more mildly. For Percy Mellish, thus cornered, was a pitiable object, and Reginald Talbot had more compassion on him than anyone else there.

"I tried to think whether it could have, but I didn't see how," burred Mellish, wringing his hands. "I say, shall I get sacked?"

"Hope so!" snorted Manners. "You deserve it, but I don't think you will," Tom Merry said. "I suppose you told your dear pals Racke and Crooke what you heard?"

"Yes! You see, they were chummy with those two chaps at the Green Man, so naturally they were interested."

"And you've told us all you know?" asked Dane.

"Yes!" Mellish was lying, and some of them felt sure he was lying. He dared not say that he had heard Banship tell Croy that he hated Sir Robert Digby, for that would have been to confess that he knew of a motive for anything that had been done to Dig. And, knowing of such a motive, his keeping silence became little better than a crime.

"You can go!" Tom said. "Find Crooke, get him apart from Racke, and tell him he's wanted here at once."

"That was a rummy move, Tom," said Manners, when the miserable sneak had gone. "A rip, a good one, I call it!" said Levison. "Didn't know Tommy was so wide. Mellish can get at Crooke as none of us could, because Racke won't smell a rat; and he's only got to breathe three words to Crooke to fetch him. Crooke's in a blue funk already."

And, sure enough, Crooke came almost at once.

He was pale and haggard and shaking. He could not meet the eyes of his accusers. But he spoke out with more directness than

most of them would have thought possible to him.

"I'll tell you everything," he said tremulously. "I daren't keep it in much longer, anyway. I suppose it means the dashed sack for me, but I'd rather have that than be in this horrible suspense any longer!"

And he told them, if not everything, yet all that really mattered. He told of the pretended Justin Carruthers' stay at the Green Man, of his blackmailing of Digby—for blackmailing his sponging had practically been of the little games which had worked out so badly for Crooke and Racke, of the price of getting back the I O U's they had given, of the stolen letter from Dig's mother put into the hands of Banship, and of his dread that by means of Banship's forged letter Dig had been lured away by the two scoundrels.

"Mind, I don't know what Banship wrote," he added. "Racke saw the forgery, but I didn't."

"Have you any notion where that precious pair hang out?" asked Nobie.

But Crooke said he had not, and they all thought that he was speaking truthfully in that.

"I suppose you'll report this to the Head at once?" he said bitterly.

"We'll talk it over first," answered Tom. "None of us wants to get you kicked out now that you've made a clean breast of it, though you and Racke and Mellish all deserve to be sacked."

"There's one here who will be glad to see me go!" snarled Crooke, with a savage glance at Talbot.

"You're wrong," said Talbot quietly.

Crooke departed, and the fellows he left behind settled down to earnest discussion. But they had decided nothing when a message came that Tom Merry, Blake, D'Arcy, and Herries were wanted at once by the Head.

The four found Sir Robert Digby with Mr. Holmes, Mr. Raitton and Mr. Lathom, Dig's Form-master, were also present.

"Sir Robert has had news of his son," said the Head, as soon as they entered. "He wishes you to know at once. I am not sure that I agree with what he proposes, but it lies with him to decide what shall be done."

"Boys," said Sir Robert hotly. "I have had a letter from a scoundrel with whom I came into contact some years ago, with a result that seems to have caused him to harbour bitter enmity against me. He writes that Bob is in his power, and will not be given up unless I pay a ransom of a thousand pounds! What do you say—would you pay it?"

"Not likely, sir!" cried Tom. "Hear, hear!" came from Herries and Blake.

"Bai Jove, wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus.

"There you are, doctor! Bob himself would say the same. This villain threatens starvation, torture, all sorts of things against the boy if I refuse. Merry, Blake, D'Arcy, Herries, what do you think my son would answer to all that?"

"He'd say you mustn't give in, sir!" replied Tom at once.

"Hear, hear!"

"My dear Sir Robert," said the Head, "I never counselled giving in. I should not dream of according to such demands. My doubt was as to allowing these boys, and the rest, to meddle in a matter that you have already put in the hands of the police."

"And I have no doubt about that!" answered the baronet, smiling the Head's desk with his fist. "I believe Bob to be a captive somewhere not far from here, and I believe that his chums are more likely to find him than the police."

"Thank you, Sir Robert!" said Tom. "We'll do our best, anyway. And you know, sir—he turned appealingly to the Head as he spoke—"we couldn't bear to be out of it!"

"Wathah not!"

"Very well. There is an element of danger in the search which I will not blink, though Sir Robert holds it lightly."

"If Tom Merry here were in Bob's place, I should be angry with you for keeping Bob back from any danger incurred in going to his rescue, Dr. Holmes!"

"I am sure that that, Sir Robert. And I know that my boys do not fear danger. I will take the responsibility of letting them go."

"I think you are right, sir," said Mr. Raitton quietly.

"I am not sure," said little Mr. Lathom. "Without offence, Sir Robert, I cannot say that I am sure. But it does not rest with me."

"You didn't say a word to Dig's father about what we've found out, Tommy," Blake said, a minute later, when they had left the study.

"Daren't do it," answered Tom. "It would settle the lash of Crooke, Racke, and Mellish once for all if I told. Besides, Sir Robert knows it's Banship, and we could tell him no more than really matters."

"You're right, I suppose. And now for the search!" said Blake.

But another story must tell of the finding of Dig.

THE END.

(Another long story of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's issue of THE PENNY POPULAR, entitled "The Finding of Digby!")

BOXING GLOVES, 6/6

per set of four (with lace-up palm, 11/6). Footballs (Match Size), complete, 10/-. Postage 6d. extra on all. Money returned if not satisfied.—TOM CARPENTER, 69, Morecombe Street, Walworth, S.E.17

MOUTH ORGANS BEATEN



All the latest tunes can be played on the Chella-Phone. The only Pocket instrument on which tunes can be correctly played in any key. Soldiers and Sailors love it. "Knocks the German mouth organ into a cocked hat." Post free, each, better quality, with Silver fittings, 2/6, from the maker.

R. FIELD, (Dept 33), Hall Avenue, HUDDERSFIELD.

VENTRILOQUISM. Learn this wonderful and laughable art. Failure impossible with our book of easy instructions and amusing dialogues. Only 7d. post free. Hundreds delighted. Forty Card Tricks, 7d.—IDEAL NOVELTY & PUBLISHING CO., Cleveland.

AGENTS WANTED.

10/- upwards weekly can be earned in spare time.—Apply British People's Legal Protection Association, 9 & 10, St. Bride's Avenue, E.C.4.

BLUSHING. This miserable complaint permanently cured, either sex. Simple Home Treatment. Particulars free. Enclose stamp postage.—MR. J. AMBROSE HILL (Specialist), 50, Royal Arcade, Weston-super-Mare. (Testimonials daily.)

FREE FUN! The Latest Screamingly Funny Surprise Novelty, causing Roars of Laughter, FREE to all sending 1/- for 70 Cards Conjuring Tricks, 13 Jolly Joke Tricks, 6 Catchy Coin Tricks, 5 Cunning Card Tricks, 5 Mystifying Magic Tricks, 6 "Killing" Kenoic Readings, Sensational Ventriloquism Secret, and 1,091 Stupendous Attractions. Thousands delighted! Great Fun!—O. HUGHES, 35, Southam Road, Hall Green, Birmingham

Printed and published every Friday by the Proprietors, the Amalgamated Press, Limited, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Subscription rates: Inland, 11s. per annum; 5s. 6d. for six months. Abroad (except South Africa and Australasia), 8s. 10d. per annum; 4s. 6d. for six months. Sole agents for South Africa: The Central News Agency, Ltd. Sole agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd.; and for Canada, The Imperial News Co., Ltd. Saturday, Nov. 29rd, 1919.

NERVOUSNESS is the greatest drawback in life to any man or woman. If you are nervous, timid, low-spirited, lack self-confidence, will-power, mind concentration, bluish, or feel awkward in the presence of others, send 3 penny stamps for particulars of the Mento-Nerve Strengthening Treatment, used in the Navy, from Vice-Admiral to Seaman, and in the Army from Colonel to Private, D.S.G.'s, M.C.'s, M.M.'s, and D.G.M.'s.—GOSPEL ELLIOTT SMITH, Ltd., 527, Imperial Buildings, Ludgate Circus, London, E.C.4.



FACTORY TO RIDER

Packed Free. Carriage Paid. Fifteen Day's Free Trial. LOWEST CASH PRICES. EASY PAYMENT TERMS. Prompt delivery. Save Dealers' Profits. Satisfaction guaranteed or Money Refunded.

GREAT CLEARANCE SALE of Second-hand Cycles. Thousands of Government Cycles—B.S.A., HILMER, RALLIGH, ROYAL TRIUMPH, SWIFT, etc., many as good as new—ready for riding. No reasonable offer refused. Write for Free List and Special Offer.

MEAD CYCLE COMPANY, Incorpd. Dept. 130Q, BIRMINGHAM.

80 MAGIC TRICKS, Illusions, etc., with Illustrations and Instructions. The lot post free 1/-.—T. W. HARRISON, 230, Pentonville Road, London, N.1.

All applications for Advertisement Space in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, **UNION JACK SERIES, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.**