

X A HAPPY NEW YEAR-CHUMS! X

The POPULAR

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2d
EVERY
TUESDAY.



"RUCTIONS ON THE SAMPSON RANCH!"
A Western Yarn of Thrills & Adventure - inside

RUCTIONS ON THE



How many times has the Rio Kid vowed he would keep out of other people's troubles? It must be dozens of times! But he's never been able to keep to that resolve! The Kid's in the thick of it again this week!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Trouble on the Ranch!

"YOU pesky, dog-goned, pie-faced gink!"

"Sho!"

"You gol-darned coyote—"

Old Man Sampson paused for breath.

"You're fired!" he spluttered.

For a good five minutes Old Man Sampson, of the Sampson Ranch, in the San Pedro country, had been "shooting off his mouth."

The Rio Kid, standing in the doorway of the bunkhouse at a little distance, looked on, and listened, and wondered.

It was Santa Fe Sam, the range rider, who was getting the rough edge of the boss' tongue.

Every unpleasant name that the boss could think of was hurled at the young rider; and Old Man Sampson occasionally shook his fist to give additional point to his remarks. Santa Fe Sam stood before him, with a meek expression on his sunburnt face, only interjecting a monosyllable or two.

The Rio Kid couldn't help wondering.

The Kid had recently joined the Sampson outfit, and for days he had been riding with the punchers. No man on the ranch knew, or dreamed, that the young puncher who had joined the outfit was anything but what he looked; the Kid was hundreds of miles now from the Frio country, and down in San Pedro, on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, they had never heard of the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande. The Kid hoped that they never would hear of him.

Riding with the Sampson outfit was a good deal like the old days at the Double-Bar at Frio, and the Kid was getting a happy and peaceful time. He liked the bunch, and the bunch liked him; and though Old Man Sampson was tart and testy, he never forgot that

the Kid had rendered him a big service in rounding up the gang who had been stealing beef from the ranch. No doubt that was why the Kid never got the rough edge of Old Man Sampson's tongue, as the rest of the bunch freely did.

The Kid, looking out of the bunkhouse, listening to the Old Man's tirade, wondered why Santa Fe Sam stood as meek as a boy before his schoolmaster, and let the boss bully-rag him to the top of his bent. The Kid certainly would not have been so patient had the boss turned that tirade upon him.

But the range rider did not seem to mind. Two or three other punchers glanced towards the scene, and grinned. The cook looked out of the chuck house and grinned, too. And the Kid wondered.

"You're fired!" roared Old Man Sampson, his white moustache bristling with wrath, his eyes glinting under his shaggy grey eyebrows. "You hear me shout? You can take your time instanter! Get off this ranch, you low-down, lazy, dog-goned geck!"

And, tired out by his own eloquence, Old Man Sampson turned and stamped back into the ranch-house and slammed the door after him.

"Sho!" said Santa Fe Sam.

And he wheeled and walked away to the bunkhouse, with a thoughtful expression on his face.

In the doorway he met the Rio Kid and gave him a grin.

"The Old Man was sure mad," he remarked.

"Sounded like," said the Kid. "What you been doing?"

"Me? Nothin'!"

"Shucks!" ejaculated the Kid. "I'll tell the world! Mean to say the Old Man poured all that out for nothing?"

"He's riled to-day," explained Sam.

He picked up his saddle and quirt from a bench in the bunkhouse.

"You don't seem to be mad with him," said the Kid.

"Nix."

"Leaving the ranch?"

"Nix."

"But you're fired," said the Kid, puzzled.

The rider grinned.

"Half the outfit's been fired lately," he answered. "It's jest the Old Man's way of expressin' his feelin's. He would sure be surprised if I quit."

"Oh!" said the Kid blankly.

"The Old Man's all right," explained Santa Fe Sam. "He's sure a good man, and a white man. If it helps him any to shoot off his mouth at a galoot, I ain't the feller to stop him. If it does him good, he's more than welcome."

"Oh, sho!" said the Kid.

The Rio Kid had already discovered that the bunch were devoted to their boss. Every day he heard Old Man Sampson slanging some member or other of the outfit; the Old Man's temper seemed to be raw all the time. Every man on the ranch packed a gun, and looked like a man who would use it. But they always took the boss' slanging like lambs.

"I sure reckoned you'd pull a gun on him when he was calling you them fancy names," said the Kid.

"I guess a galoot who pulled a gun on the Old Man would get his so sudden he wouldn't know what hit him," answered Santa Fe Sam. "You ain't had it yet, Carfax; but when you get it, you take it quiet, same as we do. The boss is a good little man, if he does shoot off his mouth to some extent. The boss is a good man and a square man, and don't you forget it."

The Kid nodded. He had a respect for the Old Man; but he could not see himself taking that tall talk as Sam had taken it.

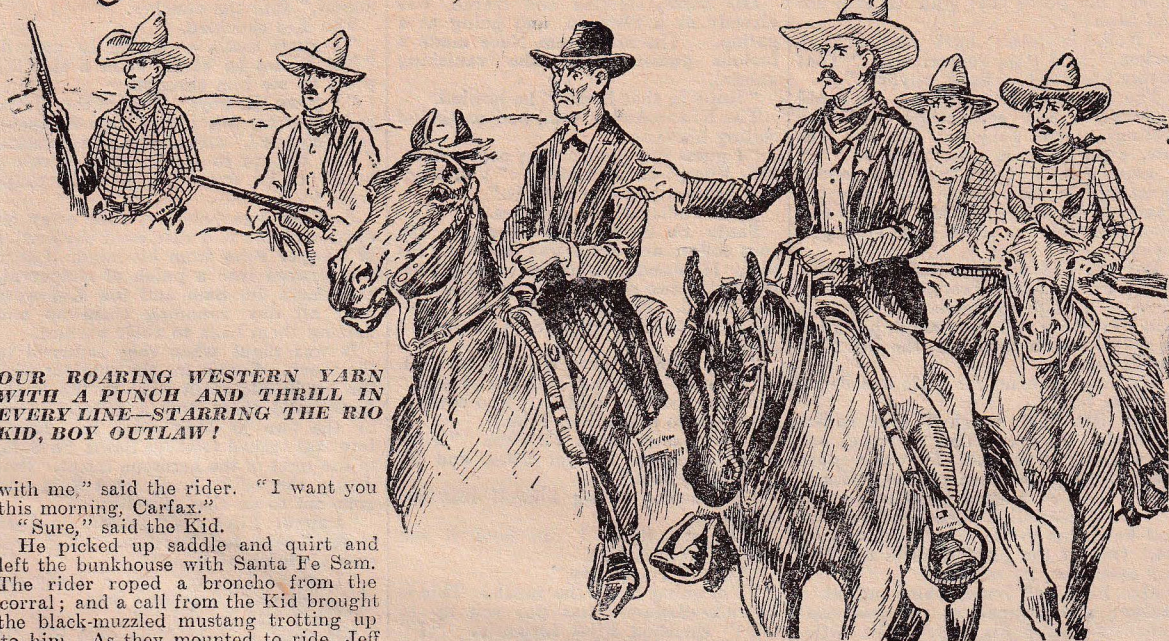
"You're new to the bunch," said Sam. "You don't savvy. The Old Man is up against trouble. But there ain't a man on this ranch that will quit, so long as it holds together. There's a lawyer coyote down at Nuce who's got his teeth into the Old Man's land, and if he's hopping mad, it's no wonder."

"Oh!" said the Kid.

"Get your cayuse and hit the trail

SAMPSON RANCH!

by RALPH REDWAY



OUR ROARING WESTERN YARN WITH A PUNCH AND THRILL IN EVERY LINE—STARRING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!

with me," said the rider. "I want you this morning, Carfax."

"Sure," said the Kid.

He picked up saddle and quirt and left the bunkhouse with Santa Fe Sam. The rider roped a broncho from the corral; and a call from the Kid brought the black-muzzled mustang trotting up to him. As they mounted to ride, Jeff Barstow, the foreman of the ranch, came up. Barstow's bearded face was grave and grim.

"The Old Man was sure mad this morning, Sam," he said.

"Madder'n a hornet," agreed Sam.

"That durned coyote is coming down from Nuce to-day," growled the foreman. "I reckon if it would do any good I'd fill him with lead when he shows his cabeza hyer."

"I guess I know he's due to-day," said Sam. "And the Old Man being so mad shows that he can't meet the mortgage."

"Sure."

"Mebbe that dog-goned scallyway, Files, won't hit the ranch to-day," said Sam.

"He's due."

"Mebbe he won't, all the same."

The foreman started a little.

"No shootin', Sam," he said.

"Shootin'," said Santa Fe Sam. "I wouldn't draw a gun on a skunk like Files. I got a quirt."

Jeff Barstow chuckled.

Santa Fe Sam gave his broncho a touch of the spur and rode away, the Rio Kid riding with him, in a very perplexed frame of mind.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Roped In!

FAR away from the ranch buildings the trail from Nuce to San Pedro followed the bank of a creek, which later on flowed into the inlet where the little coast town stood. By a big cottonwood tree, on the creek, Santa Fe Sam drew rein, and signed to the Kid to do likewise. The Kid reined in his mustang.

Not a word had been spoken during the ride, and the Kid wondered what the game was. It was not range riding that morning, at all events; he could see that his companion had quite other ideas in his mind, though he had not explained what they were.

Sitting in the saddle, Santa Fe Sam stared up the trail in the direction of the distant town of Nuce. There was no one in sight on the trail so far.

"I guess he'll be humping along soon," remarked the puncher.

"Who?" demanded the Kid.

"Lawyer Files, from Nuce."

"You're hyer to meet him?"

"Sure."

Santa Fe Sam cracked his quirt in the air.

"You better put me wise," suggested the Kid.

"I guess we're here to meet that durned coyote," said the puncher. "I guess I'm going to give him a quirtin', and then mebbe he'll be glad to hump it back to Nuce and keep there. He's the dog-gonedest, sneaking coyote in Nuce county, and I guess he's pinin' for it."

Far in the distance a hat bobbed on the trail. It announced the coming of a horseman, as yet out of sight.

"I guess I'll put you wise, Carfax," said Santa Fe Sam. "There's a stack of trouble at the ranch. Old Man Sampson's up agin it. Ain't you heard him blowin' off every day since you joined the bunch?"

"I sure have," grinned the Kid.

"There was drought last year, and it hit the Old Man hard," said Sam. "Then there was that pesky gang of thieves down at San Pedro, thinnin' out the herds, stealin' beef to sell to the coasting schooners. I guess you put the lid on that, Carfax, rounding up that gang as you did; but it'd been goin' on for a long time, and I guess it ate up the profits some. And then, the Old Man carries the whole bunch through the winter, instead of firing men like the other ranchers, and that costs money. But I guess the Old Man would have pulled out all right if he'd had a square deal. But he's too white a man to keep his end up with Lawyer Files.

He knows all about cows, but I guess he don't know much about signin' papers."

The Kid nodded; he could understand that.

"He got a loan from Files," went on Santa Fe Sam. "I guess he paid it, too, and a lot more; but there was interest pilin' up, and one thin' and another; and then there was a mortgage on the ranch. Every man in the bunch knows that the Old Man was rooked; Files has made money out of him hand over fist, and still there's the mortgage, and if it ain't met to-day, Files can foreclose if he likes—and you bet he's goin' to. Why, the ranch is worth ten times more'n he could claim on all his durned papers—but he's got the Old Man fixed, and he's got a pull at Nuce in the courts. He's comin' along to-day for ten thousand dollars, and I sure opine that the Old Man hasn't got half of it—that was why he was blowing off at me."

"It was sure mighty unreasonable," remarked the Kid.

"Oh, shucks!" snapped Santa Fe Sam. "Why shouldn't the Old Man blow off, if it does him any good?"

The Kid smiled.

"Ain't he got twice as many men in the bunch as he needs at this time of the year?" demanded the puncher. "He won't fire a man, the boss won't—only in the way of blowing off his mouth, and he don't mean it. I tell you, that coyote at Nuce has been bleedin' the Old Man white, and his game is near up; but so long as he's got a dollar left, he won't fire a man what's served him. Look how he gave you a job, because you rounded up that San Pedro bunch of beef stealers; and do you reckon he wanted an extra man, with half the outfit doin' nothin' at this time of year?"

"He's sure a white man," assented the Kid.

"And the bunch is goin' to stand by him," said Santa Fe Sam, with emphasis. "That Nuce galoot ain't gettin' to the ranch to-day with his dog-goned papers, to worry the Old Man. He sure ain't. Here he comes; and I've got a quirt hyer what says he ain't goin' any farther!"

"Oh, great gophers!" ejaculated the Kid. "I guess it might do him good, feller; but how's that goin' to help the Old Man?"

"Well, it won't hurt him any, I reckon," said Sam reflectively. "That coyote has got him fixed, anyhow."

The Kid whistled softly. He could understand and sympathise with the feelings of the puncher; but law was law, even when it was "squared" by a man with a "pull" in the courts. Quirting the man from Nuce was not likely, in the Kid's opinion, to help Old Man Sampson out of his legal entanglements.

But the Kid was not there to argue. Santa Fe Sam had brought him along to help, if help was necessary; and the Kid was ready to help, though he failed to see where the benefit to the Old Man would come in.

The horseman on the trail was drawing near now.

The Rio Kid watched him rather curiously. Lawyer Files, of Nuce, was not pleasing to the eye. He was a spare man, dressed in store clothes, with a Derby hat; he rode a good horse, but he rode it clumsily. His face was thin, and hard, his mouth like a gash, tight set. One of the hardest cases the Kid had ever seen, he reckoned.

Mr. Files, of Nuce, came up at a canter; and stopped as the two cow-punchers barred his way. His little, close-set black eyes gleamed at them.

"What's this?" he snapped. "Mr. Sampson sent you to meet me?"

"Nix! I reckon we've moseyed along sort of promiscuous," answered Santa Fe Sam. "You want to ride back to Nuce, Mr. Files, jest as quick as you know how."

"I'm going to the ranch."

"I guess not," said Sam coolly. "You're goin' back to Nuce, you dog-goned coyote, and you tell the galoots there what it's like to feel a cow-man's quirt across your pesky shoulders."

Santa Fe Sam's quirt whistled in the air. The lawyer from Nuce backed his horse swiftly, wheeled from the trail, and dashed into the plain, the quirt missing him by feet as it descended.

"Oh, sho!" ejaculated Sam.

With a thunder of hoofs, the man from Nuce dashed away at top speed, and the enraged puncher wheeled his broncho to pursue. But the cow-pony would never have overtaken the big-limbed "American" horse ridden by the man from Nuce, and Santa Fe Sam realised that at a glance; and his face flushed with rage as he dropped his hand to his gun.

There was a whiz in the air as the Rio Kid's riata flew.

The fifty-foot rope whirled in the air, and the loop dropped over the shoulders of the hard riding man from Nuce.

The Kid's mustang planted his forefeet firmly against the shock, as he was accustomed to do when the rider roped a steer.

For a second the man from Nuce rode wildly on; then the rope tightened, and he was plucked from the saddle like a bag of alfalfa.

Crash!

The horse dashed on, with swinging stirrups; and Lawyer Files, of Nuce, lay in the grass, wriggling in the rope and dazed by the shock. He lay there

gasping, as the two punchers rode up, and Santa Fe Sam dropped from the saddle, quirt in hand.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Quirting a Coyote I

THE Rio Kid shook loose his rope and coiled it. Lawyer Files sat up in the grass, spluttering with rage.

His horse, startled and scared, was already at a distance, and going at a gallop. The man from Nuce made a furious gesture after the vanishing animal.

"Rope in that horse!" he howled.

The Kid looked at him, and continued coiling his lasso.

"I guess you ain't giving orders hyer, Mr. Files," he remarked. "You want that cayuse, you hop after it."

"You ruffian!" roared Files.

Santa Fe Sam's grip closed on the coat collar, and Files was jerked to his feet. He stood panting for breath, glaring at the two punchers in mingled rage and dread. His foxy eyes were apprehensively on the quirt in Santa Fe Sam's grasp.

"You dare to touch me!" he panted.

"I guess I'd rather touch a polecat," drawled the Rio Kid. "You ain't a nice man to touch, Mr. Files."

"Git!" said Santa Fe Sam. "Turn round to Nuce, Lawyer Files, and hit the trail pronto."

The cowboy swung himself into the saddle.

"Do you think I can hoof it ten miles?" yelled Files.

"Sure! You got to."

"I'm going on to the ranch! This is a trick—Sampson has put you up to this!" shrieked Files furiously. "I'll sell him up! I'll beggar him! I'll drive him out of the country—"

The quirt cracked.

"You starting up the trail?" asked Santa Fe Sam. "Old Man Sampson don't know nothin' of this hyer stunt, and I guess he will jaw me like mad when he does know. But that don't cut no ice. I'm goin' to quirt you back to Nuce. Git goin'!"

And as Files still stood where he was, raving, the cow-puncher cracked the squirt round his long, thin legs, and the man from Nuce yelled with anguish, and started up the trail at a run.

Santa Fe Sam rode after him, the quirt singing in the air.

Lash after lash rang round the lawyer's legs, and across his back, and he ran frantically, yelling at every jump.

"Oh, shucks!" ejaculated the Rio Kid, staring after them. "I guess this ain't no funeral of mine, but that sure won't make the galoot feel any more sweet towards the Sampson outfit, and I'm a-shoutin' it! I reckon it ain't for me to horn in, but that sure will make the scallywag hoppin' mad."

For a moneylender who had got his grip on a rancher's land, the Kid was not likely to feel any sympathy. But he did not figure that Santa Fe Sam was doing any good, apart from the personal satisfaction he derived from quirting the lawyer.

But no doubt he had a heap of satisfaction from that. He looked like it, as he spurred his broncho after the fleeing man from Nuce, and lashed and lashed with the cracking thong.

For a mile up the trail, Santa Fe Sam pursued the hopping, bounding, yelling lawyer, lashing with the quirt, and then, at last he cantered back and rejoined the Rio Kid, grinning.

Lawyer Files, hatless, yelling raving, vanished up the creek.

"I guess that scallywag has been

asking for that, for dog's ages," said Santa Fe Sam, breathing hard. "It's sure come home to him now. He can tell them in Nuce how lawyer coyotes are handled on the Sampson ranch."

"He sure can," agreed the Kid. "You reckon that will keep him clear of the Old Man, feller?"

"Waal, I guess he won't come moseying on this ranch agin in a hurry, nohow," said the puncher.

The Kid chuckled.

"I guess that's a cinch," he agreed. "Not unless he comes with a sheriff's posse to see him through."

"I guess the boys will give the sheriff and his posse fits, if Old Man Sampson says the word," answered Santa Fe Sam. "Now we got to ride, feller—there's a bunch to be drove in from the chaparral."

And the two punchers rode away on duty, and the Kid dismissed the matter of Lawyer Files from his mind. Cattle had strayed into a patch of chaparral, and Santa Fe Sam and the Kid were busy all day rounding them up and driving them back to their pasture.

It was night when they returned to the ranch. Except for the men out with the herds, the outfit were in the bunk-house, and there was a general shout to the two as they came in. Every face was turned towards Santa Fe Sam, in the light of the kerosene lamps. Evidently the outfit knew what Sam had gone out to do that morning.

"Lawyer Files ain't turned up hyer to-day," said Jeff Barstow. "You 'uns seen anything of him?"

"I guess I sorter saw a scallywag about his size," answered Sam.

"What was he doin'?"

"Hoppin' back to Nuce with a quirt round his laigs."

There was a roar of laughter in the bunk-house. Santa Fe Sam's drastic methods with the "coyote" met with the full approval of the Sampson bunch. But the Kid could not help having his doubts. Sam was giving a description of the encounter with Lawyer Files, amid loud chuckles from the bunch when Old Man Sampson looked into the bunk-house doorway. There was silence at once at sight of the rancher. The Old Man was not in a temper now—but all the bunch would have preferred to see him in a rage, to seeing him with the anxious, harassed look that was on his kind old face now.

"You-uns seen anything of that coyote from Nuce?" the Old Man, asked looking from face to face. "He sure ain't come."

"I—I guess he ain't coming, boss," faltered Santa Fe Sam.

"He sure was coming," said Old Man Sampson, looking more harassed than before. "I sure hope you 'uns ain't been cavorting around playing any locoed tricks on that coyote."

"What's the harm in quirting him a few, boss?" asked Sam.

"Oh, thunder," said the rancher. "That's it, is it? I sort of allowed it might be. You gink, you!"

Santa Fe Sam stood abashed.

"I guess you can jaw me all you want, boss," he said meekly. "I ain't got no kick coming."

But the boss, rather to the surprise of the bunk-house crowd, did not "jaw" the reckless puncher.

He sighed.

"I reckon you meant well, Sam," he said. "You're a dog-goned gink, but you sure meant well. I dunno that it makes any pow'ful difference, either. Forget it."

And the rancher turned away, and walked back to the house, leaving the outfit looking at one another in silence.

**THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Guns to the Fore!**

THE Rio Kid had gone into the chuck house for bacon and beans at noon the next day, when Santa Fe Sam put his head in at the door and shouted:

"Hyar, you Carfax!"
"Hallo!" drawled the Kid.
"Got your gun?"
"Sure."
"You'll want it, come and join the boys."

The puncher hurried away, and the Kid, leaving his dinner untasted, followed him from the chuck house, hitching round his holster as he went, to bring his gun within easy reach.

A dozen men of the outfit were gathering before the ranch-house, with Jeff Barstow the foreman at their head. Every man packed a gun, and one or two had brought out rifles. Even the cook came out of the chuck house with a Colt in his grip. The Rio Kid joined the crowd cheerfully, he was ready to draw a gun along with the bunch in any trouble that came along.

Far across the plain, bobbing over the grass, appeared a bunch of horsemen, heading for the ranch.

The Rio Kid eyed them curiously.

"What's the gol-darned rookus?" he asked.

Barstow glanced at him.

"You're new here, Carfax, you can vamoose if you like. I guess this ain't no quarrel of yours. Slide out if you want."

"Aw, forget it," drawled the Kid. "If this bunch is pulling guns, I guess my gun is talking as soon as any. But put a feller wise. What's the pesky trouble?"

Barstow pointed to the distant bunch of riders. Seven men were to be counted. One, dressed in black with a Derby hat, the Kid recognised, even at the distance as Lawyer Files. The others he did not know.

"That's the sheriff's posse from Nuce!" said the foreman of the ranch.

"Great gophers!" ejaculated the Kid, in amazement. "You'uns pulling guns on a sheriff's posse?"

"We sure are," said the foreman. "If that bunch is coming to give the Old Man trouble we're pulling guns fast enough. They ain't serving any of their durned papers on the Old Man, while this outfit is around, and don't you forget it."

The Kid whistled.

"But you ain't no call to horn in," went on Jeff. "You're a stranger in this hyer country and a kid at that, and you don't want to hunt trouble with any sheriff. You slide."

The Kid chuckled involuntarily. He had had more trouble with sheriffs, in many parts of Texas, than the whole of the Sampson bunch were ever likely to see.

"Feller, I don't take that kind," said the Kid. "You sure hurt my feelin's. I allow you're a bunch of locoed moss-heads if you start anything with a sheriff and his posse, but if you do, I guess it's me for a front seat."

"Just as you like," said the foreman, shrugging his shoulders. He turned to the grim-looking bunch. "Don't you boys loose off a shot till I give the word. But them scallywags ain't getting this hyer ranch off the Old Man while we pack guns, nchow."

"I reckon not," said Santa Fe Sam. And there was a fierce, deep murmur from the group of punchers. All eyes were fixed on the horsemen from Nuce, as they came up at a gallop. The sheriff, a burly man with a tanned face, rode a little ahead, on his coat gleaming the silver star that was his badge of office. No doubt the sheriff of Nuce displayed that badge of authority intentionally, as a warning to the Sampson outfit.

The horsemen clattered up and halted. The Kid eyed them. The sheriff looked a determined man. His five deputies carried rifles across their saddles, and looked the men to use them. Lawyer Files glanced at the crowd of punchers,

in the ranch, pending the proceedings of the court!" rapped out Files. "If the money ain't paid down on the nail this very day, the mortgage is foreclosed, and I guess I ain't allowing cattle to be driven off into the hills, not if I know it. Not a stick stirs from that house, and not a hoof or a horn from the ranch. You get me?"

"I sure get you," assented the foreman. "And now you get me! Ride back the way you come, afore we pull on you!"

Files' eyes glistened.

"Sheriff, do your duty!" he rapped out.

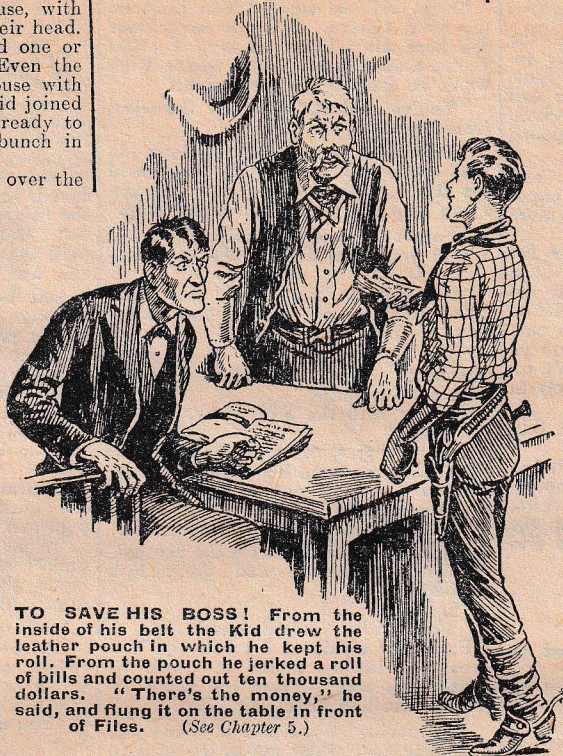
"Boys," said the sheriff of Nuce, "You can't buck agin the law that-a-way. I ain't here for burning powder, if I can help it. But Mr. Files is within his legal rights, and I got to see him through. Don't you draw a gun, any of you bunch—in the name of the law!"

The name of the law seemed to have no terrors for the Sampson bunch. Guns were drawn on all sides.

The sheriff's hard face grew grimmer. His men were handling their rifles now; and Lawyer Files backed his horse. The Rio Kid pushed forward a little, between the two groups.

"Fellers," he said. "I reckon it ain't for me to chew the rag, but I sure do advise you to let up on this. Old Man Sampson would never stand for it if he was here. I guess we can wipe out that crowd, if we want. But what then? You'll be a bunch of outlaws, after shooting up a sheriff and his posse. Fellers, I reckon you've really got another guess coming."

The Kid spoke earnestly. He was heard, and soul with the devoted bunch that were prepared to risk everything to defend their boss, the hapless rancher who had been caught in the toils of chicane. But the consequences, of which the excited punchers did not think, were very clear to the



TO SAVE HIS BOSS! From the inside of his belt the Kid drew the leather pouch in which he kept his roll. From the pouch he jerked a roll of bills and counted out ten thousand dollars. "There's the money," he said, and flung it on the table in front of Files. (See Chapter 5.)

and his foxy eyes glittered at Santa Fe Sam and the Kid. But he did not speak. It was the sheriff who opened the proceedings

"Mornin', you 'uns!" he said gruffly. "Old Man Sampson to home?"

Barstow moved forward.

"Never mind Old Man Sampson," he answered curtly. "Afore you light down from that cayuse, sheriff, jest spill what you've come for."

The sheriff of Nuce made a gesture towards Files.

"Mr. Files came along yesterday, and was turned back by a puncher," he said. "He claimed protection to call on Mr. Sampson and serve him with a paper. That's why we're here!"

"I figured that it was that-a-way," assented Barstow. "I guess that coyote is hyer to collect ten thousand dollars that the Old Man don't owe him. Waal, I can tell him it won't be paid to-day, and I guess the whole bunch is wise to that, and it ain't no secret. So you can ride back to Nuce and take Lawyer Files along."

"I demand to see Mr. Sampson!" snapped Files.

"He sure ain't to home at present," drawled the foreman. "Not bein' around, you can't see him!"

"Then the sheriff will leave two men

Kid's mind.

It was strange enough that the Kid, hunted by half the sheriffs of Texas, an outlaw, with a price on his head, should be the one to call for peace and obedience to the law. But the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande knew only too well the heavy price to be paid for defiance of the law, and his heart ached for the brave and reckless men who were bringing upon themselves the penalty of outlawry.

"I guess that kid's giving you good advice, fellers," said the sheriff of Nuce. "He's sure talking hoss-sense."

There was a growl of rage from the bunch.

"You pesky scallywag, if you ain't got any sand in your craw, slide out afore we burn powder!" shouted Jeff. "Quit chewing the rag and beat it!"

The Kid flushed crimson.

"I reckon it ain't that, feller," he said. "If you come to shooting, you'll sure find my gun barking with the rest. But it's a fool game and the Old Man wouldn't stand for it!"

"You shet your yaup-trap and git!" snapped Barstow.

"I'll shut my yaup-trap, but I ain't gitting any," answered the Kid, and he ranged himself with the Sampson bunch, revolver in hand. "I'm with

this bunch, tooth and toenail, till the cows come home."

There was a clatter of hoofs, and Old Man Sampson came galloping up to the spot. His face was crimson with haste as he spurred on his horse, and he waved his hand excitedly to the bunch. Breathless, he dashed between the two contending parties.

"You loosed ginks, put up your guns!" he roared. "Sharp! Put up them shootin'-irons, you durned gecks! You figure you're going to fire on the sheriff, durn your pesky hides. Do you reckon I want to see this bunch hanged up in a row on the cottonwoods at Nuce? Put up them guns!"

"Look hyer, boss—" growled Barstow.

"Aw, can it!" snapped the rancher. "Put up them guns, I'm telling you!"

There was hesitation among the punchers. But the Kid was deeply relieved. He had seen the Old Man spurring up from the distance, and he had gained time for the rancher's arrival. The threatened bloodshed was postponed now, at least.

As the punchers growled and muttered, Old Man Sampson's anger faded out of his face, and he spoke more gently.

"Boys, this hyer ain't a matter for gun-play," he said quietly. "I been cinched by an ornery coyote, but the law's the law. No man hyer is goin' to buck agin the law. I ask you, boys, as a last favour, put up them guns, and go to the bunkhouse quiet. You ain't refusing the last thing I'm ever likely to ask, boys!"

Jeff Barstow shoved his gun back into its holster.

"It's your say-so, boss!" he grunted. And he strode away to the bunkhouse, and the punchers slowly followed him, with glares of defiance back at the horsemen from Nuce. But the Rio Kid did not follow.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Kid Works the Rifle!

OLD MAN SAMPSON turned to the sheriff.

"I reckon you don't want to be mad with the boys, sheriff," he said quietly. "They was sure a little on the prod. You can come into the house, Mr. Files; I guess it belongs to you from now on."

The "coyote" from Nuce smiled sourly as he slid from his saddle. The sheriff and his men stood by their horses as the man in black followed the rancher into the house. The Rio Kid stood for some moments in thought, and then he, too, went into the porch.

Mr. Files had sat down, already with an air of proprietorship. Old Man Sampson did not sit down. He stood facing the man from Nuce, with a grim

expression on his grizzled face. The lawyer had taken a bundle of papers from his pocket; but the old man waved them aside.

"I reckon it ain't no use chewing the rag, Files," he said. "You've come here for ten thousand dollars, and I guess you won't take half and renew."

"I guess not," said Mr. Files, showing his teeth in a smile.

"I reckoned that was the sort of ornery cuss you was," said the rancher. "You want the ranch, and you've got me fixed."

The Rio Kid stepped lightly into the room.

"I guess if you'll let a galoot horn in, boss—" he said.

The rancher turned to him.

"Beat it!" he said. "You ain't no use hyer, Carfax. I'm sure sorry your job here ain't likely to last; I allow you're a good man. But I reckon Files won't be keeping on the bunch."

"You've said it," assented the man from Nuce.

"This hyer ranch don't belong to that dog-goned coyote yet, boss," said the Rio Kid cheerfully, "and I reckon I can help you keep it out of his grip."

"Forget it," said the rancher. "Ain't I told you there ain't to be any gun-play? Quit!"

"Gun-play nothin'!" said the Kid. "You want ten thousand dollars to get clear of that buzzard, boss."

"You going to lend it to me, puncher?" asked Old Man Simpson, with a faint smile.

"Sure!" said the Kid coolly.

"What?"

The rancher spun round, and Lawyer Files half rose from his chair in alarm. But he sat down again with a contemptuous smile.

"We're wasting time!" he snapped.

"I reckon that's so," said the rancher. "You git, Carfax; and don't talk foolish!"

The Kid smiled.

"Money talks!" he answered. From the inside of his belt the Kid drew the leather pouch in which he packed his roll. From the pouch he jerked a roll of bills.

The rancher stared at him open-eyed, open-mouthed. Files sat as if glued to his chair, gasping.

One by one the Kid peeled bills from his roll; ten bills, one after another, each of the denomination of a thousand dollars.

"Carry me home to die!" murmured the astounded rancher.

Files sat as if stunned.

"Money talks!" said the Kid cheerfully. "I reckon, Mr. Sampson, that I wasn't exactly broke to the world when I asked you for a place on your payroll. I sure wanted to punch cows with

the bunch, seein' that I was bred to cows. But once I went fossicking for gold in Arizona, and I sure struck it rich; and when I hit the trail out of Arizona, feller, I took a hundred thousand dollars in my roll. I guess some of it's spread its ornery wings and flew; but there's sure a heap left." He turned to the man from Nuce. "Count them bills, you ornery gink, and give a receipt!"

The lawyer only gasped.

"I guess I'm dreaming this," said Old Man Sampson, passing his hand across his brow. "I'm sure dreaming this hyer."

"Dreamin' nothin'!" said the Kid. "Don't I keep on telling you that money talks?"

The rancher stared at the bills, and stared at the Kid. For a long minute he was silent.

"I guess I can't touch it, feller," he said at last.

"Aw, forget it!" said the Kid. "I sure know what this ranch is worth, and you'll pay it back easy after the next round-up. I'll sure be glad to leave it in safe hands; you'll be doin' me a favour to take care of it, boss." And as the rancher still hesitated, the Kid went on: "Call it a cinch, or, by gum, I'll drill that ornery coyote there, where he sits, and cinch it that-a-way!"

And the Kid whipped out a gun; and the man from Nuce started to his feet with a yell of terror.

"Is it a cinch, boss?" demanded the Kid, covering the lawyer with a gun.

The rancher grinned.

"It's a cinch," he said.

"Good enough!" drawled the Kid; and he holstered his gun and walked out.

He was humming a tune as he joined the bunch at the bunkhouse. The punchers glared at him.

"What makes you so durned spry, you gink?" snapped Jeff Barstow. "You figure that it's funny to see the Old Man sold up?"

"Sold up nothin'!" drawled the Kid. "The Old Man's fixed to square that coyote, and I'm telling you so. You watch out, and you'll see him beat it like a whipped dog!"

"You don't say!" exclaimed Santa Fe Sam.

"Watch out!" answered the Kid.

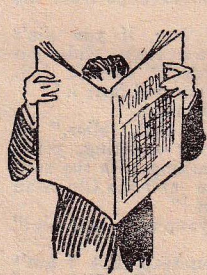
"By gum!"

Ten minutes later Lawyer Files, with a face that was white with rage and chagrin, was riding away with the sheriff's posse to Nuce. He had ten thousand dollars in his pocket, but he had lost his grip on the Sampson ranch, and lost it for ever.

And the bunch marvelled and rejoiced—and they marvelled still more a day or two later when they learned that Carfax, the new puncher, had become a partner in the ranch. So the Old Man had decided; and the Kid let him have his way. But, partner as he was, the bunch found no change in the Kid; still the same cheery comrade in the bunkhouse and on the range.

THE END.

(What do you think of these Wild West yarns? Aren't they GREAT? There's nothing like them on the market—nothing! And isn't the Rio Kid a lad for adventures? Every week he falls into some new and fearful peril, or bumps into someone's troubles! Next week this boy outlaw finds himself landed in the greatest adventure of his life. Look out for: "SHANGHAIED!")



If you see it in —

MODERN BOY

It is so! Every Monday 2d

AN ENEMY IN THEIR MIDST!

Aubrey Angel, the rascal of the Fourth, has always been up against the Famous Five, ready to do them a bad turn if ever the chance arose. And this week an opportunity does come, in which he can seek vengeance!



ANGEL'S REVENGE!

BY
FRANK RICHARDS.

(Author of the famous stories of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, appearing in the "Magnet" every Saturday.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Awful for Aubrey!

"I WON'T!"

Dicky Nugent of the Second Form at Greyfriars made that statement at the top of his voice. "I won't go! I tell you I won't go!" "I think you will!" grinned Bob Cherry.

And Nugent minor did. In spite of his emphatic statement on the subject, Dicky Nugent really had no choice about the matter.

There were five members of the Remove gathered round the fag; and they were propelling him in one direction, and Dicky's desire to escape in the opposite direction did not count.

Harry Wharton had taken hold of Dicky's left arm; Bob Cherry had a grip on his right. Johnny Bull had taken his collar. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was walking in advance, with one of Dicky's ankles tucked under either arm. Frank Nugent, Dicky's elder brother, brought up the rear.

Frank Nugent was frowning; but his comrades were grinning. As for Dicky Nugent, he was shouting with wrath.

"I won't—I won't go!"
"This way, dear boy!" chuckled Bob.
"I won't!"
"Cut ahead, Franky, and get Angel's door open."

Harry Wharton & Co.—with their unwilling companion of the Second—were progressing along the Fourth Form passage. Several Fourth-Formers were putting their heads out of their studies to stare at them. The door of Study No. 4, which belonged to Aubrey Angel of the Fourth, remained closed—till Nugent reached it. Frank Nugent did not knock at the door; he hurled it wide open with a crash.

There was a sharp exclamation in the study.

Angel of the Fourth was seated there, in his armchair, with his feet resting on the table. The blue smoke of a cigarette floated up before him; that

was one of the little ways of Angel of the Fourth. But he jumped up, almost swallowing the cigarette, as his door was hurled open, crashing.

"What the thump—" exclaimed Angel angrily.

"Bring him in!"
"We're bringing him!"
"I won't go!" roared Dicky.
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh appeared in the doorway, with Nugent minor's boots showing under his armpits. Wharton and Johnny Bull followed him in with the rest of Nugent minor.

Aubrey Angel stared at the startling apparition blankly.

"What's this silly game?" he exclaimed. "What do you mean by buttin' into my study like this?"

"Here we are again!" sang out Bob Cherry cheerily. "Dump him down!"

Nugent minor was dumped down on Angel's expensive carpet.

"What does this mean?" shouted Angel. "How dare you butt into my study—a gang of rowdy fags?"

"Pitch into him, Franky!" said Bob. "I've got something to say to you, Angel, and I've brought my minor to hear it," said Frank Nugent.

"I don't want to hear it, and I don't want to see you, or your minor either!" snapped Angel.

"That makes no difference—you've got to."

"Get out of my study!" flared Angel.

Taking no heed of that command, Frank Nugent felt in his pocket, and produced a rather crumpled cigarette. He laid it on the table, and Angel stared at it.

"You gave that to my minor?" said Nugent.

"Did I?"
"You did."

"I may have," remarked Angel carelessly. "What about it? I dare say the kid ran on a message for me, and I chucked him a cigarette."

"It's not the first time," said Frank.

"I dare say it won't be the last, either," yawned Angel. "Shut the door after you, will you?"

"It's going to be the last time," said Frank. "You can play what silly and dirty tricks you like yourself, but you're not going to teach my young brother to play the fool. I found Dicky with this cigarette, and took it away from him."

Aubrey Angel shrugged his shoulders. "You needn't have done that," he said. "I'd have given you one if you'd asked me."

"I've brought it here," said Nugent, unheeding. "You're going to eat it, Angel."

"Eh?"
"Eat it!"
"Is that a joke?"

"You'll find that it isn't. You seem to find something funny and amusing in teaching a kid in the Second Form to make a fool of himself. Perhaps you'll find it very funny to swallow that cigarette, as you've got such a sense of humour. Go ahead!"

Angel of the Fourth threw himself into the armchair again, with an affectation of indifference that he was far from feeling.

"If you've finished, clear out!" he said.

Nugent glanced round the study, and then picked up a light walking-cane from the corner of the room.

"Put him over something!" he said. "You bet!" grinned Bob.

Wharton and Bob advanced on the dandy of the Fourth, and Aubrey Angel jumped up again. His affectation of indifference was quite dropped now.

"Keep off!" he panted. "You rotters! Hands off! Ow—"

In the grasp of the two Removites Angel was sprawled across the table, face down.

Nugent poised the cane. "Are you going to eat that cigarette, Angel?"

"No!"

Whack!

The cane came down across Angel's well-cut trousers. There was a fiendish yell from Aubrey.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Whack!

"I'm keeping this up," said Nugent, "till you've eaten the cigarette. I fancy that will be a lesson to you—the lesson you want. It's within your reach when you want it."

"Let me go!"

Whack!

The yell that followed that whack rang the length of the Fourth Form passage. Outside the shut door there was an excited buzz of voices. Johnny Bull thoughtfully turned the key in the

lock. Interference from Aubrey's friends in the Fourth was not wanted until the young rascal had been dealt with.

There was a thump on the door, and the voice of Cecil Reginald Temple, the captain of the Fourth, was heard.

"What's goin' on in there? What are you Remove fags up to?"

"Snuff!" answered Bob Cherry.

"Are they raggin' you, Angel?"

"Yes!" howled Aubrey. "Rescue! Yaroooooh!"

Whack!

"It's all right, Temple!" called out Harry Wharton. "Angel's been giving a cigarette to a fag, and we're making him eat it! Nothing for you to get your rag out about."

"Oh," Temple chuckled, "is that it? Make him eat a dozen, if you like, the dashed rotter!"

And Cecil Reginald Temple walked away. Angel had no help to expect from Cecil Reginald.

Whack!

"You—you rotter, stoppit!" yelled Angel in anguish. "I—I won't do it again. On my honour! Ow!"

"Your honour would be a pretty rotten reed to lean on, I think!" said Nugent. "Are you eating that cigarette?"

"Ow! No! Ow!"

Whack!

"Oh crumbs! Oh gad! I—I will if you like!"

Angel could stand no more. This was as bad as a Head's flogging, and Aubrey was not of the stuff that heroes are made. He clutched up the cigarette, crumbled it, and thrust it into his reluctant mouth. His expression as he began to chew was extraordinary.

Even Dicky Nugent grinned at the queer look on Aubrey Angel's face.

"Go it!" said Bob Cherry encouragingly. "You're awfully fond of baccy, you know—or make out you are! Pile in! You don't seem to be really enjoying that cigarette!"

"Groooogh!"

"Buck up!"

"Gug-gug-gug!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Angel sat upon the table to masticate his peculiar meal. The Famous Five were ready for him if he stopped. But he did not dare to stop. He could stand no more of the flogging.

"You're taking a long time over one cigarette, Angel!" remarked Bob Cherry. "Don't you like it?"

"Groooogh!"

Angel's complexion was turning green. He was feeling, by this time, as if he were on a Channel steamer upon a particularly rough day. He turned a ghastly face towards the chums of the Remove.

"I—I can't go on!" he gasped. "I—I—I'm goin' to be sick! I—I can't go on! Oh dear! Ow! Groooogh!"

Harry Wharton glanced at Frank.

"Will that do?" he asked.

"Yes, let the cad off with that!" said Nugent. "I dare say he's had enough for a lesson!"

"Looks like it!" grinned Johnny Bull. Aubrey Angel rolled off the table and hung over the fender, strange sounds proceeding from him. Johnny Bull opened the study door.

"Better give your minor a taste of the cane, Franky!" he suggested. Nugent shook his head. He preferred to take the view that Angel of the Fourth was to blame. That scene in Angel's study, under the fag's staring eyes, was quite enough to make Dicky unpopular there in the future, Nugent considered.

THE POPULAR.—No. 519.

"Come on!" he said.

The Famous Five left the study, leaving Aubrey Angel still hanging in anguish over the fender, wishing from the bottom of his heart that the tobacco-plant had never been discovered. Dicky Nugent lingered a moment, looking at him. The magnificent Aubrey, who had quite dazzled the foolish fag with his magnificence, had fallen from his high estate now. There was an almost contemptuous grin on Dicky's face as he turned to go.

He went, and Aubrey Angel was left alone. For some time afterwards horrid sounds were heard in the study, and every now and then the door opened, and a fellow would look in at Angel of the Fourth and grin. The whole Fourth Form passage was chortling over the episode, and fellows came from far and near to look at Aubrey. There was no doubt that Aubrey had had a lesson—a lesson that he could not possibly forget in a hurry—and the Famous Five of the Remove charitably hoped that it would do him good.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. On the Warpath!

ANGEL of the Fourth did not enjoy life during the next few days. The ragging in his study was the joke of the House.

It would not have been talked of so much had Angel of the Fourth been a less magnificent and "swanky" individual. But Aubrey Angel had always been very prominent, and he had a supercilious and high-sniffing manner that made many fellows dislike him and sometimes envy him.

He was not good at games, and he had never shown up as a fighting man. But he was wealthy, he was well-connected, he was cool and unscrupulous, and he had made himself of consequence. Now, like Lucifer, Son of the Morning, he had fallen from his high estate, and great was the fall thereof.

Fags of the Second and Third, who had looked up to him with awe, now openly grinned when he passed them in the passages.

In the Fourth he met many glances of scorn.

He had asked for that ragging, and had fully deserved it; but he was not expected to take it quietly, as he seemed decided upon doing.

Cecil Reginald Temple, the captain of the Fourth, looked in on Angel the next day to put it to him plainly. Angel greeted him with a dark scowl.

"Lookin' for a second?" asked Temple.

"A what?" snapped Aubrey.

"Second, dear man!"

"No!"

"You're fightin' without seconds?" asked Temple, raising his eyebrows.

"I'm not fightin' anybody!" growled Angel, his colour deepening.

"Oh!" said Temple. "Well, if you won't fight one of those Remove chaps you'll have to fight little me."

"Well, I'm not goin' any further with it!" said Angel sullenly.

"You won't pick a man out of that Remove crowd and fight him?"

"No."

"Good!" Temple pushed back his cuffs. "Come on!"

"Eh! What?"

"Come on!"

"I'm not fightin' you, you ass!" howled Angel.

"You are, unless you stand up to one of the Remove. You can take your choice," said the captain of the Fourth. Angel sat and stared at him savagely.

If he was going to fight he realised that he might as well fight an enemy as the captain of his own Form. And he could see that Temple was in deadly earnest.

"Look here, Temple——" he began.

"I'm waitin' for you."

"If you really think I ought to carry this matter further——"

"I've said so."

"Well, I'll take your advice," said Angel unwillingly. "I'm not afraid of the cads, of course."

"Good, man!" said Temple. "Pick out the merry victim, and I'll be your second."

"Oh, Nugent!" said Angel. "He was the cause of the trouble."

Temple grinned. Angel had obviously picked out Nugent, not because he had started the trouble, but because he was supposed to be the least formidable of the Famous Five.

"Nugent will do!" said Temple. "Come on!"

"No hurry, I suppose?"

"Strike while the iron's hot. You might forget all about it, you know," said Temple sarcastically. "We can't have Remove fags sayin' that the Fourth are afraid of them. Come on, old bean!"

Aubrey Angel reluctantly accompanied Temple from the study. Dabney and Fry of the Fourth joined them in the passage.

"Marchin' on to war?" grinned Fry.

"That's it. Angel's simply burnin' for the fray, and I'm goin' to see him through. You fellows come?"

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

If Angel was burning for the fray his look belied him as he went along to the Remove passage with Temple & Co. But he went. Billy Bunter was the first to spot their arrival, and he gave a howl.

"I say, you fellows, here's Angel! He wants another feed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent were preparing tea in Study No. 1 when the little procession arrived.

"What the thump——" said Harry.

Cecil Reginald Temple proceeded to explain.

"Angel's challenging Nugent to fight. Will you have it here or in the gym?"

"We've got some gloves here," said Wharton. "We can put the table out of the way. You ready, Frank?"

Nugent laughed.

"Quite!"

"Take off your jackets," said Temple. "Who's goin' to keep time? I will, if you like, and Dab can second Angel."

"Any old thing," said Nugent carelessly.

"I say, you fellows, there's a fight in Study No. 1!" bawled Billy Bunter along the Remove passage.

And there was a rush of the Removees to witness it. Vernon-Smith and Peter Todd squeezed into the study; Tom Brown and Hazeldene and Russell blocked the doorway. Behind them, Bolsover major, Skinner, and Redwing and Squiff, Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh, and a dozen more fellows, crowded as near as they could. Most of the juniors were grinning. Aubrey Angel on the warpath was something new, and they did not take him very seriously as a warrior.

Angel stripped off his well-fitting jacket, which came off very slowly, perhaps on account of its excellent fit. The boxing-gloves went on more slowly still. But Aubrey was ready at last.

"Ready, you fellows?" asked Temple, taking out the handsome gold watch that was famous in the Fourth Form.

"Long ago," said Nugent politely.

"You, Angel?"

"Yes!" snapped Aubrey.

"Time!"

"Go it, ye cripples!" said Bob Cherry. And they went it.

For the space of ten minutes Angel had the time of his life. His savage attack was met and stopped, and he was knocked right and left. For a full minute in the fourth round he stood up to the punishment, and then he went down—unnecessarily—and stayed down.

"Pick him up!" grinned the Bouncer. "Prop him up! He won't stand up unless he's propped!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Up with you, Angel!" exclaimed Dabney.

Angel groaned. He made an apparent effort to rise, and sank on the carpet.

"I—I can't!" he gasped.

Temple, with a frowning brow, was counting. He did not hurry over the count.

But he might have counted ten thousand instead of ten, and Aubrey Angel would have remained on the carpet until he had finished. Angel had had enough—more than enough—and he would not face any more punishment.

"Out!" said Temple at last reluctantly. He snapped his watch away.

"Call that a fight?" said Fry, with deep disgust. "You can get up now, Angel—you're safe!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Aubrey Angel staggered to his feet. His nose was streaming red, and his rather handsome features looked damaged. And he gasped and gasped and gasped for breath.

"I've done my best!" he panted.

"What would your worst have been like?" asked Fry

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

Nugent tossed aside the gloves and resumed his jacket. He had scarcely been marked, and was good for a dozen rounds yet with an adversary like Angel.

"Take it away with you!" said Wharton, as Temple & Co. stamped angrily to the door.

"It" was Aubrey Angel. But Temple & Co. tramped off without heeding, greatly exasperated by the result of the fight. Harry Wharton kindly helped Angel on with his jacket, and received a bitter glare in return. The dandy of the Fourth limped out of the study with his handkerchief to his nose, and a howl of laughter followed him down the Remove passage.

With that sound of mockery ringing in his ears, Angel of the Fourth got back to his own quarters.

"I'll make them squirm for it, somehow!" he gasped. "The whole gang of them—I'll make them sorry!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Bookmark!

HURREE JAMSET RAM SINGH came out of the School House in football attire. It was a half-holiday, a few days after the affair of Aubrey Angel—which the chums of the Remove had almost forgotten by that time. Hurree Singh joined Wharton, Nugent, and Johnny Bull, who were waiting for him.

Aubrey Angel, loafing idly on the School House steps, glanced at the cheery juniors from under his brows; but they did not even seem to observe him there. Angel of the Fourth was nothing to them, and unless he made himself unpleasant again Harry Wharton & Co. had no intention of taking note of his unimportant existence.

"Where's Bob?" asked three voices,

THE SNEAK! Lord Maul-e-verer's back was turned to the doorway, but he had a good view of the looking-glass that faced the door. In that glass there was a momentary reflection of a fellow sneaking past his study on tiptoe. It was that of Aubrey Angel! What was he up to? (See Chapter 3.)



as the dusky junior came out with the ball. A practice game was on that afternoon, and it was seldom that Bob Cherry missed a chance of footer.

"The esteemed and fatheaded Bob is sitting repositively in his study, reading the 'Holiday Annual,'" explained the Nabob of Bhanipur. "He is going to finish a story before he comes out."

"What rot!" said Nugent.

"I have mentioned to the excellent Bob that the rotfulness is terrific, but he says the esteemed story is top-holefully ripping!"

"Slacker!" said Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Let's rout him out!" he said. "The 'Holiday Annual' is jolly good, but Bob's going to play footer."

"Hear, hear!"

"The hear-hearfulness is great!"

Four merry juniors turned into the School House again, with the cheery intention of routing Bob Cherry out of his study. That "Holiday Annual" belonged to Harry Wharton, and it had made the round of the Remove, being borrowed up and down the passage by nearly all the members of the Lower Fourth. Study No. 13 had had it for two or three days now, and there were other applicants awaiting their turn. But, as it happened, Bob Cherry did not need to be routed out.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Why, here he is!" exclaimed Wharton.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Changed my mind," he explained. "Chap can read in the evening. If you don't mind my keeping the book another day. Harry—"

"Keep it another week if you like, but don't cut footer," said the captain of the Remove.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Roll away, Bunter!"

"I've been disappointed about a postal-order—"

"You won't be disappointed about a boot if you don't roll off," said Johnny Bull.

"Well, I'm waiting for the 'Annual,' when Bob's done with it!" grunted Bunter.

"It's on my study table," said Bob. "It's Wharton's, though, not mine. If it were mine I'd make you wash the jam off your paws before you touched it!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"You can have it, Bunter; only don't take it out and lose it," said Harry good-naturedly. "You did that with the last book I lent you. But the 'Annual' costs more than three-ha'pence, you know."

"And don't drop my bookmark out of it," said Bob. "I don't want to lose my place."

"Both your bookmark!" said Bunter.

The Famous Five walked down to the football-ground, Aubrey Angel looking after them curiously. Billy Bunter blinked after them through his big spectacles discontentedly. The loan of the "Annual" was something, but Bunter would have preferred a loan of a pecuniary nature. It would even be difficult to sell the "Annual" cheap in the Remove, as all the fellows knew that it belonged to Wharton. Bunter

grunted and turned back into the House.

Angel, still with that curious expression on his face, followed him.

"Busy this afternoon, Bunter?" he asked cordially.

Billy Bunter blinked at him in surprise. He was not accustomed to much cordiality from the superb Aubrey.

"Not at all, old fellow!" he answered cheerily.

Angel winced at the "old fellow," but he contrived to smile. Billy Bunter grinned at him in quite a friendly way. Angel had plenty of money, though none of it had come Bunter's way, so far. Bunter wondered whether a little of it might come, if he buttered Angel sufficiently now that he was in this unusually friendly mood.

"I've been disappointed about a postal-order, old chap," said the Owl of the Remove confidentially. "I was expecting it this afternoon—from one of my titled relations, you know."

"I know!" assented Angel.

"Quite a small matter—only five bob," said Bunter. "If a fellow would lend me five bob, and take the postal-order when it came, that would see me through. See?"

"I see."

"I dare say you've got five bob about you," said Bunter emboldened. "I—I say, I've always liked you, Angel."

"Have you really?"

"Yes. I don't think you're half such a rotter as the fellows make out," said Bunter flatteringly.

"What?"

"I mean it. And if you're a funk, after all, chap who's a funk can't help being a funk, can he?" said Bunter tolerantly. "I wouldn't be down on you for that. I wouldn't really!"

Bunter's method of "buttering," probably, would not have been successful had not Aubrey Angel had his own reasons for conciliating the fat junior. The dandy of the Fourth still smiled, though in a rather wry manner.

"I was wonderin' whether you'd care to go down to Friar-dale for me," said Angel carelessly.

Bunter eyed him warily. He would have gone to Friar-dale, or to Timbuctoo, on the trail of tuck. Wild horses would not have dragged him so far for anything else.

"Uncle Clegg has some new cakes in at five bob each," Angel hastened to add.

Bunter's fat face was all smiles.

"I'm your man," he said at once.

"If you care to taste it on your way back, I don't mind," said Angel.

"I—I might take just a snack!" said Bunter, his eyes gleaming behind his spectacles.

Anyone who knew Bunter would have known that the "snack" would be precisely the same extent as the cake itself. But Aubrey Angel nodded cheerily.

"Here's the five bob, then. Don't hurry back, you know."

"Right-ho, old to!" gasped Bunter, scarcely able to believe in his good luck.

He rolled away with five shillings tightly clenched in a fat fist. Exertion was not in his line, but he contrived to put on quite a creditable speed as far as the gates, in case the dandy of the Fourth should change his mind.

Angel of the Fourth watched him out of sight, and then went up the staircase. The Remove passage was deserted. Angel strolled or pased the studies till he came to Study No. 13. The occupants of that study were on the football ground, as he knew. So Angel was quite well aware that he would find

Study No. 13 untenanted. He entered and closed the door rather quickly. Billy Bunter, who would otherwise have come there for the "Holiday Annual," was safely disposed of, for an hour, at least.

Angel of the Fourth breathed rather hard as he stood in the silent study. Books belonging to the juniors were on the table—prominent among them the brightly-coloured cover of Wharton's "Holiday Annual." Angel took up that volume, and turned the leaves slowly, till he came to a place marked with a bookmark.

Bob Cherry's bookmark consisted simply of a torn strip of paper, a fragment of an old exercise in his own big, scrawling hand.

For several minutes Angel stood looking at it, his face growing slightly pale, and his breath coming hard.

There was a glitter in his eyes—a glitter of deep malice. On that bright afternoon, when all Greyfriars thought of the playing-fields, or of cycling through the country, there were no such thoughts in Angel's mind—his thoughts were black and revengeful and bitter. It was natural, perhaps, that he should remember the trouble longer than the Remove fellow. The punishment and humiliation he had received rankled deeply; and ever since the fight in Study No. 1, he had had to face the contempt of his own Form. Angel was not a fellow to forget or forgive an injury; and the scorn of his school-fellows added every day fresh fuel to the fire.

He sat down at the table at last, and looked over the school-books. The name of "Robert Cherry" was scrawled in more than one of them, and he easily found an exercise in the same hand. He set that exercise before him, and studied it carefully. Then he dipped a pen in the ink, took a blank sheet of paper, and began to scrawl an imitation of Bob's sprawling hand. It was not a difficult task, especially to a fellow who was clever with the pen like Aubrey Angel.

He covered the foolscap sheet with scrawl, and smiled over it. Then he took a sheet of notepaper from the drawer, and wrote a page of a letter in the same scrawling hand. Having dried the ink, he tore the page into pieces, and all the pieces but one he stowed carefully into his pocket.

But one piece, after looking at it very carefully, he placed in the "Holiday Annual," in the place of the bookmark Bob had left there.

He closed the book and quitted the study.

As he left he gave one furtive look round him, but the passage was empty. The door of Study No. 12 was half-open as he passed it, and he heard the sound of a yawn within, which indicated that Lord Mauleverer was at home. Angel trod lightly past.

"That you, Vivian?" asked his lordship, from within.

Angel breathed hard and did not answer.

Lord Mauleverer, stretched at ease on the study sofa, could not see the doorway from where he reclined, and nothing would have induced him to take the trouble to get off the sofa.

"Got that ginger-beer, Jimmy, if it's you?" he called out lazily.

His lordship sat up. He was thirsty, and Jimmy Vivian was to have conveyed ginger-beer to the study. Jimmy had not conveyed it.

As he sat up, Lord Mauleverer's shoulder was turned to the doorway; but he had a good view of the looking-glass that faced the door.

In that looking-glass there was a momentary reflection of a fellow passing the doorway.

It vanished as Angel trod quickly and softly on.

Lord Mauleverer let his tired head sink back upon a silken cushion.

"What the dooce is Angel of the Fourth tiptoein' about the Remove passage for?" was his lordship's reflection.

But he did not take the trouble to think that matter out. He was thinking chiefly of ginger-beer; and as Jimmy Vivian evidently had forgotten the ginger-beer, and wasn't coming back, Lord Mauleverer closed his weary eyes and dozed.

Aubrey Angel, in his study in the Fourth, lighted a match in the grate, and burned the fragments of paper he had carefully brought away with him from Study No. 13 in the Remove. Then, with a cynical and satisfied smile, he sat down to smoke a cigarette, occasionally glancing out of the window. And he smiled again when he caught sight of the fat figure of Billy Bunter coming towards the School House—without any visible cake. Bunter had the cake—but in the circumstances it was naturally invisible; only the X-rays could have revealed it.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Bunter!

"SUCH a beast!" murmured Bunter. "Such a suspicious beast! I know jolly well he wouldn't take a fellow's word, without even asking him."

Bunter was thinking of Aubrey Angel and the cake. Five shillings had been expended at Uncle Clegg's in the village on that cake. Bunter had started back to the school with the cake under his fat arm.

A nibble had been followed by another nibble, a bite by another bite. Bunter really had intended to bring home some remnant of the five-shilling cake.

But his inner Bunter was too much for him.

Long before he was half-way to Greyfriars, the cake had vanished, to the last sultana and the last crumb.

Feeling that was useless to bring home the wrapping-paper and the string for Aubrey Angel, Bunter had cast them into the ditch, and proceeded on his way thoughtfully. During the earlier part of the walk his jaws had been busy; now his fat brain was busy. He had to give some account of that cake. Angel had told him that he could take a snack; but, naturally—at least, Bunter supposed so—he would expect to see something of the cake.

Bunter's active brain invented yarn after yarn to account for the total disappearance of the cake, but none of them satisfied him, so he decided, upon the whole, not to see Angel.

That was the simplest way. He could dodge the fellow easily enough, and keep out of his way for a bit; and if Angel hunted him down and asked after the cake then he could decide upon the spur of the moment whether it had been raided by Highellians, dropped into a river, or snatched by a hungry lion seeking what he might devour.

Having come to that conclusion, Billy Bunter rolled into the School House, dismissing the matter from his mind.

He made his way to the Remove passage. There was still the "Holiday Annual" to fall back on, as there was nothing more to eat.

He went to Study No. 13, and picked

the "Annual" off the table, and rolled away to his own study, No. 7, with it.

Settling himself on his back in the armchair, with his feet on the table, Bunter held the book open with sticky fingers and thumbs, which left beautiful imprints that would have pleased the gentlemen of the finger-print department at Scotland Yard. They were really perfect specimens, clearly and deeply marked.

A fragment of a letter dropped out of the volume upon Billy Bunter's well-filled waistcoat.

"Oh, that silly ass' bookmark," grunted Bunter. "Why the deuce couldn't he turn the leaf down? I should! It doesn't matter, as it's not his own book. Some fellows are such asses!"

He picked up the torn fragment of the letter, and blinked at it, and gave a jump.

"My hat!" As it was evidently part of a written letter, Billy Bunter looked at it as a matter of course—that was one of his little ways. But certainly he had not expected to see what he now saw. Apparently it was part of some letter which Bob Cherry had written but never posted, tearing it up instead; Bunter knew the scrawling hand well enough. But what was written Bunter would never have dreamed of seeing written in Bob's fist. It ran:

"—ton's not really a bad fellow in the main, only his uppish swank does get on the nerves a bit sometimes, and—"

That was all. But it was enough to make Bunter forget all about the "Holiday Annual." That volume rolled down on the floor and remained there unheeded.

Bunter stared at the tell-tale fragment

with his round eyes wide open behind his big spectacles.

"Ton!" he murmured. "There's only one chap in the Remove whose name ends in 'ton'—that's Wharton! Fancy Cherry writing about him like that, when he makes out he's such a pal! Mean, I call it."

The study door opened, and Bunter started up, clutching the scrap of paper in his fat hand. It was Peter Todd that entered.

"Hallo, frowsting indoors as usual?" he asked. "Why don't you get out a bit, you fat frog?"

"I've walked down to Friardale this afternoon for Angel," said Billy Bunter with dignity. "I'm taking a rest."

"For Angel?" repeated Peter. "Fagging for the Fourth, you fat worm."

"Well, he asked me to fetch a cake, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Peter.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. A fellow does these good-natured things—at least, I do."

"I was thinking of Angel, if he's expecting to see the cake!" grinned Peter.

"As a matter of fact, I had an accident with the cake coming back," said Bunter, blinking at Peter Todd. "Some of the Highcliffe chaps rushed me and got it."

"Try again!" said Peter.

"Don't you believe me, you beast?"

"Not a little bit."

"Well, I haven't seen him yet, and I'm not going to if I can help it," said Bunter. "After all, Angel's a cad. I don't care to talk to such a chap. He might doubt my word."

"Very likely; especially if you spin a yarn like that. Is that Wharton's 'Annual' on the floor?"

"Yes. I—I say, Peter, Wharton's name ends with 'ton,' doesn't it?" Peter stared at him.

"Of course it does, ass! What about it?"

"Wharton's the only fellow in the Remove with 'ton' at the end of his name, isn't he?"

"No, ass—there's Dutton!"

"Oh!" Bunter started. "I forgot Dutton."

"Is there anything you don't forget?" inquired Peter sarcastically.

"Couldn't be Dutton," said Bunter, unheeding. "Nobody would call Dutton an 'uppish swanker.' It's Wharton right enough. Besides, Bob Cherry doesn't have much to do with Dutton, and wouldn't be mentioning him in a letter."

"What on earth—" began the astonished Peter.

But Billy Bunter did not stay to answer. He rolled out of the study, leaving Peter Todd staring after him blankly.

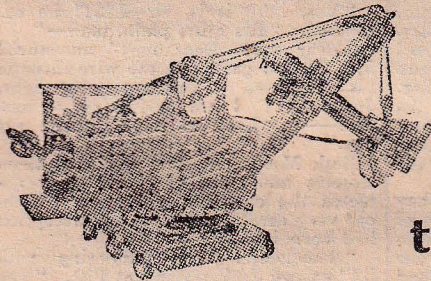
Angel's dastardly scheme of revenge was beginning to work out as he had anticipated, for Billy Bunter, as he knew, was the last person at Greyfriars to keep to himself the discovery he had made.

Bunter rolled down the passage towards Study No. 1, not knowing quite what course of action he was going to follow.

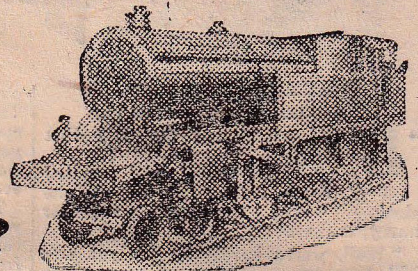
And as Harry Wharton & Co., cheery and ruddy from the football field, came into tea, they little dreamed of the bombshell that was about to burst in their midst.

THE END.

(*"A SPLIT IN THE CO.!"*—next week's dramatic story of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars. Don't miss it boys.)



Will your Outfit build these two models?

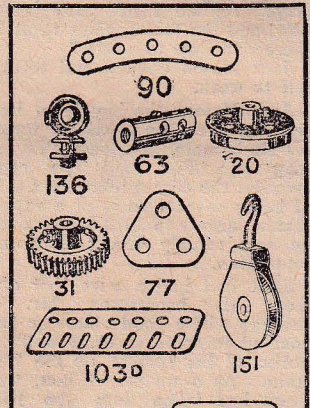
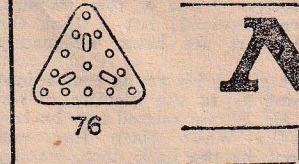
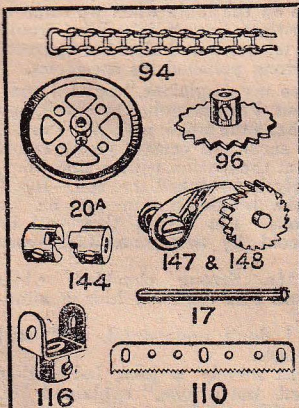


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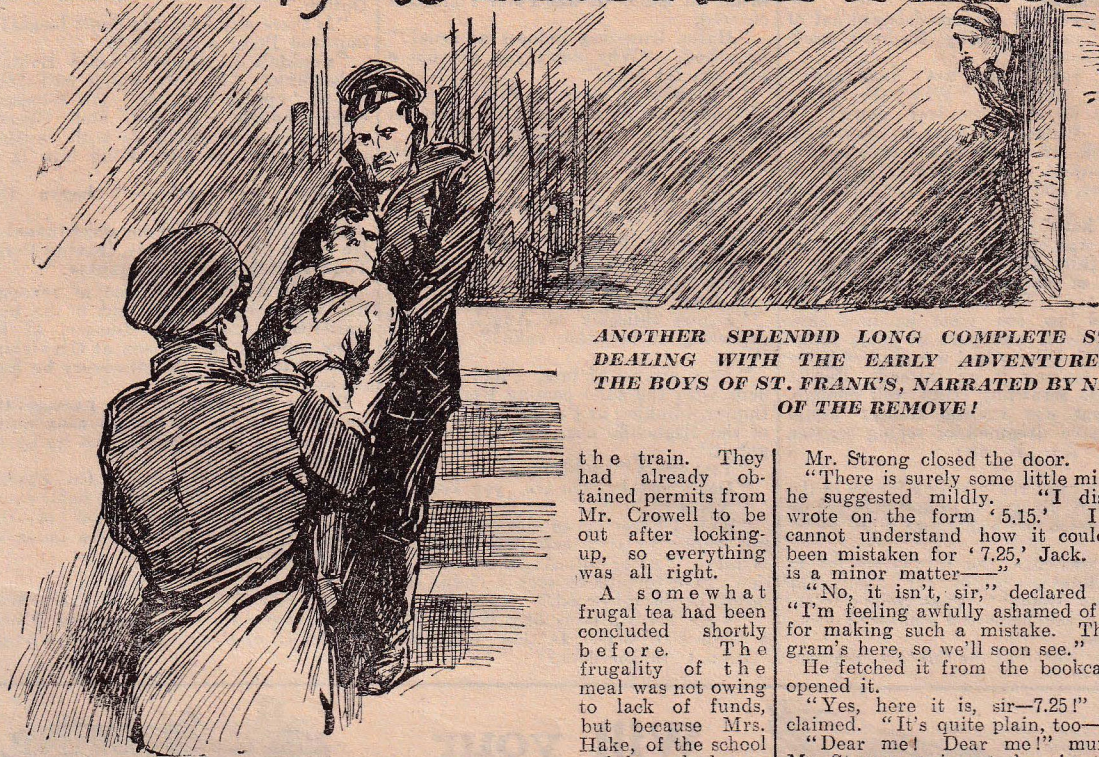
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JACK MASON IN PERIL!

Simon Grell has tried desperately hard to get hold of his nephew, Jack Mason, and the mysterious golden locket. And at last fortune favours him in his rascally plotting!

ON THE TRAIL of the KIDNAPPERS!



ANOTHER SPLENDID LONG COMPLETE STORY, DEALING WITH THE EARLY ADVENTURES OF THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S, NARRATED BY NIPPER OF THE REMOVE!

THE FIRST CHAPTER. An Unexpected Arrival!

BUCK up!" said Reginald Pitt crisply.

"Shan't be long," replied Mason, glancing up at the clock. "Why, there's no particular hurry, is there?"

"Well, we've hardly started yet, and it'll take us a good hour to do our prep," replied Pitt. "It's just on six now, and the train comes in at 7.25, so there's no time to waste."

Jack Mason nodded and settled himself to work.

Jack Mason—the boy from Bermondsey—was now on excellent terms with his study-mate, Reginald Pitt. Not so long ago Pitt had the reputation amongst the decent fellows at St. Frank's of being several sorts of a rotter; but, thanks largely to Jack Mason's example, he was rapidly living down his evil reputation.

Jack had had a wire that afternoon from his benefactor, Mr. Strong, through whose good offices he had been enabled to come to St. Frank's, giving notice of his arrival by the 7.25 p.m. train. As a matter of fact, that telegram had fallen into the hands of Fullwood & Co., the ill-natured "Nuts" of the Remove, and had been altered in certain vital particulars before Mason ever got it. But of this fact Mason and Pitt were entirely ignorant.

The two Removites were in Study E, and they were hurrying over their prep, in order to get it done before the time arranged to start for Bellton, to meet

out of supplies for the time being. This was a frequent occurrence. An epidemic of tips by the morning post generally resulted in Mrs. Hake being cleared of all eatable supplies before the evening.

Mason and Pitt were silent as they worked away; only the scratching of their pens and an occasional crackle from the fire broke the stillness of the study—except, of course, for the loud voices which proceeded from next door.

But this study—Study D—was occupied by Handforth & Co., and wild noises from that quarter were so frequent and so continuous that Mason and Pitt would have felt quite lost without them.

But Pitt suddenly lifted his head and looked at the door. A footstep had sounded in the passage—and it was a footstep which was quite unfamiliar. The next moment the door of Study E opened, and Mr. David Strong stood framed in the doorway.

"Ah, Jack!" he exclaimed heartily. "How are you, my boy?"

Jack Mason jumped up in surprise and delight.

"Why, Mr. Strong, I—I didn't expect to see you yet!" he exclaimed, hurrying forward. "I'm tremendously glad you've come, sir!"

Mr. Strong wagged his finger. "Why didn't you come to meet me at the station, you young rascal?" he asked, his face wreathed in smiles. "I suppose you were too busy to—"

"But—but you said in your telegram that you wouldn't arrive until the 7.25 train!" exclaimed Jack quickly. "Pitt and I were hurrying over our prep so that we should be able to meet the train."

Mr. Strong closed the door. "There is surely some little mistake?" he suggested mildly. "I distinctly wrote on the form '5.15.' I really cannot understand how it could have been mistaken for '7.25,' Jack. But it is a minor matter—"

"No, it isn't, sir," declared Mason. "I'm feeling awfully ashamed of myself for making such a mistake. The telegram's here, so we'll soon see."

He fetched it from the bookcase and opened it.

"Yes, here it is, sir—7.25!" he exclaimed. "It's quite plain, too—"

"Dear me! Dear me!" murmured Mr. Strong, gazing at the wire through his spectacles. "You are quite right, Jack. Ah! I am beginning to suspect— Look at these figures, my boy."

Both Mason and Pitt regarded them closely; and then, of course, they detected the crayoned alteration. Without very careful attention the deception had been invisible.

"Somebody's been tampering with it!" gasped Jack, staring at Pitt. "The wire was on the table when we came in at dinner-time, wasn't it? Who would open the telegram and alter the figures?"

Mr. Strong polished his spectacles.

"I have my suspicions," he said genially; "but I'm not going to sneak, my boys. That's the word, isn't it? I'm not going to sneak. A certain young rascal met me at the station with a fine story, and nearly hoodwinked me, too. But I turned the tables on him—and on his companions. I'm afraid they will be getting cold by this time, Jack—very cold!"

And Mr. Strong chuckled, while Mason and Pitt regarded him in astonishment.

"But I don't understand, sir," said Jack at last.

"It was merely a joke, lad—rather ill-natured, but a joke," explained Mr. Strong softly. "For a few minutes, too, I was deceived; but I think the young beggars are being adequately punished."

Without giving his young companions any inkling as to the identity of the culprits, Mr. Strong related how he had entered the White Harp Inn, and slipped out by the back door, leaving the Nuts waiting outside in the snow.

Pitt and Mason grinned with delight at the neat way in which Fullwood & Co. had been foiled. For, of course, they instantly guessed that the Nuts were responsible.

"As it happens, sir," said Jack, "there's no harm done; but I'm sorry some of our chaps should have been so disrespectful. You'll have tea with us in here, won't you?"

"Why, yes—certainly!" said Mr. Strong. "A cup of tea is just what I do want. Capital! How long will you require to make your—er—preparations?"

"About twenty minutes, sir," replied Jack.

"More likely half an hour," put in Reginald Pitt quickly.

Mr. Strong beamed. "Admirable!" he declared. "Half an hour will suit me very well indeed! I am anxious to have a few words with Mr. Nelson Lee, your Housemaster. I am well aware that you will not want me bothering about just now. I'll return by six-thirty—no; we'll say a quarter to seven, boys. That will give you ample time."

And the visitor took his departure. As the door closed Mason and Pitt looked at one another with curious expressions.

"By George!" said Pitt grimly. "I'll make Fullwood sit up for this!"

"No, we can't do that," interrupted Mason. "We don't know for certain that it was Fullwood; and Mr. Strong dished them, anyhow. But what the dickens are we going to do for tea? That's the main point at present."

Pitt grinned. "Twenty minutes!" he exclaimed. "We couldn't have done it in the time, my son. I said half an hour, and that only just gives us a minute or two to spare. Mrs. Hake's stock is exhausted, so we shall have to go to the village. It won't take us long if we hurry ourselves."

They didn't waste much time in getting off.

And, meanwhile, Mr. Strong proceeded to Nelson Lee's study. As it happened, he met the schoolmaster-detective in the passage outside. Lee had been to Mr. Crowell's study for a few minutes, and he came forward with extended hand.

"I was expecting you about this time, Mr. Strong," he said pleasantly. "Come in—come in, my dear sir. Have you seen Mason?"

"I have just left him," replied Mr. Strong. "I have promised to partake of tea in the lad's study, and have arranged to get back in about half an hour. Meanwhile, I have taken the opportunity to renew my acquaintance with you, Mr. Lee."

"I expected to see you at St. Frank's before this—er—Mr. Strong," said Lee, with a smile. "But now that you have come, I have quite a lot to tell you. I believe you will be able to clear up one or two points which have been somewhat puzzling."

Mr. Strong elevated his eyebrows as he took a seat.

"I must really confess that I do not know to what you are referring, my dear sir," he said mildly. "And please be perfectly frank with me; if I am hindering your work in any way, pitch me out. Do not consider me in the slightest."

Nelson Lee laughed.

"My work is not of such importance that I cannot put it aside for an hour," he said, proffering his cigar-case. "Yes, Mr. Strong, the fact is, Mason's uncle has been causing him a great deal of worry and annoyance."

"Mason's uncle!" ejaculated Mr. Strong blankly. "But—but, my dear sir! Pray consider what you are saying! The lad's uncle is dead."

"I don't think you would say so if you had been at St. Frank's during the last three or four weeks," replied Nelson Lee. "I was quite surprised when I learned the news; but it is an undoubted fact that Mr. Simon Grell is as much alive as I am, and he is in this district at the present time."

Nelson Lee would have been considerably astonished had he known that Mr. Simon Grell was in that very room! The reckless rascal had entered the room by the window in the momentary absence of the detective, and now stood behind the curtains, hardly daring to breathe, and certainly not daring to move!

"Good gracious me!" exclaimed the visitor, taking a deep breath. "I am astounded, Mr. Lee. Not only that, but this piece of news is most disconcerting. Jack understood that his uncle left him the money for his education. What on earth can the lad think now? I really don't know what I can say to him—"

"Surely there is no necessity to say anything?" put in Nelson Lee. "The boy is content, and has a vague idea, I believe, that some obscure relative of his thought of him before dying. And that point, after all, is of very secondary importance. The main thing is to settle this affair of Grell. The man is a scoundrel, and I am anxious to drive him out of the neighbourhood."

"A scoundrel!" echoed the other. "I am well aware of that fact. Jack never made any complaints, but I was able to gather that Grell made the lad's early boyhood an utter misery. Then, of course, he left his wife and home for years together—and no man who could do that is worth his salt. I will say, however, that Mrs. Grell is a most objectionable person, and probably as bad as her good-for-nothing husband. A pair, Mr. Lee—a most disreputable pair. That is why I was so anxious to get that splendid lad away."

Mr. Grell, in concealment, ground his teeth together helplessly. It was not at all pleasant to listen to this portion of the conversation.

"I really don't know what brought Grell here originally," said Lee. "But he very soon displayed an intense desire to obtain possession of Jack Mason's half-locket—"

"I beg your pardon!" interrupted Mr. Strong, starting.

"Surely you are aware of the fact that Jack possesses half a gold locket, which bears some Arabic signs?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Indeed, I was not aware of the fact," ejaculated the other quickly. "I really think you must be mistaken. Ah, but wait—wait one moment! Of course—of course! During my last visit I inadvertently left behind a small sealed package. That package contained the half-locket to which you refer, Mr. Lee, and I was naturally rather startled when you spoke of it as belonging to Jack. The lad evidently opened the package, under the impression that it was left for him."

Nelson Lee pulled his keys out and walked over to the safe. He returned after a moment with Jack's half-locket.

"Is this it, Mr. Strong?" he asked.

"Why, yes," said Mr. Strong at once, examining the thing. "I merely brought it to St. Frank's to show it to Jack, because I value it highly—not on account of its intrinsic value, which is comparatively little, but because it has a most remarkable history—indeed, a

sad, terrible history. I cannot understand why this scoundrelly uncle should desire to possess it."

"The Arabic writing relates, I believe, to some valuable treasure, although the message is incomplete," said Nelson Lee. "Mason asked me to take care of it for him, and I have been doing so. But I think that there is some mistake, Mr. Strong. You believe that this locket was within your sealed package?"

Mr. Strong looked up wonderingly. "I do not believe it—I know it!" he replied.

"Then how is it that the sealed package is still perfectly whole?" said Nelson Lee quietly. "Either there are two half-lockets, or there has been a substitution of some kind."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the visitor. "This is most extraordinary, Mr. Lee. The seals appear to be unbroken; and yet this half-locket was certainly wrapped up— Good heavens! What is this—what is this?"

The seals had been broken by now, and Mr. Strong stared in utter amazement at the second half of the locket, which lay revealed. Nelson Lee, too, was astonished.

"I am amazed—I am utterly amazed!" exclaimed Mr. Strong. "This is—this is more than staggering! I have had that locket since— Oh, but I cannot grasp the full significance of this very singular discovery!"

Mr. Strong rose to his feet and paced up and down with great agitation.

"It is beyond me, Mr. Lee," he went on. "I feel that I must confide in you—that it will be necessary for me to explain how my own half of the locket came into my possession—or, indeed, the whole locket. For this other piece is the fellow, without the shadow of a doubt."

Nelson Lee indicated Mr. Strong's chair.

"Pray reseal yourself, my dear sir," he said gently. "There is not the slightest need for you to become agitated. It is only too apparent that this locket has far greater significance than we know of at the present moment. Complete frankness, however, will possibly put us on the right trail."

Mr. Strong sat down again, but his expression was one of bewilderment and suppressed excitement.

Simon Grell, behind the curtain, was now intently eager. The locket was on the table, almost within reach of his grasp—and he had come here to obtain it!

"Well, Mr. Lee, you are already aware of my little secret," said Mr. Strong. "You know that I pretended to be poor, whilst I am actually rich. You know that I gave myself another name, so that Jack should be deceived. It would have disturbed him, possibly, had he known that my real name is Sir Crawford Grey, and that I am a baronet."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I understand your motives, Sir Crawford," he exclaimed. "After all, we are quite alone here, and there is really no reason why we should keep up the little pretence in private. I have done so hitherto, because you have not referred to the matter, but I do not think it is at all necessary."

Here was another surprise for Mr. Grell. The somewhat shabby-looking "David Strong" was none other than Sir Crawford Grey, the immensely rich baronet! He had been mentioned in the newspapers only recently in connection with a large donation to charitable funds.

Jack Mason would certainly have been

astounded had he known the truth. Sir Crawford had taken Nelson Lee into his confidence from the very first, and it was owing to the baronet's influence that the school governors had allowed Jack Mason to enter St. Frank's as a scholar. Without such powerful influence the lad could never have gained an entry.

I knew all about "Mr. Strong's" identity soon afterwards, for Nelson Lee told me. Therefore, in order to avoid confusion, I shall always refer to him from this point by his real name. It will be much better.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Mr. Strong's Strange Story!

"WITH regard to the locket, I shall take your advice and be perfectly frank," said Sir Crawford quietly. "The story is a most sad one, Mr. Lee, but it will not take long in telling. The discovery that Jack possesses the missing half of the locket is leading me to think the most outrageous things, and I scarcely know whether I am on my head or my heels. My dear sir, I am bewildered—I am becoming mad with a hope which has been dead for thirteen years!"

"You are puzzling me, Sir Crawford," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"Of course—of course!" the baronet hastened to explain. "But you must remember that I am excited, and I crave your indulgence. I was attracted to the boy, too, because he reminded me so much of— Oh, but it is hopeless—quite hopeless! I am crazy to imagine such an impossible thing!"

Sir Crawford sat forward suddenly, gripping the arms of his chair.

"But again I am wandering," he went on. "If you only knew what this revelation has awakened in my heart, Mr. Lee, you would share my excitement. The lad has the same eyes as— Upon my soul! What is the matter with me? I must begin at the beginning, and not ramble on in this aimless fashion."

"It would certainly be more satisfactory, my dear sir."

"You will have no cause to complain again, Mr. Lee," said Sir Crawford Grey. "The history of this locket is a terribly tragic one, but the passing years have softened the blow, and I can tell the story without flinching. Well, you are aware that I am a widower, Mr. Lee. My poor wife died close upon thirteen years ago, when my little son was just two years old. He, poor little lad, died at the same time. Unless—unless— Oh, but it is impossible!" he added hurriedly. "We were on a railway journey, Mr. Lee; my wife, myself, and our little child. For a companion we had a very old friend of mine, Colonel Morley. All this, you must understand, occurred thirteen years ago."

"I am following you perfectly," said Nelson Lee.

"Well, the first I saw of this locket was from Colonel Morley," continued Grey. "He had been a great explorer in his time, and was, indeed, intent upon fitting out an expedition to a remote region of Northern Africa at the time of his death. He presented this locket to my little baby son while we were travelling upon that never-to-be-forgotten journey. Little Norman—that was my boy's name—was naturally delighted with his present, and, child-like, immediately tried to open the locket—as all babies will. Colonel

Morley, however, declared that it would not open, and believed that it was not made that way. He had found it near the bones of a dead man in an African desert oasis, and had never given it very much thought, having slipped it into his pocket as a mere souvenir of that particular trip. Being interested in the thing we made serious attempts to force it open, and succeeded. Naturally, the colonel was rather astounded."

"On account of the inscription?"

assailed him. Here was cause for jubilation indeed! His belief that the locket was of value had now received first-hand corroboration. The treasure was worth an enormous sum! It was indeed worth a great amount of risk to obtain the thing!

"I presume that Colonel Morley regretted having given the locket to your little son?" asked Nelson Lee.

"No; he was a true sportsman, Mr. Lee," replied Sir Crawford. "He

THE CAPTAINS

AN INTERESTING ARTICLE OF TOPICAL INTEREST

AS boys how often do we take journeys into the flights of fancy! If we begin to play cricket we think, first of all, how fine it would be to play for the team of our town; beyond that, we imagine the glory of playing for our county; and, after that, the wonder, the joy, the glory of playing for our country. But there is a realm into which we fly even beyond that, and this is to be elected captain of our country's team to play in Test matches.

Every boy with real imagination, who begins to shine at cricket, must surely dream how great it would be to captain an England side in a Test match against Australia. Isn't Percy Chapman, now out in Australia, leading the England side to what will, we hope, be complete victory against Australia, the beau ideal, the real hero of the Tests? Of course he is!

England honours him because he is such a typically English boy: smiling all the time, fine of face and figure, setting the example which every one of the fellows under him is happy to copy. Lucky! Of course Percy Chapman was lucky. In 1926 England was looking round for a skipper. The choice for the final Test match—the other four having been drawn—fell upon the brilliant batsman of Kent: a man who was not even captain of his own county side, but the man the selectors said was the sort to be captain of England.

And in the last Test match of the 1926 series Percy Chapman was given the captaincy, and he led England to victory, put the Ashes into our keeping. And at that time he was only twenty-six years of age, the youngest fellow who had ever been given the captaincy of an England side against Australia.

THE GREATEST QUALIFICATION!

Now the captaincy of a cricket team is much more than merely deciding the order of the batting of his own side or when to change the bowling when the other side is batting. Ever so much more than that. I think—nay, I know—that this skipper of ours from the county of Kent is, first and foremost, a fine captain, because he realises that he doesn't know so much about the game as some of the fellows who play under him. The great captain asks the advice of the fellows of experience, and if that advice seems to him to be good he takes it. In that Test match at the Oval in 1926, in which we won the Ashes, Percy Chapman scarcely took a step without consulting such experienced players as Wilfred Rhodes and Jack Hobbs.

Because Percy Chapman was the man who led us to victory in 1926 was the

main reason why Percy Chapman was given the task of leading the English side in the effort to keep the Ashes during the present series of Test matches in Australia. Maybe there are finer cricketers in England in the all-round sense, but there is no man more likely to get the very best out of the players at his command. And that, perhaps, is the greatest qualification any captain can possess: the ability to get the utmost out of his men.

THE WINNING SPIRIT.

When our men were on the point of boarding the train which was to take them on the first part of their journey to Australia I said to Maurice Tate: "How do you think you will get on out there?"

This was his reply: "Win or lose, you can bank on this: we shall do our utmost not to let the captain down." Note that Maurice didn't say that England would win; note that he didn't suggest that the best England side ever was going out. What he did say was that they weren't going to let the captain down. In other words, the England men who went to Australia under Percy Chapman were, first and foremost, prepared to do everything they could for their skipper. And the men who will do everything for their skipper must, willy-nilly, do everything for their side.

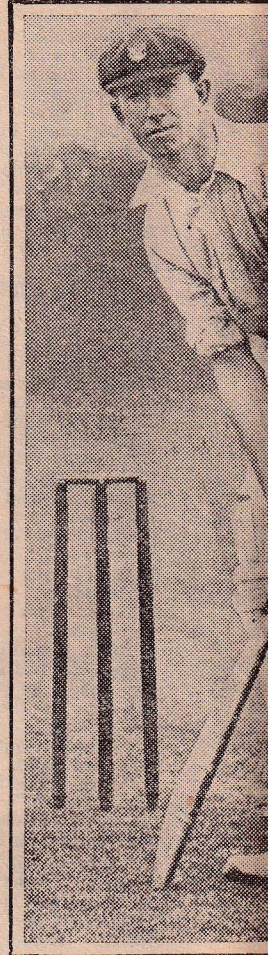
A lucky lad, Percy Chapman, to have inspired that feeling among his fellows! And that brings me to another "outside" qualification in a cricket captain: the idea that he is lucky. "Whatever he does will

"Of course. For it seemed pretty obvious that the Arabic writing on the locket—as you now see—related to a treasure of diamonds and other precious stones cached in that little-known oasis. To my belief, that treasure still exists there, having never been recovered. According to the locket, it must be worth an enormous sum!"

Mr. Simon Grell nearly betrayed his presence by the sudden excitement which

declared that the locket was the property of my baby boy, and the treasure, too, if it could be discovered. But Morley was, of course, immensely rich. Poor fellow! He only lived for a few minutes after making that presentation."

"An accident happened?" asked the detective. "Now that you have reminded me, Sir Crawford, I seem to vaguely remember a disaster about that period."



JACK I
(Skipper of the Australia)

"The train ran off the metals at a curve," said Sir Crawford, his voice suddenly becoming grave and sad. "I will go into no details, because to talk long on the subject pains me exceedingly. While we were looking at the locket the crash came, and I have only vague memories of what followed. By a miracle I escaped almost unhurt, but all the other occupants of the compartment were killed!" The baronet was silent for a moment or two. "My darling wife

"The years have passed, and they have softened my grief. The locket was never recovered complete. Only half came to light, and I found that myself, lying on the permanent way. The other half had completely vanished, and I have never set my eyes on it until this evening. You will readily understand my complete amazement and excitement. For this lad—this brave lad who saved me from death—possesses the half which was lost in that railway accident. What

"That, I am afraid, is the real explanation," he said. "You have thrown a cold douche over me, Mr. Lee, and it was necessary. I had allowed my brain to run riot for a moment. It is a singular fact, however, that I was strangely drawn towards Jack as soon as I got to know him, some months ago. He reminded me so much of my poor wife. Heavens above! How he reminded me of her! And now comes this fresh revelation. I am beginning to hope—"

"Let me advise you, Sir Crawford, not to allow these thoughts to carry you too far," said Nelson Lee gravely. "A terrible disappointment may be the result. I must admit that there is a chance that Jack Mason is your real son, your own boy—"

Sir Crawford jumped up, his face flushing with excitement again.

"You think there is a chance, Mr. Lee?" he asked tensely. "Oh, you have given me fresh hope—fresh spirit!"

"Then my words have had the opposite effect to that which I intended," said the detective softly. "I repeat, my dear sir, that such a chance is not absolutely untenable, but the probability is that Jack Mason is really Jack Mason. However, the facts are most significant, and I shall use my utmost efforts to help you in this investigation."

"Thank you, Mr. Lee, you are indeed a friend!" exclaimed the baronet enthusiastically. "To think that Jack may be my own flesh and blood! Somehow, I have a feeling that Heaven will be merciful, that this apparent miracle will turn out to be true. My dear sir, I scarcely know what else to say, and I fear that I shall betray myself when I go back to the lad's study."

"You must not do that," said Nelson Lee. "It will be far better for you to say nothing whatever until the point is either proved or disproved. Moreover, it will be just as well for you to remain 'Mr. Strong' for the time being. Rest assured that I will not let the grass grow under my feet."

A minute later Sir Crawford Grey took his leave from the study. And Nelson Lee was not blind to the fact that his visitor now seemed ten years younger. He no longer looked an old gentleman, but an upright man in the prime of life. He had grown inches taller during that short interview, and left the study with a springy, light step.

And, truth to tell, although Nelson Lee had discouraged the idea, he was becoming more and more convinced that Sir Crawford's hope would prove no idle one. It was an intensely interesting matter, and Nelson Lee was enthusiastic.

He looked at the locket, which still lay upon the table, and then turned to the mantelpiece in order to help himself to a cigarette from the box which stood there. And at that very moment Simon Grell acted.

The hidden scoundrel knew that his chance had come now—that he would probably never get another opportunity of seizing the coveted locket. And so he sprang out from behind the curtain. In his hand he held a small cloth bag, half filled with silver—one of those old-fashioned purses which are sometimes seen. In a moment of emergency it proved to be an excellent weapon.

It swung through the air as Nelson Lee was in the act of turning, and caught the detective heavily upon the head. He stumbled back and collapsed over a chair—by no means put out of action, but greatly handicapped.

Grell, panting hoarsely with excitement, did not follow up his attack, or

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OF THE TESTS!

INTEREST WRITTEN SPECIALLY BY "UMPIRE."

come out right." When a whole cricket side feels like that about its skipper, then the probability is that everything the skipper does will come right.

PUTTING THE BREEZE UP 'EM!

Australia has had great skippers in the past. Warwick Armstrong was one of them. If ever a captain won a series of Test matches, then Warwick Armstrong won the series in England against our men in 1921. It was almost as if Armstrong cast a spell over our fellows. If he moved a fielder half a dozen yards our batsmen felt that there was something particularly subtle in the move and that they had to be specially careful not to fall into a trap which was really not a trap at all. Armstrong changed the bowling when there didn't seem to be any reason for making a change at all, and our batsmen became nervous because the change had been made. "Warwick has something up his sleeve," they said to themselves. And feeling that way, they ceased to play their natural game and got themselves out.

THE VALUE OF LUCK!

The trouble with Australia during this present series of Test matches is that they haven't got a big personality—a match-winner—as captain. They were forced back on Jack Ryder, a great cricketer, undoubtedly, but just lacking that touch of genius or that reputation for being lucky, which makes all the difference.

The last captain of Australia against

England was called "Horseshoe Collins"—that is, lucky Collins.

There is no such nickname attached to Jack Ryder, and so Australia, in choosing him, chose the next best thing: a man who had a reputation for being cheerful, who would fight every inch of the way with his back to the wall, and who would never admit himself beaten. But you see the difference between a captain who will never admit himself beaten and a captain who has a reputation for being lucky. One you elect to fight an uphill battle, the other you elect make to the most of a winning position: to get on top with luck and to inspire his men never to lose their grip.

THE TOSS!

As a cricketer purely and simply Archie Maclaren was perhaps the greatest man who has ever led an England side. But somehow or other, Archie Maclaren got the reputation of being an unlucky captain. He earned it in this respect: that in one series of Test matches he lost the toss five times. Of course, Maclaren couldn't help losing the toss; that is a gamble, anyway. But if you get a whole team thinking that the captain is unlucky, then the team will play like a side down on its luck.

Look what happened to the Australians in the first Test match of the present series. They lost the toss, giving them the worst of the wicket, whatever happened. Then in the course of the match the two best bowlers of the side broke down: one hurt and one ill. The captain couldn't help that, of course; it was the luck of the game. But think of the moral effect: the difference between playing with a lucky skipper at the head and an unlucky one.

I am tempted to say, in respect of Test match cricket: give the other side the good players and give me the lucky captain and I shall be happy, because our ordinary players and our lucky captain will beat your better players every time.

Of course, we could argue that some of the luck element might be taken out of these Test games; that not so much should depend on the winning or the losing of the toss.

There is a way out of it which has often been advocated but never taken. It is for the toss of the coin to take place only in respect of the first of the five Test matches. The team which lost the toss the first time would have choice of innings on the second occasion, and thus to the end of the series automatically. What do my readers think? Would you like to see the luck element in cricket reduced, or do you prefer things as they are?

—and a better wife no man could ever have—was taken from me," he went on huskily. "My baby son was killed also, and Colonel Morley died before he could be extricated from the wreck."

"A terrible affair indeed," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I realise that it must sadden you immeasurably to converse on the subject, and I beg of you to—"

"No, Mr. Lee, I must complete my story," interrupted the baronet firmly.

can it mean? What in Heaven's name can it mean?"

"There may be any one of many explanations," replied Nelson Lee gently. "This world is not so big—and England is only a tiny morsel of it. There were other passengers on the train, and I can only suggest that some stranger picked up the half-locket and kept it, not knowing the real owner."

Sir Crawford nodded sadly.



RYDER

(Australian Cricket Eleven).

take advantage of Nelson Lee's position. He made a grab at the locket, seized the two halves and dashed to the window. Slam!

The sash went up, and Captain Jim recklessly dived headfirst out into the darkness of the triangle. He had succeeded! That thought lent him speed, and he pelted across towards the gates like a rabbit.

His desperate venture had ended in victory, but would he be able to retain the advantage he had gained?

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Reginald Pitt on the Track!

"WE shall only just do it!" Jack Mason made that remark in a rather breathless voice as he and Reginald Pitt hurried along the muddy lane from Bellton to the school.

They were both loaded, having made extensive purchases at the tuck establishment presided over by Mr. Binks. This was a special occasion, and it was necessary to do Mr. Strong honour. For, of course, both the juniors imagined their visitor to be just plain "Mr. Strong"—and an impecunious gentleman at that.

They had been longer than they had reckoned on, and were now hurrying.

"We don't want to find the guest of honour squatting down in the study twiddling his thumbs," remarked Pitt. "Let's hope Mr. Lee kept him talking. Once we get this stuff into the study, Jack, we can do the rest in five minutes."

"Yes, there's nothing to be cooked," replied Mason.

"Except the tea!" grinned Pitt. "But we left the kettle on the fire, so it ought to be boiling by the time we get in. What about that locket, old son? Are you going to tell Mr. Strong anything about it?"

"Of course. I shall tell him everything," replied Jack. "But it's pretty certain that Mr. Lee will have given him most of the facts. I dare say all that mystery will be cleared up now."

"Let's hope so," replied the Serpent. Reginald Pitt had earned that nickname during his early days at St. Frank's—for he had been extremely snaky in his ways. Hardly any of the fellows called him that now, however, for he had changed so remarkably.

"Somebody coming down the lane," said Mason a moment later.

"Somebody in a hurry, too," remarked Pitt. "Well, we're safe enough; it's not locking-up time yet, and we've got permits, anyhow. By jingo! They are in a hurry, and no mistake."

For it was now seen that there were two figures hastening down the lane. They approached at a run, and Mason and Pitt stood still in order to see who the couple were. Something was apparently wrong, for they were running very swiftly.

The boys recognised the men at about the same second as the men recognised the boys.

Simon Grell and Jake Starkey, his rascally associate!

What were they doing, running down from the school in this hurried fashion? Pitt was instantly suspicious, and so was Jack Mason. They expected to see the two men rush past, but Mr. Grell came to a halt.

"Quick, Jake!" he snapped. "It's the boy—it's Jack! Hold him!"

"By George!" muttered Pitt. "Dodge, Jack; we can't possibly fight these two rotters—"

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Before Pitt could get another word out Starkey's fist crashed upon the side of his head, and he went over like a ninepin. It was a brutal blow, and Pitt lay motionless upon the ground.

And Jack Mason, attempting to flee—for that was his only course—found himself held tightly by his uncle and Starkey.

"Bring him along!" hissed Grell. "Never mind the other kid! He'll come to himself afore long. Quick, Jake, into the wood!"

Jake Starkey grunted.

"I don't see what the game is, Simon—" he began.

"Durn you!" snarled Grell. "Don't waste time now, you fool!"

Starkey offered no further objection, but helped the other man to force Mason down the road. Jack struggled valiantly, but he knew very well that his task was a hopeless one. How could he expect to get away from these two powerful men?

Something had happened—something up at the school, apparently. And Jack was filled with vague alarm—not for himself, but for Mr. Strong. He had a terribly uncomfortable feeling that the old gentleman was somehow involved in this unexpected development. For Simon Grell had obviously met with some success. This was apparent from the very tone of his voice.

Meanwhile, Reginald Pitt lay upon the road perfectly still. He had been knocked over by a savage blow, and Jake Starkey, as he helped his chief to force Mason along, was troubled with doubts. Pitt had looked very white and still, lying there upon the road!

Had he come to any grave harm?

If Mr. Starkey could have seen Reginald Pitt at that moment his fears would not only have been allayed, but he would have been considerably surprised.

For Pitt was on his feet, and he didn't look at all stunned. He certainly rubbed the side of his head rather tenderly, but there was no sign of any serious damage. He gazed down the lane grimly.

"So that's the game!" he muttered. "Well, there's only one thing that I can do. Why aren't there a dozen of our chaps handy? We'd soon settle those rotters then!"

But the lane was quite deserted except for Simon Grell, Starkey, and their prisoner. Pitt walked down the road softly but swiftly.

As a matter of fact, he hadn't been stunned at all. He hadn't even been particularly hurt. But this does not mean to say that he had faked a fight with the scoundrels who had attacked Mason.

No; Pitt was very keen.

He knew quite well that no help was at hand, and Grell had already seized Jack. Pitt might have fled, but that would have told the rascals that a rescue party would soon come rushing down.

To attack Starkey would have been fatal, and so Pitt had remained upon the ground, quite still, pretending to be stunned. He knew that if he struggled to his feet he would go down again, and this time he would almost certainly be stunned in earnest.

It was a cute dodge on Pitt's part to remain inactive. Against these two powerful men the boys would have been helpless. It was only Mason Grell wanted, and Pitt would have been ruthlessly knocked on the head.

He preferred to be content with the knock he had already received. And now Pitt was in a position to follow the rascals and to see what their game was. He couldn't understand it at all;

he could think of no reason why Simon Grell should want to kidnap his nephew.

Without a doubt, events had happened which were totally unexpected, and Grell had acted upon the spur of the moment, taking advantage of the fact that he had met the lad on this dark portion of the road.

Pitt, full of eagerness, followed down the lane, and saw Mason's captors plunge into the wood.

"This is going to be tricky!" muttered Pitt grimly.

His head was aching abominably, but he took no notice of this. He was the only person who could be of any use to the unfortunate junior in the wood, and Pitt did not hesitate to take action, although he did not feel like exerting himself.

But his determination to help Mason was strong.

Of late Pitt had grown to like his study-mate more and more. And he was now filled with alarm lest Jack should be in any peril. It was a great change, for not so long before—only a few weeks—Pitt had been very different in his attitude.

Grell and Starkey tried to make no noise as they forced their way through the wood. But Pitt was easily able to follow—not by the use of his eyes, but by keeping his ears on the stretch.

The darkness between the leafless trees was intense, and Pitt became more and more alarmed. Why were these men taking the lad into the recesses of the wood? What was their object in doing so?

Pitt had no intention of leaving until he had discovered the truth. Besides, there was quite a good chance that he would be able to help. His presence was unknown to the scoundrels, and he might be provided with a sudden opportunity. This, indeed, was the main reason for Pitt's eager desire to keep on the track.

He wanted to rescue Mason—single-handed.

For this would prove his friendship more than anything else; and Reginald Pitt, in his changed frame of mind, was doing his utmost to make amends for his vindictive actions of the past.

At last the crackling of the dead twigs ceased, and by this time Pitt reckoned that Grell and Starkey were near the other end of the wood, where it jutted out close to the village, against the tiny side lane which led to one or two outlying farms.

Very cautiously Pitt crept forward.

He heard voices now, and his movements were like those of an experienced tracker. Finally, he lay full length at the edge of a little hollow. Gazing down, he could see two dim figures moving about.

"He'll do, Jake," came Grell's voice. "I don't reckon he'll be able to move an inch with them strings round him. You git off, an' be back here within ten minutes."

"It can't be done, cap'n—"

"It can't if you stay here talkin'!" snapped Grell. "Git off!"

Starkey disappeared, and Pitt wondered where he was going, and what his object was. At all events, an idea which had come into Pitt's head was quickly dismissed. He had thought of rushing back to the school and fetching help.

But that would occupy fully twenty minutes, and by that time Mason would have been taken off into the night by his captors. And then, of course, any chase would be practically hopeless.

It was far better to remain here, on the watch. The very fact that Grell had bound Mason proved that he intended taking him off somewhere with-

out unnecessary delay. So the best thing would be to wait, and to track the scoundrels to their ultimate destination.

"Don't you git frightened, Jack," came Mr. Grell's voice out of the hollow. "As long as you remain quiet you won't come to no harm. You've given me enough trouble these last weeks an' I'm not going to stand no more."

"Oh, you scoundrel!" panted Mason hotly. "You've half-killed poor Pitt!"

"Not quite!" murmured Pitt, grinning to himself.

Mr. Grell laughed harshly.

"Bah! Don't git them fears into your head," he said. "The kid didn't come to no harm—only a punch from Starkey's fist. I expect he's all right by this time, an' squealin' to his kind masters. But they won't git on our track, Jack, my boy. We've bin too quick for 'em."

"What are you going to do with me now—"

"It ain't your place to ask questions," interrupted Grell. "Just you lay quiet an' do as you're told. Not a hair of your head will be hurt, an' you'll be given a real holiday."

Jack made no reply, and Pitt wondered if he could do anything now. He decided that a rescue would be impossible. Grell was on guard, and Mason was bound. If Pitt revealed his presence he would soon be rendered helpless.

He could, of course, creep up behind Captain Jim and take him by surprise—but only by great good luck. The chances were that his approach would be heard, and then only disaster would follow.

Grell was on the alert, listening intently and keeping his eyes well open. And the minutes passed steadily, and at last Pitt heard the grating of iron-tired wheels upon the lane, just beyond the trees.

A trap was approaching evidently.

Just for a second, Pitt thought of yelling for help, but an exclamation of satisfaction from Grell made him change his mind. The arrival of the trap was expected, and the truth came to Pitt on the instant.

Starkey had been to the village to fetch the trap—Porlock's, from the White Harp, probably. The distance to the inn was very short from this point, for the wood lay just behind the White Harp garden.

Grell and Starkey intended carrying Mason away in the trap. It was a daring scheme, but there was really nothing against it. Bound and helpless, and probably gagged, Jack would lie at the bottom of the trap unseen. The darkness of the night was intense, and the prisoner would certainly not be seen.

Less than a minute later, Pitt knew that his surmise was correct.

Jake Starkey appeared, and he and Grell lifted their prisoner and carried



A BLOW FROM BEHIND! Grell sprang out from behind the curtain. In his hand he held a small purse of silver. With a swing of his arm he brought the purse round and caught Nelson Lee clean on the side of his head. The detective stumbled with a cry and fell over a chair. (See Chapter 2.)

him through the trees towards the lane. The watching Removite followed. Grell called a halt before entering the lane, and Pitt guessed that the gag was being applied.

Then Mason was bundled into the trap, the two men took their seats, and the vehicle drove off. It went towards the village, and Pitt stood in the centre of the lane, helpless—in a state of complete consternation.

What was he to do now?

How could he follow? For the moment the only method was to run—and Pitt pelted down the lane at full speed. But he was hopelessly outdistanced by the fast trap, and when he reached the main road he saw the vehicle bowling down the High Street boldly and daringly.

It was already at the other end of the village, and Pitt knew perfectly well that he could do nothing further. He clenched his fists fiercely, and determined to rush to the policeman's cottage. This, at all events, would be the best thing to do under the circumstances.

But then he changed his mind—and this was caused by catching sight of Bob Christine, of the College House.

Christine had just ridden along the High Street on his bicycle, and he halted outside a shop within a hundred yards of Pitt. He entered, leaving his bike outside, with the lamps burning.

"By jingo!" muttered Pitt tensely.

He didn't wait another second, but dashed forward and jumped on to the bicycle straight away. There was no time to ask for permission—Christine was a good fellow, and he wouldn't mind in the least when the affair was explained to him afterwards.

Intensely eager again, Pitt pedalled down the street with all his power. Arriving at the end, there were two roads to choose from—the one leading

to Bannington and the other to Caistowe. Far up the latter road, which was straight for half a mile, Pitt saw two twinkling little red lights.

He grinned to himself, and followed.

Before he had proceeded a hundred yards, however, he bent over his machine as he was riding, and turned out both the lamps. He didn't want his quarry to know that a bicycle was following.

Pitt was in his element now.

He kept quite a long way behind, but never allowed the trap to get out of sight, except at occasional corners. The vehicle was travelling smartly, but Pitt had no difficulty in keeping pace with it.

At length Caistowe was reached, but the trap drove straight through the sleepy little place until it arrived on the sea-front. All the shops were closed by this time, and the darkness was intense.

Rather to Pitt's surprise, the trap drove straight to the dark quayside, and there came to a halt. There was not a soul in sight, and everything was still and quiet. Out in the channel a small steamer was riding at anchor, and near by were other craft—most of them fishing vessels, snug for the night.

Pitt dismounted from his machine and waited. Dimly he saw Mason lifted out, carried down the steps, and then the watching junior could see no more. Starkey came up almost at once, and drove off in the trap.

Pitt crept nearer, wondering what on earth it could mean. Why had Mason been taken to this spot? A cold shiver passed down the junior's back when he thought that murder might be in Grell's heart.

(Continued on page 28.)

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LOVELL AT IT AGAIN!

Of course, Arthur Edward Lovell starts the trouble! He always does! His latest escapade lands both himself and his chums in an extremely unpleasant situation

THE FIRST CHAPTER.**Bad Form!**

JUST one shot!" said Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Ass!"

"Look here, Jimmy—"

"Fathead!"

"For goodness' sake, Lovell, old man, don't play the goat!" urged Newcome. "Have a little sense, old chap."

"Just for once!" said Raby.

Arthur Edward Lovell gave a snort.

He was at variance with his three comrades—a not unusual state of affairs. Being at variance with them, he was more than ever inclined to have his own way—still less unusual.

The Fistical Four of Rookwood were crossing a frosty field-path towards the river, which gleamed frozen in the wintry sun. They were a mile from Jimmy Silver's home, where the four were spending the holidays. A hedge, capped with snow, divided the field from the tow-path, and on the other side of the hedge a tall silk hat appeared in view—a handsome silk hat, well polished and shiny.

Evidently the hat was on a head; it could not have been suspended, like Mahomet's coffin, self-sustained between earth and sky. But the wearer of it could not be seen. The snowy hedge hid him from sight. Only the silk hat, gleaming in the sunshine, was visible, and the idea had occurred to Arthur Edward to knock it off with a snowball. Certainly it was a tempting target.

And the astonishment of the wearer, when his hat suddenly flew from his head, would be quite funny—at least, in Arthur Edward's opinion. He grinned in anticipation as he stooped and gathered up a double handful of snow, to knead into a snowball.

"You silly owl!" said Raby, as Lovell carefully prepared his snowball. "Let the man's tile alone!"

"Rats!" said Lovell.

"He may be one of Jimmy's father's neighbours," said Newcome. "May be somebody Jimmy knows—"

"Bosh!"

"Look here, Lovell!" urged Jimmy Silver.

"Bow-wow!"

Lovell took careful aim. The silk hat had not moved; the owner thereof was standing on the tow-path, his back to the hedge apparently gazing across the frozen stream. Why the gentleman should be standing there at all, on a cold, windy day, was a mystery; perhaps he was looking for something or somebody. Anyhow, there he was, and the silk hat still presented a tempting target when Lovell had his snowball ready for business.

"Collar him, and shove the snowball down his neck!" suggested Raby impatiently.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Lovell.

"Look here—"

"Don't bother! Here she goes!"

Whiz!

The snowball flew.

Crash!

Right on the silk-hat the snowball crashed and smashed, and the hat flew through the air.

"Good shot!" chorried Lovell.

"Oh, you ass!"

There was an exclamation on the tow-path. The wind caught the hat as it flew and twirled it over the hedge, and it dropped in the field. The next instant a red and excited face was glaring through a gap in the hedge—

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the gap the juniors had been making for when Lovell sighted the silk hat and fell to the temptation to use it as a target.

"You young rascals!"

The gentleman was an elderly gentleman. He was short and stout; he had a plump face, with gold-rimmed glasses stuck upon a plump little nose. He looked like a kindly and benevolent gentleman of sixty or so when in repose. But he was not in repose now.

He was angry, and three members of the Fistical Four could not deny that he had reason to be angry. Undoubtedly the sudden detaching of his hat had given him a startling shock.

"Hook it!" muttered Raby.

The old gentleman was scrambling through the snowy gap in the hedge. He did not pause to "field" his hat. Hatless, and evidently enraged, he came pelting through the gap, a big walking-stick grasped in his hand.

The least observant fellow could have seen that the hatless gentleman wanted vengeance, and wanted it badly.

"Cut!" said Jimmy.

Jimmy Silver thought, for a second, of stopping to apologise to the old gentleman.

But really he did not look in a mood to receive an apology with urbanity. It was more probable that, once at close quarters, he would put in some hefty work with the walking-stick without stopping to listen.

So the four took to their heels across the field.

It would have been easy enough for the four sturdy Rookwooders to "handle" the exasperated old gentleman, but even Lovell did not think of doing that.

They fled.

"My hat! He's after us!" exclaimed Lovell, as he looked back from a stile, over which the four leaped actively.

He was!

With a speed very creditable to a gentleman of his years, the hatless man came chasing across the field, brandishing his walking-stick, and shouting:

"You young rascals! Hooligans! By gad! Young rascals! Stop! Do you hear me? Stop! I am going to thrash you! Stop!"

"What an inducement to stop!" murmured Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four crossed the next field at their best speed. The old gentleman, who was evidently a game old gentleman, clambered over the stile, and came pelting across the second field on their track.

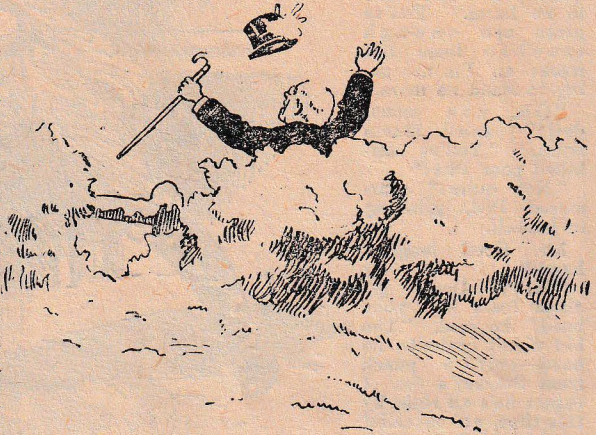
Lovell glanced back again.

"He's getting winded!" he remarked critically. "He can't keep up this pace, with all that weight to carry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Another field will do it," said Lovell. "If he keeps on after that he'll burst something. Put it on."

Well



The Rookwooders trotted across another field. From the farther side they looked back again.

The old gentleman had come to a halt at last.

He was standing in the middle of the field, gasping for breath, his plump face purple and perspiring, and with the last remnant of his energy he was brandishing his stick after the Rookwooders.

"Done!" said Lovell. "All right now."

The Fistical Four dropped into a walk. They were rather breathless themselves—though certainly not in the winded state of the old gentleman behind.

But they walked rather quickly, and crossed another field, and then a patch of woodland, and the puffing and perspiring pursuer was lost to sight.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.**Jimmy to the Rescue!**

WHAT the dickens—" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

He stopped, bent his head, and listened.

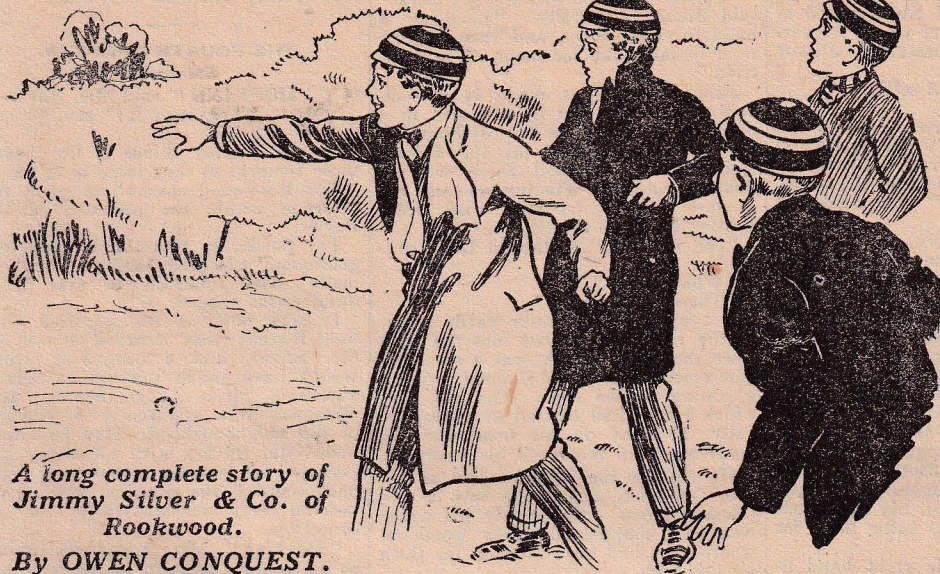
The Rookwooders had crossed the frozen stream on the ice, and were rambling on the opposite hillside—a gentle slope that was green with trees and ferns in the summer-time—now bare and frosty, with leafless trees standing gaunt against the sky.

Somewhere between them and Jimmy Silver's house they had left the pursuer behind—and had sagely resolved to make a wide detour back to the Priory, to give the old gentleman a wide berth. Fortunately, they had plenty of time on their hands.

Even Lovell realised that it would be awkward if the old fellow tracked the juniors home and lodged a complaint. Mr. Silver, it was certain, would be very much annoyed at such an occurrence—he might even be very cross with Jimmy for bringing home a friend who could not be relied upon not to knock off the hats of neighbouring old gentlemen with snowballs.

From somewhere among the frozen trees a strange wailing sound had become audible—the juniors had heard it for several minutes without taking

Out Of It!



A long complete story of
Jimmy Silver & Co. of
Rookwood.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

any special heed. But it grew louder and shriller, and they took notice of it at last. Jimmy Silver listened, and his chums stopped and listened also. Sharp and clear the howl echoed over the frosty hillside.

"Sounds like a dog!" said Jimmy.

"More likely the wind," said Lovell.

"There isn't much wind to-day."

"There's some, and I think it sounds like the wind," said Lovell, growing, as usual, more positive at a hint of argument. "In fact, I'm pretty certain it's the wind, Jimmy."

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"It's a dog," he said. "It's got hurt somehow—may have been caught in a trap. Let's go and see."

"Oh, it's the wind, you know!"

"Rats!"

Jimmy Silver listened very carefully to locate the sound. Then he turned from the path he had been following and struck off across the hillside.

At frequent intervals the painful, prolonged howl was repeated, and as the juniors advanced it grew louder—till even Lovell had to acknowledge that it was the howl of some animal.

But there was no animal to be seen.

"Fallen somewhere," said Jimmy Silver. "There are old gravel-pits in this quarter—disused now, and half-covered in with ferns and things. Mind where you step, you fellows!"

Still guided by the sound, the juniors pushed on through frosty bushes, and suddenly a plump figure in uniform came in view. It was the figure of Police-constable Blumpy, of Hadley Priors, who constituted, in his plump person, the local police force.

"Hallo, Blumpy!" called out Jimmy.

Mr. Blumpy touched his helmet to the Rookwooders.

"Mornin', Master Silver! You 'eard that dorg? I've been looking at him, but there ain't no getting him out."

"Where is he?" asked Raby.

Mr. Blumpy pointed.

The plump policeman was standing almost on the verge of a pit that cleft the hillside. The edges of it, crumbling away in wind and weather, were thick with snow, and dangerous to approach.

Treading very cautiously, the Rookwooders approached near enough to look down into the pit.

It was a good forty feet deep, and had been deeper, but had been partly choked by falling earth and stones.

At the bottom rain had collected, and there was a thin sheet of ice over water of unknown depth.

On the thin ice, which cracked even under his light weight, was a little Aberdeen terrier.

Evidently the animal, nosing inquisitively along the verge of the pit, had tumbled over, and rolled down the steep side. Climbing out would have been very difficult for an active human being; and it was quite impossible for a dog. The unfortunate terrier scuttled to and fro on the creaking ice, and howled lamentably.

"I 'eard him," went on Mr. Blumpy.

"I came along, but there ain't nothing doing. Man can't get down there."

"Not without forty feet of rope," said Raby, staring down.

"We might get a rope," said Newcome, looking compassionately at the little animal. "We could get one in the village."

Mr. Blumpy shook his head slowly.

"Two mile," he said. "That dorg wouldn't last till you got 'arf back. There he goes again!"

Crack!

The ice was thin, and was already broken in half a dozen places, where the terrier evidently had gone through, and scrambled out again. Now it broke once more, and, with a startled, scared yelp, the terrier plunged through into dark water.

"Poor old dog!" murmured Lovell.

The animal scrambled out again, cracking the ice right and left, but getting a foothold at last. Then it resumed scuttling to and fro and howling.

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows.

"We've got to help him somehow," he said. "Got any idea how deep that water is, Mr. Blumpy?"

"More'n ten foot, I reckon," said Mr. Blumpy.

"Oh, my hat!"

Jimmy stared down.

The sides of the old pit were steep, crumbling here and there, and covered with snow. But Jimmy Silver was making up his mind.

"I'm going to try it on," he said.

"Rot!" said Lovell.

"I'll manage it somehow, old fellow!"

"Look here—"

"Nuff said, old chap!"

Jimmy Silver threw off his coat and scarf. Sharply from below came the howling and whining of the dog. The thin ice cracked open again, and once more the terrier was struggling in welling water. He crawled out once more, but evidently almost exhausted; and his whining now was fainter and more pitiful.

"Look 'ere, Master Silver," said Mr. Blumpy, "you ain't going! Your father wouldn't 'ave it if he was 'ere. I think it's my dooty to stop you."

"Bow-wow!" said Jimmy cheerily.

"Once you slip you're done in," said Mr. Blumpy. "That water's freezing, and you'd never climb out of it alone. You see that?"

"I'm not going to slip."

"Now, you look 'ere—" urged Mr. Blumpy. The plump constable seemed to be doubtful whether he ought not to collar the junior and restrain him by force from the desperate attempt. Jimmy Silver's chums had the same thought in their minds.

Jimmy settled it by dropping on his hands and knees and backing on all fours to the edge of the pit. His legs swung down, groping for foothold, and he lowered himself by tufts of grass and roots.

"Jimmy!" muttered Lovell huskily. "Jimmy, old man, stop—"

But Jimmy was gone.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Still on the Trail!

DOWN, slowly but surely, went the captain of the Rookwood Fourth.

Progress was slow.

Sometimes his feet found support, sometimes they hung free in space. But carefully and cautiously he found holding for his hand and lowered himself foot by foot, inch by inch.

The strain on his arms was great;

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his face was set, and perspiration trickled on his forehead.

With his chest to the steep slope, he wormed his way down, and every now and then loose stones, fragments of earth, or chunks of snow were displaced and went hurtling downward.

It seemed ages to Jimmy Silver and to his chums before his feet touched the cracking ice on the pool at the bottom of the pit.

Holding on almost like a cat, Jimmy Silver looked round at the ice. The terrier had ceased to howl, and was already snuggling against his legs. The intelligent animal had realised at once that this newcomer was a rescuer. "Good dog!" murmured Jimmy breathlessly.

The Aberdeen whined softly. Jimmy glanced up.

Over the verge above he could see Arthur Edward Lovell's face, white and set, staring down. Lovell was lying on his chest above, his head over the verge. "Buck up Jimmy!" he called out hoarsely.

Jimmy did not reply; he had no breath to waste. The water, dotted with fragments of glassy ice, washed round his ankles, almost freezing him. He groped for a foothold, and found one at last, and released one hand.

Then he reached for the terrier and seized its collar.

A loose cord dangled from the collar, and Jimmy gathered it up. He lifted the little animal to his shoulder.

"Good dog—good doggie!" he murmured soothingly. But the little Aberdeen did not struggle or wriggle. He quite understood, in his intelligent canine brain, what was being done for him.

Jimmy had only his right hand to work with; he did not venture to let go with the other. Slowly—with painful slowness—he looped the dog's lead round his own neck and knotted it.

Then he began to climb.

Three faces were watching him from the top of the steep slope now.

With the Aberdeen on his shoulder Jimmy climbed on. The weight of the tiny animal was nothing to him. Twice the terrier slipped from his shoulder and hung over his back by the lead, scrambling wildly; and then Jimmy held on breathlessly, but the little animal scrambled back to his shoulder each time.

Slowly, but surely, the Rookwood junior wormed and scrambled his way up the steep side of the pit.

Lovell was reaching down, eager to help, and at last, as Jimmy came within reach, he was able to grasp his chum's collar and give a helping hand. A moment more and Raby and Newcome had hold of him and were helping him to safety.

"My eye!" said Mr. Blumpy.

Jimmy Silver scrambled away from the verge and lay for some minutes in the frosty grass, breathing hard and fast. He was quite exhausted.

Raby untied the dog.

"Jimmy, old man—" murmured Newcome.

"All serene!" gasped Jimmy.

He sat up, aching from his exertions and breathless. Mr. Blumpy had taken possession of the Aberdeen, holding him by the lead.

"This 'ere is a lost dorg," he remarked. "If there's a reward out for him, Master Silver, you're entitled to it."

Jimmy grinned faintly.

"Never mind the reward! I'm glad I got the little beast out. You'd better take him to the station, Mr. Blumpy;

his owner's bound to inquire for him there."

"That's so," said Mr. Blumpy; "and I'll give him your name, Master Silver."

And Mr. Blumpy walked away, holding the lead, with the Aberdeen frisking round his ample calves.

"My hat! Look at my clothes!" said Jimmy Silver ruefully, as he picked himself up.

"You look a picture, and no mistake!" said Lovell. "Mud from head to foot, and your chivvy's smothered, too!"

"Never mind—all in the day's work!" said Jimmy cheerfully. "Lend me a hand to clean down, and then I think we'd better make for home. I'm a bit tired."

Jimmy Silver was made as presentable as possible; but he was still in a muddy state when the Fistical Four left the spot and started for the Priory. And he was fatigued—there was no doubt about that. The juniors came out at last into the country road from Hadley Priors to the Priory.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Raby suddenly.

"What—"

"There he is again!"

Not more than twenty yards away, as the juniors came out into the road from the hillside path, was a stout old gentleman, his gold-rimmed glasses gleaming in the sun. The silk hat, which Lovell had treated so disrespectfully, gleamed on his head—the old gentleman had recovered his headgear.

He sighted the Rookwooders at the same moment, and broke into a run towards them. Apparently his wrath was still unappeased; they wondered whether he had been hunting for them all this time.

"My hat!" exclaimed Lovell. "That old ass is after us again! Let's give him some more snowballs—plenty of snow along the hedge in—"

"Fathead! Hook it!"

"I'm fed-up—"

"Hook it, you dummy! It's all your fault!"

"Stop!" shouted the old gentleman, brandishing his stick. "You young rascals! I know you! Stop!"

But the Rookwooders did not stop. They scudded away down the road, with the enemy in full pursuit.

Jimmy Silver panted.

His climb in the old pit had told severely upon him, and he was in no state for a foot-race. He lagged behind his comrades, and the pursuer gained on him.

Jimmy Silver's chums slackened down as he lagged. With a rush the pursuer came on.

Whack!

The walking-stick came down across Jimmy's shoulders, and the captain of the Rookwood Fourth uttered a yell.

"Yoooop!"

"Stop it, you old donkey!" roared Lovell. "Oh, my hat! Yaroooh!" Lovell caught the next hefty whack from the walking-stick.

"Young rascals—hooligans—scoundrels!" panted the old gentleman, piling in with the stick at a great rate. "Take that—and that—and that—"

The Rookwooders took them—there was no help for it. But Jimmy Silver put out a foot as the excited old gentleman was rushing at Newcome, and he tripped over it and came down.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

It was the old gentleman's turn to yell.

He sprawled in the road, his hat flying in one direction, his stick in another.

"Bump him!" shouted Lovell.

"You silly ass!" shrieked Jimmy. "Cut off while you've got a chance, fathead!"

And the Rookwooders fled once more. When they looked back from a distance, the old gentleman was sitting on a wayside stone, rubbing his knees, which seemed to have suffered in his downfall.

"Thank goodness we're done with him!" gasped Raby.

Ten minutes later the Rookwooders arrived at the Priory, late for lunch, but deeply thankful that they had done with the incensed old gentleman—if, indeed, they had done with him!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Shocking!

"SHOCKING!" said Mrs. Silver. "Yes, isn't it?" said Cousin Phyllis.

Jimmy Silver & Co. heard those remarks as they came in to tea.

The Rookwood chums had spent the afternoon within the precincts of the Priory.

The possibility that the incensed old gentleman was still hunting for them made them reluctant to take their usual walks abroad.

It was not his walking-stick that they feared; they dreaded a visit to Mr. Silver, and a complaint which would have made matters extremely awkward. The old gentleman, name unknown, was apparently a resident of the neighbourhood. Had he called upon Mr. Silver, with an angry and perhaps exaggerated account of what had occurred, the situation would have become very uncomfortable for all concerned.

"Shocking!" Mrs. Silver was saying, as the juniors came in to tea, and Mr. Silver nodded assent and Cousin Phyllis agreed.

"What's happened?" asked Jimmy.

"Poor old Mr. Corkran," said Phyllis.

"Never heard of him," said Jimmy, as he sat down. "Who is he, Phyl, and what's the matter with him?"

"Mr. Corkran is a gentleman who has recently taken Ivy Lodge," said Mr. Silver. "I have not met him, but I understand that he is a very respectable and worthy old gentleman. He seems to have been treated shockingly, from what Phyllis says."

"It must have been some of the village boys," remarked Mrs. Silver. "There are, I think, some few rough lads in Hadley Priors."

"There were four of them," said Phyllis.

Lovell, with a cup of tea half-way to his mouth, stopped and put down the teacup.

The Fistical Four exchanged sudden glances.

The same thought struck all of them at once; they wondered whether "Mr. Corkran," who had recently taken Ivy Lodge, was the same old gentleman with whom they had had so unfortunate an encounter that morning.

Jimmy breathed rather quickly.

"But what has happened exactly?" he asked.

"I heard about it in the village," explained Phyllis. "I saw Mr. Corkran there in the post office; he was talking to the postmaster, and was very angry and indignant. He was attacked—"

"Attacked?" murmured Lovell.

"Four young hooligans—" said Phyllis.

"Hooligans!" said Raby faintly.

"That was how Mr. Corkran was describing them," said Phyllis, with a smile. "Four young hooligans. They attacked him with snowballs, and knocked his hat off, and ran away—"

"Oh!"
 "Afterwards he came on them, on the Hadley Priors road, and was about to punish them, and one of them tripped him up——"

"Ah!"
 "He had a very painful fall——"
 "D-d-did he?"
 "And hurt his knees," said Phyllis. "He seemed very angry indeed. It is rather a shame, isn't it?"

"Shocking!" said Mrs. Silver.
 "Perhaps he was pitching into the chaps with his stick then they tripped him up!" suggested Newcome diffidently.

"That is no excuse" said Mr. Silver, in his deep voice. "They had provoked the punishment by attacking him in the first place."

"Oh, ah—yes! Of—of course!" stammered Newcome.

"I am sorry to learn that such rough characters exist in our quiet countryside," went on Mr. Silver. "I was quite unacquainted with the fact. I think these young rascals may turn out to be strangers in the neighbourhood—a low class of excursionists perhaps."

"Oh! Perhaps!" gasped Lovell.
 "I trust that Mr. Corkran will be successful in his endeavours to discover them," said Mr. Silver. "The matter is not, I suppose, serious enough to be placed in the hands of the police——"

"Phew!"
 "But the boys should be found, and their parents acquainted with their misdeeds," said Mr. Silver. "No doubt a thrashing from their parents would meet the case. But the thrashing should be severe."

Lovell bent a crimson face over his teacup.

There were beautiful little cakes on the table—cakes of Cousin Phyllis' own making. But Lovell did not touch them—though Phyllis had made them. Arthur Edward had lost his appetite.

Cousin Phyllis did not speak. She had noted crimson complexions on four faces, and something had suddenly dawned on her mind. For a moment or two the girl's eyes danced.

Then, with great kindness and tact, she spoke on another topic, and the subject of Mr. Corkran and his grievances was dropped. Jimmy Silver & Co. were only too glad to have done with it.

They got away as soon as they could; and out of hearing of Jimmy's parents three members of the Co. proceeded to tell the fourth what they thought of him.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
For It!

"**Q**UICK!"
 "What!"
 "He's coming!"
 Lovell gasped out the warning.
 It was the next day—a frosty January morning.

Mrs. Silver and Cousin Phyllis had driven out that morning; and Mr. Silver was occupied in his library. Raby was trying over some of Cousin Phyllis' music, in the music-room, and Newcome was helping him vocally. Jimmy Silver was in the room, reading a letter from Harry Wharton of Greyfriars, who had been spending part of the vacation with the Rookwooders, and had left a few days ago. Arthur Edward Lovell had gone out into the gardens—and now he suddenly opened the french window, fairly jumped into the music-room, and gasped out his warning in breathless haste.

Lovell had said that "he" was

coming, and his comrades did not need to ask who "he" was.

There was only one "he" of whom the Rookwooders lived in dread—and whose coming was a matter of consequence to them. Any other "he" in Wiltshire might have butted in without worrying them.

"So he's trailed us down!" gasped Raby. His fingers ceased suddenly to wander idly over the ivory keys.

"Yes. He——"
 "Coming here?" exclaimed Newcome.
 "Coming up the drive!" said Lovell.
 "For goodness' sake, let's get out of sight!"

"Well, that's a good idea," Jimmy Silver said. "It's barely possible that his call mayn't have anything to do with us."

"Barely," said Newcome.
 "Well, it's a chance!" exclaimed Lovell impatiently. "For goodness' sake, don't let's butt into him and ask for trouble. He may be shown into this room—or some ass may open the door and let him see us from the hall——"

"Come on!" said Jimmy hurriedly.
 The Fistical Four hurried out of the music-room.

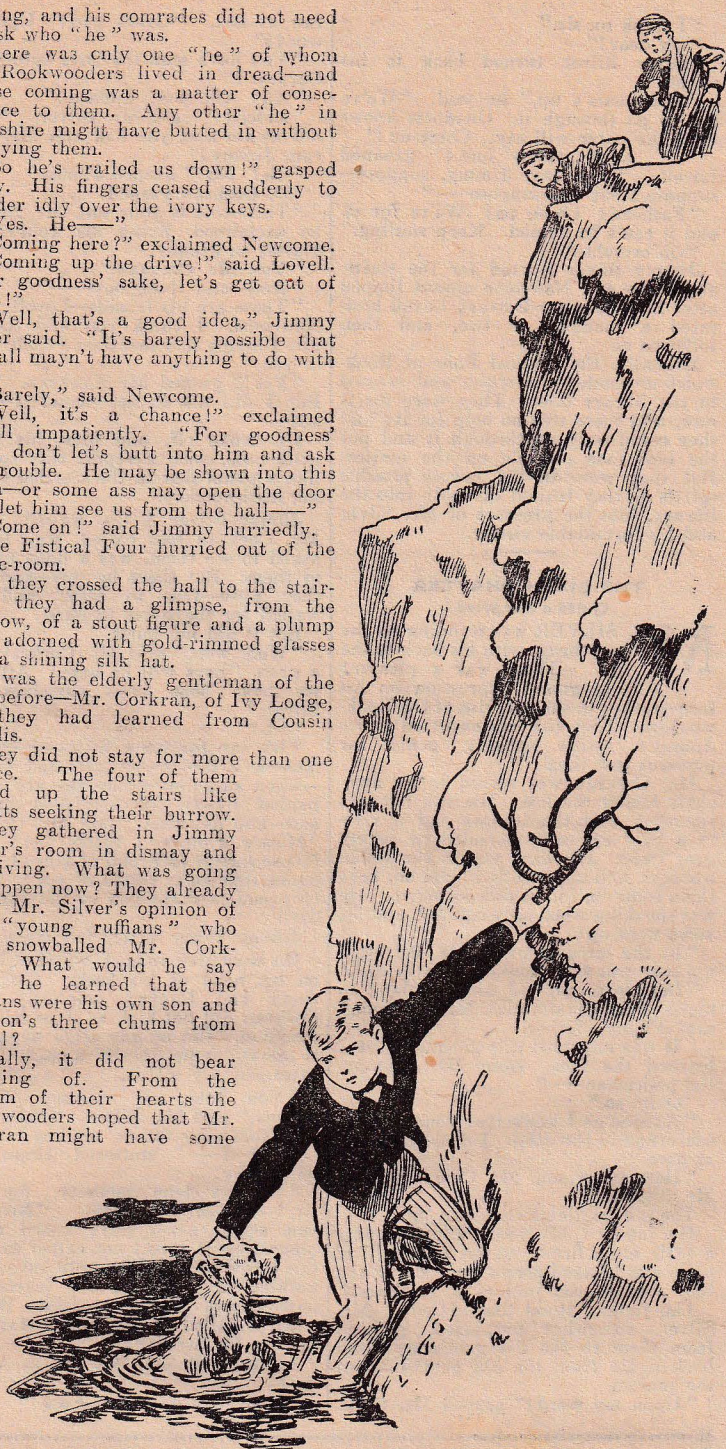
As they crossed the hall to the staircase, they had a glimpse, from the window, of a stout figure and a plump face adorned with gold-rimmed glasses and a shining silk hat.

It was the elderly gentleman of the day before—Mr. Corkran, of Ivy Lodge, as they had learned from Cousin Phyllis.

They did not stay for more than one glance. The four of them bolted up the stairs like rabbits seeking their burrow.

They gathered in Jimmy Silver's room in dismay and miggiving. What was going to happen now? They already knew Mr. Silver's opinion of the "young ruffians" who had snowballed Mr. Corkran. What would he say when he learned that the ruffians were his own son and his son's three chums from school?

Really, it did not bear thinking of. From the bottom of their hearts the Rookwooders hoped that Mr. Corkran might have some



A PLUCKY ACTION! "Euck up, Jimmy!" called out Lovell hoarsely from above. Jimmy Silver did not reply; he had no breath to waste. The water, dotted with fragments of glassy ice, washed round his leg, almost freezing him. He groped for a foothold and found one at last, and released one hand. Then he reached for the dog, seized its collar, and gathered up the little animal. (See Chapter 3.)

other reason for calling on Mr. Silver, and did not know that they were inmates of the Priory House.
 Tap!
 "Oh dear!"
 Jimmy Silver opened the door as there was a tap outside. It was a parlour-maid who had tapped.
 "What is it, Harriet?" asked Jimmy dismally. He could guess only too well what it was.

"The master sent me for you, Master Jimmy. Will you and your friends go down to the library?"
 "Oh dear! Is—is—is there a visitor there, Harriet?"
 "Yes, Master Jimmy."
 "He—he's not gone yet?"
 "No, sir."
 "Does he want to see us, do you know?"

"I think so, sir."

"Oh dear!"

Jimmy Silver turned back to his chums.

"The game's up," he said. "We've got to go through it. Goodness knows what the pater will say. Come on!"

"Oh, what rotten luck!" groaned Lovell. "I—I say, Jimmy, suppose—suppose I cut off—suppose—"

"Fathead! Come on! We're for it, and it can't be helped. Keep smiling."

"Oh crumbs!"

Jimmy Silver started for the stairs, and Raby and Newcome almost limped after him. Arthur Edward Lovell hesitated a moment or two, and then followed on.

Dismally, the Fistical Four of Rookwood descended the stairs and crossed to the library door. They were for it now, and there was no help for it; and they could only go through it and put the best face possible on the matter. But they were in the lowest possible spirits as they trailed dismally into the library, in the presence of Mr. Silver and his formidable visitor.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Quite a Surprise!

MR. SILVER was standing on the hearthrug, with his back to the fire. There was a pleasant and genial expression on his face—rather to the surprise of the Rookwooders. They had not expected to see Jimmy's father looking genial or pleasant just then.

Mr. Corkran was seated in an arm-chair facing the fire. His silk hat was removed, and the juniors had a view of a bald crown surrounded by scanty grey locks. His back was to the Rookwooders, and apparently he did not hear them come in, for he did not move. He was speaking when they entered, and his voice went on:

"In the circumstances, Mr. Silver, I am sure you will excuse this early call." "Certainly, sir. I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr. Corkran," said Jimmy's father.

"It was not until this morning that I learned the facts, from Mr. Blumpy, the policeman—"

"Quite so."

"As soon as I knew that your son was concerned in the affair, I decided to call at once."

"Here is my son, Mr. Corkran," said Mr. Silver.

The old gentleman jumped up.

He jammed his gold-rimmed glasses a little more firmly on his plump little nose, and blinked across the room at the four shame-faced juniors of Rookwood.

The juniors stood tongue-tied. Mr. Silver, somewhat perplexed, glanced from them to the old gentleman, and back again from the old gentleman to the juniors.

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Cork-

ran at last. "Great gad! Upon my word!"

"You have seen the boys before, Mr. Corkran?"

"Eh? Oh, yes! Indeed!"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Silver. "I was not aware that you had met Mr. Corkran, Jimmy!"

"Oh! No!" gasped Jimmy.

Mr. Corkran gasped.

"This—this is your son, Mr. Silver?" he exclaimed, fixing his gold-rimmed glasses on Jimmy.

"Yes, Mr. Corkran."

"And—these boys—"

"These are his friends—Lovell, Raby, Newcome. I think you told me that Mr. Blumpy had mentioned their names to you."

"Yes!" gasped Mr. Corkran. "Yes! But I did not expect—hem!—I—I did not—"

He broke off, and blew his plump little nose, with a report that sounded like a pistol-shot to the startled ears of the Rookwooders.

Jimmy Silver & Co. waited. Why Mr. Corkran had called, why he had asked to see them, was a deep mystery to them. But there he was—and there they were—face to face; and they waited for the storm to burst.

But it did not burst.

"Well, well," said Mr. Corkran, with a gasp, "boys will be boys! After all, we have been boys ourselves, Mr. Silver."

"Eh?"

"We can forgive a little—er—riotousness—a little—er—exaggerated hilarity—when such—er—outbreaks are accompanied by—by distinguished courage and—and devotion," said Mr. Corkran. "Master Jimmy, I thank you! Your father should be proud of you—I do not doubt that he is proud of you! I shall be proud to shake you by the hand, my boy."

Jimmy Silver nearly fell down.

He wondered indeed, whether he was on his head or his heels. His chums stood and blinked helplessly. Mr. Corkran did not look as if he had been drinking. But on any other hypothesis, it seemed impossible to account for his extraordinary words.

"You told me nothing of this, Jimmy," said Mr. Silver. "You should have told your father, my boy."

"I—I—I—" stuttered Jimmy, bewilderedly.

"Modesty—true modesty, my dear sir," said Mr. Corkran. "No doubt you would never have heard of the occurrence if I had not called to thank this brave lad—and I should have known nothing of it had I not learned his name from Police-constable Blumpy when I called at the police station to inquire for my dog."

"Quite so!" said Mr. Silver, with a smile.

"Your—your—your dog!" stam-

pered Jimmy Silver. A light broke on his mind at last.

"My dog, that you saved from the pit he had fallen into, at the risk of your life, my boy," said Mr. Corkran. "I learned what had happened from the policeman, with whom I found my terrier—quite safe and sound, owing to your courage, my dear lad."

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy.

"Oh, what luck!" murmured Raby.

Mr. Corkran shook hands impressively with Jimmy Silver. He proceeded to pay that blushing youth a series of warm compliments. Evidently he had forgiven the snowballing episode, in his gratitude for service rendered, and did not mean to mention it to Mr. Silver. The relief to the Rookwooders was very great.

"And you had seen my son before, it seems," remarked Mr. Silver.

Mr. Corkran coughed.

"Yes. I—I saw these—these lively young fellows yesterday. They were—hem!—snowballing, and running about," he said. "I did not know then what I owed to your son, and his friends, Mr. Silver—your son especially. True courage—unexampled devotion—kindness to a dumb beast—"

And Mr. Corkran ran on again, quite eloquently, till Jimmy Silver began to wonder whether he would ever leave off.

Mr. Corkran stayed to lunch at the Priory, and the story of the rescue of the Aberdeen was told over again to Mrs. Silver and Cousin Phyllis. And when Mrs. Silver inquired gently whether Mr. Corkran had heard anything of the young hooligans who had snowballed him, the old gentleman coughed and blushed, and said that after all it was a trifle, and boys would be boys—and the Rookwooders blushed also and looked down at their plates, and Cousin Phyllis' eyes danced.

When Mr. Corkran left the Rookwooders walked down to the road with him, and Lovell took the opportunity of offering an apology—which the placated old gentleman accepted graciously. When he was gone, the Fistical Four looked at one another.

"Well," said Raby, "we're well out of that!"

"What-ho!" murmured Newcome.

"As for that ass Lovell—"

"That fathead Lovell—"

"That chump Lovell—"

All the way back to the house Lovell's chums told him what they thought of him. Indeed, they continued to do so, on and off, all through the remainder of the vacation, till the holidays were over and the Fistical Four went back to Rookwood.

THE END.

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The Return of Ernest Levison!

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

(Author of the well-known tales of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's, appearing in the "Gem" every Wednesday.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Rally Round!

TO-MORROW!" said Sidney Clive.

Ralph Reckness Cardew, who was reclining in a comfortable, if not precisely graceful attitude in the armchair in Study No. 9, in the Fourth Form of St. Jim's, looked up at Clive as the latter spoke.

"To-morrow!" he repeated.

"Yes. I'm jolly glad. Aren't you?"

"Glad?" said Cardew.

"Yes, ass. I suppose you're glad!" said Clive, rather warmly.

"Certainly, if you say so," assented Cardew. "If you suppose I'm glad, old bean, I'm no end glad; in fact, as that Indian chap at Greyfriars would put it, the gladfulness is terrific! But, since we're both jolly glad, would you mind droppin' me a hint of what we're glad about? Don't think I'm inquisitive; but I'd like to know."

Sidney Clive gave a grunt.

"You've forgotten what's happening to-morrow," he said sharply, and with a slight touch of scorn.

"You know what a memory I've got," pleaded Cardew.

"So you've forgotten that Levison's coming back to St. Jim's to-morrow?" Clive exclaimed.

"Levison?"

"Yes, Levison?" snapped Clive.

"Perhaps you've forgotten, too, that he is our study-mate, and that he's been over at Greyfriars for some weeks with his brother Frank."

"Dear me!" said Cardew. "Old man, you know what a memory I've got—I mean, what a memory I haven't got. Now I come to think of it, the name Levison does seem familiar to me."

"Wha-a-at?"

"I know I've heard it before," said Cardew calmly. "Let's see, wasn't his other name Ernest? He had a brother in the Third Form, named Fred, or Frank, or somethin'—"

Snort from Sidney Clive.

"Who checked his Form master and cleared out of school," continued Cardew, with the air of a fellow trying to recall half forgotten facts. "It came out that he had—or hadn't—done something or other, and he's pardoned for runnin' away, or else he isn't pardoned—somethin' to do with pardon, I feel sure. And he was found wanderin' by some Greyfriars fellows, who took him in like good Samaritans, and Levison was sent for to stay with him, and—now he's coming back. I remember it all now perfectly. I knew I'd heard the name Levison somewhere."

Sidney Clive's clouded face had gradually cleared, and he grinned.



"You silly owl!" he said. "So you were pulling my leg."

Cardew chuckled.

"Dear old man," he said, "you go around askin' a fellow to pull your jolly old leg, you know! You've been sittin' like a stuffed owl for ten minutes without sayin' a word, and suddenly you bark out 'To-morrow!' So I deduced, like jolly old Sherlock Holmes, that you'd been thinking about Levison, an' I couldn't resist pullin' your leg."

Clive laughed, his good-humour quite restored.

"So far from forgettin' him," continued Cardew. "I was just thinkin' when you barked of makin' his home-comin' a pleasant one to-morrow—"

"Oh, good!"

"Meetin' him at Abbotsford, you know, and takin' him to the races—"

"Oh, don't be an ass, old chap; you can't pull my leg a second time, you know," said Clive good-humouredly. "Levison said in his letter that he would get to Wayland Junction at three to-morrow afternoon. We're going to meet him there."

"Hem!"

"Don't you want to come?" demanded Clive.

"Lots! Heaps! But I believe the Third Form are rather keen on young Levison comin' back. Wally and Reggie and Joe, and in fact, a whole mob of inky little beasts, may be at Wayland greetin' Frank of the Third."

"Let them."

"Certainly. Put are we goin' round with a mob of fags in soiled collars and unwashed necks?" asked Cardew. "Why not let the Third escort the conquering heroes to the school, and—meet Levison here?"

"Fathead!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said a voice in the doorway. "I wegard you as a fathead, Cardew!"

Cardew glanced round, and nodded cheerily to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Dear old man," he said, "you are at liberty to regard me in any character you are pleased to assume for the purpose."

"Bai Jove! I mean that you are a fathead, Cardew, not that I am a fathead, you ass!"

"Then you've got it wrong, Gussy. Do you reverse?"

"Wats!" Arthur Augustus stepped into Study No. 9. "I twust that I shall meet with some support in this study," he said.

"Stony?" asked Cardew. "Without any visible means of support? If a pound-note is any good—"

"Wubbush! My ideah," explained Arthur Augustus, "is to give Levison a weception when he comes back to-morrow, aftah the wippin' way he has distinguished himself at Gweyfwiahs, and upheld the honah of St. Jim's, and all that, you know. Are you fellows goin' to wally wound?"

"How does a fellow wally?" inquired Cardew innocently.

Clive chuckled.

"I have spoken to Blake, and he is coming," said Arthur Augustus, "and Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah will be there. As this is Levison's own studdy, I twust I can wely on you chaps to wally wound. My ideah is for Levison's fwiends to turn up at the station in a body, you know, and weceive him—"

"With three cheers?" asked Cardew.

Clive smiled.

"Good!" he said. "The more the merrier!"

Arthur Augustus took out a little pocket-book, and made an entry.

"This is my list of fellows meetin' Levison at the station," he said.

"How many, so far?"

"Nearly a dozen."

"Well, collect 'em all."

"Wight-ho!" said Gussy cheerily; and he left the study to gather more names for his list.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Scheming a Scheme!

OH, give us a rest!" Reuben Piggott of the Third Form made that remark, in tones of intense irritation.

Piggott of the Third felt that he had reason to be irritated.

There was a conversation going on in the Third Form room, and the topic was extremely distasteful to Piggott. The topic was the return of Levison minor, due on the morrow.

Wally of the Third was very keen on the subject. So was Manners minor. They were Frank Levison's special chums; and they had missed Frank during his stay at Greyfriars. Joe Frayne and Hobbs and Curly Gibson joined in the talk on the subject with some interest. But Piggott was irritated. Piggott did not like Levison minor, and he did not like Levison minor's friends; indeed, Piggott liked nobody in the wide world excepting Reuben Piggott, who was really not a likable fellow at all.

"Give us a rest!" went on Piggott, as

D'Arcy minor stopped and glared at him. "I'm fed up."

"You're fed up!" ejaculated Wally of the Third.

"Right up to the chin!" said Piggott defiantly. "A fellow would think that a dashed fag had never been away from the school for a few weeks before. Blow Levison minor!"

Wally of the Third slipped off the desk upon which he was seated. Piggott backed away, not liking the look on Wally's face.

"Piggy's fed up, you fellows," said Wally in measured ones. "Piggy doesn't want old Frank to come back.

Old Franky ran away from school because of a trick Piggy played on Mr. Selby, and if Piggy hadn't been found out, Frank wouldn't be allowed to come back at all. Piggy is a cad, you fellows! Piggy is a first-class roiter! And Piggy is going to be ragged!"

"Hear, hear!" said Reggie Manners. "Look here—" began Piggott, beginning to wish that he had not made his annoyance audible.

"Lay him over that desk. Young Hobbs, you get me a ruler."

"What-ho!" said Hobbs.

Piggott made a run for the door of the Form-room, darted out, and fled down the corridor.

"Stop him!" shouted Wally.

With a whoop, half a dozen fags rushed after him.

Piggott, looking back from the corner of the passage, saw the whole mob in hot pursuit, and fled for his life.

"After him!"

"Stop him!"

"Collar him!"

Piggott panted as he ran. Reggie Manners was about a foot behind him as Piggott passed Mr. Railton's door. At any other time Piggott would as soon have dashed into a lion's den as into a Housemaster's study. But vengeance was close behind him, and he did not stop to think. He passed the door, then stopped and whirled back and hurled the door open, and rushed into the study.

Reggie Manners stopped just in time.

"Hook it!" panted Wally.

"It's all right; Railton's out!" called out Frayne.

"Oh! Good!"

Piggott, breathless, came to a halt in the Housemaster's study, behind the table. Had Mr. Railton been there, Piggott would certainly have been called to account for rushing into the room in that unceremonious manner. Fortunately he was absent. But, although the Housemaster was not there, the fags did not venture to invade the sacred precincts, and collar the refugee. Ragging in a Housemaster's study was rather too serious a thing for even Wally & Co. to undertake.

The fags crowded round the doorway, and Piggott panted behind the table and glared at them.

"Come out!" said D'Arcy minor.

"Shan't!" panted Piggott.

"Hook him out!" said Jameson.

Wally shook his head.

"Can't rag here," he said. "Let's clear; some dashed prefect may come along. We'll wait for Piggy in the next passage. He won't dare to stay here long."

And Wally & Co. retired, closing the door.

Piggott breathed hard. It was risky to remain in the Housemaster's study; he did not know when Mr. Railton might return, and he did not want to be found there by the Housemaster. But it was still more risky to venture out,

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in the present mood of Wally & Co.; and Piggott decided to remain, as the lesser of two evils.

He sat down in Mr. Railton's armchair to wait—not in a happy mood. But he remembered, now he had leisure to think, that he had heard that Mr. Railton was going to Abbotsford that afternoon; so there was no immediate hurry to move. He decided to give Wally & Co. an hour or so to cool down—by which time it was probable that their wrath would have evaporated. They were not likely to haunt the passages on the watch for him for very long.

But after a quarter of an hour in the solitary study Piggott was tired of waiting and he decided to chance it. He rose from the armchair and crept to the door, to listen for sounds without. He did not want a master or prefect to see him dodging out of the Housemaster's study.

There were footsteps in the passage, approaching the door; and Piggott scowled. The footsteps were too light to be Mr. Railton's; but it was quite possible that someone was coming to the study. The fag crossed to the window, and squeezed himself out of sight behind the curtains.

A few moments later the door opened.

Someone came in, closed the door quietly, and crossed the room to the telephone. Piggott heard the receiver taken off the hooks. Then a voice said: "Trunks!"

It was the voice of Racke of the Shell.

Evidently Racke knew that the Housemaster was away, and not likely to return soon, and had taken advantage of the fact to give himself the use of the telephone for a trunk call. Piggott grinned. Mr. Railton was likely to find an unaccountable trunk call entered upon his account at the end of the quarter.

Piggott did not show himself, though he had nothing to fear from Racke of the Shell. He was inquisitive by nature, and he determined to know what Racke had to telephone about. He wondered whether the black sheep of the Shell had the "nerve" to use his Housemaster's telephone in connection with his sporting speculations.

"Courtfield!"

That was what Racke was saying into the transmitter. Piggott's eyes opened wide. He knew that Courtfield was the exchange for Greyfriars School—where Levison was. Surely Racke of the Shell was not ringing up Greyfriars to speak to Ernest Levison—well known to be his enemy!

"I don't know the number," Racke was going on. "I want Greyfriars School, near Courtfield, in Kent."

That reply apparently satisfied the Exchange. Piggott heard Racke replace the receiver, to wait for the Exchange to tell him when he was "through."

Piggott wondered. What on earth would Racke have to say to Levison, the St. Jim's fellow, at Greyfriars? Was he going to speak to Levison, though? Racke knew two or three fellows at Greyfriars—Skinner of the Remove, for one. Skinner had spent a holiday with Racke once—the two being birds of a feather. Perhaps he was going to speak to Skinner. Piggott of the Third meant to know.

Racke moved uneasily about the study while he waited to be called. He was uneasy at being there; but he did not venture to leave, lest he should miss his call.

Once or twice Piggott heard him creep to the door, evidently to listen. There was a sudden buzz from the tele-

phone, and Racke uttered an exclamation of relief, and ran back to it, and jerked off the receiver.

Piggott was almost trembling with curiosity by this time. Unseen, his presence unsuspected by Racke, he listened with all his ears.

"Is that Greyfriars? Mr. Quelch speaking—Thank you! Would it be possible for me to speak to Skinner—Skinner of the Remove? I'm awfully sorry to trouble you, sir, but it's important—if you'd be so very kind, sir—Thank you!"

A short silence.

"Is that you, Skinner? Racke speaking, from St. Jim's. How are you going on, old fellow? Good! Levison still there—what?"

Piggott, of course, could not hear what was said in answer on the telephone. Racke's half of the conversation had to suffice for him.

"You don't like that cad—what? I thought you wouldn't. You've had trouble with him? No wonder. Well, he's coming back to St. Jim's to-morrow, and you'll be shot of him. I say, Skinner, will you help me to pull his leg to-morrow? His friends here are making no end of fuss about his coming back, and I'd like to put a spoke in his wheel."

Piggott would have given a great deal to hear Skinner's reply. But he could guess its purport from Racke's next remark.

"Good man! Levison used to belong to your school at one time, and I understand that he left a jolly juicy reputation behind him. Well, the fellows here know that, and nobody would be really surprised to hear that Levison had come a mucker at Greyfriars. If you could manage a telegram, say, to Clive, here, to-morrow morning—"

Piggott breathed hard.

"Of course, it's only a jape—it would come out later. But it would rather muck up their giddy reception—what? Pile it on thick—put in a robbery and the police—Ha, ha, ha!"

"Phew!" murmured Piggott.

"I'll square for the wire, of course. Dash it all, you know, I've got plenty of money! Make up a real thriller, and let Clive have it in the morning. He's Levison's best pal here, and he's the chap the cad would naturally tell first. Something really rich. Ha, ha!"

Piggott peered out from behind the curtain. Racke was bending eagerly over the telephone; and Piggott caught his profile—eager, cruel, malicious. Evidently Skinner's replies were pleasing to Racke's ear.

"Good! Something like that. Of course, you run no risk. Who's to know? Good man! Done!"

A few words more were exchanged, and then Audrey Racke put up the receiver. Evidently he was satisfied. Piggott heard him chuckle as he went to the door. A moment more, and the door closed on Aubrey Racke. Then Piggott emerged from behind the window-curtain, and Piggott, too, chuckled.

He waited a few minutes for Racke to get away, and then left the study, hoping that the coast was clear by this time. Wally & Co., certainly, had cleared off. But Reggie Manners was still on the watch. As Piggott turned the corner of the corridor he was collared.

"Now, then—" said Reggie Manners grimly.

And for the next five minutes Piggott of the Third was involved in trouble.

But as he bathed his nose, in a bath-room, afterwards, Piggott felt solaced. The return of the Levisons, on the morrow, was not to be exactly as

Wally & Co. anticipated—if Racke's little scheme of vengeance was a success. There was solace in that reflection for Piggott—and also in the reflection that Racke, the wealthy black sheep of the Shell, would be under his thumb afterwards. So Reuben Piggott felt fairly well satisfied—in spite of the really painful state of his nose.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. A Telegram for Sidney Clive!

TAP! Second lesson was proceeding in the Fourth Form room the following day, when a telegraph boy tapped at the door and looked in. Mr. Lathom glanced round.

"Bad news?" whispered Cardew.

Clive nodded.

"Levison?"

Another nod.

Mr. Lathom glanced at Clive over his spectacles.

"You have read your telegram, Clive?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it any matter that demands immediate attention, my boy?" asked the master of the Fourth kindly. "In that case—"

"No, sir."

"Very good."

"May I give the telegram to Cardew to read, sir?"

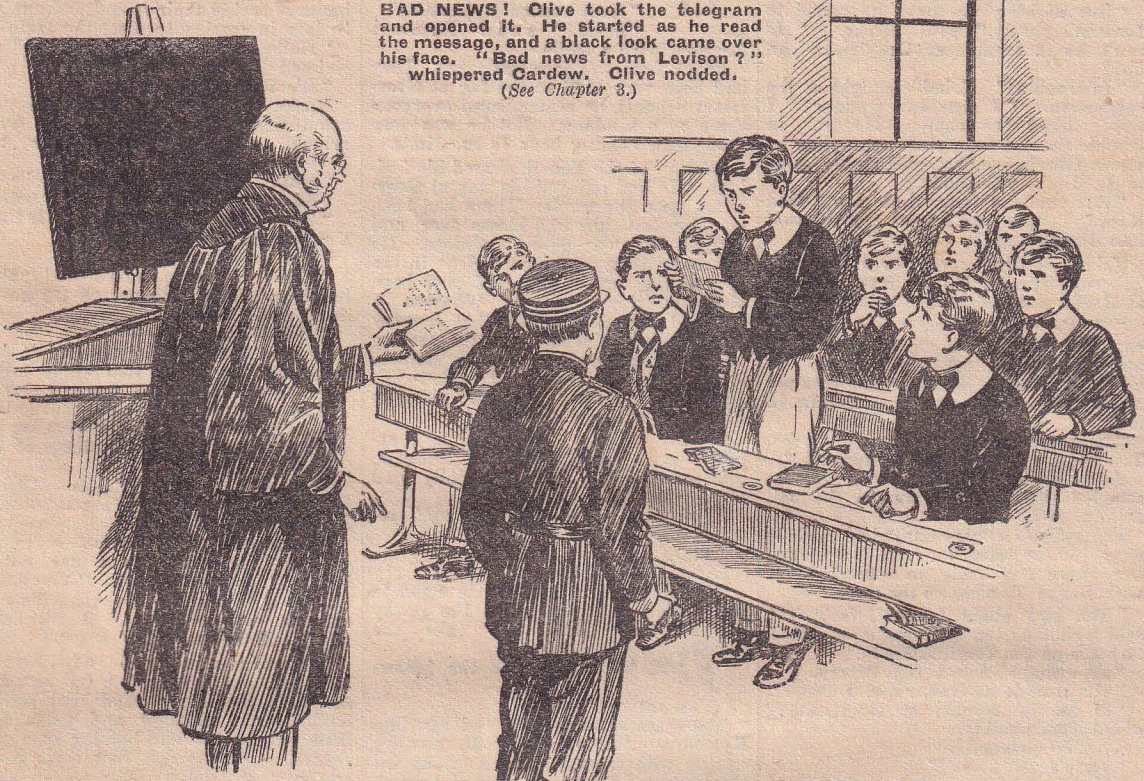
"Certainly, Clive."

The two juniors walked away by themselves.

The Shell came out a few minutes later, and Aubrey Racke looked for Trimble of the Fourth. He wanted to know what had happened during lessons with the Fourth, or if anything had happened. He was pretty sure that Skinner, his pal at Greyfriars, had played up; it was worth the while of a fellow like Skinner to keep in the good graces of the profiteer's son and heir. But he could see that there was no sign of a sensation in the Fourth, so far. If anything had happened, however, it was easy to pump it out of the chattering Trimble.

"You joining in the giddy reception

BAD NEWS! Clive took the telegram and opened it. He started as he read the message, and a black look came over his face. "Bad news from Levison?" whispered Cardew. Clive nodded.
(See Chapter 3.)



He did not like interruptions of lessons. The Form did; but the Form master didn't.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Telegram, sir—"

"Oh, very well!"

"For Master Clive, sir."

Mr. Lathom pursed his lips.

Fellows were not supposed to receive communications from the outside world when classes were in progress. But a telegram might mean illness, or something serious.

"You may give it to Master Clive," he said. "Clive, you may read your telegram."

"Thank you, sir!" said Clive.

The South African junior was surprised. His face was rather troubled as he stood up.

The telegraph boy retired, and Clive opened the buff envelope; the lesson proceeding while he read the telegram.

Several fellows glanced curiously at him, especially Cardew. It had occurred to Cardew that possibly the wire was from Levison, announcing some change in his arrangements.

Clive started as he read, and a black look came over his face. Several fellows noticed that the colour changed in his cheeks.

Sidney Clive passed the telegram to his chum, and sat down. The expression on his face had caught the attention of almost all the Fourth, and there was a good deal of wonder and surmise. Clive's face was a little pale, but quite composed, as he sat down.

Cardew read the telegram without a sign of his thoughts appearing on his face. Whatever was the news in it, it had not overcome the cool nonchalance of the dandy of the Fourth.

He slipped it into his pocket, and gave his attention—as much attention as usual—to Mr. Lathom.

That was the end of the incident, till the morning break came after the second lesson.

Three or four fellows gathered round Clive as the juniors came out of the Form-room.

"Not bad news, old chap, I hope?" said Arthur Augustus. "Nothin' wrong with the old folks at home, what?"

"Nothing, thanks!" answered Clive.

"You looked a bit knocked over, I thought," said Lumley-Lumley.

"Did I?"

"Glad I was mistaken," said Lumley-Lumley. Clive nodded, and turned away with Cardew.

this afternoon?" asked Racke, tapping Baggy Trimble on the shoulder with unusual friendliness.

Trimble grunted.

"D'Arcy hasn't asked me—"

"Hasn't he?"

"I—I mean, I refused," said Trimble hastily. "I can't waste a half-holiday buzzing around silly stations waiting for a mere nobody to turn up. All very well for D'Arcy."

"Levison's coming, after all, then?"

"Eh? I suppose so," said Trimble.

"I haven't heard that he wasn't."

"Well, he might put it off, as they're making such a lot of him at Greyfriars," Racke remarked carelessly. "But in that case, of course, he would send a telegram, as his pals are expecting him."

Trimble jumped at the word telegram.

"My hat! Very likely that's it!"

exclaimed Baggy.

"That's what?"

"Clive had a telegram this morning in class," said Trimble. "It wasn't from his own people either."

Racke's eyes gleamed.

"Was it from Levison?" he asked.

"He seems to be keeping it rather dark," said Trimble. "He's not told

anybody about it, only Cardew. He looked jolly knocked over when he read it in class."

"Knocked over?" repeated Racke.

"Awful!" said Trimble impressively, drawing on his fat imagination, as usual, for details. "Turned quite pale; ghastly, in fact!"

"What rot!" said Racke. "Even if Levison's not coming back to-day, I suppose Clive can't mind very much."

"Don't see why he should. But he looked thoroughly knocked over. I thought he was going to faint!" said Trimble, still more impressively.

Racke laughed.

"I tell you he did!" said Trimble warmly. "I saw him! Lots of fellows saw him!"

"But nothing can have happened to Levison, surely," said Racke. "He can't be in trouble at Greyfriars, can he?"

"In trouble!" Trimble caught at the suggestion. "I shouldn't wonder! I never liked the chap. He was in trouble there a long time ago, when he was a Greyfriars chap—before he came to St. Jim's, you know."

"But that's a long time ago," said Racke. "He can't have got himself into disgrace again, can he?"

Trimble's little round eyes gleamed. The suggestion caught his fancy at once, as Racke was well aware that it would.

"That's it, of course," said Trimble eagerly. "He's been up to something, and he's bowled out. I—I thought so all along, Racke. It—it flashed into my mind as soon as I saw the telegram, in fact."

"Not much goes on that you don't see, Trimble," remarked Racke admiringly.

And Racke strolled away, feeling satisfied that he had started the ball rolling, as it were.

If Levison's chums wanted to make a secret of the telegram from Greyfriars, they were not likely to succeed now, with Baggy Trimble on the track.

"Too bad about Levison, isn't it?" said Trimble, ten minutes later, when he came on the Terrible Three.

"Eh—what?" asked Tom Merry.

"His trouble at Greyfriars, I mean."

"Is he in trouble at Greyfriars?" asked Tom blankly.

Trimble grinned.

"Didn't you know?"

"No, I didn't! And I don't believe it now, either!" said the captain of the Shell gruffly.

"I should have thought Clive would have told you," said Trimble, "as you're one of the party going to meet Levison—"

"Has Clive told you anything?" demanded Manners.

"You see, he had the telegram in class," explained Trimble. "He was quite knocked over by the news, poor chap. Looked quite ill."

"Trimble's yarning again," said Lowther. "You got into trouble once, Trimble, for spinning yarns about Levison of the Fourth. Now you're going to get into trouble again—to the extent of one bump!"

"I say—Leggo! Yooop!" roared Trimble.

The Terrible Three sat Trimble on the ground and walked on. That was all the gratitude they displayed for early information imparted by the tattler of the School House.

But by the time the juniors went into the Form-rooms again a good many fellows had heard of Trimble's interpretation of the telegram incident, and they wondered. In the Fourth Form room, Sidney Clive was the object of some

curiosity, and the fellows could not help noticing that he was troubled and worried, and that he was called to order by Mr. Lathom more than once. And the impression spread in the Fourth that there was something—something very wrong with Levison at Greyfriars. And when lessons were over they learnt the truth, and saw that fatal telegram. Certainly something was very wrong, and that put a stop to the demonstration prepared for the return of the native.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Return!

"**E**RNIE!"

"Yes, Frank?"

"Next station Rylcombe!"

"Good!" said Ernest Levison, with a smile.

Frank Levison's face was eager. They had been very kind to the fag at Greyfriars School; he remembered everyone there with kindness. But he was very glad to be coming back to St. Jim's.

Levison of the Fourth shared his feelings. He had enjoyed his stay at Greyfriars upon the whole. There had been troubles, but they had blown over, and Levison had won golden opinions. He had more than set himself right in the eyes of the juniors who had once been his schoolfellows. Harry Wharton & Co. had seen him off on that journey back to his own school, and the parting had been most cordial. But Levison was looking forward to getting back to St. Jim's and rejoining the cheery circle to which he belonged there.

"Wally will be at the station, I expect," said Frank brightly. "Reggie, too, most likely. I shall be jolly glad to see them."

"I suppose Clive will turn up," remarked Levison.

"And Cardew, of course."

Levison laughed.

"Cardew will be too lazy to come to the station, I expect. But I'm pretty certain that Clive will take the trouble."

"It will be jolly to see the fellows again."

"Yes, rather!"

The train slowed down and ran into Rylcombe, the pretty little country station with neat flower-beds along the platforms. Levison major and Levison minor jumped out of the train.

They looked up and down the platform; there was no St. Jim's fellow in sight.

"Outside the station, perhaps," said Frank hopefully.

Levison of the Fourth nodded and led the way from the station. Outside the station, however, no St. Jim's cap was to be seen.

Levison compressed his lips a little.

Certainly it had not been arranged for his friends to meet him on his return. There had been some reference to it in letters from Clive, but no definite fixture had been made. Nevertheless, as Levison had been away from school for some weeks, surely one or the other of his friends might have taken the trouble. Rylcombe was not ten minutes from St. Jim's on a bike, and it was a half-holiday and a very fine afternoon.

"Come on, Franky!" said Levison.

"We'll walk it!"

Frank's glance lingered up and down the street. Only the previous day he had had a letter from Wally of the Third, full of friendship and mistakes in spelling. And now he was coming back Wally hadn't taken the trouble to walk or ride a mile to give him a greeting.

The fag's lips quivered.

"I dare say old Selby's detained them," he said suddenly. "He would, you know! Old Selby's a beast!"

"He can't have detained Fourth Form chaps!" grunted Levison. "I dare say they didn't think it worth while to come. Why should they, if you come to that?"

"I'd have come if Wally had been away for weeks, and ill, too," said Frank.

"Well, let's get going. Nobody's here."

Frank gave a last glance round, and followed his brother down the old High Street of Rylcombe. They emerged into the country road leading to St. Jim's, and both looked about them keenly as they walked on. They were still in hopes of seeing their friends, who might be late in coming to meet the train.

"Hallo, that's a St. Jim's cap!" exclaimed Frank suddenly.

"It's Racke."

Racke and Crooke of the Shell were sauntering along the lane. They grinned at the sight of the two Levisons.

"Hallo, you back!" said Crooke.

"So you've turned up!" said Racke.

"Yes," said Levison curtly. "Is there a match on this afternoon?"

"Not that I know of."

"There was going to be a trial match, but I understand it's put off till Saturday," said Crooke.

"Then Clive isn't—"

Levison broke off abruptly. It had come into his mind that Clive might have been wanted in a football match, and so could not come out. But he did not want to confide his thoughts on the subject to the two black sheep of the Shell—his old enemies.

"Clive!" repeated Racke. "Clive isn't playing footer. He's gone out for the afternoon, I think."

"Gone out?" said Levison.

"Yes. Cardew's got a car out, I believe," drawled Racke. "You know Cardew's swankin' ways—regardless of expense, an' all that. I shouldn't wonder if they're havin' a good time."

Levison was extremely unwilling to let Racke see what he felt, but he could not hide the black cloud that settled on his brow. Cardew and Clive had gone out for the half-holiday in a car, regardless of the fact that their chum was coming back to the school that afternoon! It was "out of sight, out of mind," with a vengeance.

"Dear men, the school hasn't missed you so much as you seem to think!" he sneered. "If you're expectin' to see your fag pals before tea, young Levison, you're offside! D'Arcy minor and Manners minor are at Wayland, if you want to know! I gave them two tickets to the cinema!"

And, with a laugh, Racke walked on up the lane.

"Come on, Frank!" muttered Levison major.

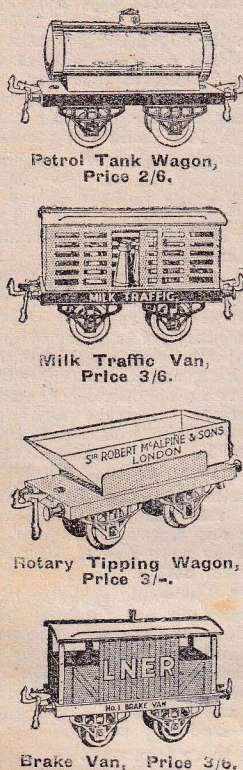
The two Levisons walked on towards St. Jim's, both with a dark and moody brow. All the happiness of the home-coming was gone now.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Back Again!

TOM MERRY was standing on the steps of the School House. The "reception" being off, Manners had gone out with his camera, and Lowther had cycled over to Wayland to the pictures. Tom Merry was going to get some footer practice; Blake & Co. of Study No. 6 were already on the ground.

(Continued on page 28.)



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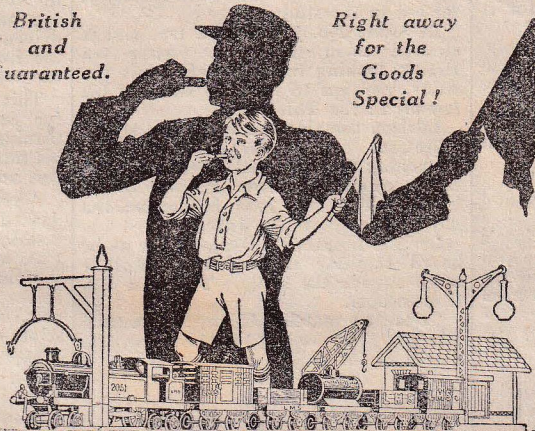
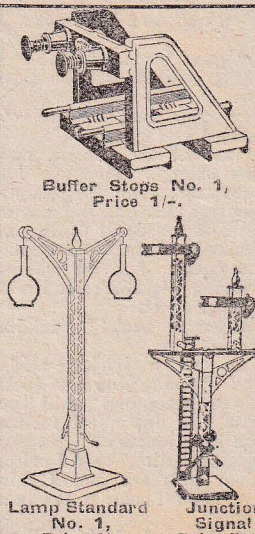
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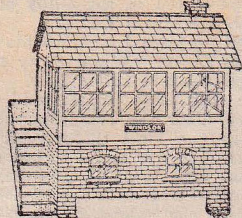
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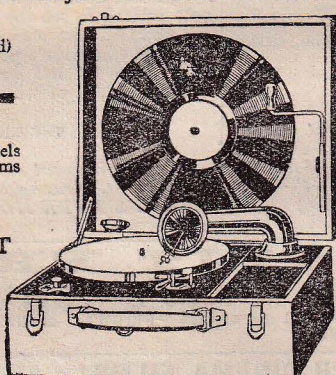
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The Return of Levison!

(Continued from page 26.)

Tom gave a start at the sight of the Levisons coming up the path to the House.

"My only hat, they've come!" he ejaculated.

Levison of the Fourth was looking gloomy enough. He gave Tom Merry a slight nod, after the description of his own chums. Levison did not expect the captain of the Shell to be particularly enthusiastic about his return. Levison was sensitive, and he was not given to wearing his heart on his sleeve for days to peck at.

"So you're back?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yes, we're back," said Levison briefly. "Going down to footer?"

"I was just going," said Tom. "I—I suppose you don't feel inclined for it after a long journey?"

"No, not quite," said Levison grimly.

"Your pals are out, I think," said Tom. "You'll come to tea in my study, Levison?"

"Thanks, no! I think Frank and I will have tea in my study on our first day home," said Levison.

And he passed on with his brother.

Tom Merry walked away slowly and thoughtfully to Little Side.

He did not understand Levison's return after the telegram, and he did not in the least understand Levison's evidently bitter mood. Had there been serious trouble at Greyfriars.

Levison went into the House, and Mr. Railton, the School House master, met him in the hall.

"I am glad to see you back again, Levison!" said Mr. Railton, shaking the Fourth Former by the hand.

"Thank you, sir!" said Levison, his brow clearing a little.

Dr. Holmes has received a very excellent report of you from the headmaster of Greyfriars," said Mr. Railton. "You seem to have done remarkably well in every way there, Levison. I am glad of it."

And, with a kind nod, the Housemaster went on his way.

Levison went to Mr. Lathom's study to report his return to his Form master, and Frank went on the same duty to Mr. Selby, the master of the Third. After leaving Mr. Lathom, whose greeting was very kind, Ernest Levison went up to his own study—No. 9 in the Fourth.

The room was empty and silent, and

seemed desolate somehow. This was not the return that Levison had looked for.

"His lip curled bitterly. 'Not a fellow to give him a welcoming word except Tom Merry, and even Merry of the Shell had seemed constrained."

There was a footstep at the door, and Frank came in, with his lower lip drooping. The fog did not seem far from tears.

"Hallo, kid!"

"There's nobody about," said Frank. "Everybody seems to have gone out, Ernie."

"Why not, on a fine half holiday?" said Levison indifferently. "Let's get some tea here, Frank."

"Right ho!" said Frank, a little more brightly.

Levison major and minor visited the tuckshop and came back with materials for tea in the study.

In Study No. 9 they had tea, and it cheered them somewhat. After tea Frank, looking more cheerful, left the study, perhaps to hunt up some of his friends in the Third.

Levison remained alone in the study.

He sat and stared at the slowly darkening window, with bitter thoughts in his mind and bitter feelings in his breast. The dusk was falling on the old quadrangle of St. Jim's.

Levison breathed a little harder as he heard familiar steps and a familiar voice outside the study. The door was thrown open.

"Got a match, Clivey?" yawned Cardew, not seeing Levison in the gloom of the study.

"Yes. Here you are."

Clive lighted the gas. Then there was a shout from the two juniors.

"Levison, by gad!"

"Levison!"

Ernest Levison rose from his chair.

"Sorry to startle you!" he said satirically. "You don't seem to have expected me to-day! Sorry!"

"Levison—"

Levison affected not to hear. He walked out of the study and strolled down the passage, humming a tune. Cardew and Clive, left in the study, stared at one another blankly.

THE END.

(As yet Levison is ignorant of the false telegram. What he does when he hears all about it you will learn in "CLEARING HIS NAME!"—next week's stirring tale of St. Jim's.)

On The Trail of the Kidnappers!

(Continued from page 18.)

The Removite edged nearer, until he could gaze down over the side of the quay and look along to the steps. To his relief, he saw Mr. Grell sitting in a boat, and Mason was certainly there also, although Pitt could not see him.

"Don't you get frightened, my boy," Grell was saying, in a low voice. "You're just going to be took out to that nice little steamer. You'll have a sea-voyage for your health. How does that strike you—hey?"

Mason, of course, could make no reply, and Pitt judged that Grell was waiting until Starkey returned. There was no possibility of anybody interfering, for there was nobody within sight. And here, again, Pitt knew that he would have no opportunity of carrying out a rescue. Starkey had only driven to one of the inns which lined the front, and he had probably handed the trap over to an ostler.

This conjecture was probably correct, for Starkey returned while Pitt was turning over one or two alternatives in his mind. They were useless, for there was no time for action.

A reckless fellow would probably have dashed forward without thinking, and disaster would have followed. Reginald Pitt, by remaining in the background all the time, was not proving himself deficient in pluck, but full of quick-wittedness. Grell and Starkey thought themselves secure—and they weren't!

Mason was to be taken to the steamer which was lying just out in the channel. That information, at all events, was of the first importance. Pitt knew his chum's exact destination.

All he had to do was to hurry back to St. Frank's and give the alarm—Nelson Lee would attend to the rest. Pitt had great faith in the Housemaster-detective, and he knew that Lee would be able to awaken the local authorities and have Jack Mason rescued in a very little time.

Pitt had done splendid service, and he only waited to see the boat being pulled out towards the steamer. Then he remounted Christine's bicycle and pedalled back towards St. Frank's with every ounce of speed of which he was capable.

THE END.

(Don't miss next week's rousing long story of St. Frank's, entitled "JACK MASON'S DARK HOUR!")

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