

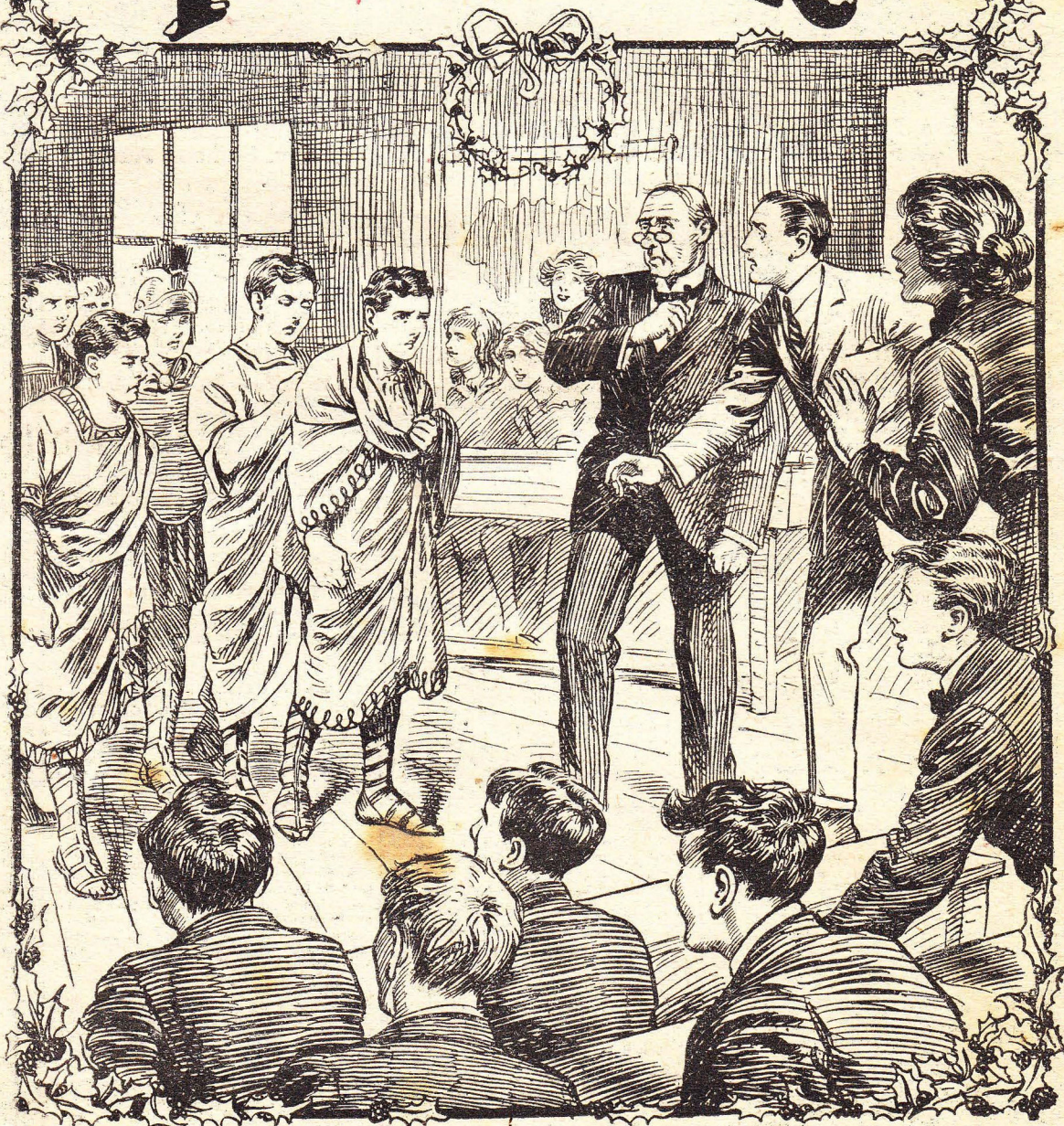
TOPPING BUMPER CHRISTMAS NUMBER!

New Series.
No. 206.

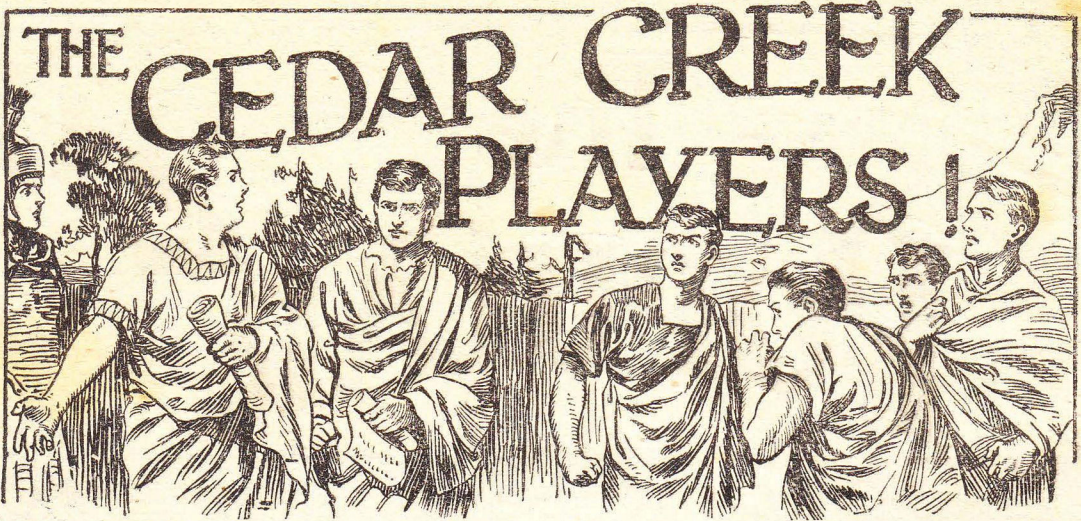
Week Ending,
December 30th,
1922.

The **POPULAR** 2d

28
Pages.



FRANK RICHARDS & CO. COME INTO CLASS "IN COSTUME!"
(An amusing incident in one of our four long complete school stories.)



At the foot of the Great Rocky Mountains, in the very heart of the Canadian Backwoods, lies the Cedar Creek School where the Famous Author spent his schooldays with his rough-neck pals.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Play's the Thing!

"SHAKESPEARE!" said Frank Richards.

"Ahem!" remarked Bob Lawless.

Verè Beauclerc looked doubtful.

And Chunky Todgers asked:

"Who's that?"

It was a meeting in the old corral near Cedar Creek School.

Frank Richards, as president of the Cedar Creek Thespians, was presiding.

Frank was responsible for the existence of the Thespians.

It was he who had introduced amateur theatricals at Cedar Creek, and he had displayed great energy in making a success of the idea.

Quite a number of Cedar Creek fellows, and some of the girls, had joined the Thespian Club, the subscription being fixed at a low figure, suitable for all pockets.

The subscriptions did not, as a matter of fact, cover the cost of the "props," especially as the latter had to be brought all the way from Fraser.

But the wealthier members of the club were at liberty to stand the extras, if they liked—and some of them liked.

Bob Lawless' father had generously "donated" fifty dollars to the club, and that handsome sum went a very long way, for Frank Richards, who was treasurer as well as president, was a very careful manager, and looked at every cent twice before he expended it.

The Thespians had met to discuss a new play shortly to be produced, and the first step, of course, was to decide upon the play.

Chunky Todgers had offered to write a play all on his own, and promised in advance that it would be a regular sock-dolager, but the offer was received with a plentiful lack of enthusiasm, and Chunky had indignantly withdrawn the generous offer.

So far the Thespians had been successful in a small way, but the honourable president was growing ambitious.

Moreover, he had secured a "job lot"

THE POPULAR.—No. 206.

of props that were going cheap in Fraser, which were suitable for a Shakespearian production.

So Frank Richards suggested Shakespeare.

"Chap you know?" inquired Chunky Todgers innocently.

"Fathead!" was the president's reply. "I've heard the name before, I believe," remarked Chunky thoughtfully. "Does he write plays?"

"Well, of all the jays!" said Tom Lawrence. "How can he write plays when he's been dead about a thousand years?"

"Not quite that," said Frank Richards, laughing. "Nearer three hundred."

"Well, if the galoot wrote plays three hundred years ago, I should think they were jolly old-fashioned," said Chunky. "What we want is something a bit more modern."

There was a snort from Frank Richards.

"Chunky, old man, use your ears instead of your mouth for a bit. What do you fellows say to 'Julius Cæsar'? I've got a copy of the play at home, and we've got the props—with a bit of altering. Molly will help with the altering and cutting and sewing and things—won't you, Molly?"

"Oh, yes!" said Molly Lawrence. "Anything you like!"

"Molly will make a good Portia, too," said Frank. "She will look nobby as a Roman matron. Beauclerc can play old Julius—his got the manner."

"Thanks!" said Beauclerc, laughing.

"I'll put myself down for Brutus, if you fellows agree," went on Frank modestly.

"Does Brutus have most of the chin-wag?" asked Chunky Todgers.

"That's got nothing to do with it, ass!"

"I guess it has."

"Bob can take the part of Cassius," continued Frank. "That will suit him all right. Lawrence can be Octavius Cæsar. As for Mark Antony—" He paused.

"Does Mark Antony chew the rag a lot?" inquired Chunky.

"Well, yes, a good bit."

"Put me down, then."

"My dear chap, you're too fat for Mark Antony. Besides, we shall want you as—as First Citizen," said Frank.

"I don't mind so long as it's a good part," said Chunky.

Frank Richards diplomatically left that remark unanswered.

"Hopkins can play Mark Antony," he went on. "We'll whack out the other parts later. You see, we can handle it all right. My idea is that we ought to go the whole hog, you know, and play something really topping. Do you fellows agree to 'Julius Cæsar'?"

"Well, you mean to have 'Julius Cæsar,' anyhow, so we may as well agree first as last," remarked Bob Lawless. "I'm on!"

There was a general nodding of heads.

It was decided unanimously that the Thespians were to undertake the rendering of "Julius Cæsar."

Just as the amateur actors came to that decision, Gunten and Keller came into the old corral.

The two Swiss looked rather loweringly at the Thespians.

They did not belong to the amateur theatrical club.

"Hallo! Chewing the rag, as usual!" remarked Kern Gunten, with a sneer. "We'd better find somewhere else, Keller."

"I guess this'll do," answered Keller, sitting down on a log. "I suppose those galoots won't tell Miss Meadows they've seen us playing poker."

Gunten took a pack of well-worn cards from his pocket.

"Can't you rotters go and gamble somewhere else?" exclaimed Frank Richards warmly.

"Don't care to."

"Well, I'm blessed if you're going to play poker here!" exclaimed Bob Lawless, jumping up. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves—with ladies present, too! Vamoose the ranch!"

"Go and chop chips!" retorted Gunten.

He began to shuffle the cards.

Bob Lawless strode towards him, and



with a well-aimed kick knocked the pack out of his hands.

Gunten jumped to his feet with a yell as the cards were scattered far and wide.

He clenched his fists and strode at Bob Lawless, who put up his hands coolly and waited for him.

Gunten changed his mind, however, before he reached the Canadian schoolboy.

"Hang you, you interfering rotter!" he muttered savagely.

"Are you going to vamoose?" answered Bob. "You're interrupting the meeting."

Gunten sullenly gathered up the scattered cards, and the two young rascals lounged out of the corral.

The Thespians were left to discuss the forthcoming production of "Julius Cæsar" uninterrupted.

Before the meeting broke up, the parts were allotted, and to Frank Richards was assigned the task of copying out the script required by the various members of the company.

That evening, at the Lawless Ranch, Frank was very busy, and when he arrived at Cedar Creek the next morning he had the written parts all ready in his pocket.

The businesslike manager of the Cedar Creek Thespians did not allow the grass to grow under his feet.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Thespians Get To Work!

"FRIENDS, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears! I come to bury Cæsar, not to praise 'im!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Frank Richards.

Lessons were over, and most of the Thespians were improving the shining hour by learning up their parts.

Harold Hopkins, the Cockney of Cedar Creek, had been cast for the part of Marcus Antonius.

In handing that important part to Hopkins, who was a keenly enthusiastic member of the society, Frank Richards had forgotten Hopkins' delightful accent, which he had brought to Canada with him and never lost.

The cheerful Cockney always referred to himself as "Arold 'Opkins," and Miss Meadows had striven in vain to drive into him some slight respect for the aspirate.

But to compensate for leaving out aspirates where they were wanted, Hopkins frequently put them in where they were not wanted, and that, Bob Lawless had remarked, made it all right in the long run.

But it certainly was a drawback when it came to delivering the declamations of Mark Antony.

"The hevill that men do lives after them, The good is hoft interred with their bones.

So let it be with Cæsar. The noble Brutus

'Ath told you Cæsar was hambitious."

"Ye gods!" murmured Bob Lawless.

"Bide a wee, Hopkins," said Frank.

"Ain't that all right?" asked Hopkins, who rather prided himself upon his delivery.

"Topping—but put in an 'h' or two, old chap!"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Hopkins. "You coves are always cuttin' jokes about my aitches."

"F'rinstance," said Frank. "Lend me your ears." See?"

"I got that all right. 'Lend me your ears," said Hopkins.

"Not hears—ears!"

"What?"

"Hears—not hears!"

"Hears, not hears," repeated Hopkins. "I don't savvy. What are you getting at?"

"It's his own ears that are to blame," grinned Bob. "I mean, his own hears."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look 'ere, if you're goin' to larf at a chap!" said Hopkins indignantly.

"But this is serious, old sport," said Frank Richards. "We can't have Mark Antony dropping 'h's' all over the place. Now, listen to me. Lend me your ears. Like that, see?"

"I see! Lend me your hears!" said Hopkins.

"Oh, my hat!"

"What's wrong with that there?" demanded Hopkins warmly. "What are you all larfing at, I'd like to know? I'm surprised at you, Molly Lawrence, larfing at a chap!"

"I'm sorry!" gasped Molly. "I didn't mean to laugh—ha, ha! But what do you do it for?"

"Wot do I do wot for?"

"Oh, get on with it, and let's see how you manage it!" said Frank Richards resignedly. And Harold Hopkins went on:

"The noble Brutus, 'Ath told you Cæsar was hambitious

—"

"Ambitious!" shouted the manager.

"I said hambitious!"

"My only hat!" said Frank Richards. "I don't think we can give Hopkins a fat part, unless we play the 'Dumb Man from Manchester.' Then he could have the title role."

"I say, Frank—"

"Dry up a minute, Chunky!"

"But look here!" exclaimed Chunky Todgers indignantly. "I've been looking

better change over with Chunky. You can come in as a trumpeter, and a soldier, and a senator, and a page, and things, all through the play."

"Oh, orl right!" said Hopkins. "Hany-thing for a quiet life."

"Let's see how you do it, Chunky."

Chunky Todgers took Hopkins' script, and blinked at it, and puffed out his podgy chest, and started.

Grinning faces surrounded him as he delivered Mark Antony's celebrated oration. Certainly, Chunky did not look a very convincing Mark Antony, but at least his aspirates were in the right places.

"Just my part!" wound up Todgers. "You wait till you see me in the togs."

"The toga," said Frank laughing.

"Well, the toga was the Roman togs, wasn't it?" said Chunky. "I tell you, I guess I shall simply live this part. You can see that what it needs is a fellow with a commanding presence."

"A whatter?"

"A commanding presence," said Chunky firmly. "A stately sort of galoot."

"Oh, my heye!" said Hopkins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see what you're cackling at. A fellow with a presence and some flesh on his bones, you know."

"Well, you've got a ton or two," said Frank, "if that's any good. Anyhow, we'll give you a trial as Mark Antony. Now, you chaps, take your script home with you, and slave at it and get letter-perfect. We're going to have a dress rehearsal on Friday. I'm going to bring all the props with me and stack them in the cabin on the old clearing. That's the place for the rehearsals."

And the members of the Thespian company dispersed for their various homes, and some of them astonished parents and relations that evening by speaking in language that was certainly not customary in the Thompson Valley.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Mr. Shepherd is Alarmed!

MR. SLIMMEY, the assistant master at Cedar Creek, received a surprise the following day when

Bob Lawless looked into his cabin after dinner, and asked for the loan of the hunting-knife that hung over his chimney.

"My dear Lawless, what do you want a hunting-knife for?" asked Mr. Slimmey.

"To kill the Cherub, sir."

"Wha-a-at!"

"I—I mean Beauclere, sir."

Mr. Slimmey's gold-rimmed glasses nearly fell off his nose.

"What can you possibly mean, Lawless?" he stammered.

"We're going to kill him, sir."

"Are you insane, boy?"

"I—I mean, the Cherub's Julius Cæsar, and we've got to assassinate him," explained Bob.

"Oh," said Mr. Slimmey, "you are acting a play?"

"Yes, sir."

"You had better use something a little less dangerous than a real knife, then," said Mr. Slimmey dryly. "You probably do not want to change your play into a real tragedy, Lawless."

And Bob retired without the hunting-knife.

Several table-knives were borrowed from Black Sally's kitchen in the lumber schoolhouse, the "property" daggers being still at the ranch.

After lessons it had been arranged for Julius Cæsar's death scene in the Roman senate-house to take place in a corner of the playground, so that Frank could judge how his company was getting on; and the knives gave an air of reality to the scene—in the eyes of the schoolboys, at least.

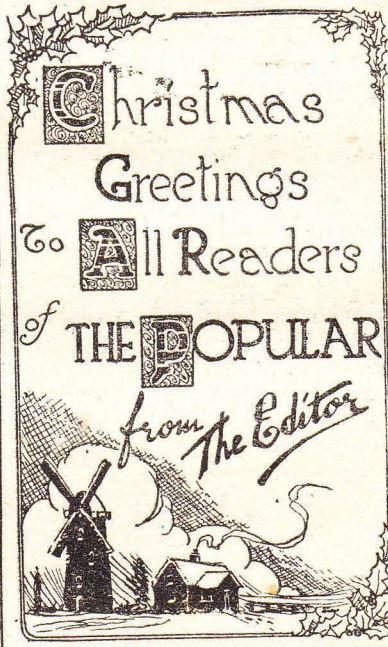
Black Sally's table-knives were not sharp enough to do much damage.

Bob Lawless was practising a thrust at Beauclere, when Mr. Shepherd, the new master, came by.

Mr. Shepherd was a tenderfoot from Tenverville, as Bob expressed it.

He had brought great stores of knowledge

THE POPULAR—No. 206.



over my part, and it's rotten. Only a few lines for me."

"You do them so jolly well, Chunky, that they'll be the success of the piece," said Bob Lawless solemnly.

But the soft answer did not turn away wrath. Chunky Todgers was not satisfied with the meagre role of First Citizen.

"I'll tell you what," said Chunky. "Give me Mark Antony. I can do that a treat; I've looked at Hopkins' part. Hopkins can be First Citizen, and he can chuck 'h's' all over the place."

"You let my aitches alone!" growled Hopkins.

"Let's see how you do the First Citizen, Hopkins. Give him your script, Chunky."

Hopkins took the paper from Todgers.

"Go on from 'Thou art a cobbler,'" said Frank.

And Hopkins went on:

"Truly, sir, hall that I live by is with the hawl—"

"All that I live by is with the awl!" shouted Frank.

"That's right," assented 'Arold 'Opkins.

"Hall that I live by is with the hawl. That's wot I said."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, that's better as First Citizen than as Mark Antony," said Frank. "You'd



with him from the Old Country, but not much adaptability, and he found it very difficult to get into Western ways.

The boys rather liked him, but they were never tired of pulling his leg; which was all the easier, because Mr. Shepherd never dreamed that anybody could pull his leg, or would venture to do so if he could.

Mr. Shepherd halted in amazement as Bob made a thrust at Beaulerc with the gleaming steel, exclaiming "Die!"

The new master ran forward, seizing Bob's arm just in time, and stopping the thrust.

"Lawless!" he gasped.

"Oh crumbs!" said Bob. "All right, sir; no harm done."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Shepherd, "Is that a joke—a Western joke? You should not play such jokes, Lawless. It is dangerous. Please put that knife away at once, my boy. You may cut yourself."

Mr. Shepherd shook his head seriously and walked on, leaving Bob Lawless blinking after him, and Beaulerc grinning.

"Well, my word!" ejaculated Bob. "Of all the howling idiots! Blessed if the ass didn't think I was going to stick you, Cherub!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Frank Richards.

"Isn't he a prize jay?" exclaimed Bob. "A joke—a Western joke, the howling chump! I don't believe that galoot knows enough to go in when it rains."

"He is an ass, and no mistake," agreed Frank.

"A jay from Jaysville!" growled Bob.

During afternoon lessons Mr. Shepherd glanced at Bob Lawless several times, as if in doubt.

Bob caught his glance once or twice, and he wondered whether the "tenderfoot" was still in doubt as to whether he had really intended to slaughter Vere Beaulerc in the playground.

The new master was so unacquainted with Western ways, and had so many queer ideas on the subject, that there really was no telling what he might or might not get into his head.

After lessons, however, Bob forgot all about Mr. Shepherd, as the chums of Cedar Creek repaired to a retired corner of the playground to rehearse the senate-house scene from the third act of "Julius Cæsar."

Vere Beaulerc was there as Cæsar, and Frank Richards as Brutus, and Bob as Cassius.

Dawson was Casca, and Hopkins was Metellus Cimber.

All and the conspirators were armed with table-knives, which had been polished but not sharpened, and looked quite dangerous, though they would not have cut into cheese without some pushing.

The scene went quite strong. The actors were well up in their parts, and Vere Beaulerc made quite an imposing Cæsar.

But though Bob Lawless had forgotten Mr. Shepherd, Shepherd had not forgotten him.

The new master noted the fact that Frank Richards & Co. did not leave after lessons as usual, and after a time he strolled out of his cabin, to take a glance at the corner whither the schoolboys had retired.

He was quite uneasy in his mind.

He had heard of brawls in the backwoods in which knives were used, and though certainly he had never heard of a case of knifing at Cedar Creek, he would not have been greatly surprised.

Mr. Shepherd had an enormous amount to learn about Canada—and a great deal to unlearn!

He started a little as he saw the group of schoolboys in the distant corner, surrounding Beaulerc with very serious looks.

And even as he glanced at them, Dick Dawson's shining blade was flashed at Beaulerc, who staggered.

Mr. Shepherd had never even heard of the Thespians of Cedar Creek, so naturally he did not know that it was only Casca stabbing Cæsar.

He stood rooted to the ground with horror, as Beaulerc staggered artistically, and caught Dawson by the arm as if to stop a second stab.

Bob Lawless stabbed him at the same moment, and then Hopkins, and then, last of all, Frank Richards.

THE POPULAR.—No. 206.

"Ei tu, Brute!" groaned Cæsar, as the dearly-loved Brutus stabbed; but the horrified master was too far off to hear him.

Beaulerc sank to the ground.

He moved for a moment or two, and then stretched out still.

Over him were brandished the fatal weapons.

Pale with horror, Mr. Shepherd dashed towards the group.

"Stop!" he shrieked. "Wretched boys, stop! Hold your hands!"

The conspirators spun round in amazement.

The speeches that were about to be delivered over Cæsar were never delivered. The amateur actors stared at Mr. Shepherd instead, blankly.

The new master dashed up breathlessly.

With a swing of his arm, he sent Frank and Bob staggering back, and the other fellows jumped out of his way.

Mr. Shepherd threw himself upon his knees beside the still form of Vere Beaulerc.

"Good heavens," he panted, "you have killed him!"

"K-k-kick-kick-killed him!" stuttered Bob Lawless.

"Wretched boy!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"My poor lad!" Mr. Shepherd raised Beaulerc's head, and Vere's eyes opened wide in utter amazement. "Ah, he lives! He lives! Thank Heaven he lives!—Stand back, you reckless young ruffians! Touch him again at your peril!"

"My heye!" gasped Hopkins. "Is he orf his rocker?"

"My poor boy, you are hurt!"

"Eh? I'm not hurt, sir," gasped Beaulerc.

"What?"

Frank Richards burst into a yell.

He understood now that the new master had taken the scene seriously, and that discovery was too much for him.

He yelled almost hysterically.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Lawless, as he, too, understood. "Oh, by gum! Ha, ha, ha! This is too rich!"

Mr. Shepherd looked up at them in horrified amazement.

"Do you dare to laugh in the presence of your victim?" he thundered. "Are you lost to all sense of humanity?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, sir!" gasped Frank. "You see—ha, ha—we—we—ha, ha!—oh dear!" And Frank Richards went off into another yell, quite unable to explain for the moment.

To Mr. Shepherd's surprise, the dying youth on the ground joined in the yell of laughter.

The new master could scarcely believe his eyes or his ears.

"Beaulerc!" he gasped. "You—you are hurt—"

"Not at all, sir," gurgled Beaulerc. "It's only—ha, ha!—it's only—ha, ha, ha!"

"Only a—ha, ha, ha!" yelled Dawson.

"Only a—ha, ha!—play, sir!"

"What?"

"We're doing 'Julius Cæsar, sir!' gurgled Frank Richards, with tears rolling down his cheeks. "Only a play, Mr. Shepherd! Beau is Julius Cæsar, and we're assassinating him in the Capitol."

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Shepherd.

Beaulerc sat up and roared. He did not want to be disrespectful to Mr. Shepherd, but he could not help it.

The other fellows were yelling.

The new master rose to his feet, his face crimson. He, too, understood at last, and realised that he had put his foot in it once more.

He walked away very quickly, leaving Frank Richards & Co. almost in convulsions.

When he met the Co. in class the next morning Mr. Shepherd was still looking rather pink.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Gunten is Humorous!

"DRESS rehearsal after dinner!" said Frank Richards on Friday.

"Right you are!"

Kern Gunten, who heard the remark, looked round.

"You're bagging the corral again, I suppose?" he said.

Frank Richards nodded.

"Yes; if you want to sneak off somewhere to play poker. Gunten, you can sneak off somewhere else. The corral's booked."

Gunten gave a sniff and said no more.

Immediately after dinner, Frank Richards & Co. repaired to the old corral near the school.

This was a secluded spot, and eminently suitable for rehearsals; and the weather was so fine and clear that a rehearsal in the open air was no disadvantage.

The "props" were in the old cabin, packed there in readiness, and the altering and cutting and sewing had been done.

There was not time for a full rehearsal before afternoon lessons, and the Thespians were going to rehearse the senate-house scene in full dress, chiefly to make sure that the costumes were all right.

"We shall have time to do the third act if we don't waste any," Frank Richards remarked.

"We can do the fourth after lessons, the fifth to-morrow. One Saturday we must have a grand rehearsal of the whole thing, with all the characters present. And after that—"

"After that the terrific performance!" grinned Bob Lawless. "Well, Franky, really think we shall get through the performance without having things thrown at us—unless they heave rocks at Mark Antony."

"You silly jay!" exclaimed Chunky Todgers. "Mark Antony's the best of the bunch! Just hear me do the oration as we go along—"

"Mercy!"

Chunky Todgers snorted.

Every time he rehearsed that oration he was more and more pleased with it, which, according to some other members of the company, showed how easily satisfied he was.

There were no feminine characters in the third act, which Tom Lawrence rather ungalantly declared was an advantage.

At all events, it enabled all the rehearsers to use the old cabin in the corral as a dressing-room.

All the "props" that were required had been conveyed there during the week, and were locked up in a big chest.

Frank Richards opened the chest, and the costumes were handed out.

There was plenty of brightness and colour about the costumes, and they were very pleasing to the eye.

The schoolboys stripped off their more prosaic everyday garments in the cabin, and donned togas and hoods and sandals.

They grinned at one another a good deal during the process of transformation from Canadian schoolboys into ancient Romans.

The window was darkened as a head appeared there, and Frank Richards glanced round, and saw Kern Gunten looking in, and grinning.

"Buzz off!" he snapped.

"Mayn't a galoot look on?" jeered Gunten. "By gum, you look a precious set of circus performers!"

"Vamoose!" roared Bob Lawless.

He picked up a property Roman sword, and Gunten vanished from the window, chuckling.

The dressing was finished at last, and the crowd of Romans, in their togas, moved out into the old corral.

In a corner of the corral grew a big tree, and under its wide-spreading branches the schoolboys started the rehearsal of the third act.

Frank Richards was a hard-working and exacting manager; but he was very well satisfied with the progress of his company.

The senate-house scene was voted a great success, and even Chunky Todgers' oration in the Forum went very well.

While the rehearsal was going on under the big tree, Kern Gunten's keen and cunning face looked in at the window of the old cabin again—the Swiss being careful to keep the cabin between him and the actors.

Gunten's eyes gleamed as he looked in.

About the cabin were thrown the clothes the schoolboys had discarded when they put on the Roman costumes, with a dozen pairs of boots, and as many hats.

Gunten chuckled softly.

He turned to the window, and made a sign to Keller, who was waiting at a distance; and his comrade came up quietly, keeping,

like Gunten, the cabin between him and the party rehearsing under the tree.

"All safe?" asked Keller.
"You bet! You stand here and take them as I pass them out of the window," whispered Gunten.

Gunten squeezed himself in through the window, Keller's grinning face watching him from outside.

With swift hands the Swiss collected up the clothes left there by the Thespians, made them into bundles, and passed them out to Keller.

Laden with bundles, Keller hurried away, and returned in a few minutes for more.

In ten minutes the cabin was cleared of the clothes belonging to the amateur theatrical society.

The boots were next handed out, and conveyed away, and after them the hats. The cabin was left quite bare.

Then Gunten squeezed himself through the window again, and dropped quietly outside.

From the other side of the cabin came the fat voice of Chunky Todgers:

"For when the noble Cæsar saw him stab, Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms,

Quite vanquished him: then burst his mighty heart!"

"They're still going it!" grinned Keller.
"They'll go it till the bell rings!" chuckled Gunten. "And then how they'll turn up to classes without their duds they can work out for themselves."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Laden with the last of the boots and the hats, Gunten and Keller crept softly away, leaving the old corral by a gap in the broken palisade.

Outside, on the ground, lay the clothes piled by Keller.

For the next ten minutes the two Swiss were very busy carrying them to a safer spot farther off, where they were hidden in the thickets.

Then, with grinning faces, the two young rascals strolled away to the lumber school, reaching it as the bell began to ring for afternoon classes, and leaving Frank Richards & Co. to work out, as best they could, the toughest problem that the Thespian Club had ever had to deal with.

**THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Surprising the School!**

"BRING me to Octavius!" concluded Chunky Todgers.

The school bell was ringing as Mark Anthony wound up.

"My hat! We've run it rather close!" exclaimed Frank Richards. "Only just time to change before we get in. Get a move on!"

The rehearsal of the third act had been a great success. All the Thespians agreed that the costumes lent reality to the scene, and, indeed, the more enthusiastic members felt as if they really were ancient Romans.

But the clang of the iron bell at the lumber school summoned them back to everyday life, and they rushed into the cabin to change back to modern life again.

And then there was a chorus of dismayed exclamations.

"Where's our clothes?"

"Great gophers!"

The Romans stared into the empty cabin in astonishment and dismay.

It was quite empty, save for an odd boot or two lying about.

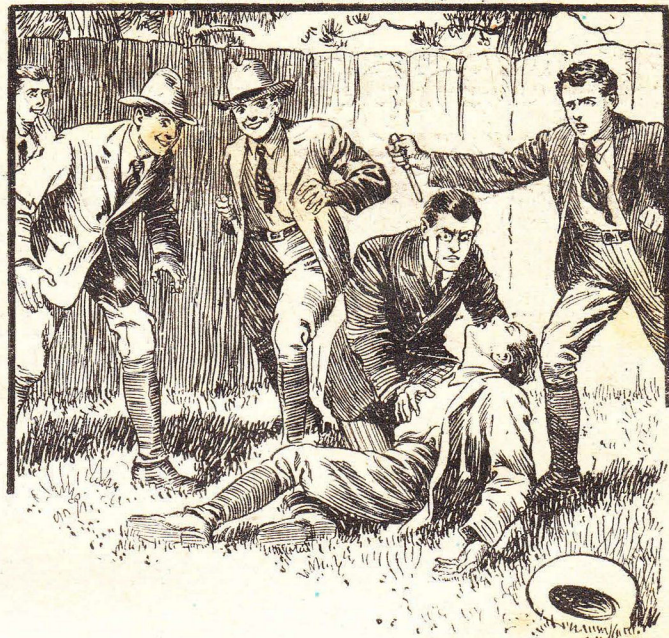
Frank Richards blinked round him.

"Who on earth—" he ejaculated.

"One of you duffers been larking?" exclaimed Bob Lawless.

"Somebody's been larking!" growled Dawson. "Where's our clothes gone?"

"Somebody's been 'ere!" said Hopkins.



A SLIGHT MISTAKE!—Mr. Shepherd threw himself upon his knees beside the still form of Vere Beauclerc. "Good heavens!" he panted. "You have killed him!" He raised Vere's head, and the schoolboy opened his eyes. "Ah, he lives! Stand back, you reckless ruffians! Touch him again at your peril!" (See Chapter 3.)

"Perhaps—perhaps the things are outside!" exclaimed Franky.

He ran out of the cabin again with two or three others. But there was no sign of the clothes outside.

It was evident that the garments had been taken clean away.

Utter dismay fell upon the Thespians.

The Roman costumes had given reality to the rehearsal, and the amateur actors were very pleased with them; but those light and airy garments were not suitable for the lumber school.

Their cheeks crimsoned at the thought of the merriment that would greet them if they turned up at Cedar Creek, in broad daylight, habited as Cæsar, Mark Antony, Brutus & Co.

But Miss Meadows was a stickler for punctuality, and already the school bell had ceased to clang.

Cedar Creek had gone in to lessons now, excepting the unhappy cast of "Julius Cæsar."

"Wh-at on earth are we going to do?" ejaculated Lawrence. "We—we—we can't go in like this!"

"Miss Meadows will be mad if we don't go," said Dawson. "We're late already."

"We—we can't!"

"But we've got to go some time," said Bob. "We—we can't stay here all the afternoon and the evening, too. We've got to make a move, Frank!"

"Oh, my hat! I wish I had that practical joker here!" gasped Frank. "It was Gunten, of course—I'm sure it was Gunten. He was watching us."

"I'd rather have the clothes here!" groaned Bob.

The schoolboys made another desperate search for the missing garments, inside and outside the corral, but there was not a trace of them.

It was borne in upon their minds that there was nothing to be done but to return to the lumber school as they were.

What Miss Meadows would say, when they presented themselves in the school-room as ancient Romans, instead of modern Canadians, they could not even guess.

"We—we'd better go," said Beauclerc at last.

Frank Richards nodded.

"Can't be helped," he said. "C-c-come on! Oh, my hat, what awful asses we shall look!"

And the unhappy Thespians started at last.

In a body they came out of the corral and started for the lumber school.

As they came in at the school gates Cæsar, Antony, Brutus, & Co. all seemed to be trying to hide behind one another.

Black Sally, the cook, was crossing the school ground with a pail when they came in. Black Sally gave them one look and shrieked, and the pail went with a clatter to the ground.

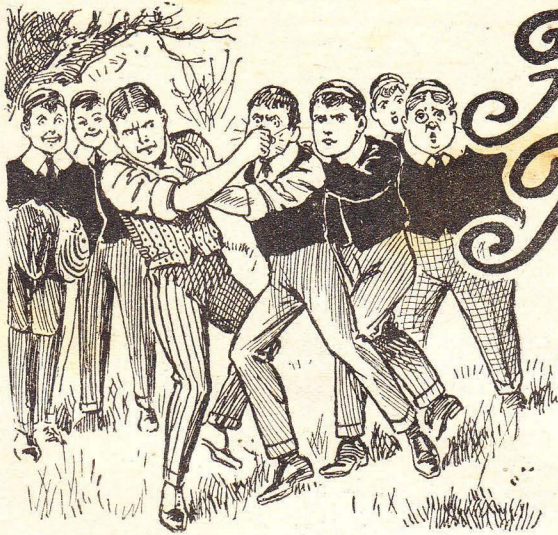
"It—it—it's only us, Sally!" called out Frank Richards.

"Golly!" gasped Black Sally, her black face a picture of astonishment. "Golly! Dat Mass' Frank? Oh, golly!"

(Continued on page 27.)

THE POPULAR.—No. 206.

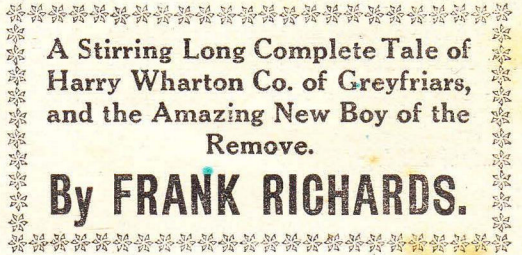
FUNK OR FIGHTER?—There is more in Percy Esmond, the Funk of the Remove, than meets the eye. Is he a funk or—?



Forced To Fight!

A Stirring Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton Co. of Greyfriars, and the Amazing New Boy of the Remove.

By FRANK RICHARDS.



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Funk of the Remove.

COMING out, Esmond?" Esmond, the new junior in the Remove Form at Greyfriars, started a little at the sound of that voice. Esmond was standing by himself in the Close, his hands plunged into his pockets, in moody reflection. Esmond was not happy, and he did not look happy.

From the playing fields came the cheery shouts of the Removes, and he caught a glimpse of Harry Wharton running with a football at his toes.

Harry Wharton had been asked by Mr. Quelch, the Remove master, to look after Esmond, who was a funk, and, what was more, admitted that a fight scared him half out of his wits. It was rough luck on the captain of the Remove, for he had already had to fight a good many of the funk's battles for him. Bolsover, Skinner, and Snoop had all tried to bully the new boy, and they had all come to blows with Harry Wharton.

The day before—his very first day at Greyfriars—he had been chased by Ponsonby of Highcliffe—one of the Removes' biggest rivals. And Esmond had run—hard—and escaped. The Removes looked upon him with scorn, and Esmond was unhappy in consequence.

Even Billy Bunter could bully him, and Billy was the biggest ass who ever donned a pair of boxing-gloves. It was he who broke in upon Esmond's moody thoughts. And, at that moment, Esmond was glad enough to be addressed by the fat junior.

"Did you ask if I was coming out?" asked Esmond.

Billy Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles with a peculiar glimmer in his little round eyes.

"Yes; come out for a walk, Esmond."

Bunter was about the last person at Greyfriars with whom Esmond would have cared to be friendly; but Bunter was better than solitude. So the new junior nodded.

"I'll come with pleasure," he said.

And they walked across the Close together, and out of the school gates.

Billy Bunter took the lane to Friardale, and Esmond strolled with him. The countryside was full of winter life, and there was a fresh breeze from the sea. It was very pleasant in the leafy lane, but Esmond had no eyes for scenery. His thoughts were bitter and unpleasant.

He started as they came in sight of the stile in the lane. On the stile, in a row,

THE POPULAR.—No. 205.

were seated Bolsover major, Skinner, and Snoop.

Esmond cast a quick glance at Bunter. The Owl of the Remove was grinning.

"You—you fat rotter!" exclaimed Esmond breathlessly. "You've tricked me."

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter. Bolsover and his companions had jumped off the stile, and were running towards them. Esmond understood at once that Bunter's invitation to take a walk was a trick to get him outside the school, into the hands of the ragers. He turned back towards Greyfriars, but Billy Bunter planted himself in his path, with a pair of fat fists raised.

"Stop!" said Bunter. "Let me pass!"

"Rats! Here he is, Bolsover."

Esmond panted.

On any other occasion, he would not have tackled even a fat, unwieldy fellow like Bunter, but with Bolsover major behind him, he found a desperate courage in his fear itself. He made a rush at Bunter, hitting out blindly. Bunter gave a roar as Esmond's fist crashed on his fat chin, and he went spinning across the road.

"Ow, ow! Beast! Yah!"

Esmond passed him and fled like a deer. "After him!" roared Bolsover.

The three juniors dashed in pursuit. Bunter sat up in the dust, and held his fat chin in his fat hands, and groaned.

Esmond ran fleetly; but as he ran, Stott of the Remove jumped out of the hedge in advance of him, and stood in his path. Esmond halted. His fight was cut off. He cast a desperate glance at the high hedges bordering the road; but before he could make up his mind what to do, his pursuers were upon him. Bolsover's heavy grasp fell upon his shoulder, and he was a prisoner.

"Don't be afraid, you wretched cad!" said Bolsover contemptuously. "We're not going to hurt you. It's not a ragging this time."

"What do you want?" gasped Esmond.

"We want you. You wouldn't have come out if we'd asked you, though any other fellow would have been glad to, considering what's on."

"What do you mean?"

"We're going to meet Ponsonby of Highcliffe."

"Ponsonby?" faltered Esmond.

"Exactly. We happen to know where he is this afternoon, and you're going to lick him for sending that white feather—see?"

Esmond shivered.

"I—I can't!"

"Wait till we plant you face to face with

Ponsonby," said Skinner. "You'll stand up to him then. You'll have to!"

"I won't!" panted Esmond.

"Don't you want to lick him for sending you a white feather?" bawled Bolsover angrily.

"N-no!"

"And you ain't ashamed to say so?" exclaimed the bully of the Remove in deep disgust. "Blessed if you don't take the whole giddy cake! Well, if you're willing to take it quietly, we're not! You're not going to disgrace the Remove, if we can stop you! Do you think we're going to have the Highcliffe rotters cackling at us, simply because you're a rotten coward!"

"No fear!" said Skinner. "You ought to be jolly keen to meet Ponsonby, and give him something back for his white feather."

"I—I—I—"

"Keen or not, he's going to meet him!" said Bolsover. "Come on!"

"Let me go! I—I—"

"This way!" said Bolsover major. And he linked his arm in Esmond's; and the funk of the Remove had no choice about accompanying him.

Esmond's face was red and white by turns as he walked into Friardale with his tormentors. There was no escape for him now, but he knew that he had no courage to face the enemy he was seeking. Bolsover major halted outside Uncle Clegg's tuckshop.

Three fellows in Highcliffe caps were there, sitting round the little table under the old elm-tree, and sipping lemonade. They were Ponsonby and Monson and Vavasour of Highcliffe.

They rose to their feet as the Greyfriars fellows came up. There were five of the Greyfriars juniors, and only three of the Highcliffians, and Ponsonby & Co. anticipated trouble.

"I thought we'd meet you," said Bolsover, with satisfaction. "We've brought a fellow along to see you, Ponsonby. You sent him a white feather to-day."

Ponsonby grinned.

"He's come to give you a licking in return for it," said Bolsover. "One good turn deserves another, you know. Haven't you, Esmond?"

"I—I—I—"

"Have you come to give Ponsonby a licking or not?" roared Bolsover, compressing Esmond's arm till he gasped with pain.

"Ye-es!" stammered Esmond.

The Highcliffe fellows laughed derisively.

"He looks as if he would give anybody a licking—I don't think!" remarked Monson.

Look Out for this Stunning Tale of Greyfriars: "A LESSON FOR SNOOP!"



"More used to using his feet than his hands, I should say!"

"Will you come out of the village and stand up to him, Ponsonby?"

Ponsonby yawned.

"My dear chap, I've no time to waste licking that rotten funk!"

"You'll lick him or me, and you can take your choice!" said Bolsover grimly. "I suppose you know I could wipe up the ground with all three of you, and not half try, either!"

The Highcliffe fellows exchanged glances.

"Of course, I don't mind giving the fellow a licking, if you really want me to," said Ponsonby airily. "It is understood that we get fair play—none of you others interfere?"

"Honour bright!"

"Then we're quite at your service, my dear fellow."

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Come on, then!"

The three Highcliffe fellows strolled out of the village with Bolsover & Co. On second thoughts, Ponsonby did not object to reaping a little cheap glory by licking a fellow who was evidently too funky to take care of himself.

Bolsover halted in a field, where a clump of trees hid them from view from the lane.

"This will do!" he remarked.

Ponsonby peeled off his jacket, and gave it to Monson to hold.

"Ready?" he remarked.

"Take off your jacket, Esmond!"

"M-m-my jacket!" stammered Esmond.

"Yes, your jacket, idiot!" snorted Bolsover major. "Do you want to fight with your jacket on, fathead?"

"I—I don't want to fight at all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Ponsonby & Co.

"Take his jacket off him, Snoop!"

Snoop grinned and jerked Esmond's jacket off. The funk of the Remove stood in his shirt-sleeves. Bolsover jerked him forward to face Ponsonby.

"Ready?" he demanded.

"Nunno!"

"Ready or not, you're going to fight!" said the bully of the Remove. "Hallo, stop him—collar him—after him!"

Esmond had made a sudden break for the road.

The juniors dashed after him, while Ponsonby & Co. yelled with laughter. Esmond was secured before he could escape, and dragged back, struggling and panting.

"If you break away again, I'll hammer you till you won't know your own chivvy in the looking-glass!" shouted Bolsover. "Now begin!"

He swung Esmond forward at Ponsonby with such force that the funk of the Remove bumped on the Highcliffe junior. Ponsonby promptly hit out, and Esmond measured his length in the grass.

"Time!" shouted Bolsover.

"Get up!"

"I—I won't!"

"I'll kick you black and blue if you don't!" roared Bolsover, infuriated by the mocking laughter of the Highcliffians. "Get up, you coward!"

He drew back his heavy boot. Esmond jumped to his feet.

"Now pile in, you beastly worm!"

And Esmond—between the devil and the deep sea, as it were—piled in. He was more afraid of Bolsover than he was of Ponsonby, and he chose the lesser antagonist.

And the Greyfriars juniors stood close round, on the watch for him, to drag him back if he made another attempt to bolt.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Surprising Victory!

ESMOND'S face was white as he stood up before Ponsonby.

Ponsonby was grinning maliciously. He winked to his chums, indicating that he was going to give them some fun, and Monson and Vavasour grinned with delighted anticipation.

Ponsonby "sailed in" and started by knocking Esmond all round the ring. Bolsover & Co. looked on grimly. A rat in a corner will fight—and Bolsover had expected that when Esmond found that there was no escape, he would put up a good show. But the wretched funk was allowing

himself to be knocked about like a punching-ball.

"Oh, this is funny!" gasped Monson. "Go it, Pon! Another on his nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Buck up, you worm!" shouted Bolsover furiously. "If you don't lick him, I'll thrash you within an inch of your life when he's finished with you."

Esmond panted.

He was getting excited, and the pain of the blows he was receiving roused his angry feelings.

To his own surprise, he found himself beginning to feel keen for the fight—the instinct for battle was waking within him.

He stood his ground at last, and Ponsonby's attack was checked—indeed, pushing on a little too recklessly, in his contempt for his opponent, Ponsonby found himself stopped by a heavy right-hander full on the nose.

He staggered back with a gasp, and sat down; and Bolsover gave a chirrup of delight.

"Bravo! You rotter, you can fight, after all! Pile in and win!"

"Go it, Esmond!"

"Give him beans!"

Esmond's face lighted up, and his eyes gleamed. The shouts of encouragement from his Form-fellows were like wine to him.

And he was amazed to find that he was not afraid.

Ponsonby jumped up and came on furiously. There were no rounds in that fight; the two combatants hammered away at their own sweet will. Ponsonby had not expected it to last as long as a round, in fact. But it was lasting longer than he had anticipated.

The wretched funk, whom he had intended to knock sky-high, or higher, was developing an unexpected obstinacy.

Esmond piled in; and as he was an active, sturdy fellow, fully a match for Ponsonby physically—in fact, rather more than a match, for Ponsonby was out of condition—he began to gain the upper hand.

Ponsonby was surprised to find himself sitting in the grass again.

Bolsover's face was illuminated with delight. He patted Esmond on the back, as the champion stood gasping, waiting for Ponsonby to rise.

"Good—good!" he exclaimed. "You can fight, you bouncer. What have you been pretending to be a funk for? You're beating him!"

"Beating him hollow!" said Skinner encouragingly. "Go in and win!"

"I'll beat him!" said Esmond, setting his teeth.

"Bravo!"

Vavasour had helped Ponsonby to his feet. The Highcliffe fellow was looking decidedly groggy, and he had bellows to mend with a vengeance. At that moment Ponsonby bitterly regretted the "doggishness" which had impelled him to smoke half a dozen cigarettes that day. He needed all his wind now—and his wind was wanting.

Ponsonby would have been glad enough to leave off at that point, and the signs of hesitation in his looks were very encouraging to Esmond.

"Come on!" shouted Esmond. "I'm waiting for you!"

"Bravo!" yelled Bolsover major.

Ponsonby came on—slowly.

Esmond met him with a hot attack, and the Highcliffe fellow backed away, and was driven round the ring in his turn, followed up by the funk of the Remove.

Esmond seemed to have forgotten, in the excitement of the combat, that he was a funk at all; certainly he did not look like a funk now.

His teeth were set, his eyes were gleaming, and he took no notice of the blows that Ponsonby rained upon his flushed face, as he attacked the Highcliffe fellow. Ponsonby was getting twice the punishment he gave, and he was plainly sickening of it.

Bolsover was in a state of great delight. Although he did not make himself agreeable in the Remove, he had the honour of the Form at heart, and he keenly desired to avenge the affront of the white feather.

Esmond was turning out better than he had ventured to expect. Bolsover felt very friendly towards him just then, and he chirruped out encouragement at every blow:

"Stand up to him! Go for his ribs! One

on his nose! Bravo! He won't last much longer! Pile in! That's right! Hurrah!"

This encouraged, Esmond piled in manfully.

One of his eyes was closed, his nose was swollen and streaming with red, and a thin stream of scarlet ran from the corner of his mouth.

But he did not seem to feel his injuries.

He seemed to be, as Skinner remarked, a "hog" for fighting, now that he had fairly started. His expression was almost blood-thirsty as he followed up the weakening Ponsonby, knocking him right and left.

"Bump!"

Ponsonby was down at last, so knocked about that he could hardly see out of his blinking eyes.

Monson ran to him.

"I—I'm done!" gasped Ponsonby. "I—I can't go on!"

"Just try him one more round," urged Monson. "He's a funk, you know!"

Ponsonby groaned.

"Not much like a funk, the way he's been handling me. He's been spoofing us, I suppose. Ow! I feel as if my face was knocked right off!"

"Just try—"

"Try him yourself!" snarled Ponsonby.

But that Monson had no mind to do.

"Is your man ever going to get up?" hooted Bolsover major.

"He's done!" said Monson.

"Licked?"

"Yes."

"You own up you're licked, Ponsonby?"

"Ow! Yes!" groaned Ponsonby.

"Good!"

Vavasour and Monson helped Ponsonby up, and put on his jacket, and helped him away.

He bathed his face dismally in an adjacent pond, inwardly resolving that the next time he tackled a funk he would make sure that he really was a funk.

Bolsover clapped Esmond on the back with a force that made him stagger.

"You've licked him!" he grinned.

"Licked him hollow!" chuckled Skinner.

"What a giddy surprise!"

"I—I don't know how I did it," muttered Esmond. "I—I wasn't afraid after I'd started. Oh, I've got a pain all over! Is my eye black?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Both of 'em as black as the ace of spades!" chortled Bolsover gleefully.

"Never mind that. It's something to be proud of. I'll bet the chaps will be surprised to see you with two black eyes, when they know you got 'em in a fight!"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Stott.

"I—feel awfully done up!" groaned Esmond. "All the same, I'm glad I licked him; and—and I'm much obliged to you, Bolsover!"

"So you ought to be!" said Bolsover good-humouredly. "I've looked after you like a friend and a brother; and I'm going to keep on doing it. If you show any more signs of the white feather, I'm going to lick you every time, old chap!"

Esmond did not look very grateful.

"Better bathe your face in the pond," said Bolsover major, eyeing him critically. "You do look a lovely sight, and no mistake! If Quelchy sees you like that, he'll have a fit. Come along! Bring his jacket, Skinny!"

Esmond bathed his face in the pond, and removed the worst signs of the combat. But he could not remove the dark hue from his eyes, the swelling from his nose, or the cut from his lip. But, as a matter of fact, he did not want to remove them. It was the first time he had had the scars of honourable combat to show, and he was quite keen to let all the Remove fellows see them.

"I say, you fellows," remarked Billy Bunter, when Esmond had donned his jacket, and they came out into the road, "I think we ought to celebrate an occasion like this. I'd offer to stand a feed at Uncle Clegg's, only I—I've been disappointed about a postal-order. But Esmond can stand it!"

"I don't feel much inclined for a feed," said Esmond.

"Well, I do!" said Bunter, in a bullying tone. "You just trot along with us to Uncle Clegg's, or you'll have a thick ear to add to your black eyes. Understand?"

Esmond turned on the fat junior. He did not speak, but he swung out his open hand, and his palm came on Bunter's fat cheek with a report like a pistol-shot. Billy Bunter

THE POPULAR.—No. 206.

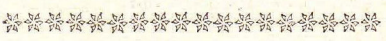


uttered a fiendish yell, and staggered away, and brought up against the fence on the other side of the road.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Why, you beast—Ow! Yow!"

Esmond glared at him. "Want some more?" he demanded. "Why—ow—yow—you rotten funk—Yaroop!"

"If I can lick Ponsonby, I can lick a fat beast like you, Bunter!" said Esmond victoriously. "Come on, if you want any more!"



THE ANNUAL FOR YOU—



But William George Bunter did not want any more. He had had enough—indeed, he felt as if he had had more than enough. He set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and blinked at Esmond from a safe distance.

"I—I was only joking, of course," he stammered. "I—I really meant to say—"

And Esmond walked on to Greyfriars, his arm linked in Bolsover's; and Billy Bunter followed dolorously, feeling a dismal foreboding that all his little feeds at Percy Esmond's expense were at an end now.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Mr. Quelch is Surprised!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"
"What on earth have you been doing with your chivvy?"
"Run into a motor-car?"

These exclamations, and a good many more, greeted Esmond as he came into the school gates with Bolsover & Co. The Remove football match was over, and the crowd had come off the field, and they were in time to meet Esmond as he came across the Close with Bolsover.

Esmond's face was certainly a striking sight.

"Look here, what has been going on?" exclaimed Harry Wharton, his brows contracting. "If you have been ragging that kid again, Bolsover—"

"It's all right," said Esmond hastily. "Then what's happened to your face?"
"It's been hammered," said Esmond ruefully.

"Esmond has been in a fight!" grinned Bolsover major.

There was a chorus of unbelief.

"Rats!"
"Draw it mild!"
"Tell us something easier!"
"If he'd been in a fight, he'd have all the damage on his back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a fact," said Bolsover. "I made him stand up to Ponsonby; and he fought like a giddy Trojan, and licked Ponsonby!"

"Licked Ponsonby!" shouted the juniors.

"Licked him hollow!"

"Well, my only summer-hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"You didn't dream it, Bolsover?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then you've only been pretending to be a funk all along!" exclaimed Nugent, in wonder.

"Blessed if I can quite believe it!" said Johnny Bull, with a shake of the head.

"I'm jolly glad to hear it, if it's true. I was going to look for Ponsonby myself."

"You'd find him with two lovely black eyes, if you looked for him now!" grinned Bolsover.

"I tell you, Esmond simply walked over him! Knocked him right and left—knocked him fairly out; and Pon had to cry off, and the other chaps had to help him away!"

"Well, wonders will never cease!" remarked Bob Cherry. "What ass was it said that the age of miracles was past?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Esmond walked into the House with Bolsover major, leaving the fellows in a buzz of talk, and a great state of wonder. As

THE POPULAR.—No. 206.

luck would have it, the damaged hero met Mr. Quelch face to face in the passage.

Mr. Quelch stopped dead, his eyes fixing at once upon Esmond's battered face.

"Good heavens, Esmond!" he exclaimed.

"Who has been treating you like that? Was it you, Bolsover?"

And Mr. Quelch's glance turned upon Bolsover with a look that made the bully of the Remove exceedingly glad that it was not he who had handled Percy Esmond like that.

"No, sir!" said Bolsover hastily.

"Someone has treated the boy disgracefully," said Mr. Quelch. "How did this happen, Esmond?"

Esmond's half-closed eyes twinkled.

"I've been taking your advice, sir," he said demurely.

"Taking my advice!" repeated the Form master, puzzled.

"Yes, sir."

"I do not quite understand you, Esmond," said Mr. Quelch. "Have the kindness to explain yourself."

"Certainly, sir! You remember what you said to me this afternoon, when the fellows were ragging me about the white feather, sir."

"Ye-es."

"Well, sir, I've made that effort!" said Esmond.

"You—you have been fighting!" exclaimed the Remove master.

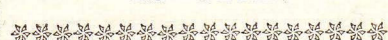
"Yes, sir," said Esmond calmly.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Quelch, very much taken aback. "I—I did not mean my advice to be taken in that sense, Esmond. I was not advising you to become quarrelsome, not at all. I had no intention of encouraging you to—to fight."

"Well, sir, I thought I'd make an effort, as you advised, sir," said Esmond, with an inward chuckle at the Form master's discomfiture. "I wanted to please you, sir."

"Ahem! I am afraid you misunderstood me a little, Esmond. However, I will say no more about the matter."

—IS THE



And Mr. Quelch walked hastily away.

"You're getting on, Esmond," murmured Bolsover, with a chuckle. "First licking Ponsonby, and then cheeking your Form master. We'll make a man of you some day."

Esmond laughed, and went up to his study.

He was feeling very tired and sore, but he had a sense of inward satisfaction that far outweighed the pain of his personal injuries.

He had vindicated himself in the eyes of his Form-fellows; he had avenged the insult of the white feather. He had made the discovery that he was not the coward that, in his want of assurance, he had believed.

What he had done once he could do again.

After all, what was it to get a black eye or a bruise or two? Injuries of that kind soon mended. What was it he had been afraid of? Next to nothing. It was simply want of resolution that had unnerved him, and placed him at the mercy of any fellow who chose to bully him.

Had he finished with that now?

He wondered!

What he had done once, could he not do again? If he had found resolution on one occasion, why not on another? He wondered! He glanced at himself in the glass, at his sturdy limbs, his powerful shoulders. Physically, he was splendidly made, almost a match for the overpowering Bolsover himself, so far as that went. All he wanted was resolution, to wipe out the stain of disgrace that his cowardice had brought upon him.

Would that resolution be forthcoming when required, or would it fail him again in the time of need? He wondered!

He was not left alone in his study. Fellows came from far and near to look at him. The story of his victory over Ponsonby had spread. The Removites were amazed. The fellow who had allowed Billy Bunter and Snoop to bully him had stood up to, and licked, the best fighting man Highcliffe possessed. Naturally the Removites were amazed and keenly interested. Esmond's

character seemed to be a puzzle that was past finding out.

Harry Wharton came in, and carried him off to Study No. 1 to tea. There Esmond had to give an account of the great battle, which he did with pleasure.

"Well, it beats the band!" said Bob Cherry. "Ponsonby is the only one of those chaps who can put up a good fight, and you've licked him."

"Jolly good thing Bolsover made you take him on," said Nugent. "You ought to be obliged to him."

"I am!" said Esmond.

"Well, I'm blessed if I understand you," said Harry Wharton. "Anyway, now you've made a start, don't let's have any more beastly funking."

"I—I'll try," said Esmond doubtfully.

"Ain't you sure about it?" howled Bob Cherry, in astonishment.

"Well, no!"

"I'll tell you what!" said Bob generously. "I'll take you on with the gloves if you like, and teach you to stand up and take a whacking. I'll keep on knocking you about till you get used to it, and don't mind it—see?"

"Ahem! I—I'd rather not, thank you!" faltered Esmond. "I—I won't give you the trouble, if you don't mind."

"No trouble at all," said the obliging Bob. "I always punch the ball for exercise, you know. Well, I'll punch you instead of the punching-ball."

"I—I'd rather not, especially now."

"Well, perhaps you've had enough for one day," assented Bob. "We'll start on Monday, and I'll make a fighting man of you, or smash you into little pieces. Not a word. I'm glad to take the trouble to help a chap on. Don't trouble to thank me."

Esmond did not take the trouble to thank him. He was not feeling thankful. He was feeling worried.

After tea he left the study in a very thoughtful mood. Bob Cherry chuckled when he was gone.

"All he wants is plenty of hammering to get him used to it," he remarked. "I'll take a lot of trouble about him, and set him right on his feet, whether he likes it or not. Must be cruel only to be kind, as Tennyson says."

"Shakespeare," grinned Nugent.

"I don't care who it was; that's what I'm going to do," said Bob.

Esmond, after leaving Study No. 1, went down the passage, and met Bolsover major in the doorway of his study. Bolsover major's good humour had vanished. He was looking decidedly cross.

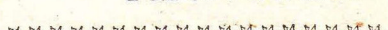
"Hallo, Esmond!" he exclaimed. "You'll do!"

Esmond stopped, and looked at him inquiringly. The good-humoured Bolsover of the afternoon had given place once more to the bullying, overbearing Bolsover he knew so well.

"What's wanted?" asked Esmond nervously.

"I told that fat rotter Bunter to make my toast," said Bolsover. The bully of the Remove arrogated to himself the right of fagging fellows who did not like the weight

"HOLIDAY ANNUAL."



of his heavy hand. "He's cleared off somewhere instead. You can do it, Esmond."

"I—I've got to do my prep," said Esmond.

Bolsover major's face assumed at once its most bullying expression. He glared at the unfortunate funk, and Esmond backed away to the opposite wall.

"Going to cheek me, are you?" said Bolsover menacingly. "Do you think because you've licked a Highcliffe cad you can cheek me? Do you?"

"N-no!" stammered Esmond.

"I should rather say not!" remarked

Bolsover emphatically. "Why, if you give me two words of cheek I'll kick you the length of the passage."

"I—I—I—"
"Get into my study and make my toast!" snorted Bolsover. "And if you don't make it all right I'll wallop you! Understand?"

Esmond hesitated. He tried to recall some of the courage that had carried him through the combat with Ponsonby. But it seemed to have oozed out at his fingertips. He tried to summon up resolution enough to knock Bolsover back into his study with a doughty right-hander. But his right hand hung at his side. Bolsover stared at him, angry at once at his slowness in obeying.

"Do you hear me?" he thundered.

"Ye-es."

"Do as I tell you, then!"

"I—I—I won't!"

Esmond tried to make the words defiant, but he couldn't. They came from his lips in a mumble of uncertainty and nervousness. It was no use, and he realised it. He had found courage enough to lick Ponsonby, but he was still the funk of the Remove. What was going to happen to him now?

"You won't!" roared Bolsover. "I'll jolly soon show you whether you won't or not! My hat! Why, I'll pulverise you!"

He made a jump at the shrinking junior. "I—I mean I will!" yelled Esmond. "I—I'll do anything you like, Bolsover."

But submission came too late. Bolsover was in a bullying humour. He grasped Esmond, swung him into the study doorway, and kicked him into the study. Esmond staggered across the room, with Bolsover's heavy boot behind him. The bully of the Remove kicked the yelling funk right round the room, finishing with leaving him sprawling on the hearthrug gasping for breath.

"Now are you going to make the toast?" he demanded.

"Ow! Yes!" groaned Esmond.

And he made it!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Promising Pupil!

BOB CHERRY came out of the Remove Form-room, after lessons on Monday morning, with the intention of going down to the footer-ground to practice.

That intention was not carried out. Esmond came after him, and overtook him in the doorway, and touched him on the arm. Bob looked round inquiringly.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he said. "Coming down to the footer?"

Esmond shook his head. "No. Do you remember what you said on Saturday?"

"I believe I said a lot of things on Saturday," said Bob. "Which thing specially do you mean?"

"About teaching me to box?"

Bob whistled, and regarded the funk of the Remove curiously. He had not forgotten, and he fully intended to keep his promise of using Esmond as a punching-ball. But he had certainly not expected that peculiar junior to remind him of it.

"Do you want a lesson?" he asked.

"Yes," said Esmond firmly.

"After school, then—"

"Why not now?"

Bob Cherry laughed.

"Are you specially keen on being knocked about?" he asked. "You've still got two lovely black eyes. Still, if you're keen on it, come on! I'm quite at your service. Mind, I'm going to hit hard."

"I don't care."

"Come on, Bob!" called out Harry Wharton.

"Got an engagement," replied Bob, with a chuckle. "I'm going to hammer Esmond black and blue. Chuck the footer for once, and come and see the fun!"

"Oh, rather!"

And the Famous Five, grinning, accompanied Percy Esmond into the gymnasium. Esmond was looking a little pale and nervous. But there was a determined gleam in his eyes. Since his fight with Ponsonby, he had fallen back into his old wretched ways. Not only Bolsover major, but Skinner, and even Snoop, bullied him with impunity. It seemed that the hope which had dawned for him had been extinguished for ever.

And that it would be extinguished for ever he knew, unless he made an effort before it was too late. And he had summoned up all his resolution now.

The two juniors took their jackets off, and put on the boxing-gloves. Esmond stripped quite as well as Bob Cherry. Bob cast an admiring glance at his muscular arms and deep, strong chest.

"Blessed if I see why a chap built like you should be afraid of anybody!" he remarked. "I'm going to get over it if I can," said Esmond.

"Hear, hear!"
"I want you to hit me hard," said Esmond quietly.

"That's all right. I'm going to."
"And if I try to back out, hit me all the harder."

"My dear chap, I will."
"If I should scoot, I want you fellows to collar me, and bump me as hard as you can," went on Esmond, with a glance at the Co.

And the Co. grinned, and promised faithfully that they would.

"Well, you mean business, I can see," remarked Bob Cherry, greatly delighted. "Now toe the line, and I'll give you the kybosh."

"I'm ready!"
"After I've handled you a few times, you'll be so used to hammering that you'll find it a pleasant change to tackle even Bolsover major," added Bob Cherry.

"That's what I want!" said Esmond.

"Come on!"
Bob Cherry came on—like a whirlwind. Esmond evidently knew very little of boxing, and he was knocked right and left. He gasped, backed away, and made a rush for the door. The old strain of the white feather in his nature was too much for him, in spite of all his heroic determination.

But the Co. were mindful of their promise. They collared him promptly, yanked him back, and bumped him hard on the floor of the gym. Esmond roared.

"That enough?" asked Nugent, with great consideration.

"Ow! Yes! Ugh! Ow!"
"Sure?" asked Johnny Bull. "We don't mind giving you another bump or two if you think you ought to have it. We take any trouble to oblige our clients."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"That'll do!" groaned Esmond. "Oh, crumbs!"

"Stand up!" said Bob.

And Esmond stood up.
"Still want to be hit hard?" grinned Bob.

"Yes," said Esmond, gritting his teeth; "as hard as you like. I'm going to learn to stand it."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Wharton. "My dear chap, you're not a funk, you're a giddy hero! But why not give him some instruction before you thump him, Bob?"

"Good wheeze!" said Bob Cherry. "I never thought of that! Now, put up your hands, Esmond, and I'll show you how to box. Now, you're to stop this drive at your nose. If you don't stop it, it will lay you right out—like that!"

Bump!

"Oh! Ow! Groogh!"
"Try again," said Bob encouragingly. "If I keep on giving you the same drive, you'll learn how to stop it in time, or you won't have any nose left."

"Ow!" gasped Esmond. "I don't feel as if I've got any left now."

"You have—in fact, more than usual," said Bob. "It's increasing in size. Now, keep your guard up—so! Don't get flabby just as I'm coming on. Keep your eye steady. Remember that it really doesn't matter if you're hurt. Any fellow ought to be able to stand a little pain. See how I do it, and then try for my nose."

Esmond succeeded in stopping the drive this time. Then he tried for Bob Cherry's nose, with such eminent success that Bob went bowling over backwards with a roar like a bull.

The juniors burst into a yell of laughter.



THE FIRST LESSON! Esmond lashed out at Bob Cherry's nose, and Bob went bowling over backwards with a roar. He sat up dazedly and blinked at the new boy and put his hand to his nose. "Was that right?" asked Esmond anxiously. (See Chapter 4.)



and Esmond stood staring at the fallen fighting-man, amazed at what he had done.

Bob Cherry sat up dazedly, and blinked at Esmond, and put his hand to his nose. His glove came away red.

"Was that right?" asked Esmond anxiously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Right," mumbled Bob Cherry, dabbing at his nose with his handkerchief—"right, you silly ass! I didn't tell you to knock my nose through the back of my beastly head! Ow! Right, you silly dummy! I've a good mind to slaughter you!"

"I—I did my best, you know," faltered Esmond.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry gained his feet, looking rather grim. Esmond had certainly benefited by his instructions, and Bob's nose was looking decidedly bulbous.

"Shall I try again?" asked Esmond.

Bob Cherry burst into a laugh.

"Yes, you young ass! Try again. It's all right. Don't mind if I was a bit rusty for a minute. It was rather a shock. I don't mind how much trouble I take over you, but I want to have a nose left to smell with, you know."

Esmond stood up to the champion fighting-man of the Remove till he could stand no longer. He could hardly walk out of the gym when he was finished. But he made an appointment with Bob for another lesson after school that evening.

And he kept his appointment, too. Bob Cherry was a splendid boxer, and he was only too willing to impart his knowledge of the manly art of self-defence to the funk of the Remove. He bestowed more hard-hitting than instruction upon him, it is true. But that was a valuable training for Esmond. He learned to stand up steadily to the hardest drives, to take punishment without wincing.

Indeed, he picked up the manly art so quickly that Bob Cherry, after a few days, found that he had his hands full with the funk of the Remove, who no longer showed the slightest signs of funkiness in the encounters.

"By Jove, you're getting on!" said Bob Cherry, gasping after a bout one evening. "Look here, do you know that I don't know whether I could lick you if you stood up to me in real earnest?"

"You really mean that?" asked Esmond joyfully.

"Honest Injun!"

"But you can lick Bolsover major?" said Esmond.

Bob nodded.

"Then I should have a chance with him?" said Esmond eagerly.

"Yes, rather! A jolly good chance, too!" said Bob. "I can't imagine why you let him rag you. Why, he's been fagging you for the last week as if you were a kid in the Second Form and he were a prefect."

"Yes; and he has ordered me to come to his study this evening and get his tea ready," said Esmond quietly.

"Don't do it!" said Bob.

Esmond grinned as he peeled off the gloves.

"If you fellows want to see some fun, you can drop into Bolsover major's study about tea-time," he said.

Bob Cherry chortled.

"Good egg! We'll be there!"

"What-ho!" said all the Co. together. And they grinned with anticipation.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Last of the Funk!

BOLSOVER MAJOR was in a bad temper.

He had come into his study, expecting to find his tea ready. He found the study empty, the table bare, and

THE POPULAR.—No. 206.

the fire out. The bully of the Remove was righteously indignant. Hadn't he given Esmond, the funk of the Remove, explicit orders to have his tea ready for him when he came back from his spin on his bike, at half-past six exactly? And here was his study, cold and cheerless and inhospitable, and no sign of Esmond!

Bolsover major breathed wrath and vengeance as he stood in his doorway and called for the funk of the Remove.

"Esmond! Where's Esmond? Come here, Esmond!"

Esmond came out of his study farther up the passage. Bolsover major glared at him.

"Come here!" he rapped out.

"Here I am," said Esmond, coming calmly along the passage. "What's the matter, Bolsover?"

"Matter!" snorted Bolsover. "Didn't I tell you to have my tea ready, and the toast made, and the sardines opened at half-past six? And you haven't done anything!"

"Yes," said Esmond.

"You cheeky whelp!" roared Bolsover. "So you're making fun of me, are you?"

Esmond shook his head.

"Can't make fun of you," he said. "You're as funny already as you can be."

Bolsover stared at him blankly. Was this the funk of the Remove who was answering him as coolly and independently as Bob Cherry himself could have done? It was a time for action, not words. Bolsover felt that. This "cheek" must be hipped in the bud. The funk must be instructed that he could not give the bully of the Remove back-answers. Bolsover glanced round, and picked up an ebony ruler.

"Lean over that chair!" he commanded.

"What for?" asked Esmond, without moving.

"I'm going to give you a jip," explained Bolsover. "A dozen cuts—that's the kind of lesson you want!"

"Thanks! I'm not taking any!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, looking into the study, with the Co. behind him. "Trouble in the happy family—what?"

Bolsover major scowled at the Famous Five.

"That rat is cheeking me," he said. "I'm going to give him a hiding; and if any of you rotters chip in, I'll give you a hiding, too!"

"We won't chip in," said Bob, with a chuckle. "Let's see you give Esmond the hiding. I want to see you do it."

Bolsover major glanced at them suspiciously. He did not quite understand the hilarity of the Co. But he was satisfied with their assurance that they would not interfere; and he turned with a black brow to Esmond.

"Are you going to lean over that chair, or are you not?" he demanded.

"Not!" said Esmond calmly.

"Then I'll jolly soon make you, and I'll give you two dozen cuts instead of one!" roared Bolsover major.

He clattered the ruler down on the table, and jumped at Esmond.

"Back up, Esmond!" shouted Bob Cherry.

Bolsover major's powerful grasp closed upon the new junior. For a moment Esmond seemed to yield in his grasp—was it the old pusillanimity returning, in the critical moment when all was at stake? If so, it was only for a second. Then he returned grasp for grasp, and Bolsover major, to his astonishment, found himself seized in a grip as fully powerful as his own.

"Why, what—what—?" he gasped.

Crash!

The bully of the Remove was swept off his feet, and he landed on the carpet with a concussion that knocked all the breath out of his body. Esmond stood over him, panting. Bolsover major sat up and stuttered.

"M-m-my hat! That rotten funk! Why,

I'll smash him! I'll strew him about in little pieces! I'll—I'll—"

Bolsover major did not wait to finish saying what he would do. He jumped up to do it. He came for Esmond like a whirlwind, with eyes blazing with rage, and fists lashing out like hammers. It was a terrific attack, and a fellow who was not a funk might have been excused if he had backed away from it. But Esmond did not back away. His severe training at the hands of Bob Cherry had not been wasted. Furious as Bolsover's attack was, it was not worse than the hard hitting Esmond had learned to face during his training in the gym.

The funk of the Remove stood as firm as a rock.

The Famous Five gazed on the scene in surprise and delight. Behind them the passage was crowded with Remove fellows, attracted by the noise, and amazed and delighted to see the bully of the Form handled by anybody. For Bolsover was being handled now, and handled severely. His fierce attack was met and baffled, and he reeled back from a right-hander that made him stagger, and then he lurched across the study under the impetus of a terrific upper-cut, with all the force of Esmond's strong arm behind it.

There was a roar from the crowd in the passage.

"Hurrah! Go it, Esmond!"

"Pile in, funk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Bolsover was not beaten yet. He recovered himself, and rushed at Esmond again; and they fought it out, hammer and tongs. Blows rained upon the fellow who had been called the funk of the Remove; but he did not heed them—he did not seem to feel them. Headless of his own punishment, he slogged away at Bolsover, and Bolsover's rugged face was soon a study in bruises and cuts. The juniors looked on spellbound.

Down went Bolsover at last, battered and beaten, breathless; licked as thoroughly as ever any fellow had been licked. The study was a wreck—the chairs and table had been knocked flying, the clock swept off the mantelpiece, the fender kicked out of its place, the books swept off the shelf. In the midst of the wreck lay Bolsover major, looking the greatest wreck of all.

And then Esmond picked up the ruler, and whirled Bolsover over on the floor, and the ruler came down upon Bolsover's nether garments with a resounding smack.

"Ow!" gasped Bolsover. "Chuck it! I give in! Ow! Yow!"

Esmond blinked at him out of his half-closed eyes.

"You were going to lick me," he said. "I'll let you off if you promise not to be such a beastly bully again."

"Ow! Ow! All right!"

"Honour bright?" demanded Esmond.

"Honour bright!" groaned Bolsover.

Esmond pitched the ruler into the grate.

"Good enough! It's a go!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the Removites. "Well done, Esmond!"

Bolsover major staggered to his feet. Harry Wharton helped him up. The bully of the Remove was utterly spent, and he had to lean heavily upon Wharton to keep his feet at all. He blinked uncertainly at Esmond.

"You're good stuff!" he gasped. "Ow! You've licked me, fair and square—I don't bear any malice! Give us your fist!"

And Esmond grinned and gave it.

Esmond had a "pal" in the Greyfriars Remove from that day forth—it was Bolsover major! And never again did Esmond have to be forced to fight!

THE END.

(Another topping tale of the chums of Greyfriars next week.)



Tell Your Chums about Our Ripping Series of Wild West Yarns! They're First Rate!

THE SCHOOL WITHOUT MASTERS!—Dealing further with the amazing state of affairs at Rookwood when the masters defied the Head!



The STRIKE of the MASTERS!



Here we have another Story of Rookwood School and popular Jimmy Silver & Co. Yarns of Rookwood appear every week in the "Boys' Friend." They are written by OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Staff on Strike.

WHAT larks!" That was the general feeling at Rookwood School—in the Lower Forms, at least.

The great men of the Sixth, perhaps, took the matter with proper seriousness. Perhaps the Fifth saw that there was a serious side to it.

But the juniors did not seem to see anything serious about it at all. Their opinion, freely expressed, was that it was a tremendous lark.

Certainly, the state of affairs at Rookwood was unprecedented.

Masters on strike!
"Who," as Lovell of the Fourth remarked, "had ever heard of such a thing?"
Nobody had!

"It's a corker!" said Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth. "A regular corker! What's the Head going to do? That's the question?"

"All right for the Sixth!" remarked Mornington. "The Head takes the Sixth. But who's going to take the rest?"

And Tubby Muffin chirped joyously:
"There won't be any lessons! There can't be! Fancy that!"

Which was not an unpleasant prospect to most of the juniors.

Lessons, as Lovell observed sagely, could be overdone. Lovell declared that, if he ever became Head of a public school, he would see that more time was devoted to footer than to lessons—a view that found much favour in the Fourth Form.

There was much excitement in Rookwood when the news became generally known that the whole staff had struck, and the fellows went to bed that night in an excited frame of mind.

Discussion ran on in the dormitories for a good hour after lights-out.

For there was no doubt about the state of affairs.

The masters of Rookwood had met in solemn session in the Masters' Room, and had delivered their ultimatum to the Head. And at least a dozen juniors, in various corners and recesses, had been witnesses of the scene in the corridor when Dr. Chisholm had come out of his study and met his indignant staff.

Opinions were a little divided as to where the blame lay.

But opinions were not divided on one point—that it was a great lark.

All the juniors, at least, agreed on that. The rising-bell in the morning awakened an expectant school.

In the dormitory of the Classical Fourth discussion and speculation commenced the minute the juniors were out of bed.

"It was French this afternoon," said Raby. "There won't be any French. Mosso was one of the gang."

"And the Moderns won't get any German!"
"And we sha'n't have to construe!" said Tubby Muffin brightly. "Bootles, of course, will be on strike with the rest, as he's the cause of all the trouble. How jolly lucky I didn't do any prep last evening! It would have been wasted if I had! Fancy that!"

"There'll be prayers this morning," observed Oswald. "The Head takes prayers."

"But nothing after prayers!" said Muffin jubilantly.

"Hurrah!"

"There'll be some brekker, I hope?" said Jimmy Silver, laughing.

"We might get up a punt-about this morning," remarked Arthur Edward Lovell thoughtfully. "No good going into the Form-room if there isn't any master! The Head can't want us to make one another construe, can he?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, I'm not going to get up yet," said Tubby Muffin, rolling back into bed. "If the masters can go on strike, so can we. Nothing to get up for, is there?"

"Bulkeley may come up and go on strike, too—with his asphalt!" remarked Raby.

"Oh, bother Bulkeley! I wish the prefects would go on strike, too!" said Tubby Muffin plaintively.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anyway, I'm not getting up. What's the good?"

"Don't be a slacker," said Jimmy Silver. "I'm not slacking—I'm going on strike," explained Tubby Muffin. "What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander."

And Reginald Muffin laid his head on the pillow and closed his fat eyelids once more. A strike of the masters, if it led to an extra nap for Tubby, was an excellent thing in the eyes of the fat Classical.

"Better turn out, Tubby!" called out Jimmy Silver, when the Fistical Four were ready to go down.

Snore!
Jimmy Silver & Co. went down, and Tubby Muffin was left in bed.

But a few minutes after the rest of the Fourth were down, Bulkeley of the Sixth looked into the dormitory.

The captain of Rookwood had his asphalt under his arm.

He fixed his eyes sternly on Tubby Muffin's bed.

"Muffin!"
Snore!
Tubby Muffin was sleeping with one eye open, as a matter of fact, and that eye was

fixed rather uneasily on Bulkeley as the Sixth-Former came into the dormitory.

Bulkeley let the asphalt slide down into his hand, and as he did so Tubby Muffin awakened very suddenly and sat up in bed.

"I—I say, Bulkeley—"

"Why aren't you down?" demanded Bulkeley.

"I—I— The fact is, I'm not going to do any lessons to-day. Masters on strike, you know."

"I see!" Bulkeley nodded. "You're going on strike, too—what?"

"That's it!" said Tubby brightly. "Just the idea! I'm not going to get up till about ten or eleven—see?"

"I see!" assented Bulkeley. "Now I'm going on strike!"

"Are you really, Bulkeley?"

"Certainly!"
Swish, swish!

"Yaroooh!" roared Tubby Muffin, as the asphalt caught his fat shoulders. "Yoop! Leave off! I say, you beast— Yaroooh! Leave off, can't you? Yoop! I'm getting up, ain't I?"

Bump!
Tubby Muffin rolled out of bed on the opposite side so hurriedly that he was mixed up in the bedclothes, and landed on the floor in a heap.

He rolled there and roared.

"Feel like getting up now, Muffin?" asked Bulkeley genially.

"Yaroooh! Yes! Ow!"

"You don't feel like an extra nap?"

"Nunno! Yow-ow-ow!"

"If you do, turn in," said Bulkeley cheerily. "I don't mind laying into you again with this stick. It's good exercise, in fact."

"Yow! I don't want a nap! I—I want to gerrup! Oh dear!" howled Tubby Muffin. "I—I really meant to say, Bulkeley, that I wouldn't stay in bed for—for anything!"

"That's better! I expect to see you down in five minutes, Muffin. If you're not, I'm coming back."

"Ow!"

The captain of Rookwood tucked his asphalt under his arm and quitted the dormitory.

"Oh dear!" mumbled Tubby Muffin. "Awful rotter— Ow! Wow!"
Tubby Muffin's ablutions did not take him long that morning.

He was down well within the five minutes. And in that short space of time he had also made a firm resolve that, whatever the staff of Rookwood School might do, he would not follow their example of going on strike.

Amazing Developments in Next Week's Topping Rookwood Yarn!



THE SECOND CHAPTER. Expectant.

JIMMY SILVER & CO. came into breakfast after a run in the keen, fresh air of the quadrangle.

They looked forward at once to see whether Mr. Bootles was in the dining-room. That day, Mr. Bootles the master of the Fourth Form, was to leave Rookwood—or was to have left Rookwood, for it was by no means certain now that he would go. The juniors were glad to see him in the room.

He was looking troubled and harassed, but at least he was not gone yet, and that was satisfactory.

Mr. Bootles took his place at the head of the Fourth Form table as usual. It was plain enough to the juniors that he was in a perplexed and worried frame of mind.

He was under sentence of dismissal from his post, and in those circumstances it was difficult to see how he could remain at the school.

But there were other circumstances that had to be considered.

Nearly the whole staff had supported Mr. Bootles in his difference with the Head, and led by Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth, they had declined to serve their chief any longer unless the dismissal of Mr. Bootles was cancelled.

How the school would get on without masters was a problem.

Mr. Manders and another master on the Modern side, had declined to have anything to do with the strike.

They were, as the juniors put it, black-legging!

But practically the whole staff were acting in concert, and unless the Head yielded, the state of affairs at Rookwood was certain to be very extraordinary indeed.

The sympathy of the juniors was with Mr. Bootles, with few exceptions.

For Mr. Bootles had incurred the wrath of the Head by standing between Jimmy Silver of the Fourth and an unjust punishment.

That Jimmy had not committed the fault ascribed to him had been proved, and the Head had acknowledged it; and he was glad, doubtless, that an unjust punishment had not been administered.

But he could not forgive Mr. Bootles for his intervention.

The dismissal held good, and poor Mr. Bootles had packed to go, when his colleagues took up the matter in solemn session.

At the breakfast-table the Classical Fourth were very good indeed.

There was no chattering or whispering, no shying of bread bullets; they did not, in fact, take any advantage of Mr. Bootles' preoccupation.

They wanted the little gentleman to understand that they were backing him up.

Whether Mr. Bootles understood, it was a question, however; he was probably not thinking about the juniors at all.

Jimmy Silver glanced at the other tables, noting the looks of the other masters present. Mr. Greely of the Fifth was looking grim and stern.

That stout and important gentleman was the leader of the strike, and there were certainly no signs of surrender in his severe face.

Mr. Wiggins and Mr. Bohun did not look happy, and they were very quiet indeed.

The other masters were not to be seen. Breakfast passed off in an atmosphere of subdued thunder.

Even the juniors, though they still regarded the masters' strike as a "lark," realised that it had its serious aspect.

After breakfast, when the chapel bells began to ring, the juniors headed for chapel, with a great curiosity to see the Head.

Somewhat to their disappointment, Dr. Chisholm presented his usual aspect.

Perhaps his lips were a little tighter than usual, but that was all.

Certainly he showed no sign of being in a worried frame of mind.

"The Head's a hard case!" Arthur Edward Lovell remarked, as they came away from chapel. "Hard as a steel. He won't give in."

THE POPULAR.—No. 206.

"I don't think the masters will, either," remarked Newcome.

"Goodness knows what will happen, then."

"It's a case of the irresistible force brought to bear upon the giddy immovable object," remarked Jimmy Silver. "I wonder if there's going to be any lessons?"

"Are you going in to lessons, Tubby?" chuckled Lovell.

"I—I think so," said Tubby Muffin. "On second thoughts, you know, I don't think this idea of striking is much good. Bulkeley's such a beast, too."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The hour was at hand for morning classes, and fellows gathered round the doors of the Form-room in a state of subdued excitement.

The Sixth went in as usual; those high and mighty personages declined to show the slightest excitement or perturbation.

Perhaps they felt that they were called upon to set an example to the rest of Rookwood.

But outside the Fifth Form-room Hansom and Jobson and Lumsden and some more of the Fifth stood chatting in low voices, and wondering what they were to do if Mr. Greely did not come along.

Adolphus Smythe of the Shell was chatting with some more Shell fellows, with a satisfied grin on his face.

Adolphus did not object to a day off.

He was discussing "geegees" with Howard and Tracy, and making arrangements for a "little run" that day if there were no lessons.

Among the fags of the Second and Third there was open chirruping and chuckling.

Algy Silver, Jimmy's cousin in the Third, was starting a punt-about in the Third Form-room with a cushion for a footer.

Evidently the seriousness of the position was quite lost upon that lively young gentleman.

The Fourth Form made it a point not to be noisy like the fags; something was due to the dashed dignity of the Form, as Townsend put it.

They waited—some of them in the Form-room, and some outside.

It was past the time for beginning, but not a master had put in an appearance so far.

The strike was taking effect.

The Second Form were playing leap-frog along the passage now.

It was a symptom of what was to come.

Peele of the Fourth came in from the quad, grinning.

He looked as if he had news.

"Anythin' goin' on?" asked Mornington.

"Yes—the Head!" grinned Peele.

"What about the Head?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"I've just seen him through his study window. Marchin' up an' down his study like a giddy Grenadier on sentry-go!" chuckled Peele. "He doesn't know what to do, of course. I saw Knowles come into his study an' go out. The Head knows what's goin' on, and he doesn't know what to do! Ha, ha!"

"Poor old Head!" grinned Conroy.

Jimmy Silver wrinkled his brows.

"It's a rotten state of affairs, and no good for Rookwood!" he said. "The Head ought to let up on poor old Bootles, and make an end of it."

"He can't give in!" said Mornington, with a shake of the head.

"Well, I don't see how he can," admitted Jimmy. "He oughtn't to have let it go as far as this. It's got to end somehow."

"Here comes Bootles!" murmured Lovell.

Mr. Bootles was observed, with a troubled brow, approaching along the passage.

From the Third Form-room came a continuous uproar.

And the Second Form fags were growing more and more lively with their leap-frog.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Substitutes.

AHUSH fell on the juniors as Mr. Bootles came up.

"We're ready for lessons, sir," said Jimmy Silver respectfully. "Shall we go into the Form-room?"

Mr. Bootles coughed.

"I have not come to take the Form, Silver,

I am sorry to say. I am leaving Rookwood to-day—"

"Oh, sir!"

"I should like, however, to make an appeal to you," said the Form master. "You are no longer my pupils, and I have no right to give orders to you, but I am sure you will regard my wishes—"

"Oh, yes, sir!" said a dozen voices.

"I appeal to you, then, to keep order," said Mr. Bootles. "The present state of affairs is unfortunate—very unfortunate indeed. It must not be allowed to degenerate into disorder. You will remember the good name of the school, and you will be careful not to be led into disorder or anything unseemly. I hope and trust so."

"Certainly, sir!"

"That is all, my boys."

Mr. Bootles walked away, leaving a buzz of discussion behind him.

A little later Tubby Muffin, who had been scouting, brought the news that the prefects had left the Sixth Form-room, and gone to the Head's study.

"Prefects!" said Lovell, with a grin. "Do they think they can run Rookwood with prefects? My word!"

There was another long wait.

Then there was a hush, as Bulkeley of the Sixth came along, with Neville and Carthew and Lonsdale, all Sixth Form prefects.

Bulkeley, with a grave face, addressed the Fifth-Formers, who were lounging about at ease.

"The Fifth are to go in with the Sixth to-day," he said.

"Who says so?" asked Hansom of the Fifth.

"Head's orders."

"Oh, all right!"

"What about little us?" murmured Lovell.

It was clear now that an attempt was to be made to "carry on" with the prefects, as masters were not available.

Lonsdale went into the Second Form-room, and with a considerable amount of cuffing the fags of that Form were reduced to order.

Bulkeley took charge of the Third, probably the most unruly of all the Forms; and even the great Bulkeley did not find it very easy to get the Third Form into an orderly state.

Neville looked after the Shell.

Adolphus Smythe's cigarette disappeared as if by magic, still unlighted, at the sight of the prefects.

The Shell went in quite meekly with Neville.

It was Mark Carthew, the bully of the Sixth, and the most unpopular prefect at Rookwood, who was assigned to the Fourth.

There was a slight grin on Carthew's face as he came up to the group outside the door of the Fourth Form-room.

The juniors eyed him rather grimly.

The Fistical Four, especially, had had their rubs with Mark Carthew, and it was not with pleasant feelings that they discovered that the Sixth Form bully was to take their Form master's place.

"Now then!" rapped out Carthew. "Get in! You've wasted enough time, you idle young rascals!"

"What are we to get in for, if there's nothing doing?" asked Lovell.

"Don't answer me, Lovell! I'm taking you to-day, and if there's any rot in this Form, I'm sorry for you, that's all!"

And Carthew made a significant movement with his ashpant.

"So you're going to give us lessons?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"That's it!"

"We shall go ahead like steam, and no mistake!" said Jimmy sarcastically.

"No cheek, Silver, I warn you! Go to your places!"

The Fourth-Formers exchanged looks, and in silence they went into the Form-rooms and sat down at their desks.

Carthew followed them with a grin.

The bully of the Sixth was plainly pleased with his new authority, and it was pretty clear that he was going to exercise it to the utmost limit.

From the looks of the Fourth, it was pretty clear, too, that if Carthew carried his authority too far there would be trouble.

But the juniors were not unmindful of Mr. Bootles' appeal, and lessons in the Fourth Form-room began quietly, though with a subdued atmosphere of thunder.

(Continued on page 16.)

BILLY BUNTER'S WEEKLY

Greyfriars.

Edited by W. G. BUNTER of Greyfriars, assisted by SAMMY BUNTER of Greyfriars, BAGGY TRIMBLE and FATTY WYNN of St. Jim's, and TUBBY MUFFIN of Rookwood.

St. Jim's

Rookwood

Supplement No. 103.

Week Ending December 30th, 1922.

LEFT BEHIND!

By Dick Russell.

I SAY, you fellows!" Thus Johnny Shunter, the Owl of the Remove Form of Blue-minster, as he poked a fat and shiny face round the doorway of Study No. 1.

No reply. "Just packing?" Johnny Shunter advanced farther into the study, and surveyed the scene before him with a fat grin on his lips. Larry Horton and Dick Appleton were in the study, but only just visible. To all appearances, it looked as if a bomb had been let loose in the room, such a state of chaos was it in.

Chairs and tables, books and all other furniture had been thrown aside to make room for several large trunks which took up what little floor space there was. Piled up in great heaps and mixed up beautifully were shirts, collars, suits, socks, and a hundred and one other kinds of personal property. Kneeling before this, two juniors wildly gathered and attempted to pack the clothing into the large trunks.

"Want any help?" asked Shunter affably.

Grunt! "Let me do your packing," pleaded the Owl. "I'm just the fellow to straighten a muddle out!" Larry Horton looked up at last. His face was grimy and red from exertion. He pointed to the door.

"Get!" He bellowed the one word like an angry bull. But Shunter was a sticker. He did not "get"—in fact, he came farther in, ignoring, if he saw them, the danger signals on Horton's fiery face.

"Sure, I can't do anything for you, old top?" asked Shunter again. "Three seconds to shift!" shouted the junior captain. "One—two—"

"Don't be in such a hurry!" interrupted Shunter hastily. "I came in—



NO INTRUDERS WANTED! Shunter broke off with a yell as Horton sprang at him. Without ceremony he grabbed Shunter by the collar. "Hi, what's the game! Yarooop! Help!" yelled the fat junior.

"Hi! What's the game? Here—Yarooop! Help!"

Shunter broke off with a yell as Horton sprang at him like a stone from a catapult. Without ceremony, he grabbed Shunter by the collar, swung open the door, and planted a well-shod foot in Shunter's back.

Crash!

The fat junior emerged from Study No. 1, and crashed into the wall of the passage opposite. Another crash sounded as the door was slammed to. Shunter blinked indignantly at the closed door.

He struggled to his feet. He bent down and put his mouth close to the keyhole.

THE POPULAR.—No. 206.

Supplement I.]

"Beasts!" he roared.

He turned and ambled down the passage, and stopped at the door of Lord Monty's study. He turned the handle of the door and pushed. It refused to move. The door was locked.

"I say, Monty!" he shouted through the keyhole.

"Yaas?" came the schoolboy earl's troubled voice from within. Monty was packing. He had been packing for over two hours now, and still there was more to be packed. In half an hour's time the car would be calling for him and the Famous Four. Half an hour, and he was not even half ready! He groaned at intervals in his usual labour. But he groaned louder when he heard Shunter's voice from the other side of the door.

"Would you like me to help you pack, old man?" asked Shunter genially.

"No, no!" called out Monty hastily.

There was a pause. Then Shunter's voice came again through the keyhole:

"What time's the car coming?"

"What car?"

"The one to take us away in, of course."

"The car's comin' for Horton & Co. and myself in half an hour," said Monty firmly.

"You know you can't come, Shunter!"

"Oh, I say, that's not playing the game!"

howled Shunter. "And I've refused tons of other offers to accept yours, Monty! Smithy asked me to go home with him—"

"Well, go with him!" called out Monty.

"Go away at once. I'll have to come out to you with a cricket-stump in a minute if you don't!"

"Don't be a rotter!" said Shunter. "I'll wait for you outside, Monty! Don't forget!"

Shunter firmly intended to join Monty's party to the Moat House that Christmas.

The school was emptying fast now. Cars, brakes, and cabs came and left incessantly, taking with them crowds of cheering fellows home for the holidays.

Within a few hours Blueminsters would be emptied of its many hundred inmates, and only one person would be within its walls. That person would be Duckling, the porter.

Johnny Shunter wandered into the quad. His traps were packed, and he was ready for the car from the Moat House to take him away.

At last the car, a beautiful, blue closed limousine, swung into view through the stately gates of Blueminsters, and glided up the elm-lined drive to the school entrance.

Johnny Shunter came running forward, his little round eyes gleaming behind his huge goggles. He eyed the smart chauffeur at the wheel.

"You from the Moat House for Lord Monty?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir," said the driver.

"Oh, good!"

He turned away and mounted the steps just as Horton & Co., with Monty, came out of the School House, bearing their trunks and bags.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Dick Appleton, as he caught sight of the car. "Here we are, chaps!"

"Yes, here's the car! Pile your bags on, old beans!" said Monty. Then his face fell as he saw Shunter coming up towards him.

"Hallo! You still here, Shunter?"

"Of course. I'm not going to desert an old pal!" smiled Shunter.

"What are you doing here, Shunter?" demanded Horton sternly, eyeing the Owl of the Remove.

"You should have left the school hours ago, with your father."

"Rats! I'm coming with my old pal, Monty," protested Shunter. "You can go and eat coke! Want to get rid of me; but you won't. Monty wants me to come with him—don't you, Monty?"

"Yaas—no, no! Certainly not, Shunter!" said Monty.

"Just a sec, you fellows!" interrupted Dick Appleton. "Here, I say, Johnny, old man, go and get some tuck for this journey. We shall want some, won't we, Shunter?"

"Yes, rather!" said Shunter, his eyes glistening. "All right, you fellows; I know you were only joking just now when you said I couldn't come. Just wait here a moment. I'm long!"

THE POPULAR.—No. 206.

He grabbed at the ten shillings Dick handed to him, and made off for the school tuckshop at top speed.

It didn't take him many minutes to buy ten shillings worth of tuck. With a neatly tied parcel under his arm, he ambled out of the shop.

Then he stopped short and stared across towards the School House. The car had gone.

Shunter gave a howl of rage.

"Oh, the beasts! They tricked me into getting the grub for them so they could go off without me!" he groaned.

He would have to spend his Christmas holidays at home after all. No Moat House for Johnny Shunter!

THE END.

(Russell, you rotter, I believe you have been making fun of me! You've only altered the beginning of my name, and made it Shunter. I've a good mind to throw this story in the yawning depths of the waste-paper-basket!—Ed.)

EDITORIAL!

By Billy Bunter.

Although Harry Wharton is a week in advance of me with his Christmas Number, it was my idea of having one first and he's cribbed the brane-wave. Just like Wharton to do a thing like that, and it's not the first time it's been done, either. I've caught him at it before on several other occasions.

Either he sends out special reporters to eavesdrop round the door of the Editorial sanktum, or he creeps round on all 4's and listens through the keyhole himself. I shall have to do something drastic soon—it's getting quite annie oying.

However, we will leave Harry Wharton & Co. to their nefarious games and come down to brass tacks, as the ostrich said when he came across a carpenter's bag.

Although this specul Christmas Number is a week late in appearing, it is far in advance of Wharton's Christmas Number. This may sound rather Irish but it's true gossip. My "Weekly" beats the "Herald" at every turn.

Like a Klaxon on a car this specul Christmas Number is going to make a big noise. I have burnt gallons of midnight oil. Meny nights have found me a prisoner in my study, slogging away to compile the very Best of numbers for many millions of readers who have been eagerly awaiting the promised appearance of this number.

It is a number of numbers!

You see, it is only right that for such a great occasion as Christmas there should be an extra-specul number. Christmas only comes once a year, and when it comes we must make the most of it. "Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we dine."

This number is likened unto a well-stocked tuck-hammer—it is full of good things and well worth devouring.

I can picture you all, dear readers, seated round a blazing log-fire, your eager, happy faces lit up, scanning with joybound eyes the contents of this really wonderful issue. All round you are scenes of festivity, and outside the wind moans ghostly round the chimney-pots and snowflakes lash the window-frames in fury. But inside you are employing yourselves to the fool with a Christmas feast and a Christmas Number of my "Weekly."

How I wish I was with you. But I'm afraid that cannot be.

Hoping you will have a merry Christmas and plenty of turkey and Christmas-pudding,

I am,
Yours very Christmasy,
BILLY BUNTER.

NIBBLES FROM THE XMAS PUDDING!

By Bob Cherry.

The Christmas vacation has at last arrived, and everyone is eager to pack and leave the school behind them. To-morrow will see the last of us leave, and the old school will be deserted for some weeks to come.

All along the corridors the sounds of packing can be heard and the crash of portmanteau as it is hurled down the stairs. But in spite of the ever-increasing medley of sounds, I am able to write this column. You ask how I am managing it. Well, I will tell you. High up in the old clock-tower is a small room lighted by a tiny window. There, away from the madding crowd, I am plying my pen. The safest retreat in the whole of Greyfriars, and so very peaceful!

To-night there will be a breaking-up concert at Greyfriars, and I have heard Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's and Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood are organising one as well.

By stating this I am not casting aspersions at our old rivals at St. Jim's and Rookwood—meaning, I don't think they have cribbed the idea of a breaking-up concert. But I will say this, they've got to have some concerts to beat ours, and that's not bragging.

Poor old Bunter is wandering about trying to find a home. He's been trying to insinuate himself into about a dozen parties. But they're wise, and not having any. Billy even had the cheek to ask Loder if he could join his party for Scotland. Needless to say Bunter came back sucking his hands and moaning dismally. Fancy asking Loder, of all people! Bunter must, indeed, have been desperate to have done a thing like that.

I hear old Quelch and Prout have made arrangements to spend most of their Christmas vac. on the golf-links. Can't you just picture Quelch and Prout, carrying spades and rakes in the bags to aid them in ball-hunting, struggling gamely through six feet snowdrifts, trying to look for small white pills? Or even putting on a green in two feet of snow! The Head is stopping with his family at Greyfriars, and Twigg proposes to go south and escape from the snow. Twigg's pet aversion, I hear, is a well-aimed snowball.

Horace Coker has informed me he is taking his pals, Potter and Greene, to Paris for Christmas. Horace in Paris! Can't you just imagine it! Oh, what a dream of marble halls! Coker, in his estimation, can speak French like a native. I presume he means like a Congo native. Perhaps it is fortunate for Coker that Potter will be with him. Potter can talk the lingo like a giddy Froggy himself. In a fit of geniality Coker offered to take the Co. with him if we behaved ourselves. His invitation was, of course, gently turned down, as we are going to spend the vac. with Mauly at Mauleverer Towers. If we are lucky enough to escape the very gummy intentions of the Bunters, we shall have a ripping time!

Won't Góssy have a peaceful time when we are gone! No leg-pulling, no shutting of gates, no sweeping of leaves in the Close. Just one long joyous rest. I don't fancy Gosling's task, though—looking after an empty school at Christmas-time!

Read "Billy Bunter's Weekly" and Have a Good Laugh!

[Supplement II.]

CHRISTMAS GHOSTS I HAVE MET!

By Jimmy Silver.

Our corpulent editor, Billy Bunter, has put a rather strange request to me this week. He phoned me the other day at Rookwood just at the time I was most pressed—and asked for an article about Christmas ghosts.

"Do you know anything about ghosts?" I can hear you all say.

Well, as a matter of fact, I am rather what you might call an authority on the subject, especially the Christmas variety.

I've met plenty of phantoms in my time, but the cause of the spirits has always been explained in the end.

I don't believe in real ghostly phantoms that haunt dark corners in old country houses and moan their grievances about the gables. All the spirits I have met have been of quite a different brand, but none the less eerie and unnerving.

I remember one Christmas at the Priory. The rest of the Co. and one or two other fellows were staying with me at the time. The day before Christmas we were returning from the village, and the hour was very late. The snow was falling in great sheets, and we struggled on to the Priory with great difficulty.

We were peering the gates of the Priory when suddenly a long, terrifying moan awoke the echoes, and caused our hearts to jump about six feet into the air. All around was blackness, and thick clouds covered the moon. Again that weird moan. It seemed to come from the roof of the house.

Hardly daring to breathe, we traced our footsteps up the drive. The house was in darkness. Everyone was evidently in bed. As we neared the porch, I tumbled for the key in my pocket, and was about to put it in the lock when a sudden, sharp tapping and a shriek made us jump back, and our hair stood up on end.

"A ghost!" muttered Lovell at my elbow, and he shivered.

"Don't be an ass!" I whispered.

We nerved ourselves to advance. Opening the door, we crept silently in. A sudden tapping sounded on our left. It came from the pater's library.

"Let's g-go and see w-what it is!" I muttered, and with the others following, I made for the room whence the strange sounds came.

I opened the door, making no sound, and peered into the room, believing some terrible apparition would confront me.

But no phantom of the departed was there. What I did see caused me to break into a peal of laughter. I saw, quite plainly silhouetted against the window, the large form of—an owl. Its wings moved in the air, and tap, tap, tap! as it beat against the closed window.

That was the Christmas ghost which had given us such a fright; an imprisoned owl. How it got there, I don't profess to know, but we eventually let it out by the window.

An illuminated sheet drifting down a dark corridor was another ghost I met, but the "ghost" had forgotten to take off its boots before prowling. The boots fairly hammered on the bare boards.

Other ghosts in various phantomish forms have "prowled" the long oak corridors of the Priory, and usually at Christmas-time. But those spirits have always ended their prowls in a most unspiritualistic manner.

Once, coming across a long stretch of moorland, I encountered an extraordinary apparition—the most ghostly in appearance I have yet met.

It was dark and horribly cold, and walking

MY IDEAL CHRISTMAS DAY!



BY FATTY WYNN.

To my mind, the basis and the very foundation-stone of a really merry Christmas is the Christmas dinner.

But a good dinner does not alone make an ideal Christmas Day. There are one or two other things which have a great deal to do with the matter.

Some people like to stop in bed and snooze half the day, and get up when the jolly old dinner is ready. But I think this is a rotten way of beginning the day.

Of course, you don't want to get up as early as the cock crows. Then, again, you don't want to keep in bed until noon. Draw the line somewhere about nine o'clock, and you won't be far off the mark.

Having made a good solid brekker, take a run out in the country for a breath of crisp morning air. After this there are several things in which to occupy yourself until the gong sounds a welcome summons to dinner. Football, snowfighting, skating, etc., are real Christmas sports. A good snowfight and a half an hour's skating on the lake gives one a terrific appetite for dinner.

The dinner is the greatest item on the programme, and with the appetite you have got you can thoroughly enjoy yourself without discomfort.

A short rest, and out into the open again. Tea-time arrives, and you make yourself at home with a great assortment of pastries and cakes.

To follow tea, I think a party of boys and girls takes some beating. You then indulge in all kinds of Christmas party games. And at the end of the party, which should last until twelve o'clock, there should be supper, and then you will be ready to take to your beds and sleep the sleep of the just.

That is the way I should like to spend my Christmas Day.

A happy Christmas to you all, readers, and may you enjoy your Christmas pudding.

(Continued from column 1.)

across that great stretch of moor I felt decidedly lonesome. The wind was particularly annoying that day. It went careering madly all over the show, and moaned most dismally on the elm tops. It sounded awfully like a ghostly moan.

Then suddenly I saw, just ahead of me, a curious swaying, white, transparent form near the ground. Beyond this form I could see a black, ruined tower, a place reputed to be haunted.

This was the ghostliest ghost I have ever encountered, and yet—not a ghost at all.

I found out afterwards how my ghost was made. Near the ruined tower the ground sank down pretty low and formed a kind of swamp. From out of this swamp a white vapour rose, and at night, with the moon shining upon it, it looked for all the world like a white, swaying phantom.

Later on I think I will write a book called "My Ghostly Acquaintances," or "Spiritual Reminiscences," but for the present I must put down my pen and continue with my packing.

A merry Christmas, and may you have a real topping time.

AN ESSAY ON CHRISTMAS!

By George Tubb.

Christmas falls on the 25th of December every year, and has so far been fortunate to have fallen perfectly strate, not missing it.

Just a weak or so in advvaunce of the grate Annie Versary (who ever she may be) the snow makes up its mind to fall, so that we can have a grand snow-fite before going into Christmas dinner.

About the same time the snow falls all the schools brake up for the vacation, and there are scenes of grate hurry and busel and screeching and moaning and crying and shouting.

Greyfriars has broken up—I am glad to say no one was hurt when it broke, although, personally, I am in that state of impi cunosity.

If you are popular at school like me, you are able to fix up your vac with another fello hoo is taking his best palls away with him, to his statly home, somewhere in England, where there are dozens of family butlers to wait hands and feet on you and see you are wanting of nothing from nobody.

Some fellos are not lucky enuff to strike oil in this way—I mean, get invited home to another fello's palacial halls. In that case they spend Christmas with their own peepie, taking with them one or too chaps to keep them company.

All this is pre Paratory to the grate day which, according to the novelist, "dawns brite and clear and crispy, full of country life and snow," and like the celebrated old gentleman in the poem:

"Good King Wenc a lass, looked out

On a crisp, uneven morn,

When the snow lay round about,

And mufflers should be worn."

The two grate thorts in peepie's minds are: "How meny presents shall I get?" and "I wonder how long dinner will be now?"

I don't know if it has ever struck you like this. But when I arise on the dawning of Christmas morn I start counting my presents, and then start counting the hours to dinner.

The Christmas dinner is the grate feest of the day and year.

In the olden days, about the time of Alfred the Grate, who burnt the Christmas-puding, the barrens of England made a grate event of the Christmas dinner.

The long barren's hall of the castle was profusely decorated with small, coloured electric lights. About eleven o'clock, hundreds of guests, all wearing holy and paper chanes on their armor, seated themselves round a long table, and tremendous bores' heads were brort in by about ½ a dozen valets and scurvy naves.

These were pickt by the hungry revelers, then a farmyard of turkeys, duxs and geeze were served amidst the sound of popping ginger-beer corks.

When the Christmas-puddings were brought on the scene, the guests organised a competition to see who could demolish the most, and the winner was presented afterwards with a small golden pudding mee-dallon as a mee-mentoe.

Thus the Christmas-pudding became famous and the biggest feature of the feest. Amonge other things ghpulled with Christmas are holy, misædoe, gosts, and other decorashons.

Talking of gosts, I remember the last Christmas spent in the ancestral home of the Tubbs. I met the ancient gosts who prowled every Christmas nite. Some day, I will tell you about it.

THE POPULAR.—No. 206.

THE STRIKE OF THE MASTERS.

(Continued from page 12.)

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

"A Little Brief Authority," and the Result.

"A RMA virumque cano—"
"Construe!"
"The Army, the man, and the dog—"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
Tubby Muffin was not reflecting credit upon the instruction he had received from his Form master.
A howl of irrepressible laughter from the Classical Fourth greeted his unique rendering of P. Vergilius Maro.
Poor Tubby was not really at his best. He could have done better than that, but for Mark Carthew's bullying manner, which made him so nervous that he hardly knew what he was saying.
"Silence!" thundered Carthew.
The laughter died away, but the juniors were still grinning.
"Muffin!"
"Ye-es, Carthew."
"Is that how you construe in this Form?"
"Ye-es, please."
"I'm not surprised at it," said the prefect sarcastically.
"This—this isn't where we left off with Mr. Bootles, you know, Carthew," ventured Tubby Muffin.
"So you forget all that's gone before every time you make a step forward—is that it?"
"Exactly!" gasped Tubby.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Silence! Muffin, come out here!"
"I—I say, Carthew, what for?" stammered Tubby Muffin.
The question was quite unnecessary, for Carthew of the Sixth was taking Mr. Bootles' cane from the desk.
It was abundantly clear what the unfortunate Tubby was to come out for.
"Do you hear me, Muffin?"
"Ye-es."
"Do you want me to fetch you?" demanded Carthew.
"Nunno!" gasped Tubby.
The fat Classical came out very reluctantly before the Form.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on grimly. Jimmy had been the first to construe, and he knew that Carthew had tried to catch him, but Jimmy was well up in the Form work, and was not to be caught.
The Classical Fourth were well on in the "Æneid," and Jimmy had gone on in the right place; but Carthew, on his own account, had turned back to the beginning.
More than one fellow in the Fourth had a suspicion of his reason.
Carthew was a prefect of the Sixth, and was supposed to know Virgil inside out, so to speak; but there was more supposition than reality about that.
He found it easier to deal with the beginning of the "Æneid," which, of course, everybody knew more or less by heart.
It was quite possible that some keen scholar like Eroll or Rawson would have caught Carthew himself "out" if the prefect had not taken that precaution.
Naturally, that suspicion did not increase the respect of the juniors for the fellow who was placed over them instead of Mr. Bootles.
In the First Book the dunce of the Sixth was sure of his ground, but so were most of the Fourth, and he had little chance of coming down on fellows like Jimmy Silver or Mornington or Lovell.
Hence, as Jimmy felt sure, he had picked on Tubby Muffin; and even Tubby would have construed "Arms and the man I sing"

if the bully of the Sixth had not made him nervous and confused.

Mark Carthew's object, in fact, was not so much to impart instruction to the Classical Fourth as to find some opening for exercising his new authority.

He "fancied" himself in a Form master's place, and he meant to let the Fourth understand that he was monarch of all he surveyed in the Form-room.

But Carthew of the Sixth, in the character of amateur Hun, was likely to find trouble before long.

He swished the Form master's cane in the air, with an evident satisfaction in hearing the swish of it.

The sound was not so gratifying to Tubby Muffin.

That plump youth eyed Carthew very uneasily, and looked inclined to bolt back to his place.

"Hold out your hand, Muffin!"
"I—I say, Carthew—"

"Hold out your hand!" thundered Carthew, in his most bullying manner.

Having found a victim and an excuse, the bully of the Sixth was not to be denied.

Jimmy Silver, with knitted brows, started up in his place.

He was head of the Form, and he felt called upon to speak up for the unlucky Muffin.

"Carthew!" he called out.
The prefect spun round.

"Silence, Silver!"
"I was going to say—"

"Hold your tongue!"
"I'm bound to speak," answered Jimmy

silently.

— GET —

"THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL"

before it is too late!
OVER 360 PAGES.

6s.

steadily. "Mr. Bootles never caved a chap for a mistake in his construe."

"Perhaps that's the reason why you seem such a set of dunces," said Carthew with a sneer. "My methods are different, as you will see."

Carthew spoke of his "methods" as if he had been a Form master for a couple of years at least.

He was, in fact, swelling with importance, and was not in a humour to brook the slightest contradiction.

"But—" began Jimmy again determinedly.

"Another word, Silver, and I will cane you as well as Muffin!"

"You have no right to cane Muffin," said Jimmy Silver. "He wouldn't have blundered as he did if you hadn't scared him."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Lovell.
Carthew fixed his eyes on Jimmy Silver.

He had been unable to catch the captain of the Fourth in his construe; but Jimmy had placed himself in his hands now. He had the excuse he wanted.

"Stand out here, Silver!" he said.
Jimmy hesitated a moment.

He was strongly inclined to refuse, but he remembered Mr. Bootles' appeal, and the fact that the bully was, after all, placed there in authority by the Head.

His hesitation was only momentary. He rose and came out before the class.
"Wait your turn!" said Carthew grimly.

"Hold out your hand, Muffin! If I have to

tell you again, it will be the worse for you!"

Tubby Muffin's fat hand came out in a very gingerly manner.
"Swish!"
"Yarooooh!"

"Silence! Go back to your place!"
Tubby Muffin, with an expression of deep anguish, squeezed his hand under his fat arm and limped back to his Form.

He had, however, escaped more cheaply than Carthew had intended, for, had not a second victim offered, the bully of the Sixth would certainly not have let Tubby off with one cut.

Carthew turned to Jimmy Silver with a glitter in his eyes.

"You have interfered and disobeyed orders, Silver!" he said. "Mr. Bootles may have allowed that kind of thing, but I don't! Hold out your hand!"

Again Jimmy hesitated.
"Do you hear me?" rapped out Carthew.

Again Jimmy was on the point of resistance, and again he restrained himself.
He held out his hand.

"Swish!"
It was a cruel cut, and it made Jimmy catch his breath.

Lovell's eyes glittered, and he half rose. But he sat down again.

There was a murmur in the Fourth.
Jimmy had set his teeth to keep back a cry of pain.

"Now the other hand!" said Carthew grimly.
Jimmy looked him steadily in the face, and did not move.

He had had enough, and he did not intend to have any more—from Mark Carthew, at least.

"You hear me, Silver?"
"I hear you."
"Will you hold out your hand?"
"No!"
"Wha-at?"

"That's enough!" said Jimmy Silver quietly.
"I'm not taking any more, Carthew!"

A loud murmur came from the Fourth.
It was clear enough that the Classical juniors were in sympathy with the captain of the Form, and ready to back him up.

Carthew stared blankly at Jimmy Silver.
Like most bullies, he did not know where to stop, and, having provoked resistance, he did not quite know how to deal with it.

"Will you hold out your other hand?" he repeated.
"No, I won't!"

"Do you want me to lay the cane about you?"
"I shall kick your shins if you do!"
"Bravo!" chirruped Lovell.

Carthew panted.
"Silver! You—you— Go to the Head, at once! I will write you a note to take to Dr. Chisholm, and he will deal with you!"

Jimmy Silver turned on his heel and walked back to his place.
There he sat down.

"Silver! You are to go to the Head!" shouted Carthew.
Jimmy Silver did not move.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Fourth Breaks Out.

HERE was a breathless pause in the Form-room.

Jimmy Silver sat tight, with his steady eyes fixed upon the prefect.

The juniors round him were quivering with excitement.

Trouble had threatened from the moment Mark Carthew had taken charge of the Fourth, and now it had broken out.

Carthew stood with the cane gripped in his hand, his eyes blazing at the captain of the Fourth.

"Silver!" he panted at last. "This means a flogging for you! I order you to take a note to the Head in the Sixth Form-room!"
Jimmy did not answer.

"Will you go?"
"No!"
"Don't go, Jimmy!" called out several voices.

"I don't mean to!" said Jimmy Silver.
"Silence!" thundered Carthew.

"Rats!"
"Wha-a-at?"
"Rats to you, old sport!" said Mornington coolly.
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew's face was crimson with rage. He had made a mess of his Form-mastership already, and he had no idea at all how to deal with the situation he had created.

He decided on drastic measures, and strode towards the Form.

Tubby Muffin was chuckling, a fat chuckle, greatly delighted to see Carthew taken down; but he ceased all of a sudden as the prefect turned on him.

Probably Carthew was selecting him as the easiest victim, in the hope of striking terror to the Fourth by the sight of condign punishment.

"What are you laughing at, Muffin?" he asked in a grinding voice.

"I—I wasn't laughing, Carthew!" gasped Tubby in dismay. "Not a bit! I—I was—was crying— Yaroooh!"

The cane sang on Tubby's fat shoulders. He uttered a yell that rang through the Form-room.

Carthew gripped the fat Classical by the collar and swung him out from his desk.

Then he laid on the cane.

Tubby Muffin struggled and howled wildly. But Carthew had miscalculated, if he had supposed that the sight of that thrashing would reduce the juniors to obedience.

It had the reverse effect.

The cane had fallen thrice on the howling Tubby, when Jimmy Silver jumped up and ran out of his place.

He grasped the prefect's arm and dragged it back.

"Stop that, you bully!" he said between his teeth.

"Let go my arm!" shrieked Carthew.

"Let Muffin alone, then!"

Carthew released Tubby Muffin and turned furiously on Jimmy. The cane lashed out with savage force.

There was a rush of Lovell, Raby, and Newcome to the aid of their leader.

They charged into Carthew, and sent him spinning.

Erroll and Mornington, Conroy and Van Ryn and Pons, were only a moment behind them.

Carthew sprawled on the floor of the Form-room, with the excited juniors round him.

"Kick him out!" shouted Conroy.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Hurrah! Turn him out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You young rotters!" yelled Carthew, as the juniors seized him on all sides. "I'll smash you! I'll call in the Head! I'll—I'll— Yaroooh! Leggo! Oh crumbs!"

"Bump him!"

"Hurrah!"

Bumping a prefect was a form of amusement that was not, under ordinary circumstances, indulged in at Rookwood.

Perhaps for that reason, among others, the Classical Fourth were not inclined to let the present opportunity pass.

Seven or eight pairs of hands were on the infuriated prefect, and his struggles were quite unavailing.

He was swept off the floor, yelling, and he came down again with a smite that made him yell still louder.

"Give him another!"

"Ha, ha! Bump him!"

"Give him jip!" howled Tubby Muffin.

"Lemme gerrat him! I'll jump on him! Let me jump on the beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bump!"

"Oh! Ah! Ow! Help!"

The door opened.

Mr. Bootles, in his overcoat, with his umbrella on his arm, looked into the Form-room, with distended eyes behind his glasses.

The "sacked" master had been about to leave when the uproar from the Fourth Form-room reached his ears.

It had drawn Mr. Bootles to the spot.

"Boys!" stuttered the little gentleman, in horror. "Silver—Erroll—Conroy! My dear boys—"

"Oh, my hat! Bootles!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. released Carthew suddenly.

The prefect lay on his back on the floor and roared.

The juniors turned crimson faces towards their horrified Form master.

True, Mr. Bootles was no longer their master, and he had no authority there, but old habits were strong.

"Sorry, sir!" gasped Jimmy.

"What does this riot mean?" exclaimed Mr. Bootles.



A SHOCK FOR BOOTLES! Mr. Bootles looked into the Form-room. "Boys!" stuttered the "sacked" master in horror. "Silver—Erroll—Conroy! My dear boys—" "Oh, my hat! Bootles!" Jimmy Silver & Co. released Carthew suddenly and turned crimson faces towards their horrified master. (See Chapter 5.)

"We can't stand that rotten bully, sir," said Mornington coolly.

"Mornington!"

"Yow-ow-ow!" came from Carthew. "I'll go to the Head! Yow-ow-ow! You young demons, just you wait a minute or two!"

The breathless and dishevelled prefect staggered out of the Form-room.

"Carthew!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles. "One moment, Carthew—"

"Don't speak to me!" panted Carthew.

"You are not a master here now, Mr. Bootles, and you needn't interfere."

"What! Carthew, this impertinence is—"

"Oh, rot!" snapped Carthew rudely.

Mr. Bootles stood quite dazed by that reply.

But from somewhere in the Fourth a Latin dictionary whizzed through the air, and it landed on the side of Carthew's head in the doorway.

The juniors were not disposed to see their Form master insulted, whether he was sacked or not.

Carthew uttered a fiendish yell, and went staggering into the passage.

"Well hit!" yelled Lovell. "Right on the wicket!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew spun back in the doorway with a face like a demon, as if about to rush at the juniors.

A regular fusillade met him. Books and inkpots whizzed through the air, and under the volley Carthew fairly turned tail and bolted, streaked with ink.

A roar of laughter followed him.

"Boys!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles, almost wringing his hands in dismay at such a scene in the Form-room. "My dear boys, do not—"

"Order!" called out Jimmy Silver. "Remember Mr. Bootles is here, you fellows! Order!"

"Right you are!" said Conroy. "Sit down, you chaps. Shall—shall we go on with Virgil, sir?"

"Yes, yes! Certainly!" stammered Mr. Bootles.

He picked up the book Carthew had laid on the desk, and the Classical Fourth sat down in a very quiet and orderly way.

It seemed to Mr. Bootles the best method of quietening the tumult.

In a very few minutes the Form-room presented its old aspect, with the exception

that the Form master was in his overcoat, and had an umbrella hanging on his arm.

But within five minutes the door was flung open, and the Head of Rookwood strode in, with rustling gown, with the ink-splashed face of Mark Carthew scowling behind him.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Trouble With the Third.

DR. CHISHOLM'S face was pale with anger.

A hush fell on the juniors as the Head's angry glance swept over them.

The next moment, however, the Head observed Mr. Bootles, and he transferred his attention to the Form master.

Mr. Bootles coloured under his grim gaze.

"You here, Mr. Bootles!" exclaimed the Head angrily.

"Really, sir—"

"You have no right in this Form-room! Have I not spoken plainly enough, Mr. Bootles, in informing you that your services are no longer required in this school?" rapped out the Head.

Mr. Bootles crimsoned.

"I came here because the Form-room was in an uproar!" he exclaimed. "I have interfered to restore order. Dr. Chisholm, and I have done so. Now that I have done it I am ready to retire."

And Mr. Bootles, trembling with wrath and indignation, laid down his book and whisked to the door.

"Good-bye, sir!" called out Jimmy Silver.

"Silence, Silver!" thundered the Head.

Jimmy bit his lip.

Like most of the Rookwooders, he had a great respect for the Head, but the stern old gentleman was running the risk of losing it now.

"And now," resumed the Head, when Mr. Bootles was gone, "what does this riot mean? I placed Carthew of the Sixth Form in charge of this class. In disobeying him you have disobeyed me!"

"He's a rotten bully, sir!" said Mornington.

"How dare you use such expressions to me, Mornington?"

"It's the truth, sir!"

"You have taken advantage of the present unusual state of affairs to break out in riot!" exclaimed the Head.

"It's not like that, sir," said Jimmy Silver.

"We—"

Something MUST Be Done! The Rookwood Masters' Rebellion Cannot Go On!



"Don't contradict me, Silver!"

"But, sir—"

"Silence! I shall punish every boy here!" said the Head. "Give me a cane, Carthew."

Carthew, with a glitter in his eyes, handed Mr. Bootles' cane to the Head.

"You may go to the Sixth Form-room, Carthew," added the Head. "I will place another prefect in charge of the Fourth Form."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Carthew.

The Head made a gesture of dismissal, and Carthew left the Form-room.

He was "sacked" from his new position already.

The Head intended to punish the juniors for their outbreak, but he had tact enough to send away the prefect who had been unable to keep order in the Form.

The next ten minutes were not enjoyable to the Fourth.

They had to file before the Head and take a cut each, and Dr. Chisholm did not lay the cane on lightly.

The juniors were looking grim, some of them sullen, when they went back to their places.

Dr. Chisholm laid down the cane.

"I shall send Bulkeley to take charge of this Form," he said. "If there is any further trouble, very severe measures will be taken."

"There won't be any trouble with Bulkeley, sir; he's not a rotten bully!" said Mornington.

The Head did not appear to hear that remark.

He left the Form-room, and in a few minutes Bulkeley of the Sixth came in.

Another prefect had been placed in charge of the Third, leaving the captain of Rookwood free to deal with the Classical Fourth.

Bulkeley's methods were very different from Carthew's, and the remainder of the morning passed off quietly enough.

Bulkeley was too popular for the juniors to wish to give him any trouble, though they were in a restive mood.

Some of them were rubbing their hands as they came out of the Form-room at twelve o'clock.

"What a merry mornin'!" remarked Valentine Mornington, with a laugh. "The Head was in a rare way."

Lovell gave a snort.

"They can't run a school on prefects!" he said. "It's all rot! Bulkeley can handle the Fourth, simply because we like the old chap, and don't want to worry him. I'll bet you there's been trouble in the Third."

Jimmy Silver was of the same opinion, and he looked for his cousin, Algy of the Third, to learn how matters had gone on that morning.

He found the usually cheery Algy scowling in the corridor, and squeezing his hands—an occupation that was also Grant's and Wegg's.

"Trouble?" asked Jimmy.

Algy Silver grunted.

"Of course! What did you expect? Did you think the Third Form could be run by a blessed prefect?" he inquired.

"But old Bulkeley—"

"We were willing to go easy with old Bulkeley, so long as he didn't want to make us work," said Algy, in an injured tone. "Of course, we weren't going to work without a Form-master. He cut up rusty. And in the middle of the morning Bulkeley was called away—"

"He came to take us!" grinned Raby. "And they sent in Knowles instead," said Algy resentfully. "Knowles—a Modern prefect—a worm of a Modern, you know. They actually thought that Classicals were going to be run by a Modern! I don't know why they made old Chisholm Head of Rookwood. It wasn't for his brains."

"Ow-ow!" remarked Grant.

"Woop!" murmured Wegg, rubbing his grubby hands.

THE POPULAR.—No. 206.

"You've been ragging?" asked Jimmy.

"What do you think?" answered his cousin, with a grunt. "We weren't goin' to stand Knowles. He's a bully—nearly as bad as Carthew—and he's a Modern. I shied an ink-ball at him—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Of course, he laid into me with the pointer," groaned Algy. "He's been givin' us the pointer most of the mornin'. I don't know whether that's what the Head thinks we're sent to Rookwood for. I thought we'd come here to learn things."

"Well, Knowles could teach you the rot you learn in the Third, if you'd let him," remarked Newcome.

"Catch us letting Knowles teach us anything!"

"It's all rot!" said Wegg, in a very injured tone. "There ain't any masters, and there oughtn't to be any lessons. I don't call it fair play."

"Why should we pull with Knowles, when the Head himself can't pull with his giddy staff?" said Grant.

"That's what I say," agreed Algy Silver. "I know jolly well I'm goin' to make Knowles' life a burden, so long as he's lookin' after the Third. Ow! My hands!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. walked away in a thoughtful mood.

There was no doubt that discipline was already considerably relaxed, and that the school without masters would be the scene of strange happenings if something was not done soon.

"Hallo, there go Bootles' goods and chattels!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell, with a nod towards the gates.

Old Mack, the porter, was taking out the trap, with several trunks and boxes stacked in it.

Mr. Bootles, in hat and coat, was to be seen in the old stone gateway, in company with Mr. Greely of the Fifth.

The Fourth Form master had not gone yet, but he was evidently going at last.

"Let's go and say good-bye to him," said Lovell.

"Yes, rather!"

The Fistical Four walked quickly down to the gates, glad of the chance of saying good-bye to their Form master before he went.

Mr. Greely was speaking as they came up, and they could not help bearing the words of the Fifth Form master.

"The Coombe Arms, then," said Mr. Greely. "Well—very well! You will engage a sufficiency of accommodation for—"

"Yes, certainly. But—"

"If matters remain as they are, the whole staff will be leaving Rookwood," said Mr. Greely. "We do not intend, however, to disperse—not yet, at all events. My idea is to wait at hand, at a return to common-sense on the part of Dr. Chisholm, or the intervention of the governing body."

"Quite so; but—"

"At the Coombe Arms we can remain till matters are clearer," said Mr. Greely. "The Head, I believe, has been telephoning and telegraphing to various agencies all day, with the view of engaging a new staff without delay, but—"

The Fistical Four walked away, and Mr. Greely's voice was no longer heard.

Neither of the masters had observed them, and they gave up their intention of saying good-bye to Mr. Bootles just then.

"A new staff!" murmured Lovell. "Fancy a new set of masters at Rookwood, with the old set putting up at the inn in the village, looking on! Can the Head get a new lot in so quick as all that? And isn't that what's called blacklegging?"

Jimmy Silver wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

The masters' strike at Rookwood might be a tremendous lark, in some of its aspects, but Jimmy realised that it was not for the

good of the old school, and he would have been very glad to see it at an amicable end.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER. Mischievous Brewing.

THERE was an interview that evening between Mr. Greely and the Head.

Probably the Fifth Form master was making a last attempt to reach some accommodation.

If so, the attempt was a failure, for during the evening there was a general exodus of the staff from the school.

On the Modern side Mr. Manders and another master remained, but on the Classical side there was not one.

Even the French master had thrown in his lot with his English confreres.

The staff had very serious and grave faces, and Mr. Greely a decidedly irritated expression.

The gates of Rookwood closed behind them.

Most of the school knew that the departed masters had taken up their quarters at the village inn, which looked as if they did not believe that they had looked their last on Rookwood.

There, apparently, they were to wait till the strike had its effect, and the headmaster came to reason.

But there was no sign about Dr. Chisholm of any intention of coming to reason.

In public his face was as calm, severe, and unemotional as usual.

In private, probably, he felt the trouble that had fallen upon him and the school; in public he betrayed nothing of what he thought or felt.

The school was without masters pending the arrival of a new staff, and a new staff for such a school as Rookwood was not to be gathered at a moment's notice.

Meanwhile, it was necessary to "carry on" by the aid of the Sixth Form prefects, who did their best in the unprecedented emergency.

But that evening there were growing signs that the rule of the prefects would not long remain undisputed.

Some of the fellows alluded to them openly as "blacklegs."

That, when it came to the ears of the prefects, naturally caused great wrath, and the liberal use of the official ashplant, which, in turn, excited indignation and restiveness.

The next day the Forms went into class as usual, with the prefects in charge.

In the Classical Fourth all was quiet.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were attached to "old Bulkeley," and did not want to worry him.

Bulkeley's personal popularity carried him through.

But it was different with the other Forms.

Knowles of the Modern Sixth was in charge of the Third, and there was trouble with that lively Form.

During the morning, the Fourth heard an uproar proceeding from the quarters of the Third, and grinned at one another.

They guessed that Cecil Knowles was having a lively time.

When the juniors were dismissed, Jimmy Silver & Co. went along to the Third Form-room, and, to their surprise, found the door locked—a crowd of fags roaring with laughter outside, and some inside hammering furiously on the door.

"What's the row?" asked Jimmy Silver. "Thump, thump, thump! came from within the Form-room."

"Only Knowles!" grinned Algy Silver. "We've locked him in!"

"My only hat!"

"Knowles was a bit too fresh," explained Grant of the Third. "We're going to leave him there."

(Continued on page 26.)



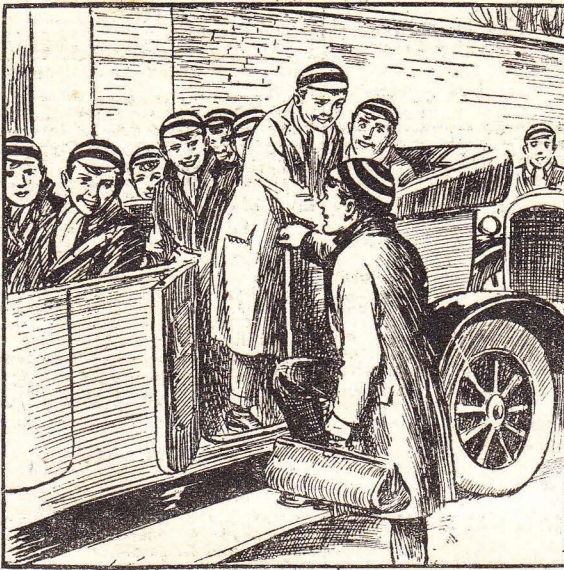
Next Week's Tale of Jimmy Silver & Co. Will Thrill You!

SCHOOL AND FOOTBALL!—Telling of the St. Jim's footballers' Titanic tussle in the first round of the Public Schools Challenge Cup!

THE TEAM THAT TRIUMPHED!

A Topping, Long, Complete Tale, dealing with the adventures of Tom Merry & Co., the Famous Chums of St. Jim's.

BY
MARTIN CLIFFORD.



THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Luck of the Draw.

"**W**ISH Cardew would buck up!" said Tom Merry. "This suspense is awful!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, peering anxiously through the gloom in the hope of seeing Cardew's bicycle-lamp. "Cardew ought to be back frowm Wayland by now."

"Give him a chance," said Jack Blake. "He might have had to wait a long time for the news."

The gateway of St. Jim's was crowded with juniors. The light from the lamp overhead showed their faces to be tense and excited.

They were all waiting for Ralph Reckness Cardew, who had promised to be back post-haste with news of how St. Jim's had fared in the draw for the first round of the Public Schools Challenge Cup.

Cardew had cycled over to the "Wayland Gazette" office. The editor of the "Gazette" would be the first to hear the news, and he had undertaken to pass it on to the St. Jim's junior directly it came through.

Tom Merry & Co. were on tenterhooks. They wondered whether they would be drawn to play at home, or whether they would have to make a long journey. They wondered who their opponents would be—whether strong, weak, or medium. They wondered lots of things. And their curiosity would not be satisfied until Cardew turned up.

"What a lark if we were drawn against Greyfriars or Rookwood!" said Figgins.

"No such luck," said Tom Merry. "The chances are that we shall be drawn to play Harrow, at Harrow, or Charterhouse, at Godalming."

"Well, of all the gloomy prophets!" said Dick Redfern, with a laugh. "We shouldn't stand the ghost of a chance against Harrow or Charterhouse—they are fine Soccer schools—but there's no reason why we shouldn't be drawn

against quite a weak side. We've as much right to expect good luck as bad."

"Hear, hear!" said Fatty Wynn. "If Cardew doesn't come soon, and put an end to this suspense, I shall do something desperate!"

"Listen!" said Manners suddenly. The clang of a bicycle-bell came to the ears of the waiting throng. A light gleamed in the distance, and it drew rapidly nearer, darting from side to side like a will-o'-the-wisp.

Cardew was a reckless cyclist, and he was zigzagging from one side of the road to the other.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Harry Noble. Cardew rode cheerfully up to the school gateway. He was whistling "Up from Zummerzet."

"What luck, Cardew?" inquired a score of eager voices.

Cardew seemed in no hurry to satisfy his schoolfellows' curiosity. He dismounted in a leisurely manner, still whistling.

Tom Merry strode forward, and gripped the Fourth-Former by the arm.

"What's the result of the draw, you duffer?" he exclaimed. "Can't you see we're dying to know?"

"Calm yourself, Tommy lad," said Cardew blandly. He moved towards the shaft of light thrown by the arc-lamp overhead, and drew a sheet of paper from his pocket. The crowd watched him breathlessly.

"Greyfriars," announced Cardew, "are drawn against Abbeyside."

"Blow Greyfriars!"

"Bless Abbeyside!"

"Cut the cackle, and come to the hosses!"

Cardew smiled. It was an irritating smile.

"Rookwood are drawn to play Westminster, in town," he drawled.

"Never mind Rookwood!"

"Never mind Westminster!"

"Who are St. Jim's drawn against, you frabjous ass?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Tell us at once, or we'll bump the information out of you!"

"Yes, rather!"

Cardew realised the folly of further delay.

"We've got to go to Somerset," he said. "You might have gathered that, from the tune I was whistling just now."

"Was that supposed to be 'Up from Zummerzet'?" said Monty Lowther. "I thought it was 'Rule, Britannia!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're drawn to play Wellesley College, on their ground," said Cardew.

Tom Merry groaned. It was the signal for a whole chorus of groans.

"Wellesley College!" murmured Jack Blake. "Oh, my hat!"

"One of the toughest teams in the country," said Figgins. "We should stand as good a chance of licking Aston Villa or Liverpool as of licking Wellesley."

"If we were playin' them on our own ground, it might be different," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But we've got to ttravel down to Somerset. The luck hasn't been a bit kind to us."

There was consternation among the St. Jim's fellows. They had hoped to have an easy match in the first round of the competition, so as to be able to pass automatically into the second. But there was nothing easy against this fixture with Wellesley College—except from a Wellesley point of view.

Those who had followed public school football were aware that Wellesley College held an unbeaten record up till now. They had started the season in smashing style, and they had kept up their form. On their own ground they were one of the most formidable school teams in the country.

Greyfriars had been lucky in the draw. They would easily account, on their own ground, for Abbeyside.

Rookwood had been unlucky. They were not likely to get any change out of Westminster, one of the finest footballing schools in the country.

But St. Jim's had been even more unlucky than Rookwood. Their task seemed an impossible one.

Another Great Football Battle for St. Jim's Next Week! Don't Miss It!

"Well," said Tom Merry at length, "there's no sense in our going about with faces a yard long. We must make up our minds to give Wellesley a good run for their money."

"Hear, hear!"

"We may be licked, but we won't be disgraced. That's the way to look at it. We'll play the game of our lives!"

Tom Merry's spirited words found an answering echo in the hearts of his school-fellows.

The St. Jim's footballers were up against a stiff proposition. But they had wrought miracles before, by winning games which they had seemed certain to lose. And what they had done already, they could do again. It would need plenty of courage and stamina and good football; but those were the very qualities for which Tom Merry & Co. were famous.

The effects of Cardew's bombshell soon wore off. The fellows had groaned when they first heard the news, but they soon realised that lamentations would not help them. Cheerfulness and courage—that was the spirit they had to cultivate.

Next morning, a letter came for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It was from his father, Lord Eastwood. And Gussy recited it to his chums:

"My dear Arthur,—I have just seen the result of the draw for the first round of the Public Schools Cup. You have a hard match, and I am glad. Hard games bring out a team's best qualities. Had you been drawn to play at home against some fifth-rate team, there would be nothing to enthuse over. As it is, you have to go down to Somerset on Saturday to play Wellesley College; and with luck and pluck—ten per cent of the former and ninety per cent of the latter—you will beat them.

"I am placing my two large touring-cars at your disposal; one for the team itself, and the other for the use of any St. Jim's supporters who may wish to go and see the match. The cars will arrive at the school early on Saturday morning. You will find this method of travelling less fatiguing than a long train-journey, with constant changes.

"I may also say that in the event of a St. Jim's victory, I shall be pleased to present a gold medal, suitably inscribed, to each member of the winning team.

"Into the fray with stout hearts, my boys! I know you will do your best.

"Your affectionate
"FATHER."

That letter acted as a tonic to the spirits of the St. Jim's footballers.

"Gussy's pater is a brick!" said Figgins warmly.

"The brickiest brick that ever bricked!" said Monty Lowther. "I shall cherish my gold medal till I'm an ancient 'beaver' of ninety—"

"You haven't won it yet!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Wait till Saturday afternoon," said Lowther. "If we don't make Wellesley bite the dust, I'm a Dutchman!"

The idea of awarding gold medals was a splendid one. It gave the footballers much more incentive than the offer of sums of money, or a banquet, would have done. Even Fatty Wynn, who loved a free feed, would have preferred a gold medal. A feed was a temporary affair; a gold medal was a permanent souvenir, to be treasured all through life.

Every afternoon, between then and Saturday, the St. Jim's eleven put in a

brisk spell of practice. And when the great day dawned, the team was pronounced to be fighting fit.

Lord Eastwood's magnificent touring-cars arrived immediately after breakfast. The footballers clambered into one of them, and a party of loyal supporters boarded the other.

It was rather a gloomy crowd that saw the footballers off.

Nobody at St. Jim's seriously thought that Tom Merry's team had anything of a chance. And the fellows could hardly be blamed for holding that view, which was based upon the unbeaten Wellesley record.

Three cheers were given for Tom Merry & Co. as the cars started off on their long journey. But the cheering was subdued, and not boisterous.

Racke & Co., the cads of the Lower School, were among the crowd that watched the departure of the footballers.

"Lams goin' to the slaughter!" remarked Aubrey Racke.

And Crooke and Mellish grinned. Racke's phrase seemed to hit off the situation to a nicety.

"What time will they be back?" asked Mellish.

"Oh, about midnight!" said Racke. "But I shall know the result long before then."

"How?"

"I shall put through a trunk call on the telephone to Clive, who is goin' to see the match. He's promised to give me the score."

"Oh, good! It will be about ten—nil for Wellesley, I expect," said Crooke.

"More or less," said Racke, with a chuckle.

And the birds of a feather linked arms and strolled back towards the school building.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

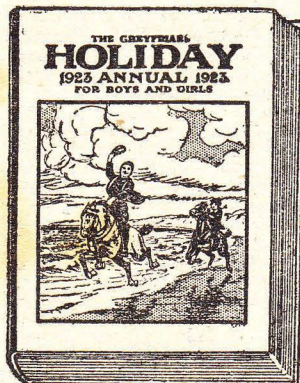
A Titanic Tussle!

"HEAH we are, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spoke cheerfully. There was a thrill in his tone.

The lofty spire of Wellesley College

Don't miss this treat, Boys!



6/-

Of all
Booksellers,
Newsagents,
and
Bookstalls.

Here you are, Boys! "The Holiday Annual" is the jolliest present you can have. It is packed with school and adventure stories, pictures, and coloured plates, and you will enjoy every line of it. Just drop the hint that the present you want this year is "The Holiday Annual."

had come into view, followed by the school building itself—a goodly pile, as Monty Lowther expressed it.

The two cars, which had accomplished the journey from Sussex to Somerset with rare speed, halted outside the college gates.

The pillars of the gateway were overhung with two flags. One of them embodied the Wellesley College colours, and the other the St. Jim's colours. Tom Merry & Co. appreciated this little mark of courtesy.

The visiting team had a cordial reception.

Bob Loring, skipper of the college eleven, greeted them in the quadrangle.

"Jolly pleased to meet you!" he said, shaking hands with Tom Merry. "This is the first time we've been paired together at football, but I hope it won't be the last. Brought a good side along?"

"The best we could muster," said Tom Merry.

"And you're hoping to be the first team to lick us this season?"

"Of course!"

"Well, we mean to make your task as hard as possible," said Loring, with a grin. "We rather like the look of your fellows, and I've no doubt we shall all be jolly good pals. But we're not going to let you lick us on our native heath."

"No fear!" said a curly-headed youth at Loring's side. "We're not going to be sentimental on the footer field. We'll pile up the merry goals as fast as we can."

"This way to the ground," said Bob Loring.

Tom Merry & Co. were escorted to the playing-fields. When they saw the football ground, they almost held their breath in wonder.

The St. Jim's ground was a very fine one, but it could not compare with the playing arena at Wellesley College.

A wide expanse of green, with a surface as smooth as that of a billiard-table, greeted the juniors' gaze.

"What an awfully-wippin' gwound, bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, rather!"

"Nicely roped in, too," said Jack Blake. "There will be no fear of spectators getting in the way."

Loring glanced at his watch.

"Better come straight to the dressing-room," he said. "The kick-off's in a quarter of an hour."

The St. Jim's footballers changed into their football attire. Then they sprinted out on to the field, in order to put in a little preliminary practice, so that they might find their feet. Their limbs had been rather cramped with the long car ride, but they soon became supple again.

The Wellesley supporters, clustered around the ropes, looked on with smiling faces. They could be forgiven for smiling, and for regarding the match as a foregone conclusion. So solid was the Wellesley defence that it had not yet yielded a goal on its own ground. So fleet of foot were the Wellesley forwards, and so deadly in their shooting, that they had averaged five goals in each home match.

Small wonder, then, that the Wellesley supporters were smiling!

They knew nothing of St. Jim's football. But they could tell, by the way Tom Merry & Co. shaped at practice, that they were no duffers at the game.

Fatty Wynn guarded the goal, while a number of stinging shots dashed in upon him from all angles. Fatty saved them

The Finest Tales of School and Footer Ever Written!

in such masterly style that the Wellesley fellows smiled a little less jubilantly. Here was a goalkeeper of the first order, they reflected.

The Wellesley team came out, and an enthusiastic cheer rang across the field.

Very fine and fit these Wellesley chaps looked—footballers every inch of them.

"Come on, you fellows!"

"Good old Loring!"

"On the ball!"

The referee sounded his whistle. Bob Loring and Tom Merry walked to the centre of the field to toss for choice of ends.

Tom won the toss, but there was nothing in it. The weather was dull and bitterly cold, but there was no wind.

The teams lined up, and Loring kicked off for the college.

There was a thrill in the first minute.

The ball was swung across to Forrester, on the college right wing, and he went away like a hare. Monty Lowther rushed up to tackle him, but he was left standing.

Forrester went clean through. He steadied himself on reaching the corner-flag, and sent across a delightful centre.

Loring was waiting and watching. He pounced upon the ball like a tiger, and drove it in.

"Goal!" shouted the Wellesley supporters, whisking off their caps and waving them in the air.

But they were too premature.

Fatty Wynn, in the Saints' goal, was equal to the emergency. He fielded the ball beautifully, and punted it up the field.

Loring gave a gasp.

"Is that Sam Hardy in disguise?" he asked.

Tom Merry laughed breathlessly.

"That's Fatty Wynn," he explained. "And he's going to be another Hardy when he grows up."

"In my opinion, he's another Hardy already!" said Loring. "I didn't expect him to stop that one. And he fielded it as if it was the softest thing in the world."

"Takes a good shot to beat Fatty," said Monty Lowther. "On with the merry game!"

Fatty Wynn was not destined to have a restful afternoon. Within a couple of minutes the college forwards were back again, subjecting him to a fierce bombardment.

Fatty saved his charge again and again, but it must be confessed he was a trifle lucky. On one occasion Figgins got in his way, and he was unsuspected. But instinct told him when and where the ball was coming, and instinct caused him to be in the right place at the right time.

On another occasion Fatty was actually beaten all ends up by a lightning drive; but the ball cannoned against the cross-bar, and rebounded into play.

And now St. Jim's took up the running. Dick Redfern sent their forwards away, and brilliant combination by Talbot and D'Arcy spelt danger to the home defence. But Gussy's shot was charged down by one of the backs, and the college again took command of the game.

It was a ding-dong tussle. The pace was truly terrific. There was no time, as Monty Lowther said afterwards, to stop and pick flowers. The ball sped from end to end of the field, and the on-lookers were on tiptoe with excitement.

There were plenty of thrills, but no

goals. Wellesley should have scored on at least two occasions, but they were balked by two things—bad luck, and Fatty Wynn.

Fatty was playing the game of his life in the St. Jim's goal. His anticipation was wonderful. Some of his saves bordered on the miraculous.

The half-time whistle came as a welcome respite.

"Phew!" panted Tom Merry. "What a game!"

"Much too strenuous for a man of my years!" gasped Monty Lowther. "I feel as if I've been through a mangle, under a steam-roller, trodden on, kicked, punched, turned inside-out, and generally pulverised!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've managed to keep our goal intact, and that's the main thing," said Kerr. "Hallo! The clerk of the weather is going to take a hand in the game."

Even as Kerr spoke, snow began to fall in sheets.

It was a real, raging snowstorm. Within a few moments the surface of the ground changed from green to white. And the caps and greatcoats of the spectators were powdered over.

"Oh, help!" muttered Tom Merry. "We shall have this snow in our faces in the second half."

"Nevah mind, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We'll win those gold medals yet!"

"Hear, hear!" said Dick Redfern. "Never say die!"

The whistle sounded, calling the teams into action once more.

The small section of St. Jim's supporters made themselves heard.

"Play up, the Saints!"

"Never mind the weather!"

Many people thought that the pace would slacken in the second half. But it didn't.

The players threw themselves into the struggle with renewed zest.

The St. Jim's fellows contested every inch of ground, and Bob Loring & Co. were baffled and nonplussed. At last they had come up against a team that they could not do as they liked with.

After ten minutes of give-and-take play, Jack Blake broke away on the St. Jim's left. He put in a fine solo run, and just as one of the college backs charged him over, he managed to lob the ball into the goalmouth.

A short, swift jerk of Tom Merry's head, and the ball shot into the net.

"Goal!"

That was the first goal scored by a visiting team on the college ground that season. And it met with the ovation it deserved.

The St. Jim's supporters, in particular, shouted themselves nearly hoarse.

A moment later Tom Merry almost regretted having scored. For that goal had an electrifying effect on the college team.

No sooner was the ball kicked off from



FOOTER VERSUS SNOW! Fighting at a fierce pace in the blinding snow-storm, Tom Merry & Co. began to feel that they were on the verge of collapse. But they stuck it out manfully. (See Chapter 2.)

the centre of the field than Loring and his men attacked, and in no half-hearted fashion, either.

Twice Fatty Wynn was brought to his knees by powerful shots. And on the third occasion he was beaten. A shot came in from the foot of Forrester which not even a wizard could have saved.

"Goal!"

The scores were level now. And the game went on at a hotter pace than ever.

What with the blinding snow and the fierce pace that was maintained, Tom Merry & Co. began to feel that they were on the verge of collapse. But they stuck it out manfully. Having kept on terms with their opponents so far, they determined to go on playing as if their lives depended on it.

Another college attack was beaten off by Figgins and Kerr, who were playing heroically at back. And then came a big sensation.

Dick Redfern, at centre-half, tried a long shot. It was the sort of shot that would never have come off under normal conditions. But the college custodian was hampered by the snow, and he bungled the ball, which eluded his frantic clutch and crashed into the net.

"Goal!"

St. Jim's were on top. And on top they meant to remain.

The college now played as they had never played before. Every man went "all out!" Bob Loring set an example of dashing determination that the others were swift to follow.

If Fatty Wynn had been busy before, he was overworked now. But he was equal to every emergency. Never, surely, had a goal been guarded so well as Fatty guarded his citadel that afternoon!

Time wore on. The referee, shaking the snow from his garments, glanced significantly at his watch.

"Only a few minutes to go!" was the remark that passed from mouth to mouth along the touchline.

In those few minutes the home team played with the vigour of desperation. They did everything but score. Their shots rained in upon Fatty Wynn from all angles. And Fatty was for ever punching and kicking and leaping and diving, in order to prevent the threatened score.

The St. Jim's players were almost at a standstill now. With two exceptions they had reached the limit of their endurance.

The exceptions were Tom Merry and Talbot.

From one of Fatty Wynn's clearances Tom Merry gained possession of the ball, and he and Talbot ran it through between them.

The attack was so unexpected that the college defenders were unprepared for it. They realised the danger when it was too late. The goalkeeper came running out in a frenzied attempt to save, and Talbot shot past him into the empty net.

"Goal!"

It was the last goal of the match, scored in the last minute.

The final whistle rang out clear and shrill.

THE POPULAR.—No. 206.

St. Jim's had defeated Wellesley College by three goals to one.

The scene that followed was one of such pandemonium and uproar that it beggars description.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. The Conquering Heroes.

"THAT you, Clive?"

It was Aubrey Racke who spoke.

Racke had put through a trunk call to Wellesley College, and after some delay a voice hailed him over the wires.

"Yes; Clive speaking," came the reply.

"Match finished?" asked Racke.

"Yes."

"What was the score?"

"Three to one."

"Much obliged to you, Clive," drawled Racke. And he rang off.

Crooke and Mellish looked questioningly at Racke as the latter stepped out of the public telephone-box on Rylcombe Station.

"How went the merry match?" asked Crooke.

"The result was 3-1," said Racke.

"I'll own I'm a bit disappointed. I expected Wellesley to win by a bigger margin than that. Still, Merry & Co. have been licked, an' that's the main thing."

It did not occur to Aubrey Racke that the score of 3-1 might have been in favour of St. Jim's. The possibility of the Saints winning had been left completely out of his calculations. Clive had given the score as 3-1, and Racke did not doubt for a moment that the three applied to Wellesley College, and the one to St. Jim's.

"We'll have a rippin' rag to-night, you chaps," said Racke. "The Head's given permission for everybody to stay up late, as Merry & Co. won't be home till midnight. We'll organise a torch-light procession, an' meet 'em at the school gates."

"But that would be like greeting a victorious team!" protested Mellish.

"Not at all, dear man. We'll carry a banner, with the inscription on it to the effect that Tom Merry's team can't play footer for toffee, an' that they are a set of duds. Now do you cotton on?"

Mellish chuckled, and so did Crooke. They could see now that Racke intended to give the footballers a hostile reception—not a friendly one.

At half-past eleven Racke formed his torchlight procession.

The banner had already been prepared. It was quite a work of art. It was supported on a couple of broomsticks, and it bore the inscription:

"DUDS, DOLTS, AND DUFFERS!"

WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO LEARN
TO PLAY FOOTBALL?

CALL YOURSELVES A TEAM?

KNOCKED OUT IN THE FIRST
ROUND BY
WELLESLEY COLLEGE!
DOWN WITH TOM MERRY!

LET'S HAVE A NEW SKIPPER!
YAH!"

It was a far from flattering inscription. And Racke had no doubt that Tom Merry & Co. would gnash their teeth with rage when they saw it.

Laughing gaily, the torch-bearers made their way towards the school gates.

It was a bitterly cold night, and the snow fell thick and fast. The quad was covered with a carpet of white.

Racke and Crooke carried the banner between them. The flaming torches showed up the words to advantage.

"Gettin' on for midnight!" muttered Racke. "They ought to be here soon."

Even as he spoke, the soft purring sound of the approaching touring-cars became audible.

There were other sounds, too—sounds of voices raised in song.

Why this singing? Wherefore this hilarity? It was not natural for a defeated team to come home with the air of conquerors.

The singing grew louder as the cars approached. It was obvious that Tom Merry & Co. were on the best of terms with themselves, and with the world in general.

The cars halted in the school gateway, and footballers and supporters alighted. They looked at the flaming torches, and at the banner with its inscription, and they were obviously taken aback.

"What the merry dickens—" began Tom Merry in astonishment.

"They seem to imagine we lost the match, deah boys!" said D'Arcy.

"Well, you did lose it, didn't you?" demanded Racke, an awful suspicion dawning in his mind.

"Of course not, you duffer!" said Tom Merry. "The boot was on the other foot! We won!"

"My hat!"

"What made you think we lost, Racke?" asked Jack Blake.

"Clive told me on the telephone—"

"I told you the score was 3-1, but you rang off before I could give further details," said Clive. "You took it for granted that Wellesley College won."

The discomfited torch-bearers, looking as foolish as they felt, turned away, and staggered into the school building, followed by a peal of laughter.

St. Jim's had come successfully through the first round, and their players had earned the gold medals promised by Lord Eastwood.

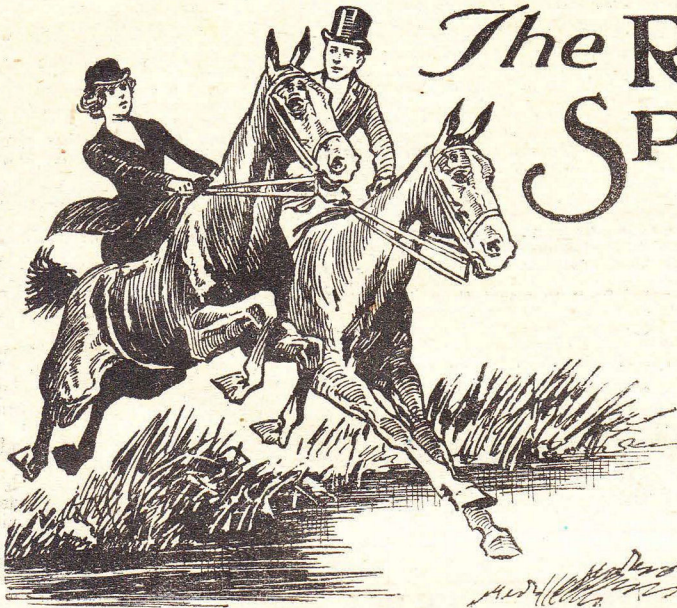
Whether they would go much farther in the competition, or whether they would be knocked out, remained to be seen. Sufficient unto the day was the triumph thereof!

THE END.

(Another extra grand story of St. Jim's next week, entitled "Football Mad!" By Martin Clifford. Order your POPULAR early!)

ON THE BALL, SAINTS! Hurrah! Another BIG SCORE Next Week!

A FORTUNE IN THE BALANCE!—On the field of sport two hardy sportsmen fight for a great fortune! Who will win the amazing contest?



The RIVAL SPORTSMEN!

A Grand New Serial, full of excitement and thrill, introducing **HARRY LESTRADE** and **AUSTIN COURTNEY**, and dealing with their extraordinary fight, on the field of sport, for the Lestrade Fortune.

By **VICTOR NELSON.**

(Author of "By Nero's Command!" and "The Boy With Fifty Millions!" etc.)



WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

By the terms of the late Sir Charles Lestrade's will, Harry Lestrade and his cousin, Austin Courtney, must fight for the possession of the Lestrade fortune on the field of sport. The one who distinguishes himself most becomes owner of a vast amount of wealth. Harry Lestrade receives the first opportunity to distinguish himself in a local football match, and he is "signed on" to play for the Wessex Wanderers permanently. Several other sporting events, in which both the cousins compete, are won by young Harry Lestrade. Furious at his non-success, Courtney tries underhand methods of getting Harry out of the struggle. In the fourth round of the English Cup, Courtney's team, Romford Rovers, is drawn to meet the Wanderers. Courtney arranges with a reserve, Jem New-

bold, who is up against Harry, to administer drugs to his team at half-time.

The dastardly scheme is carried out, and when the two teams commence the play again, three of the Wanderers fall down unconscious. But in spite of this catastrophe, Codling, the captain of the Wanderers, decides to continue the match, playing short.

After a stern struggle the Wanderers defeat their opponents. Later Tony Wagg discovers that Newbold is responsible for the drugging, and Newbold is turned out of the club. That night Harry Lestrade is kidnapped at the Lestrade Castle by Courtney and the ex-footballer. Coming out of his room, Specs, a chum of Harry's, sees them moving down the corridor.

(Now read on.)

Specs' Bad Luck!

DOWN the main corridor and into a branching passage Courtney and Newbold went with their burden, and they had no suspicion that when they carried Harry into an adjoining wing, in which the picture gallery was situated, a pair of short-sighted eyes were watching them.

Specs had crept along noiselessly in the shadows in their wake, pausing behind the angles of the oak-panelled walls until they made some turn, then gliding forward again and catching up with them. The boy was but a dozen yards in the rear when the two men passed into the picture gallery with Harry and Courtney, and deeming no one save themselves was in that part of the house, switched on the lights.

Specs tiptoed to the door and cautiously peered round it.

He was just in time to see Newbold swing Harry over his shoulder and Courtney step up to the picture of King James, touch the eyes, and send it slowly revolving.

"A secret passage!" Specs thought. "Where on earth are they taking him? I wonder if I ought to raise the alarm, or if I shall be able to follow and untie him?"

He stiffened listening. Newbold was triumphantly mocking at the helpless Harry. "I saw by your eyes that you recognised

me when the lights were switched on," he sneered. "Well, you whelp, it doesn't matter, for you won't be able to talk. At eight o'clock to-morrow morning you'll be blown into kingdom come!"

A thrill of horror shot through Specs. He understood now. The secret passage must lead into the old and ruined farmhouse that the film company proposed to destroy for purposes of their picture early on the following morning. Thank Heaven he had been aroused and discovered the diabolical plot!

After all, there was no need to seek aid. As soon as Courtney and his confederate—Specs had recognised the former now—came out of the passage, he would see to Harry's release.

The door of a room on the opposite side of the corridor stood ajar. Specs turned and entered, and, in the darkness behind the door, he waited or sounds that would tell him Courtney and his hireling had returned after their dastardly deed.

Half an hour, perhaps, elapsed. Then Specs heard their soft footfalls in the picture gallery. A moment later both were in the corridor and creeping past the room in which he stood.

The boy gave them plenty of time to leave the wing. He then left the room and, as silently as possible, returned to his bed-room

for an electric torch he had amongst his belongings.

Specs secured it and slipped it into the pocket of his jacket, which he donned over his pyjamas. This done, he once again made his way noiselessly to the picture gallery.

Something prompted him to look at his luminous wristlet watch as he entered, and he saw that the time was nearly one o'clock in the morning. It was a habit of Specs' to slip his watch into the breast pocket of his jacket when retiring for the night.

The lad produced his electric torch and directed its white ray on to the portrait of James II., as he gained that end of the long room. He stepped up to the picture and pressed upon the eyes, as he had watched Austin Courtney do. He drew back with a little breath of relief as, without any hitch, the movable part of the wall swung round and left revealed the secret opening beyond.

Specs flashed his torch into the darkness and saw the steps. But his short-sightedness prevented his noticing that the third step from the top was crumbling and worn in its centre, and the fact was to bring disaster to Harry Lestrade's chum.

As he commenced to descend the flight and made to put his foot on the third step down, only the heel of his slipper met the worn stone. Specs stumbled and, to try to save himself, he flung out a hand to the wall. In doing this, he must have touched some portion of the secret mechanism connected with the movable part and set it in motion.

For, as he went plunging headlong down the narrow flight of stone stairs, he heard the revolving panelling and stonework swing back into place. Next instant, Specs had struck his head a terrific blow as he fell to the floor of the passage far below. A great darkness followed the myriad lights that flashed before his eyes, and he remembered no more.

Ten Precious Minutes! A Leap for Life!

WHEN Specs eventually recovered his senses, in a dim kind of way he wondered if someone were pounding at his head with a hammer. Terrible racking pains were shooting through and through his temples and his brain seemed to be on fire.

At first, as he lay on the damp floor of the passage in the total darkness, he could

THE POPULAR.—No. 206.

A Real Fine Sporting Tale that is Making a Great Sensation! Are You Reading It?



not for the life of him determine where he was or what could have happened. Then, as he put his hand to his temple and found it swollen and covered with congealed blood, memory came flooding into his mind, and, with a hoarse, choking cry, the boy staggered up.

For how long had he lain in the secret passage? A numbing horror gripped Specs. Was there still time to save his chum?

Remembering the luminous watch that was in his pocket, Specs snatched it out and held it close to his eyes. He had lost his spectacles in the fall.

After peering hard at the watch for several seconds, Specs uttered a dismayed groan. The hands stood at ten minutes to eight.

He had lain in the darkness at the foot of the steps for nearly seven hours, and but ten precious minutes remained in which to reach his friend and rescue him, supposing the film company blew up the old farmhouse on time!

What should he do? Should he return up the steps and try to get back into the castle? Almost at once he abandoned this idea, remembering how the movable portion of the wall had swung shut and thinking it highly likely that it would take him a considerable while to find out how to manipulate the mechanism from the inner side.

No, he must go on along the underground passage and find his way into the farmhouse. Where were his torch and spectacles? Without the first he was hampered. Without the second, almost helpless.

His foot chanced to touch the torch, and he picked it up. But it was only to toss it away again in disgust, for the bulb had become smashed, when it had fallen from his hand, and no light came from it as he touched the switch.

Knowing how necessary they would be to him, supposing he could get into the doomed farmhouse in time, Specs fell to his hands and knees and groped for his glasses. Again he groaned as he found them. Both lenses were broken.

Setting his teeth, the boy went as fast as possible along the totally dark passage, a hand against the slimy wall to guide him.

And meanwhile a scene of activity was taking place away at the old farmhouse beyond the private park.

The producer of the film company was standing near the doomed buildings with his camera-man and some workmen, who had carried in the kegs of gunpowder and emptied their contents on the floor of one of the lower rooms, were connecting the slow fuse, the end of which lay in the porch doorway.

Little did they think that, up on the first floor of the farmhouse, a boy stood lashed helplessly to an upright beam, unable to make a sound that would warn them of his awful danger.

All through the night Harry Lestrade had struggled with his bonds, and worked his head from side to side to try to loosen his gag. But it had been all to no purpose. Courtney and his fellow-scoundrel had not bungled in their foul work, and Harry was as fast a prisoner as when they had left him some seven hours before.

Down below, one of the workmen applied a match to the fuse, and it began to splutter, the tiny ominous sparks running along its rope-like texture and disappearing towards the large heap of gunpowder lying in the house.

"Take, Tom!" the watching producer instructed, as the workmen ran to a safe distance, and the camera-man began to turn the handle of his machine.

Harry Lestrade's face was white, as he made a last desperate effort to force the gag from between his teeth. He had heard the voices of the men who had been below, later heard them run, and he knew that, unless a miracle happened, within a few minutes he and the house would be hurled skyward in a sheet of flame.

Never for a moment did Harry think of the possibility of anyone beside his cousin and Jem Newbold knowing of his peril. Specs had now reached another flight of steps at the opposite end of the subterranean tunnel; he had stumbled up them, and was fumbling at the wall he found before him, desperately searching for the means of revealing the exit he knew must exist.

THE POPULAR.—No. 24

Suddenly his fingers touched a protuberance that was shaped like a face, carved in stone, and, as Specs ran his hand over it, he found that something that felt like a crown was modelled above.

The truth rushed into his brain. It was a carving of the head of the long dead King James. Instinctively, Specs pressed at the carved eyes, and, to his joy, he found the wall revolving before him.

He stepped through the cavity it left, as the movable stonework came to a standstill. He was in the room where the gunpowder lay, with the fuse growing shorter and shorter, the deadly spark now perilously near.

But Specs could not see that. It was some distance from him, and he was almost blind without his glasses. He found himself stumbling against a flight of wooden stairs leading to the next floor, and clutched at their rail.

What prompted Specs to mount them, he could not afterwards say. But he did grope his way to their top and into the room above, and, as he crossed it, he could just distinguish the form of Harry tied to the beam before him.

Fortunately, Specs had a pocket-knife in his coat. He opened it, and stooping close, cut through Harry's bonds.

"Quick—this way!" Harry cried, with something like a sob of thankfulness in his throat, after he had snatched the gag from his lips. "The window, Specs; no time to go down the stairs! Quick, old chap—for your life!"

READ THIS— IT'S IMPORTANT!

No boy should miss

"BY ORDER OF THE LEAGUE!"

The Greatest School Story Ever Written by
P. G. WODEHOUSE,
appearing in next week's issue of our
magnificent Companion Paper the

BOYS' FRIEND

16 Big Pages—On Sale Every Monday.

Seizing Specs' hand, Harry rushed him across the rotting floor. Specs distinguished the glassless and frameless window before him, and began to scramble through. Harry hastened him with a push. It was better to risk a broken limb than they should both be blown to atoms.

A cry of horror broke from the producer of the film company, as he saw the boy's figure drop from the window and another youthful form begin to clamber through. It was echoed by the camera-man, who ceased to turn at the handle of his machine, and stood, wide-eyed, "white-faced."

Harry Lestrade leapt after Specs, falling to his hands and knees on the grassy bank below, as his short-sighted friend began to pick himself up. Again Harry seized Specs' hand, and together they started to run.

Not a moment too soon. The spark of the fuse reached the gunpowder. There was a deafening roar, and the old house, which was split in twain, was enveloped in a mighty sheet of flame.

Harry and Specs were flung upon their faces, and as they laid for a moment where they had fallen dazed, bricks, pieces of stonework and shattered timber fell about them like hail. All that was left of the farmhouse was a heap of smoking debris.

"You've spoilt our picture, but that doesn't matter! Thank Heaven you got out in time!" cried the producer, as he came running to the spot, just as the two lads picked themselves up and stood swaying dizzily. "But, what's it mean? How the mischief did you come to be in the place?"

"You have been the witness of an attempt

upon my life," Harry Lestrade answered, as he pulled himself together. "Come with me, and you shall see the end of it!" he added, with his blue eyes flashing.

The camera-man and the workmen had now joined the producer. It was plain they did not understand, but they followed Harry and Specs, as they made for the castle.

There, after making whispered inquiries of the butler, Harry entered a room on the left of the lofty and gloomy old hall.

Jem Newbold and Austin Courtney were seated there at breakfast, and both sprang to their feet with hoarse and startled cries, as Harry appeared in the doorway with his companions. From the manner in which their faces blanched and their eyes dilated, it seemed that, for the moment, they took him to be a ghost.

Harry Lestrade strode to the table, picked up a cup, and dashed the steaming coffee it contained full in his cousin's face.

"You are going to fight me, you would-be murderer!" he said through his teeth.

"You young fool! What is the meaning of this?" Courtney said huskily, as he wiped the coffee from his face. "I'm a grown man, and I do not fight with boys."

Harry advanced upon him, his fists clenched and his eyes ablaze.

"Boy or not," he said, "you are going to stand up to me, cousin, or take the hiding of your life!"

Harry's Great Fight—And How it Ended!

HARRY LESTRADE sprang at his cousin, and before Courtney could step back or guard himself, struck him a stinging, flat-handed blow across the cheek.

A gasp of rage broke from the man who had done his best to bring about the lad's death. Surprise caused him to reel back, his hand to the red weals upon his pale face.

For a moment he hesitated. Then, realising that he had got to fight the plucky boy who had challenged him or be thought an arrant coward by the little group in the doorway who watched, Courtney made a blind rush at the pyjama-clad Harry.

Specs had supreme confidence in his friend, and was grinning. Short-sighted though he was, the light was good in the old oak-paneled room, and Harry's chum had seen both the incident of the coffee being dashed into Courtney's face and the blow his cousin had administered.

At a word from the film producer, Specs helped to drag the table away from the centre of the floor, so as to leave room for the combatants, who were now momentarily wrestling in a grim clinch.

Jem Newbold made a sudden dash for the door, and the others heard his footfalls clatter away through the hall. The front door opened and slammed upon Austin Courtney's accomplice. Newbold had had ugly visions of being arrested for his part in the dastardly attempt upon Harry Lestrade's life, and had determined to make himself scarce.

Austin Courtney thrust his cousin out of the clinch, aiming a savage blow for the boy's jaw that Harry avoided by a duck and a swerve.

For a breathing space both stood seeking an opening, their hands clenched and up. Austin Courtney was crouching, as had always been his style when in his college days he had shone not a little as a boxer. On the other hand, Harry Lestrade stood upright, which made his disadvantage in height less noticeable.

For the fraction of a second Austin Courtney seemed to balance himself. Then his head dropped lower, and he darted in to the attack. A straight left from Harry grazed across the top of his scalp as he ducked and upper-cut viciously at the boy with his right.

Harry, who was at a disadvantage because of his bare feet, as well as being, after all, but a boy, though strong and well developed, managed to smother the blow just in time.

What happened in the next few moments it would have been hard to say. There was a sharp exchange of blows that seemed to give neither the man nor the lad an advantage, another clinch, out of which Harry suddenly pushed his cousin, and which was followed by a hook to the jaw, which just missed and

Harry Lestrade, the True-Blue Sportsman—a Fellow You Will All Like!

landed on Courtney's neck, sending him reeling.

"Bravo, youngster!" involuntarily cried the producer. "Follow it up! Ah!"

Harry had not needed the advice. Even as the producer had spoken, he had been after Courtney, but the latter, realising the kick that the lad could put behind his blows, was taking no chances. He kept out of the way with clever footwork whilst he recovered from the steadier he had received.

Many a boy in Harry's position would have tried rushing tactics; but the youngster knew better.

He was aware that Courtney was in perfect training by reason of his recent doings in the great sporting contest that had gone on between them, and he knew that one unlucky blow might be capable of knocking him out. Courtney's age gave him superior strength.

Covering up skilfully, with a vengeful light in his eyes, the young man circled about the boy, and Harry knew that the rush was soon coming. The villainous attempt to murder him had, however, roused in him all his fighting spirit, and he stood his ground, waiting.

Courtney felt tentatively, with his left. But, before he knew where he was, Harry had reversed the lead. His right hand had dropped over the man's left forearm, and almost at the same instant his left swung for Courtney's chin. The blow got home with a force that sent his cousin to the floor with a thud that shook the room.

Specs yelled his enthusiasm, as did the two workmen, the producer and the camera man. Their cries of delight drove Courtney into a red passion as he came quickly, if a little unsteadily, to his feet.

He rushed, both his arms swinging. Ducking a blow to the head, then getting into a clinch, he delivered a rain of short-arm jabs to Harry's body that set him gasping, fit though he was. His ribs were sore as he managed to break away from the savage embrace, only for Courtney to come at him again in another fierce, anger-maddened rush.

For five seconds it was give and take, and a stream of blood began to flow from beside the boy's left eye, whilst one of Courtney's were showing signs of swelling.

Both breathing hard now, they went in and out, sparring one moment, the next waiting the other to give an opening, and once Harry very nearly fell into a trap Courtney set for him.

He avoided it, and sprang clear in the nick of time. Courtney feinted, side-stepped sharply, and swung with all his strength for Harry's jaw. But the blow was guarded, and, in return, the young man got a smack on the face from his cousin's clenched fist that caused his head to wobble.

"Hurrah! Good old Harry—go it, old thing!" yelled Specs jubilantly.

But the next instant his face fell, and he looked anxious.

For Courtney, half-insane with fury, had recovered himself like lightning, and, dashing in, he was fairly fighting Harry back towards the table, his additional strength, weight, and reach telling.

Specs and his companions looked on breathlessly. They saw a quick blow from Harry, a smart counter from his cousin, then a perfect whirl of jabbing, swinging punches, both the combatants getting in blows that sounded like a tattoo upon a muffled drum.

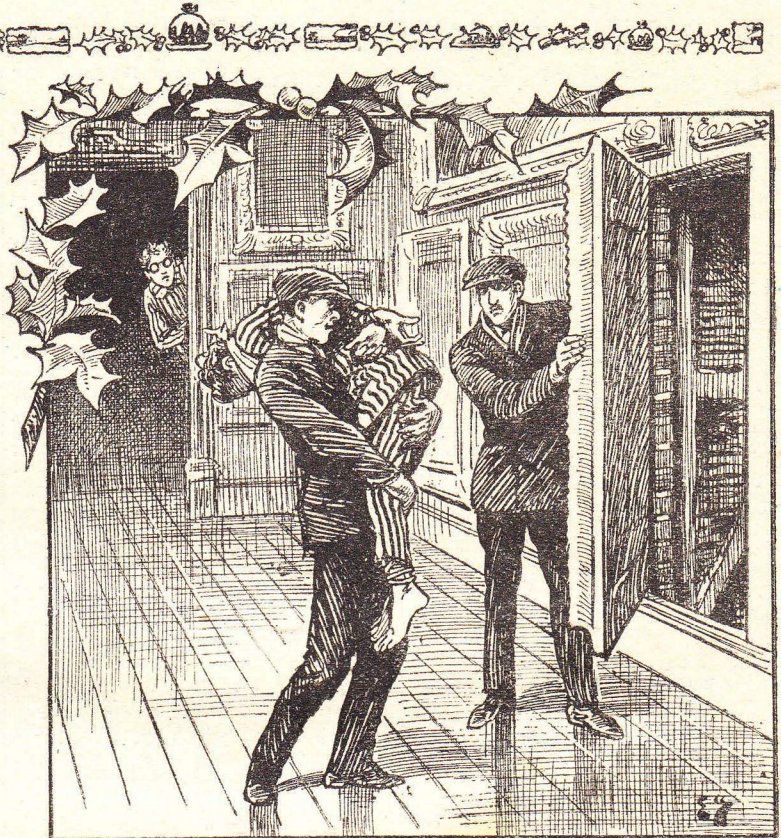
Then Courtney proved the kind of sportsman that he was. Deliberately he planted his boot upon Harry Lestrade's bare right foot, and, as, with an involuntary gasp of pain, the lad dropped his hands, Courtney crashed his right full in his face, then brought up his left in a brutal uppercut.

"You cad!" Specs cried indignantly, as Harry crumpled up, and, with his lips cut and bleeding, went down on one knee.

"I'll deal with you later, you impertinent brat!" Austin Courtney snarled.

"Will you, you beastly coward?" retorted Specs fearlessly. "As sure as you attempt to lay a finger on me, I'll start throwing the crockery at you! I am short-sighted and a boy, and you are a man—at least, an apology for one!"

"Stand back and give him a chance!" the



KIDNAPPED AT MIDNIGHT! Specs tiptoed to the door and cautiously peered round. He was just in time to see Newbold swing Harry over his shoulder and Courtney step up to the picture of King James, touch the eyes, and send it slowly revolving. "A secret passage!" muttered Specs. (See page 23.)

film producer said angrily, as he came striding forward.

"No, no! Don't interfere!" Harry Lestrade protested; and the man fell back with a shrug. "I can manage, and if he knocks me out I have the satisfaction of knowing I have put up a fight."

The boy was still on one knee, and, with a malicious smile of triumph twisting his lips, Courtney was standing ready to finish him when he rose.

Harry swayed, a dazed look in his eyes. For a moment his hands touched the floor. Then, by sheer will-power, he pulled himself together, and suddenly he was up and Courtney was leaping at him like a panther.

Harry side-stepped unexpectedly. His legs had seemed to stiffen out like bars of steel. He and Courtney went at it like hammer and tongs, a dogged determination to punish his cousin for his murderous plot keeping the boy up and giving him additional strength.

The film producer had once been interested in boxing, and, in promoting important fights, had seen endless tussles in the ring. Though Specs looked very doubtful now, and was inclined to groan as he saw the crashing, shattering blows he was ever and again receiving, the trained eyes of the man told him that Courtney was rapidly becoming "all-in."

The young man's breath was coming and going sobbingly through his parted lips. His blows were slowly but surely losing the vicious force that had once been behind them.

He was trying hard to finish matters quickly. But, with clever guarding and footwork, Harry Lestrade was keeping away from the worst of Courtney's attacks, and suddenly it was he—the boy—who became the aggressor.

Taking a risk, he rushed in. His right went out hard to his opponent's body, and his left swung with all his weight behind it for the point.

Courtney had come sagging forward, his breath gone, and Harry's bunched knuckles landed truly upon their objective. With his head jerking back, Courtney reeled away from him. His knees wobbled, then gave way, and he fell upon his face, and remained, limp and inert, where he had fallen.

He was knocked completely out of time.

Harry Lestrade was not a little "groggy," and, in his turn, was inclined to stagger, as Specs pumped his hand up and down and clapped him on the back.

"Bravo, old thing!" Harry's old school chum chuckled. "I would not have missed this for a year's pocket-money. I say"—anxiously—"the brute hasn't snuffed it, has he?"

"Not he," Harry objected, with a grim laugh. "Some of you chaps throw some water over him. He'll soon come round, then. Come along Specs! I'll wash the blood from my face and dress, and then we'll forage round for some breakfast."

Specs looked a little grave when they reached Harry's bed-room.

"You'll have to keep a sharp look-out after this, Harry," he said. "Your cousin will be as mad as anything when he gets back his senses and realises that you put him out. He'll be more ready to do you some bad injury than ever now!"

Harry Lestrade finished drying his face, which he had just raised from a basin of cold water.

"You're right, old chap," he admitted. "It is real open war between us now. I think I know my cousin well enough to realise that he will stick at nothing to get the better of me. But I shall keep my weather eye open, and he will not find me such an easy prey again. Ah, look!"

He drew Specs to the window, out of which he had chanced to glance.

Specs shook his head.

THE POPULAR.—No. 206.

The Sporting Story of the Year! Another Instalment Next Week!



"I can't see without glasses. I must send home for one of my spare pairs," he said.

Harry Lestrade made no reply. He had been in time to see his cousin, who must have just left the castle, standing in the drive. Courtney had been savagely shaking his fist towards his room, and, though he was not near enough to see, the boy sensed that there had been murder in his cousin's eyes.

Six Days to the Grand National!

THE great crowd that was pouring from the ground of Brighton and Hove Albion was eagerly buying papers from the newsboys who hovered about the exits.

For it was semi-final day, and, naturally, as football enthusiasts, they were anxious to learn how the great game between the contestants, the Wessex Wanderers and Barnsley, had stood at half-time.

Harry Lestrade's team had been drawn against Barnsley on the latter's ground, and, as Barnsley had been going great guns all through the season, there were many who had predicted that the Wanderers would meet their Waterloo.

The blurred announcement under "Half-Time Scores" in the "Stop Press" column of the newspapers was not exciting, however. It just left everyone guessing as to what the result of the game would be, for it read, "Barnsley 0—Wessex Wanderers 0," showing that neither team had contrived to score up to the time of the interval.

It was Romford Rovers who had been playing in the League match that had been taking place here against Brighton to-day, and, after a drawn game, in the dressing-room Austin Courtney was hurriedly changing.

He, too, was anxious to get out and buy a paper. He hoped fervently that Wessex Wanderers would be soundly trounced, and

that his cousin's brilliance on the footer-field would be brought to a check.

Leaving his team-mates still in the process of dressing, Austin Courtney quitted the enclosure.

He almost snatched a paper from the hand of one of the boys, giving him the necessary coin. He frowned, then sighed with relief, as he looked in the "Stop Press" column.

At least, the Wanderers had not been ahead at half-time, and the end of play might see them defeated.

Courtney suddenly felt his shoulder tapped. He swung about, and uttered an ejaculation of surprise as he found Jem Newbold confronting him.

"You!" he exclaimed. "What has brought you to Hove?"

Jem Newbold shrugged his shoulders.

"What else but to see you, Mr. Courtney?" he answered, a trifle grimly. "I have been on the look-out for a chance to find and have a straight talk with you. You read, of course, the result of my appearance before the F.A.?"

Courtney nodded. "You were suspended for life. But one could hardly expect anything else, in view of the way you bungled matters and left evidence against yourself."

Newbold's face went ugly. His hands clenched, and he put his lips near Courtney's ear.

"The thing is, what are you going to do about it?" he demanded. "My living's gone, and I have you, and you alone, to thank. You promised to make me well off for life if you came into your uncle's fortune, but the way things are going on now you look as though you are likely to be an 'also ran.' Remember that I could still make things confoundedly unpleasant if I wrote to the Football Association and disclosed what I have up till now kept back—that when I fooled with those lemons at Romford I did so at your instigation."

Courtney looked him straight in the eyes.

"Look here, my friend, I am not the kind of man to submit to threats and blackmail!" he snapped. "If you had acted with a little more discretion, the drugging of the Wessex players would never have been brought home to you, so you can hardly blame me for all your troubles. Still, we'll not quarrel. I may need your help again, and the promise I made you about giving you a thousand a year still stands if my cousin can be put out of the contest between us. Whether that will be immediately necessary depends on the result of the semi-final this afternoon. If his side wins I shall be so behind that I dare take no risks as to how his horse, Tearing Haste II. and mine, Fast and Free, finish in the Grand National next Friday."

"I'll help you in anything that will get one back on that whelp, Lestrade," Jem Newbold returned, his voice full of a venomous hatred. "But I'll tell you candidly that you have got to look after me, Courtney, or, as sure as I live, I'll blow the gaff. I want some money now. I am almost broke."

With a gesture of impatience, Courtney took a wallet from his pocket, extracted a banknote, and slipped it into his hand.

"There's twenty pounds, which will keep you going for awhile," he said. "Now walk into Brighton with me, and we'll see what happens up at Barnsley."

It was almost in silence that they tramped into the well-known seaside resort. The match between the Romford Rovers and Brighton and Hove Albion had finished somewhat early, and it was not until they had killed time by discussing a meal and a pot of tea in one of the restaurants on the front that they heard the newsboys shouting "Football results!"

(You must not miss next week's long instalment of our amazing sporting serial—Harry Lestrade on the Warpath Again.)

THE STRIKE OF THE MASTERS!

(Continued from page 18.)

Thump, thump! "Cave! Here comes the Head!" called out Oswald of the Fourth.

There was a sudden scudding off of the fags.

The Fourth-Formers vanished also, leaving a clear field for the Head.

Dr. Chisholm's brow was like thunder, as he came up to the door.

Thump, thump!

"Let me out, you young scoundrels!" roared the Modern prefect within.

"Knowles!"

"Oh, it is you, sir! I've been locked in, sir. Those fags—"

"I will see that you are released, Knowles."

It was some time before the key was found and the prefect released.

Shortly afterwards, there was a painful scene in the Third Form-room, with fags holding out reluctant hands, and the Head wielding the cane.

In the afternoon Bulkeley returned to the Third; it was pretty clear that Knowles could not handle them.

Knowles was bestowed upon the Classical Fourth.

And the moment Knowles stepped into the Fourth Form-room the juniors exchanged glances that told that their thoughts were of war.

Knowles was unusually good-tempered that afternoon; perhaps he had had enough trouble, and did not want any more.

But an angelic temper would not have saved him from trouble.

The Classics were "up against" a Modern, anyway—and Knowles had not Bulkeley's popularity to see him through.

And the feeling was growing in the Form that the prefect was acting the part of a "blackleg."

Knowles was systematically worried by his

THE POPULAR.—No 206.

hopeful pupils, till at last his temper failed him.

Then he brought the cane into play.

And then there was a volley of grammars, dictionaries, and exercise books from the Fourth, smiting Knowles right and left and covering the floor of the Form-room like a snowstorm.

"You young rotters!" howled Knowles. "You—you disorderly little beasts, you—you—you—"

"Clear off!" called out Mornington. "You've no business here! We want Bootles!"

"Silence! Order!"

"We want Bootles!" roared the Fourth.

And that cry was taken up as a slogan, and chanted at Knowles, and his voice was drowned in the roar.

"We want Bootles! We want Bootles!"

Knowles stood panting for breath, and quite at a loss. He beat a retreat from the Form-room at last.

"He's gone for the Head!" murmured Lovell.

"Look out for squalls!" grinned Mornington.

In a few minutes Dr. Chisholm entered the Form-room, with a brow like thunder.

"Silence!" he exclaimed, as the buzz of voices did not cease at his entrance.

"We want Bootles!"

"What!"

"We want Bootles!" came in a shout.

The Head stood transfixed for a moment. It was the first expression of opinion from the Fourth that had reached his ears, and it probably came as a surprise to him.

"How dare you!" he panted at last. "Silence! Silence! The next boy who speaks will be flogged!"

There was silence then.

The Head's glance swept over the class, flashing; but it did not find there the usual awed submission.

"I shall take this class for the remainder of the day!" said Dr. Chisholm, in a grinding voice. "I warn you to let me hear no more insolence!"

How the Fifth and the Sixth got on, on

their "lonesome," the juniors did not know; probably they spent the afternoon chatting.

The Head was tied to the Fourth.

And there certainly was exemplary order in that Form—while the Head was there.

The Head was probably as glad as the juniors when the time came to dismiss the Form.

He had a harrassed look as he rustled away.

With all his grim determination of character, he was not finding it an easy task to run Rookwood "on his own."

Jimmy Silver & Co. were smiling as they strolled into the dusky quadrangle.

"It can't last!" said Lovell sapiently. "I don't say I wholly approve of masters going on strike! It's setting a bad example to us nice boys. But the Head's too stiff by half. We want Bootles."

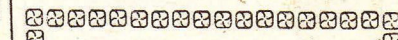
"We do—we do!" said Jimmy. "Bootles has got pushed out because he stood up for little me! It's up to us to stand up for him!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And when the new masters come," said Jimmy, "I think there's going to be trouble. We're not going to see Bootles ousted. Perhaps, when our giddy new master has dealt with us a bit, the Head will be glad to call Bootles home—what!"

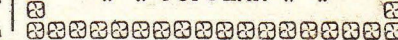
And the chortle that followed indicated that Jimmy Silver's chums thought it very probable.

THE END.



THE STRIKE BREAKERS

appear at Rookwood— you must read all about them in next week's :: POPULAR ::



THE CEDAR CREEK PLAYERS!

(Continued from page 5.)

"Golly!" mumbled Bob Lawless hopelessly. "Golly isn't the word! Miss Meadows will snatch us bald-headed for this! Oh dear!"

The unhappy Romans marched in at the porch, but they paused in the passage outside the school-room door.

It required a great deal of nerve to enter the crowded school-room in the garb of ancient Rome.

"Better get in!" said Bob desperately. "Here goes!"

And he marched as boldly as possible into the school-room, with the others at his heels.

"Oh, here they are!" exclaimed Miss Meadows, at the sound of many footsteps; and she turned to look sternly at the newcomers. Then her expression changed, and she gasped: "Why—why—who—how—"

Words failed her. With crimson faces, and their eyes fixed on the floor, Julius Caesar & Co. came up the middle of the big school-room.

Mr. Shepherd rubbed his eyes.

Mr. Slimmy blinked over his glasses like a man petrified.

Miss Meadows was rooted to the floor.

Then a roar of Homeric laughter sounded through the school-room.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

It was in vain that Miss Meadows made frantic gestures for silence and called for it.

Her voice was drowned in the roar of merriment that rang through Cedar Creek.

Boys and girls were almost weeping with mirth as they stared at the unhappy crowd of ancient Romans.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Richards & Co. stood sheepishly before Miss Meadows, their eyes on the floor.

At that moment they fervently wished that the floor would open and swallow them up. But the floor didn't, and they had to face the really terrific look that the schoolmistress fixed upon them.

"What—what—what—" Miss Meadows fairly stuttered. "What—what— Silence! There is nothing—nothing whatever to laugh at! Silence, I say! Richards—Lawless—what does this mean—this—this ridiculous masquerade?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If—if you please, ma'am," mumbled Frank Richards—"if—if you please, we—we were rehearsing, and some beast collared our clobber—I mean clothes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! I will cane the next boy or girl who laughs! Richards, this—this is—is—is unheard of! I—"

"We couldn't help it, ma'am!" groaned Bob Lawless. "Our truck's been pinched, and—and we had to come in. We—we couldn't find our clothes!"

"Leave the school-room at once!" gasped Miss Meadows. "You—you should not have come here like that. Go—go into the dining-room, and—and I will send some of the boys to look for your clothes! Bless my soul! Leave the school-room at once!"

Frank Richards & Co. were only too glad to leave. And in spite of Miss Meadows' wrath a fresh yell of laughter followed them as they went.

The Thespians had to wait some time before their clothes were found and brought in, and it happened to be Gunten and Keller who found them.

Frank Richards & Co. did not feel grateful. They had a shrewd suspicion that those who hid could find.

When they took their places at last in the school-room all Cedar Creek was on the broad grin, and even Miss Meadows' severe face was twitching at little.

The Thespian Society of Cedar Creek decided to postpone the great performance of Shakespeare's masterpiece, after due consideration.

After what had happened, it was probable that the audience would have taken it as a comedy, instead of a tragedy. But though Gunten declared that he knew nothing of the matter, the Co. found some slight satisfaction in pommelling him on suspicion.

THE END.

(Next week's story of the chums of the Backwoods is a real thriller, entitled, "In Deadly Peril!" Don't miss it!)

BIG MONEY PRIZES! A GRAND ONE-WEEK FOOTBALL COMPETITION!

Read the Puzzle Picture, and send in your solution—it's so simple.

FIRST PRIZE £5 0 0: Second Prize £2 10 0: TEN PRIZES OF FIVE SHILLINGS EACH.

What You Have to Do!

Here is a splendid Footer competition which I am sure will interest you. On this page you will find a history of Newcastle United Football Club in picture-puzzle form. What you are invited to do is to solve this picture, and when you have done so, write your solution on a sheet of paper. Then sign the coupon which appears underneath, pin it to your solution, and post it to "NEWCASTLE UNITED" Competition, POPULAR Office, Gough House, Gough Square, E.C. 4, so as to reach that address not later than THURSDAY, January 4th, 1923.

The FIRST PRIZE of £5 will be awarded to the reader who submits a solution which is exactly the same as, or nearest to, the solution now in the possession of the Editor. In the events of ties the prize will be divided. The other prizes will be awarded in order of merit. The Editor reserves the right to add together and divide all, or any of the prizes, but the full amount will be awarded. It is a distinct condition of entry that the decision of the Editor must be accepted as final. Employees of the proprietors of this journal are not eligible to compete.

This competition is run in conjunction with "Gen," "Maguet," and "Boys' Friend," and readers of those journals are invited to compete.

I enter NEWCASTLE UNITED COMPETITION, and agree to accept the Editor's decision as final.

Name

Address

P

A WORD WITH YOUR EDITOR!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Address: The Editor, The "Popular," The Fleetway House, Farringdon St., London, E.C. 4.

SNOOP'S UNCLE.

There is a big programme for next Tuesday. The POPULAR "bill" has never been stronger, and you have a splendid treat before you in "A Lesson For Snoop." Snoop needs a lesson. His uncle is expected on a visit to Greyfriars, and, in order to see whether Snoop is true blue or a thorough outsider, "uncle" turns up as a dilapidated personage, looking as if he wanted help. Snoop has a bad time, and deserves what he gets. It is a rattling fine yarn.

CEDAR CREEK IN GREAT FORM.

The Backwoods story next week is called "In Deadly Peril." The tale sweeps you along with it. Frank Richards is captured, and the rush of incident, with the dramatic surprise at the wind up makes this yarn one of the best yet of Cedar Creek.

"THE STRIKE-BREAKERS."

At Rookwood things are positively humming. Next week we see the remarkable carry on of the rising at the school. The masters are in grim earnest, and no wonder, but some particularly astonishing events take place, and the situation becomes still more critical. Rookwood has never known anything like it. There is an attempt to break the strike, but when a revolt is justified it generally goes badly with strike-breakers. The new masters who are drafted in to take the places of the learned dignitaries who have risen against the Head, have a bad time. No wonder! Don't miss this fine story.

"FOOTBALL MAD."

St. Jim's has always been famed for its prowess in the winter game. Next week's yarn is a real winner. It throws fresh light on the sport as it is viewed by Tom Merry & Co. Mr. Martin Clifford is good at many things, but he is seldom happier than when he takes on a football theme such as this.

A SPARKLING SUPPLEMENT.

Bunter is in his stride next week with a side-splitting supplement, full of the best humour. Bunter has come back to work like a giant refreshed—the accent on the word giant.

FREE REAL PHOTOS.

Look out for these next Tuesday. They are prime. And don't forget that Victor Nelson will be all there with his grand serial, "The Rival Sportsmen." A final word in your ear—there are New Year surprises on the way.

Readers Notices.

Miss Edna M. Hall, 47, James Street, Work-sop, Notts, wishes to correspond with readers interested in boxing and football, also to exchange cards.

Steve Shields, 18, Matilda Lane, Sheffield, wishes to correspond with readers in New Zealand or South Australia interested in coins, stamps, and postcard views; ages 16-17.

Private S. Turner and Private R. Swain, C Squadron, 16th (Queen's) Lancers, Lucknow, India, wish to correspond with readers.

Ronald P. Langley, 42, Clifton Street, Brighton, Sussex, wishes to correspond with readers overseas, ages 15-19. He would also like to hear from possible members of his correspondence club. All letters answered.

Charles McConnell and John Ross, 163, First Avenue, E. Toronto, Canada, wish to correspond with readers of the Companion Papers. All letters answered.

Manson Harris, Kiharney Road, Frankton Junction, Waikato, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers, ages 17-18; anywhere; those interested in photography especially asked.

Merlin P. Harding, 98, Claremont Avenue, Malvern, Victoria, Australia, wishes to hear from readers ages 14-16, living in America preferred; interested in sports, drawing, and swimming. All letters answered.

Dave Hastie, 45, Charles Street, Brunswick Victoria Australia, wishes to correspond with readers, also to exchange postcard views and newspapers.

H. Keeler, 1, Pastures, Scouthead, nr. Oldham, Lancs, wishes to correspond with

readers, ages 13-15, who are interested in amateur magazines.

Miss Mary Berman, 9, Rose Hill Street, Derby, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere, ages 14-17. All letters answered.

Miss Jennie Rubin, 74, Perkin Street, North End, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere. All letters answered. She would like to include a few Jewish readers among her correspondents.

Messrs. S. G. Lawson and S. Todd, 15, High Street, Penarth, South Wales, require a few correspondents on the subject of their magazine, "The Magnet Pals," ages 16-18. All letters answered.

Miss M. Roessler, Campbell House, 15, Pembury Road, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex, wishes to exchange postcard views with readers anywhere.

John Algic, 4, Balfour Street, Newtonards, Co. Down, Ireland, wishes to correspond with readers in Bangor, Co. Down, Ireland; ages 17-18; topics, sports of all kinds.

Sig. G. Rickett, Military Telephone Exchange, Staff Lines, Shorncliffe Camp, Kent, wishes to correspond with readers, especially those living in the Folkestone district.

Jacob Bergman, 1,119, City Hall Avenue, Montreal, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers outside Canada and the States who are interested in stamp collecting.

W. S. Ollett, 88, Newbury Road, Bromley, Kent, wishes to correspond with readers who are interested in electricity.

Miss Stella Williams, Rushey Siding, Babworth, Retford, Notts, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere; ages 14-16. All letters answered.

Jack Henry, jun., Lismore House, Eyrecourt, Co. Galway, Ireland, wishes to correspond with readers, ages 14-15; subjects, cricket and Rugby.

Allwaith Beach, Humber Bay, P.O., Toronto, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers, ages 15-18; those interested in foot racing and field events.

Miss Emmeline La Reserve, Seymour Street School, South End, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers, ages 20 upwards, in England, Scotland, Holland, Italy, Spain, France, and Canada.

Your Editor.

COMPLETE SET OF PARTS & BOOK OF INSTRUCTIONS FOR MAKING THE MASCO BIPLANE



PRICE 1/-

BUILD A GLIDER

All you have to do to make this fine scale model is to cut out our set of paper and cardboard parts, then erect the model just as if you were building a real plane. The model will glide and loop the loop when finished. It is complete in every detail and is exactly like the above illustration. The set of parts and instructions are packed in an attractive coloured carton and will be sent post free on receipt of 1/- P.O. If possible come and see our window display of Model Railways, Engines, Aeroplanes, Boats, and Electrical Models.

MASCO CO. (Dept. G), 56, Grey Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

BE TALLER.—Height will make you respected in business and private life. Students of the Givan Scientific Treatment report from 2 to 5 inches increase, with far better health. These advantages can be yours also if you are under 40. Over ten years' unblemished reputation. The increase is quite permanent. Send P.O. to-day for particulars and our £100 guarantee to ENQUIRY DEPT. A.M.P., 17, STROUD GREEN ROAD, LONDON, N. 4.

HOME CINEMATOGRAPHS.—Machines from 7/6; with Take-up, from £3. Large Stock of Films. Sample Film, 1/-. Post Free. Lists Free.—Desk E. DEAN CINEMA CO., 54, Drayton Avenue, West Ealing, W. 13.

Printed and published every Tuesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press (1923), Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4. Advertisement offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4. Registered for transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Subscription rates: Inland, 13s. per annum; 6s. 6d. for six months. Abroad, 11s. per annum; 6s. 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. (Canada). Saturday, December 30th, 1922.

HOME CINEMATOGRAPHS AND FILMS.



Send for New Free Illustrated List of Machines, Toy and Professional, from 10/6 upwards, and Accessories. Films, all lengths, for Sale or Exchange. Enquiries invited. Special Line, Cheap Cinemas for Shops.

FORD'S, Dept. A.P.,
13, Red Lion Square, London, W.G. 1.

MAGIC TRICKS, etc.—Parcels, 2/6, 5/6. Ventriloquist's Instrument. Invisible. Imitate Birds. Price 6d. each, 4 for 1/-.—T. W. Harrison, 239, Pentonville Rd., London, N. 1.

WIRELESS SETS.—The Simplest, Best, and Cheapest Sets and Parts for the Beginner. Illustrated Catalogue Free.—Desk E. DEAN TRADING CO., 94, Drayton Avenue, West Ealing, W. 13.

NERVOUS FEARS

How many people fear meeting others, travelling in Trains, Trams, Tubes, or Buses, mixing in Society, going into a Restaurant, or of having anything important to do. Such Nervous Fears are ruin to any man or woman's chance of success in life. Become Nerve-Strong, Self-Confident, Bright and Happy, by sending immediately 3 penny stamps for particulars of the Mento-Nerve Strengthening Treatment. **GUARANTEED CURE OR MONEY REFUNDED.—GODFREY ELLIOTT-SMITH, LTD., 643, Imperial Buildings, Ludgate Circus, London, E.C. 4.**

50 WAR & ARMISTICE STAMPS Free to applicants for Blue Label Approvals, enclosing post. Mention Gift 501. B. L. CORYN, Wave Crest, Whitstable, Kent.

CONJURING TRICKS GIVEN AWAY TO ALL

sending sixpence for Illustrated Catalogue of Tricks, Puzzles, Jokes. We will send absolutely free a Remarkable Card Trick. Write name and address plainly, enclose postal order sixpence, and address—**Desk LX, ECLIPSE NOVELTY CO., Francis Terrace, London, N. 19.**