

# THE FIRST CHAPTER Charteris is Warned

"You may observe," said the referee kindly, "whatever you like.

Twenty-five."

" The rules say-"

"I have given my decision. Twenty-five!"
A spot of red appeared on the official cheek.
The referee, who had been heckled steadily since the kick-off, was beginning to be annoyed.

"The ball went be'ind without bouncing,

and the rules say-"

"Twenty-five!" shouted the referee. "I

know what the rules say quite well."

And he blew his whistle with an air of finality. The secretary of the Bargees' F.C. subsided reluctantly, and the game was restarted.

The Bargees' match was a curious institution. Their real name was the Old Crockfordians. When, a few years before, the St. Austin's secretary had received a challenge from them—dated from Stapleton, where their secretary happened to reside—he had argued within himself as follows:

#### P.G.WODEHOUSE

Charteris is a born schemer, and he manages to surprise quite a number of people

"This sounds all right. Old Crockfordians? Never heard of Crockford. Probably some large private school somewhere. Anyhow,

DOUNOS

they're certain to be decent fellows."

And he arranged the fixture. It then transpired that Old Crockford was a village, and, to judge from their appearance on the day of battle, their football team seemed to have been recruited exclusively from the riff-raff of the same. They wore green shirts with a bright yellow leopard over the heart, and O.C.F.C. woven in large letters about the chest. One or two of the outsides played in caps, and the team to a man criticised the referee's decisions with point and pungency.

Unluckily, the first year of the fixture saw a weak team of Austinians rather badly beaten, with the result that it became a point of honour to wipe this off the slate before the match could be cut out of the card. The next year was also unlucky. The Bargees managed to score a penalty goal in the first half, and won on that. In the following season the match resulted in a draw, and by that time the thing had become an annual

event.

Now, however, the school was getting some of its own back. The Bargees had brought down a centre-threequarter of some reputation from the North, who happened to be staying in the village at the time of the match, and were as strong in the scrum as ever. But St. Austin's had a great team, and were carrying all before them. Charteris and Graham, at half, had the ball out of their

centres in a way that made Merevale, who looked after the football of the school, feel that life was worth living; and when once

it was out things happened rapidly.

MacArthur, the captain of the school fifteen, with Thomson as his fellow-centre, and Welch and Bannister on the wings, did what they liked with the Bargees' threequarters. All the school cutsides had scored; even the back, who dropped a goal from near the half-way line. The player from the North had scarcely touched the ball during the whole game, and altogether the Bargees were becoming restless and excited. The kick-off from the twenty-five line, which followed upon the small discussion alluded to above, reached Graham. Under ordinary circumstances he would have kicked, but in a winning game original methods often pay. He dodged a furious sportsman in green and yellow, and went away down the touch-line. He was almost through, when he stumbled. He recovered himself, but too late. Before he could pass, someone was on him. Graham was not particularly heavy, and his opponent was muscular. He was swung off his feet, and the next moment the two came down together, Graham underneath. A sharp

pain shot through his shoulder. A doctor emerged from the crowd—there is always a doctor in every crowd—and made an examination.

"Anything bad?" inquired the referee.

"Collar-bone," said the doctor.

"Rather badly smashed. Be all right in a month or two. Stop his playing. Rather a pity. Much longer before half-time?"

"I was just going to blow the whistle when this happened."

Graham was carried off, and the referee blew his whistle for half-time.

"I say, Charteris," said MacArthur,
who on earth am I to put half

instead of Tony?"

"Swift used to play half in his childhood, I believe. I should try him. But, I say, did you ever see such a scrag? Can't you protest, or something?"

"My dear chap, how can I? It's on our own ground. These people are visitors, if you come to think of it. I'd like to wring the chap's neck, though, who did it. I didn't spot who it was. Did you see?"

"Yes; it was their secretary. That man with the moustache. I'll get Prescott to mark

him this half:"

Prescott was the hardest tackler in the school, with the single exception of MacArthur. He accepted the commission cheerfully, and promised to do his best by the moustached one. Charteris certainly gave him every opportunity. When he threw the ball out of touch, he threw it to the criminal with the moustache, and Prescott, who stuck to him like glue, had generally tackled him before he knew what had happened. After a time he began to grow thoughtful, and whenever there was a line-out went and stood among the threequarters. In this way much of Charteris' righteous retribution miscarried, but once or twice he had the pleasure and privilege of putting in a piece of tackling on his own account. The match ended with the enemy still intact, but considerably shaken. He was also much annoyed. He spoke to



"Might I observe, sir—" "You may observe," said the referee kindly, "whatever you like. I have given my decision. Twenty-five!" (See page 50.)

Charteris on the subject as they were leaving the field.

"I was watching you," he said.

"That must have been nice for you," said Charteris.

"You wait!"

"Certainly. Any time you're passing, I'm sure---"

"You ain't 'eard the last of me yet!"

"That's something of a blow," said

Charteris cheerfully, and they parted.

- Charteris, having got into his blazer, ran after Welch and MacArthur, and walked back with them to the house. They were all three at Merevale's.

"Poor old Tony!" said MacArthur. "Where have they taken him to-the

house?"

"Yes," said Welch. "I say, Babe, you ought to scratch this match next year. Tell

them the card's full up, or something."

"Oh, I don't know! Do you think so? One expects pretty rough play in this sort of game. After all, we tackle pretty hard ourselves. I know I always go my hardest. If the man happens to be brittle, that's his look-out," concluded the bloodthirsty Babe.

ordinary hard tackle and a beastly scrag like the one that doubled Tony up. You can't break a chap's collar-bone without jolly well trying to."

"Well, when you come to think of it, the man had some excuse for being rather sick. You can't expect a fellow to be in an angelic temper when his side's being beaten by about

forty points."

The Babe was one of those thoroughly excellent individuals who always try, when possible, to make allowances for everybody.

"Well, dash it," said Charteris indignantly, "if he had lost his hair, he might have drawn the line at falling on Tony like that. It wasn't the actual tackling that crocked him. The brute simply jumped on him like a hooligan. Anyhow, I made him sit up a bit before I finished. I gave Prescott the tip to mark him out of touch. Have you ever been collared by Prescott? It's a liberal education. Now, there you are, you see. Prescott weighs thirteen-ten, and he's all



Graham was swung off his feet by his muscular opponent and both fell heavily-Graham underneath. A sharp pain shot through his shoulder as his collar-bone broke under the impact.

(See page 51)

muscle, and he goes like a battering-ram. You'll own that. He goes as hard as he jolly well knows how, and yet the worst that he ever does to a man is to lay him out for a couple of minutes while he gets his wind back. He's never crocked a man seriously in his life. Well, compare him with this Bargee man. The Bargee isn't nearly so strong, and he weighs about a stone less, I should say, and yet he smashes Tony's collar-bone. It's all very well, Babe, but you can't get away from it. Prescott tackles fairly, and the Bargee scrage."

"Yes," said MacArthur, "I suppose you're

right."

"Rather," said Charteris, "I wish I'd slain him."

"By the way," said Welch, "you were talking to him after the match. What was he saying?"

Charteris laughed.

"By Jove, I'd forgotten. He said I hadn't heard the last of him, and that I was to wait."

"What did you say ?."

"Oh, I behaved beautifully. I asked him to be sure and look in any time that he was passing, and after a few chatty remarks we parted."

"I wonder if he meant anything."

"I believe he means to waylay me with a buckled belt. I shan't stir out except with the Old Man or some other competent body-guard. 'Orrible outrage. Shocking death of a Sint Orsting's schoolboy!' It would look rather well on the posters."

Welch stuck strenuously to his point.

"No, but look here, Charteris," he said seriously, "I'm not joking. You see, the man lives in Stapleton, and if he knows anything of school rules—"

"Which he probably doesn't. Why should

he ? "

"If he knows anything of school rules, he'll know that Stapleton is out of bounds, and he

may book you there, and report you."

"Yes," said MacArthur; "I tell you what, Alderman, you'd better knock off a few of your Stapleton expeditions. You know you wouldn't go there once a month if it wasn't out of bounds. You'll be a prefect next term. I should wait till then, if I were you."



"You ain't 'eard the last of me yet!" threatened the Bargee, and Charteris grinned cheerfully as he walked on. (See page 52.)

"My dear chap, what does it matter? The worst that can happen to you for breaking bounds is a couple of hundred lines, and I've got a capital of four hundred already in stock. Besides, things would be so slow if you always kept in bounds. I always feel like a cross between Dick Turpin and Machiavelli when I go to Stapleton. It's an awfully jolly feeling. Like warm treacle running down your back. It's cheap at two hundred lines."

"You're an awful fool," said Welch, rudely

but correctly.

Welch was a youth who treated the affairs of other people rather too seriously. He worried over them. This is not a particularly common trait in either boy or man, but Welch had it highly developed. He could not probably have explained exactly why he was worried, but he undoubtedly was. Welch had a very grave and serious mind. He shared a study with Charteris—for Charteris, though not yet a school prefect, was part-owner of a study—and close observation had convinced him that the latter was not responsible for his actions, and that he wanted somebody to look after

him. He had, therefore, elected himself to the post of a species of modified and unofficial guardian angel to him. The duties were heavy, and the remuneration particularly light.

"Really, you know," said MacArthur,
"I don't see what the point of all your lunacy is. I don't know if you're aware of it, but the Old Man's getting jolly sick

with you."

"I didn't know," said Charteris, "but I'm very glad to hear it. For hist! I have a ger-rudge against the person. He sat upon me—publicly, and the resulting blot on my escutcheon can only be wiped out with gore—or broken rules."

To listen to Charteris on the subject, one might have thought that he considered the matter rather amusing than otherwise. This, however, was simply due to the fact that he treated everything flippantly in conversation. But, like the parrot, he thought the more. The actual casus belli had been trivial. At least, the mere spectator would have considered it trivial. But Charteris, though he would have considered it an insult if anybody had told him so, was sensitive. The affair had happened after this fashion. Charteris was a member of the school corps. The orderly-room of the school corps was in the junior part of the school buildings. Charteris had been to replace his rifle in that shrine of Mars after a midday drill, and on coming out into the passage had found himself in the middle of a junior school rag of the conventional type. Somebody's cap had fallen off, and two hastily picked teams were playing football with it (Association Rules). Now, Charteris was not a prefect. (That, by the way, was another source of bitterness in him towards the Powers, for he was well up in the Sixth, and the others of his set, Welch, Thomson, the Babe, and Tony Graham, who were also in the Sixth-the two last below him in form order-had already received their prefect's caps.) Not being a prefect, it would have been officious in him to have stopped the game. So he was passing on with what Mr. Hurry Bungsho Jabberjee, B.A., would have termed a beaming simper of indescribable suavity, when a member of one of the opposing

teams, in effecting a G. O. Smithian dribble, cannoned into him. To preserve his balance, he grabbed at the disciple of Smith amidst applause, and at the precise moment that he did so, a new actor appeared upon the scenethe headmaster. Now, of all things that lay in his province, the headmaster most disliked to see a senior "ragging" with a junior. He had a great idea of the dignity of the senior school, and did all that in him lay to see that it was kept up. The greater the number of the juniors with whom the senior was discovered ragging, the more heinous the offence. Circumstantial evidence was dead against Charteris. To all outward appearances he was one of the players in the impromptu football match. The soft and fascinating beams of the simper, to quote Mr. Jabberjee once more, had not yet faded from his face. In fact, there he was-caught in the act.

A well-chosen word or two in the headmagisterial bass put a premature end to the football match, and Charteris was proceeding on his way, when the headmaster called him. He stopped. The headmaster was angry. So angry, indeed, that he did what, in a more lucid interval, he would not have done. He hauled a senior over the coals in the hearing of a number of juniors, one of whom (unidentified) giggled feebly. As Charteris had on previous occasions observed, the Old Man, when he did start to talk to anyone, didn't leave out much. The address was not long, but it covered a good deal of ground. The section of it which chiefly rankled in Charteris' mind, and which had continued to rankle ever since, was that in which the use of the word "buffoon" had occurred. Everybody who has a gift of humour and who (very naturally) enjoys exercising it, hates to be called a "buffoon." It was Charteris' one weak spot. Every other abusive epithet in the language slid off without penetrating or causing him the least discomfort. The word "buffoon" went home, right up to the hilt. And, to borrow from Mr. Jabberjee for positively the last time, he had said to himself: "Henceforward I will perpetrate heaps of the lowest dregs of vice." He had, in fact, started upon a perfect bout of breaking rules simply because they were rules.

The injustice of the thing rankled. No one so dislikes being punished unjustly as the person who might have been punished justly on scores of previous occasions, if he had only been found out. To a certain extent Charteris ran amok. He broke bounds and did little work, and—he was beginning to find this out gradually—got thoroughly tired of it all. Offended dignity, however, still kept him at it, and, much as he would have preferred to have resumed a

less feverish type of existence, he did not do so.

"I have a gerrudge against the man," he said.

"You are an idiot, really," said Welch.

"Welch," said Charteris, by way of explanation to the Babe, "is a lad of coarse fibre. He doesn't understand the finer feelings a bit. He can't see that I'm doing this simply for the Old Man's good. Spare the rod, spile the choild. Let's go and have a look at Tony, when we've changed. He'll be in the sick-room if he's anywhere."

"All right,"

said the Babe, as he went into his study. "Buck up. I'll toss you for first bath. Heads! Heads it is. Good."

Charteris walked on with Welch to their sanctum.

"You know," said Welch seriously, stooping to unlace his boots, "rotting apart, you really are a most awful ass. I wish I could get you to see it."

"Never you mind," replied Charteris.
"I'm all right. I'll look after myself."

### THE SECOND CHAPTER Charteris Scores

It was about a week after the Bargees' match that the rules respecting bounds were made stricter, much to the popular indignation. The penalty for visiting Stapleton without leave was increased from two hundred lines to two extra lessons. The venomous characteristic of extra lesson was that it cut into one's football, for the criminal was turned



In the midst of the scrimmage the Head appeared. He stood glowering angrily at Charteris. (See page 54.)

from two till four on half-holidays, and so had to scratch all athletic engagements for those days, unless he chose to go for a run afterwards, which he generally did not. In the cricket term the effect was not so deadly. It was just possible that you might get an innings somewhere after four o'clock, even if only at the nets. But during the football seasonit was now February—to be in extra lesson meant a total loss of everything that makes life endurable, and the school protested

into a form-room

(to one another in undertones) with no uncertain voice against this barbarous in-novation.

The reason for the change had been simple. At the corner of Stapleton High Street was a tobacconist's shop, and Mr. Prater, strolling in one evening to renew his stock of Pioneer, was interested to observe P. St. H. Harrison, of Merevale's, busy buying a consignment of "Girl of My Heart" cigarettes. Now, Mr. Prater, was one of the most sportsman-like of

masters. If he had merely met Harrison out of bounds, and it had been possible to have overlooked him, he would have done so. But such a proceeding in the interior of a small shop was impossible. There was nothing to palliate the crime. The tobacconist also kept the wolf from the door and lured the juvenile population of the neighbourhood to it by selling various brands of sweets, but it was perfectly obvious that Harrison was not after these. Guilt was in his eye, and the packet of cigarettes in his hand. Also, Harrison's house cap was fixed firmly at the back of his head. Mr. Prater finished buying his Pioneer, and went out without a word. That night it was announced to Harrison that the headmaster wished to see him. The headmaster saw him; the interview was short and not sweet; and on the following day Stapleton was placed doubly out of bounds.

Tony, who was still in bed, had not heard the news when Charteris came to see him on the evening of the day on which the edict had

gone forth.

"How are you getting on?" asked Charteris.

"Oh, fairly well. It's rather slow."

"The grub seems all right," said Charteris, absently reaching out for a slice of cake.

" Not bad."

"And you don't have to do any work."

" No."

"Well, then, it seems to me that you're having a jolly good time. What don't you like about it?"

"It's so slow, being alone all day."

"Makes you appreciate intellectual conversation all the more when you get it. Mine, for instance."

"I want something to read."

"Bring you a Sidgwick's Greek Prose Composition, if you like. Full of racy stories."

"I've read 'em, thanks." "How about Jebb's Homer? You'd like that. Awfully interesting. Proves that there never was such a man as Homer, you know, and that the Iliad and the Odyssey were produced by evolution. General style, quietly funny. Make you roar."

"Don't be an idiot. I'm simply starving

thing?"

"You've read all mine."

"Hasn't Welch got any books?"

"Not one. He bags mine when he wants to read. I'll tell you what I will do, if you like "

"What's that?"

"I'll go into Stapleton, and borrow some-

thing from Adamson."

Adamson was the College doctor. Residence: Number Three, High Street, Stapleton. Disposition, mild and obliging.

"By Jove, that's not a bad idea!"

"It's a dashed good idea, which wouldn't have occurred to anyone except a genius. I've been quite a pal of Adamson's ever since I had the 'flu. I go to tea with him occasionally, and we talk medical shop. Have you ever tried talking medical shop during tea? Gives you an appetite!"

"All right," said Tony; "but," he added, "Stapleton's out of bounds. I suppose Mere-

vale will give you leave to go in?"

"I shan't ask him. On principle. So long."

On the following afternoon Charteris went into Stapleton. The distance by road was exactly a mile. If you went by the fields it was longer, because you probably lost your

way.

Charteris arrived at the High Street, and knocked at Dr. Adamson's door. The servant was sorry, but the doctor was out. Her tone seemed to suggest that, if she had had any say in the matter, he would have remained in. Would Charteris come in and wait? Charteris rather thought he would. He waited half an hour, and then, as the absent medico did not appear to be coming, took two books from the shelf, wrote a succinct note explaining what he had done and why he had done it, and hoping the doctor did not object, and went out with his literary spoil into the High Street again.

The time was now close on five o'clock. Lock-up was not till a quarter past six—six o'clock nominally, but the doors were always left open till a quarter past. It would take him about fifteen minutes to get back-less if he trotted.

Obviously the thing to do here was to spend a thoughtful quarter of an hour or so inspectfor something to read. Haven't you got any ing the sights of the town. These were ordinarily not numerous, but this particular

day happened to be market-day, and there was a good deal going on. The High Street was full of farmers and animals, the majority of the former being well on the road to intoxication. It is, of course, extremely painful to see a man in such a condition, but when such a person is endeavouring to count a perpetually shifting drove of pigs, the onlooker's pain

is sensibly diminished.

Charteris strolled along the High Street observing these and other phenomena with an attentive eye. Opposite the Town Hall he was buttonholed by a perfect stranger, whom by his conversation he soon recognised as the Stapleton "character." There is a "character" in every small country town. He is not a bad character; still less is he a good character. He is just a "character," pure and simple. This particular man—though, strictly speaking, he was anything but particularapparently took a great fancy to Charteris at first sight. He backed him gently against a wall, and insisted on telling him an interminable anecdote of his shady past, when, it appeared, he had been a "super" in a travelling company. The plot of the story, as far as Charteris could follow it, dealt with the company's visit to Dublin, where some person or persons unknown had with malice prepense scattered several pounds of snuff on the stage previous to a performance of Hamlet. And, according to the "character," when the ghost sneezed steadily throughout his great scene, there was not a dry eye in the house. The "character" had concluded that anecdote, and was half-way through another, when looking at his watch Charteris found that it was almost six o'clock. So he interrupted one of his friend's periods by diving past him and moving rapidly down the street. The historian did not seem to object. Charteris looked round and saw that he had buttonholed a fresh victim. Charteris was still looking in one direction and walking in another when he collided with somebody.

"Sorry," he said hastily. "Hallo!"

It was the secretary of the Old Crockfordians, and, as that gentleman's face wore a scowl, the recognition appeared to be mutual.

"It's you, is it?" said the secretary in his polished way.

"I believe so," said Charteris.

"Out of bounds," said the man.

Charteris was surprised. This grasp of technical lore on the part of a total outsider was as unexpected as it was gratifying.

"What do you know about bounds?" he

said.

"I know you ain't allowed to come 'ere, and you'll get it 'ot from your master for

coming."

"Ah, but he won't know. I shan't tell him, and I'm sure you will respect my secret." And Charteris smiled in an ensnaring manner.

"Ho!" said the man. "Ho, indeed!"

"Well," said Charteris affably, "don't let me keep you. I must be going on."

"Ho," observed the man once more, "ho,

indeed!"

"That's a wonderfully shrewd remark," said Charteris, "but I'd like to know exactly what it means."

"You're out of bounds."

"Your mind seems to run in a groove. You can't get off that bounds idea. How do you know Stapleton's out of bounds?"

"I have made inquiries," said the man

darkly.

"By Jove," said Charteris, delightedly, "this is splendid! You're a regular sleuthhound. I daresay you've found out my name and house?"

"I may 'ave," said the man, " or I may not 'ave."

"Well, now you mention it, I suppose one of the two is probable. Well, I'm awfully glad to have met you. Good-bye. I must be going."

"You are going with me."

"Arm in arm?"

"I don't want to 'ave to take you."

"No," said Charteris. "I should jolly well advise you not to try. This is my way."

He walked on till he came to the road that Led to St. Austin's. The secretary of the Old Crockfordians stalked beside him with determined stride.

"Now," said Charteris, when they were on the road, "you mustn't mind if I walk rather

fast. I'm in a hurry."

Charteris' idea of walking rather fast was to dash off down the road at quarter-mile The move took the man by surprice,

but after a moment he followed with much panting. It was evident that he was not in training. Charteris began to feel that the walk home might be amusing in its way. After he had raced some three hundred yards he slowed down to a walk again. It was at this point that his companion evinced a desire to do the rest of the journey with a hand on the collar of his coat.

"If you touch me," said Charteris, with a surprising knowledge of legal minutiæ, "it'll be a technical assault, and you'll get beans,

anyway, if you try it on."

The man reconsidered the matter and elected not to try it on. Half a mile from the college Charteris began to walk rather fast again. He was a good half-miler, and his companion was bad at any distance. After a game struggle he dropped to the rear, and finished a hundred yards behind in considerable straits. Charteris shot in at Merevale's door with five minutes to spare, and went up to his study to worry Welch by telling him about it.

"Welch, you remember the Bargee who scragged Tony? Well, there have been all sorts of fresh developments. He's just been pacing me all the way from Stapleton."

"Stapleton! You haven't been to Staple-

ton?"

"Yes. I went to get some books for Tony."

"Did Merevale give you leave?"

"No. I didn't ask him."

"You are an idiot. And now this Bargee man will go straight to the Old Man, and run you in. I wonder you didn't think of that."

"It is curious, now you mention it."

"I suppose he saw you come in here?"

"Rather. He couldn't have had a better view if he'd paid for a seat. Half a second.

I must just run up to Tony with these."

When he came back he found Welch more

serious than ever.

"I told you so," said Welch; "you're to go to the Old Man at once. He's just sent over for you. I say, look here, if it's only lines, I don't mind doing some if you like."

Charteris was quite touched by this sport-

ing offer.

It's awfully good of you," he said, "but

it doesn't matter, really. I shall be all right."

Ten minutes later he returned, beaming.

"Well," said Welch, "what has he given you?"

"Only his love, to give to you. It was this way. He first asked if I didn't know perfectly well that Stapleton was out of bounds.

"Sir,' says I, 'I have known it from child-hood's earliest hour.' 'Ah,' says he to me, 'did Mr. Merevale give you leave to go in this afternoon?' 'No,' says I, 'I never consulted the gent you mention.'"

" Well ? "

"Then he ragged me for ten minutes, and finally told me I must go into extra the next two Saturdays."

"I thought so."

"Ah, but mark the sequel. When he had finished, I said I was sorry I had mistaken the rules, but I had thought that a chap was allowed to go into Stapleton if he got leave from a master. 'But you said that Mr. Merevale did not give you leave,' said he. 'Friend of my youth,' I replied courteously, 'you are perfectly correct—as always. Mr. Merevale did not give me leave. But,' I added suavely, 'Mr. Dacre did.' And came away, chanting hymns of triumph in a mellow baritone, and leaving him in a dead faint on the sofa. And the Bargee, who was present during the conflict, swiftly and silently vanished away, his morale considerably shattered. And that, my gentle Welch," concluded Charteris cheerfully, " puts me one up. So pass the biscuits, and let us rejoice to-day if we never rejoice again."

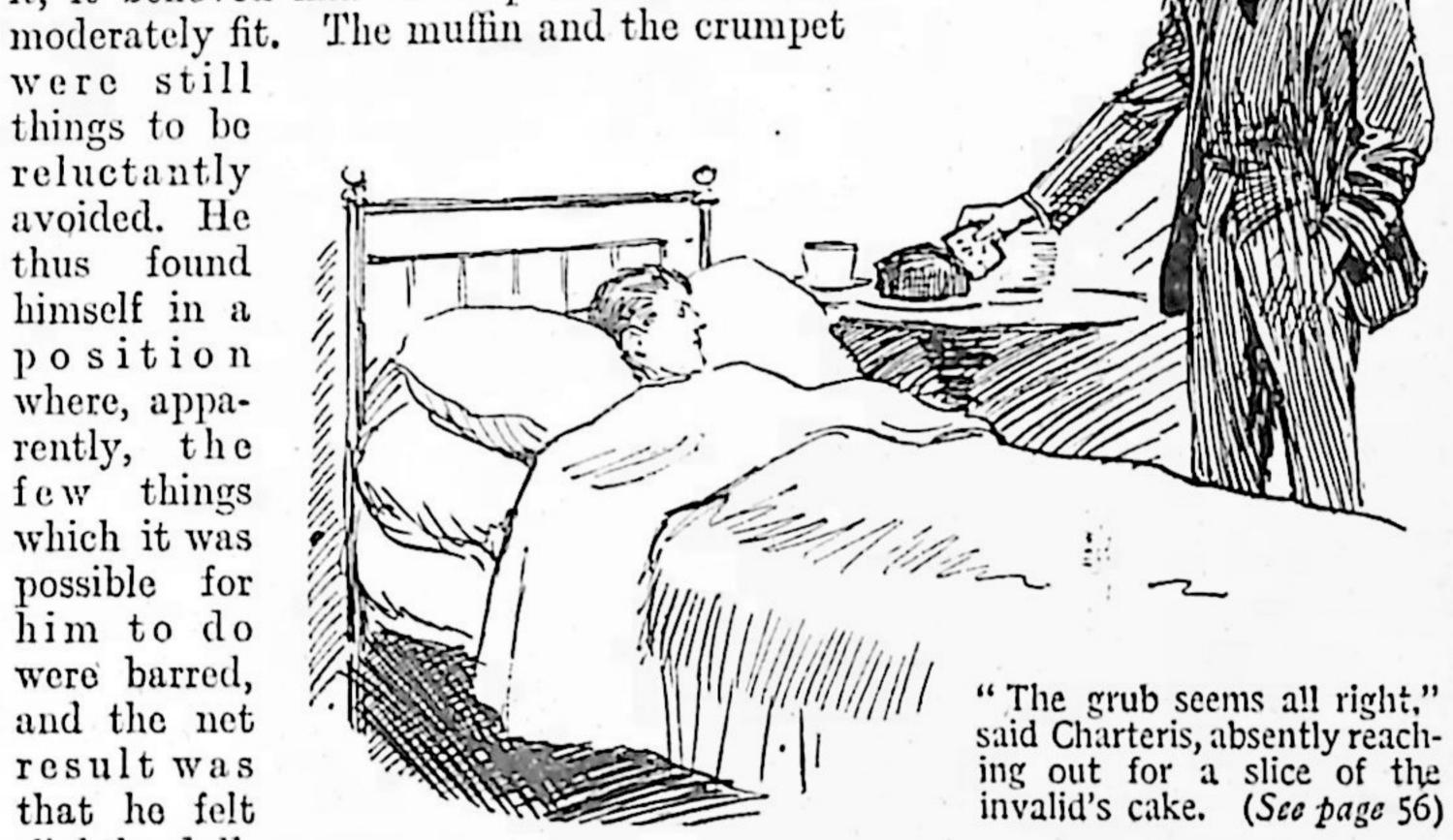
## THE THIRD CHAPTER The Strangers' Mile

The Easter term was nearing its end. Football, with the exception of the final house-match, which had still to be played, was over, and life was in consequence a trifle less exhilarating, than it might have been. In some ways the last few weeks of the Easter term are not unpleasant. You can put on running shorts and a blazer and potter about the grounds, feeling strong and athletic, and delude your-

self into a notion that you are training for the sports. Ten minutes at the broad jump, five with the weight, a few sprints on the track-it is amusing in its way, but it is apt to become monotonous. And if the weather is at all inclined to be chilly, such an occupation becomes impossible.

Charteris found things particularly dull. He was a fair average runner, but there were others far better at every distance, so that he saw no use in mortifying the flesh with strict training. On the other hand, in view of the fact that the final house-match was still an event of the future and that Merevale's was one of the two teams that were going to play it, it behoved him to keep himself at least

were still things to be reluctantly avoided. He thus found himself in a position where, apparently, the few things which it was possible for him to do were barred, and the net result was that he felt slightly dull.



To make matters worse, all the rest of his set were working full time at their various employments, and had no leisure for amusing him. Welch practised hundred-yard sprints daily, and imagined that it would be quite a treat for Charteris to be allowed to time him. So he gave him the stop-watch, saw him safely to the end of the track, and at a given signal dashed off in the approved American style. By the time he reached the tape, dutifully held by two sporting Merevalian juniors, Charteris' attention had generally been attracted elsewhere. "What time?" Welch would pant. "By Jove," Charteris would minute and a quarter, I fancy."

Welch, who always had a notion that he had done it in ten and a fifth that time, at any rate, would dissemble his joy, and mildly suggest that somebody else should hold the watch. Then there was Jim Thomson, generally a perfect mine of elevating conversation. He was in for the mile and also the half-mile, and refused to talk about anything except those distances, and the best methods for running them in the minimum of time. Charteris began

> to feel a blue melancholy stealing over him. The Babe, again. He might have helped to while awaythelong hours, but unfortunately he had been taken very bad with a notion that he was going to win the cross-country race, and when in addition to this ' he was seized with a panic with regard to the pros-

pects of Merevale's house team in the final, and began to throw out hints concerning strict training, Charteris regarded him as a person to be avoided. If he fled for sympathy to the Babe just now, the Babe would, as likely as not, suggest that he should come for a ten-mile spin with him, to get him into condition for the final houser. The very thought of a ten-mile spin gave Charteris that tired feeling.

Lastly, there was Tony. But Tony's company was worse than none at all. He went about with his arm in a sling, and declined to be comforted. But for his injury he would reply blandly, "I forgot to look. About a by now have been training hard for the At which Aldershot Boxing Competition, and the fact

that he was now definitely out of it had a very depressing effect upon him. He lounged moodily about the gymnasium, watching Menzies, who was to take his place in the ring, sparring with the instructor, and refused consolation. Altogether, Charteris was finding life a bore.

He was in such straits for amusement, that one Wednesday afternoon, finding himself with nothing else to do, he set to work on a burlesque and remarkably scurrilous article on "The Staff, by one who has suffered," which he was going to insert in the Glowworm, an unofficial periodical which he had just started for the amusement of the school and his own and his contributors' profit. He was just warming to his work, and beginning to enjoy himself, when the door opened without a preliminary knock. Charteris deftly slid a piece of blotting-paper over his MS., for Merevale occasionally entered a study in this manner. And though there was nothing about Merevale himself in the article, it would be better perhaps, thought Charteris, if he did not see it.

But it was not Merevale. It was somebody far worse—the Babe. The Babe was clothed as to his body in football clothes, and as to his face in a look of holy enthusiasm. Charteris knew what that look meant. It meant that the Babe was going to try and drag him out for a run.

"Go away, Babe," he said. "I'm busy."

"Why on earth are you slacking in here on

this ripping afternoon?"

"Slacking!" said Charteris, "I like that. I'm doing ber-rain work, Babe. I'm writing an article on masters and their customs, which will cause a profound sensation in the Common Room. At least, it would, if they ever read it, but they won't. Or I hope they won't, for their sakes and mine. So run away, my precious Babe, and don't disturb your uncle when he's busy."

"Rot," said the Babe, firmly; "you haven't taken any exercise for a week. Look here, Alderman," he added, sitting down on the table, and gazing sternly at his victim, "it's all very well, you know, but the final comes on in a few days, and you know you

aren't in any too good training."

"I am," said Charteris. "I'm as fit as anything. Simply full of beans. Feel my ribs."

The Babe declined the offer.

"No, but I say," he said, plaintively, "I wish you'd treat the thing seriously. It's getting jolly serious, really. If Dacre's win that cup again this year, that'll make four years running."

"Not so," replied Charteris, like the mariner of infinite-resource-and-sagacity, "not so, but

far otherwise. It'll only make three."

"Well, three's bad enough."

"True, O king! Three is quite bad enough."

"Well, then, there you are. Now you see." Charteris looked puzzled.

"Would you mind explaining that remark?" he said slowly. "Your brain works too rapidly for me."

But the Babe had jumped down from the table, and was prowling round the room

opening Charteris' boxes.

"What are you playing at?" inquired Charteris.

"Where do you keep your footer things?"

"What do you want with my footer things? Excuse my asking."

"I'm going to watch you put them on, and

then you're coming for a run."

"Oh," said Charteris.

"Yes, just a gentle spin to keep you in condition. Hallo, this looks like them."

He plunged both hands into a box, and flung out a mass of football clothes. It reminded Charteris of a terrier digging at a

rabbit-hole. He protested.

"Don't, Babe. Treat 'em tenderly. You'll be spoiling the crease in those bags if you heave them about like that. I'm very particular about how I look on the footer field. I was always taught to look like a little gentleman. Well, now you've seen them, put 'em away."

"Put 'em on," said the Babe firmly.

"You are a beast, Babe. I don't want to go for a run. I'm getting too old for violent exercise."

"Buck up. We mustn't chuck any chances away. Now that Tony's crocked, we shall have to do all we know to win that match."

"I don't see what need there is to get

excited about it. Considering we've got three of the first threequarters and the second fifteen back, we ought to do pretty well."

"But, man, look at Dacre's scrum. There's Prescott to start with. He's worth any two of our men put together. Then they've got Carter, Smith, and Hennesey out of the first, and Reeve-Jones out of the second. And their outsides aren't so very bad, if you come to think of it. Bannister's in the first, and the other threequarters are all good. And they've

got both the second halves. You'll have practically to look after both of them now that Tony can't play. And Baddeley has come on a

lot since last term."

"Babe," said Charteris, "you have reason. I will turn over a new leaf. I will be good. Give me my things and I'll come for a run. Only please don't let it be more than twentymiles."

"Good man," said the gratified Babe; "we won't go far and we'll take it quite

easy.".

"I tell you what," said Charteris, "do you know a place called Worbury? I thought you wouldn't. It's only a sort of hamlet. . Two cottages, four public-houses, and a duckpond, and that sort of thing. Welch and I ran out there one time last year. It's in the Badgwick direction, about three miles by road, mostly along the level. I vote we muffle up fairly well, blazers and sweaters, and so on, run to Worbury, tea at one of the cottages, and be back in time for lock-up. How does peared a couple of hundred yards away. that strike you?"



"It sounds all right. How about tea, though? Are you certain you can get it?"

"Rather! The oldest inhabitant is quite

a pal of mine."

Charteris' circle of acquaintances was a standing wonder to the Babe and other Merevalians. He seemed to know everybody in the

county.

When once he was fairly started on any business, Charteris generally shaped well. It was the starting that he found the difficulty. Now that he was actually in motion, he was enjoying himself thoroughly. He wondered why on earth he had been so reluctant to come for this run. The knowledge that there were three miles to go, and that he was equal to them, made him feel a new man. He felt fit. And there is nothing like feeling fit for dispelling boredom. He swung along with the Babe at a steady pace.

"There's the cottage," he said, as they turned a bend of the road, and Worbury ap-

"Let's sprint."

They arrived at the door with scarcely a yard between them, much to the admiration of the Oldest Inhabitant, who was smoking a thoughtful pipe in his front garden. Mrs. Oldest Inhabitant came out of the cottage at the sound of voices, and Charteris broached the subject of tea. The menu was varied and indigestible, but even the Babe, in spite of his devotion to strict training, could scarcely forbear smiling happily at the mention of hot cakes.

During the wait before the meal, Charteris kept up an animated flow of conversation with

the Oldest Inhabitant, the Babe joining in from time to time when he could think of something to say. Charteris appeared to be quite a friend of the family. He inquired after the Oldest Inhabitant's rheumatics, and was gratified to find that they were distinctly better. How was

Mrs. O. I.? Prarper hearty? Excellent. How was the

At the mention of his nevvy, the Oldest Inhabitant became discursive. He told the audience everything that had happened in connection with the said nevvy for years back. After which he started to describe what he would probably do in the future. Amongst other things, there were going to be some sports at Rutton that day week, and his nevvy intended to try and win the cup for what the Oldest Inhabitant vaguely described as "a race!" He had won it last year. Yes, prarper good runner, his nevvy. Where was

Rutton, the Babe wanted to know. About eight miles out of Stapleton, said Charteris, who was well up in the local geography. You got there by train. It was the next station.

Mrs. O. I. came out to say that tea was ready, and being drawn into the conversation on the subject of the Rutton Sports, produced a programme of the same, which the nevvy had sent her. From this it appeared that the nevvy's "spot" event was the egg and spoon race. An asterisk against his name pointed him out as last year's winner.

"Hallo," said Charteris. "I see there's a

Strangers'
Strangers'
Mile. I think
I shall go in
for that. I'ma
demon at the
mile, when
roused."

As they were going back that evening, he reverted to the subject.

"Youknow, Babe," he said, "I really think I shall go in for that race. It would be a most awful rag. And it's the day before the

"You mustn't mind if I walk rather fast. I'm in a hurry," said Charteris. His idea of "walking fast" was to dash off down the road at quarter-mile pace.

(See page 57)

house-match, so it would just keep me fit."

"Don't be a fool," said the Babe; "there would be a fearful row about it, if you were found out. You'd get extras for the rest of the term."

"Well, the houser comes off on a Thursday, so it won't affect that."

"Yes, but still-"

"I shall ponder on the subject. You needn't go telling anyone."

"If you'll take my advice, you will drop it."

"Your suggestion has been noted, and will receive due attention," said Charteris. "Put the pace on a bit."

They lengthened their stride, and conversation ceased.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER At Rutton Sports

"I SHALL go, Babe," said Charteris, on the

following night.

The Sixth Form had a slack day before them on the morrow, there being that temporary lull in the form-work which occurred about once a week, when there was no composition of any kind to be done. The Sixth did four compositions a week, two Greek and two Latin, and except for these did not bother itself much about overnight preparation. The Latin authors which the Form was doing this term were Virgil and Livy, and when either of these was on the next day's programme, most of the Sixth considered that they were justified in taking a night off. They relied on their ability to translate either of the authors at sight and without previous acquaintance. The popular notion that Virgil is hard rarely appeals to a member of a Public school. There are two ways of translating Virgil, the conscientious and the other. He chooses the other.

On this particular night, therefore, work was "off." Merevale was over at the Great Hall, taking preparation, and the Sixth Form Merevalians had assembled in Welch's study to talk about things in general. It was after a pause of some moments that had followed upon a lively discussion of the house's prospects in the forthcoming final, that Charteris had spoken.

"I shall go," he said.

"Go where?" asked Tony from inside a deck chair.

"Babe knows."

The Babe turned to the company and ex-

plained.

"The lunatic says he's going in for the Strangers' Mile or some other equally futile race at some sports at Rutton next week. He'll get booked for a cert. He can't see that. I never saw such a man."

"Rally round," said Charteris, "and reason with me. I'll listen. Tony, what do you think about it?"

Charteris thanked him. Welch, who had been reading a book, now awoke to the fact that a discussion was in progress, and asked for details. The Babe explained once more, and Welch heartily corroborated Tony's remarks. Charteris thanked him, too.

"You aren't really going, are you?" asked

Welch.

"Rather!"

"The Old Man won't give you leave."

"I shan't worry the Old Man about it."

"But it's miles out of bounds. Stapleton Station is out of bounds, to begin with. It's against rules to go in a train, and Rutton is even more out of bounds than Stapleton."

"And as there are sports there," said Tony, "the Old Man is certain to put Rutton specially out of bounds for that day. He always bars a St. Austin's chap going to a place when there's anything of that sort on . there."

"Don't care. What have I to do with the Old Man's petty prejudices? Now, let me get at my time-table. Here we are. Now  $\_$ then."

"Don't be a fool!" said Tony.

"As if I should. Look here, there is a train that starts from Stapleton at three. I can catch that all right. Gets to Rutton at three-twenty. Sports begin at three-fifteen. At least, they are supposed to. Over before five, I should think. At any rate, my race ought to be. Though-I was forgetting-I must stop to see the Oldest Inhabitant's nevvy win the egg and spoon canter. But that ought to come on before the Strangers' race. Train back at a quarter past five. Arrives at a quarter to six. Lock up six fifteen. That gives me half an hour to get here from Stapleton. What more do you want? Consider the thing done. And I should think the odds against me being booked are twenty-five to one, at which price, if any gent present cares to deposit his money, I am willing to take him."

"You won't go," said Welch. "I'll bet

you anything you like you won't go."

That settled Charteris. The visit to Rutton, hitherto looked upon as more or less of a pleasure, became now a solemn duty. One of Tony expressed his opinion tersely, and Charteris' mottoes for everyday use was

"Let not thyself be scored off by Welch." "That's all right," he said, "of course I

shall go."

The day of the sports arrived, and the Babe, meeting Charteris at Merevale's gate, made a last attempt to head him off from his purpose.

"How are you going to take your things?" he asked. "You can't carry a bag. The first

beak you met would ask questions."

Charteris patted a bloated coat pocket. "Bags," he said laconically. "Vest," he added, doing the same to the other pocket. "Shoes," he concluded, "you will observe I am carrying in a handy brown paper parcel, and if anybody wants to know what's in it, I shall tell him it's acid drops. Sure you won't come, too?"

"I'm not such an ass," quoth the Babe. "All right. So-long, then. Be good while

I'm gone."

And he took the road toward Stapleton.

The Rutton New Recreation Grounds presented, as the "Stapleton Herald" justly remarked in its next week's issue, "a gay and animated appearance." There was a larger crowd than Charteris had expected. He made his way through them, resisting with difficulty the entreaties of a hoarse gentleman in a check suit to have three to two on 'Enery Something for the hundred yards, and came at last to

. the dressing tent.

At this point it occurred to him that it would be judicious to find out when his race was to start. It was rather a chilly day, and the less of it that he spent in the undress uniform of shorts the better. He bought a correct card for twopence, and scanned it. The Strangers' Mile was down for four-fifty. There was no need to change for an hour yet. He wished the authorities could have managed to date the event earlier. Four-fifty was running it rather fine. The race would be over, allowing for unpunctuality, by about five to five, and it was a walk of some ten minutes to the station, less if he hurried. That would give him ten minutes for recovering from the effects of the race and changing back into his ordinary clothes again. It would be quick work. But the trains on that line

were always late—it was one of the metropolitan improvements which had recently been introduced into Arcadia—and, having come so far, he was not inclined to go back without running in the race. He would never be able to hold up his head again if he did that. He left the dressing-tent, and started on a tour of the field.

The scene was quite different from anything he had ever witnessed before in the way of sports. The sports at St. Austin's were decorous to a degree. These leaned more to the rollicking degree. It was like an ordinary country race-meeting, except that men were running instead of horses. Rutton was a quiet little place for the majority of the year, but on this day it woke up, and was evidently out to enjoy itself. The Rural Hooligan was a good deal in evidence, and though he was comparatively quiet just at present, the frequency with which he visited the various refreshment stalls that dotted the ground gave promise of livelier times in the future. Charteris felt that the afternoon would not be too dull. The hour soon passed, and Charteris, having first seen the Oldest Inhabitant's nevvy romp home in the egg and spoon event, took himself off to the dressing-tent, and began to get into his running clothes. The bell for the race was just ringing when he left the tent. He trotted over to the starting-place. Apparently there was not a very large "field." Two weedy youths of Charteris' age had put in an appearance, and a very tall, thin man, dressed in blushing pink, came up immediately afterwards. Charteris had just removed his coat, and was about to get to his place on the line, when another competitor arrived, and to judge by the applause that greeted his advent he was evidently a favourite in the locality. It was with a shock that Charteris recognised his old acquaintance, the Bargees' secretary.

He was clad in running clothes of a bright orange, and a smile of conscious superiority, and when somebody in the crowd called out "Go it, Jarge!" he accepted the tribute as his due, and waved a condescending hand in the speaker's direction.

Some moments elapsed before he caught sight of Charteris, and the latter had time to decide on his line of action. If he attempted

concealment in any way, the man would recognise that on this occasion, at any rate, he had, to use an adequate if unclassical expression, got the bulge, and then there would be trouble. By brazening things out, however, there was just a chance that he might make him imagine that there was more in the matter than met the eye, and that in some way he had actually obtained leave to visit Rutton that day. After all, the man didn't know very much about school rules, and the recollection of the recent fiasco in which he had taken part would make him think twice about playing the amateur policeman again, especially in connection with Charteris.

So he smiled genially, and expressed a hope that the man enjoyed robust health.

The man replied by glaring in a simple and unaffected manner.

"Looked up the headmaster lately?" asked Charteris.

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm going to run. Hope you don't mind."

"You're out of bounds."

"That's what you said before. You'd better inquire a bit before you make rash statements. Otherwise there's no knowing what may not happen. Perhaps Mr. Dacre has given me leave."

The man said something objurgatory under his breath, but forbore to continue the discussion. He was wondering, as Charteris had expected he would, whether the latter had really got leave or not. It was a difficult problem. Whether such a result was due to his mental struggles or whether it was simply to be attributed to his poor running is open to question, but the fact remains that the secretary of the Old Crockfordians did not shine

in the Strangers' Mile. He came in last but one, vanquishing the pink sportsman by a foot. Charteris, after a hot finish, was beaten on the tape by one of the weedy youths, who exhibited astonishing powers of sprinting in the last hundred and fifty yards, overhauling Charteris, who had led all the time, in fine style, and scoring what the "Stapleton Herald" described as a "highly popular victory."

As soon as he had recovered his normal stock of wind—which was not immediately—it was borne in upon Charteris that if he wanted to catch the five-fifteen back to Stapleton, he had better begin to change. He went to the dressing-tent, and on examining his watch

"I see there's a Strangers' Mile," Charteris commented, scanning the paper. "I think I shall go in for that!"

(See page 62).

was horrified to find that he had just ten minutes in which to do everything. And the walk to the station, he reflected, was a long five minutes. He hurled himself into his clothes, and, disregarding the Bargee, who had entered the tent and seemed to wish to continue the conversation at the point at which they had left off, shot away to-

wards the nearest gate. He had exactly four minutes and twenty-five seconds for the journey, and he had just run a mile.

### THE FIFTH CHAPTER Charteris uses his Fists

FORTUNATELY the road was mainly level. On the other hand, he was handicapped by an overcoat. After the first hundred yards he took this off, and carried it in an unwieldy parcel. This, he found, was an improvement, and running became easier. He had worked the stiffness out of his legs by this time, and was going well. Three hundred yards from the station it was anybody's race.

The exact position of the other competitor, the train, could not be defined. It was, at any rate, not within earshot, which meant that it had still a quarter of a mile to go. Charteris considered that he had earned a rest. He slowed down to a walk, but after proceeding at this pace for a few yards thought that he heard a distant whistle, and dashed on again. Suddenly a raucous bellow of laughter greeted his ears from a spot in front of him, hidden

from his sight by a bend in the road.

"Somebody slightly tight," thought he, rapidly diagnosing the case. "By Jove, if he comes rotting about with me, I'll kill him and Jump on his body." Having to do anything in a desperate hurry always upset Charteris' temper. He turned the corner at a sharp trot, and came upon two youths who seemed to be engaged in the harmless occupation of trying to ride a bicycle. They were of the type which he held in especial aversion, the Rural Hooligan type, and one at least of the two had evidently been present at a recent circulation of the festive bowl. He was wheeling the bicycle about the road in an aimless way, and looked as if he wondered what was the matter with it, in that it would not keep still for two consecutive seconds. The other youth was apparently of the "Charles his-friend" variety, content to look on and applaud, and generally to play chorus to his companion's "lead." He was standing at the side of the road smiling broadly in a way that argued feebleness of mind. Charteris was not sure which of the two he hated most at sight. He was inclined to call it a tie. However, there seemed to be nothing particularly lawless in what they were doing now. If they were content to let him pass without hindrance, he for his part was prepared generously to overlook the insult they offered to him by existing at all, and to maintain a state of truce.

But, as he drew nearer, he saw that there was more in the business than the casual spectator might at first have supposed. A second and keener inspection of the reptiles revealed fresh phenomena. In the first place, the bicycle which hooligan number one was playing with was a lady's bicycle, and a small one at that. Now, up to the age of fourteen and the weight of ten stone, a beginner at

cycling often finds it more convenient to learn to ride on all learn to ride on a lady's machine than on a gentleman's. The former offers greater facilities for dismounting, a quality not to be despised in the earlier stages of initiation. But, though this was undoubtedly the case, and though Charteris knew that it was so, yet he felt instinctively that there was something wrong here. Hooligans of eighteen years and twelve stone do not learn to ride on small ladies' machines. Or, if they do, it is probably without the without the permission and approval of the small ladies who own the same. Valuable as his time was, Charteris felt that it behoved him to devote a thoughtful minute or two to the examining of this affair. He slowed down once again to a walk, and as he did so his eye fell upon the one character in the drama whose absence had puzzled him-the owner of the bicycle. And he came to the conclusion that life would be a hollow mockery if he failed to fall upon those revellers, and slay them. She stood by the hedge on the right, a forlorn little figure in grey, and she gazed sadly and hopelessly at the manœuvres that were going on in the middle of the road. Her age Charteris estimated at a venture at twelve-a correct guess. Her state of mind he also conjectured. She was letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would," like the late M'Beth, the cat i' the adage, and other celebrities. She evidently had plenty of remarks to make on the subject in hand, but refrained from motives of prudence.

Charteris had no such scruples. The feeling of fatigue that had been upon him had vanished, and his temper, which had been growing more and more villainous for some twenty minutes, now boiled over enthusiastically at the sight of something tangible to work itself off upon. Even without a cause he detested the Rural Hooligan. Now that a real, registered motive for this antipathy had been supplied, he felt capable of dealing with a whole regiment of the breed. He would have liked to have committed a murder, but assault and battery would do at a pinch.

The being with the bicycle had just let it fall with a crash to the ground, when Charteris went for him low, in the style which the Babe always insisted on seeing in members of the



Charteris led until the last hundred and fifty yards, when a weedy youth exhibited astonishing powers of sprinting and beat him on the tape. (See page 65)

first fifteen on the football field, and hove him without comment into a damp ditch. "Charleshis-friend" uttered a shout of disapproval, and rushed into the fray. Charteris gave him the straight left, of the type to which the great John Jackson is said to have owed so much in the days of the old Prize Ring, and Charles, taking it between the eyes, stopped in a discontented and discouraged manner, and began to rub the place. Whereupon Charteris dashed in, and, to use an expression suitable to the deed, "swung his right to the mark." The "mark," it may be explained for the benefit of the non-pugilistic, is that portion of the human form divine which lies hid behind the third button of the waistcoat. It covers-in a most inadequate way-the wind, and even a gentle tap in the locality is apt to produce a

fleeting sense of discomfort. A genuine flush hit on the spot, shrewdly administered by a muscular arm with the weight of the body behind it, causes the passive agent in the transaction to wish fervently, as far as he is at the moment physically capable of wishing anything, that he had never been born. Charles collapsed like an empty sack, and Charteris, getting a grip of the outlying portions of his costume, rolled him into the ditch on top of his companion, who had just recovered sufficiently to be thinking of getting out again.

Charteris picked up the bicycle, and gave it a cursory examination. The enamel was a good deal scratched, but no material damage had been done. He wheeled it across to its owner. He would have felt more like a St.

George after an interview with the Dragon if he had not, in tackling hooligan number one, contrived to cover his face with rich mud from the ditch. He could not help feeling that it detracted from the general romance of the thing.

"It isn't much hurt," he said, as they walked on together down the road; "bit

scratched, that's all."

"Thanks, awfully," said the small lady.

"Oh, not all," said Charteris, "I enjoyed it." (He felt that he had said the correct thing here.) "I'm sorry those chaps frightened you."

"They did rather. But "-triumphantly-

"I didn't cry."

"Rather not," said Charteris, "you were awfully plucky. I noticed at the time. But hadn't you better ride on? Which way were you going?"

"I wanted to get to Stapleton."

"Oh. That's simple enough. You've merely got to go straight on down this road. As straight as ever you can go. But, look here, you know, you shouldn't be out alone like this. It isn't safe. Why did they let you?"

The lady avoided his eye. She bent down

and inspected the left pedal.

"They shouldn't have sent you out alone," said Charteris; "why did they?"

"They didn't. I came."

There was a world of meaning in the phrase. Charteris was in the same case. They had not let him. He had come. Here was a kindred spirit, another revolutionary soul, scorning the fetters of convention and the so-called authority of self-constituted rulers, aha! Bureaucrats!

"Shake hands," he said, "I'm in just the

same way."

They shook hands gravely.

"You know," said the lady, "I'm awfully sorry I did it now. It was very naughty."

"I'm not sorry yet," said Charteris, "but I

expect I shall be soon."

"Will you be sent to bed?"

"I don't think so."

"Will you have to learn beastly poetry?"

"I hope not."

She would probably have gone on to in-

vestigate things further, but at that moment there came the faint sound of a whistle. Then another, closer this time. Then a faint rumbling, which increased in volume steadily.

Charteris looked back. The line ran by the side of the road. He could see the smoke of a train through the trees. It was quite close now. And he was still nearly two hundred

yards from the station gates. "I say," he said, "Great Scott, here comes my train. I must rush. Good-bye. You

keep straight on." His legs had had time to grow stiff again. For the first few strides running was painful. But his joints soon adapted themselves to the strain, and in ten seconds he was running as fast as he had ever run off the track. When he had travelled a quarter of the distance, the small cyclist overtook him.

"Be quick," she said. "It's just in sight." Charteris quickened his stride, and, paced by the bicycle, spun along in fine style. Forty yards from the station the train passed him. He saw it roll into the station. There were still twenty yards to go, exclusive of the station steps, and he was already running as fast as he knew how. Now there were only ten. Now five. And at last, with a hurried farewell to his companion, he bounded up the steps and on to the platform. At the end of the platform the line took a sharp curve to the right. Round that curve the tail-end of the guard's van was just disappearing.

"Missed it, sir," said the solitary porter who managed things at Rutton cheerfully. He spoke as if he were congratulating Charteris on having done something remarkably clever.

"What's the next?"

"Eight-thirty," was the porter's appalling

reply. For a moment Charteris felt quite ill. No train till eight-thirty! Then was he, indeed, lost. But it couldn't be true. There must be some sort of a train between now and then.

"Are you certain?" he said; "surely

there's a train before that."

"Why, yes, sir," said the porter, gleefully, "but they be all expresses. Eight-thirty be the only 'un what starps at Rooton."

"Thanks," said Charteris, with marked gloom, "I don't think that will be much

good to me. My aunt, what a hole I'm in."
The porter made a sympathetic and

interrogative noise at the back of his throat, as if inviting him to confess all. But Charteris felt unequal to the intellectual pressure of conversations with porters. There are moments when one wants to be

alone.

He went down the steps again When he got into the road, his small cycling friend had vanished. He envied her. She was doing the journey comfortably on a bicycle. He would have to walk it. Walk it! He didn't believe he could. The Strangers' Mile, followed by the Homeric combat with the Hooligans, and the ghastly sprint to wind up with, had left him unfit for further feats of pedestrianism. And it was eight miles to Stapleton, if it was a yard, and another mile from Stapleton to St. Austin's. Charteris, having once more invoked the name of his aunt, pulled himself together with an effort and limped gallantly in the direction of Stapleton.

But Fate, so long hostile, at last relented. A car approached him from behind. A thrill of hope shot through him at the sound of the engine; here was a prospect of a lift. He stopped, and waited for the car—it was a two seater—to arrive. Then he uttered a yell of triumph, and began to wave his arms like a semaphore. The man in the car was

Adamson.

"Hallo, Charteris," said the doctor, pulling up, "what are you doing here? What's happened to your face? It's in a shocking state."

"Only mud," said Charteris; "good, honest English mud, borrowed from a local ditch. It's a long yarn. Can you give me a lift?"

"Come along. Plenty of room."

Charteris climbed up, and sank on to the cushioned seat with a sigh of pleasure. What glorious comfort. He had seldom enjoyed anything so much in his life.

"I'm nearly dead," he said, as the car went on again. "This is how it all happened.

You see, it was this way——"

And he began forthwith upon a brief synopsis of his adventures.

#### THE SIXTH CHAPTER An Interview With the Head

By special request the doctor dropped Charteris within a hundred yards of Merevale's door.

"Good-night," he said. "I don't suppose you value my advice at all, but you may have it for what it is worth. I recommend you to stop this sort of game. Next time something

will happen."

"By Jove, yes," said Charteris, climbing painfully from his seat. "I'll take that advice. I'm a reformed character from now onwards. It isn't good enough. Hallo, there's the bell for lock-up. Good-night, doctor, and thanks most awfully for the lift. It was awfully kind of you."

"Don't mention it," said Dr. Adamson.
"It is always a privilege to be in your company. When are you coming to tea with me

again?"

"Whenever you'll have me. I shall get leave this time. It will be quite a novel

experience."

"Yes. By the way, how's Graham? It is Graham, isn't it? The youth who broke his collar-bone."

"Oh, he's getting on splendidly. But I

must be off. Good-night."

"Good-night. Come next Monday, if you can."

"Right. Thanks awfully."

He hobbled in at Merevale's gate, and went up to his study. The Babe was in there talking to Welch. You could generally reckon on finding the Babe talking to someone. He was of a sociable disposition.

"Hallo," he said. "Here's Charteris."

"What's left of him," said Charteris.

"How did it go off?"
"Don't talk about it."

"Did you win?" asked Welch.

- "No. Second. By a yard. Jove! I'm dead."
  - "Hot race?"
- "Rather. It wasn't that, though. I had to sprint all the way to the station, and missed my train by a couple of seconds at the end of it all."

"Then how did you get here?"

"That was my one stroke of luck. I started

to walk back, and after I'd gone about a quarter of a mile, Adamson caught me up in his two-seater. I suggested that it would be a Christian act on his part to give me a lift, and he did. I shall remember Adamson in my will."

"How did you lose?" inquired the Babe.

"The other man beat me. But for that I should have won hands down. Oh, I say, guess who I met at Rutton?"

"Not a master?"

"Almost as bad. The Bargee man who paced me from Stapleton. (Have I ever told you about that affair?) Man who crocked Tony, you know."

"Great Scott," said the Babe, "did he

recognise you?"

"Rather. We had a long and very pleasant conversation."

"If he reports you-" began the Babe.

"Who's that?"

Tony had entered the study.

"Hullo, Tony. Adamson told me to remember him to you."

"So you've got back?"

Charteris confirmed the hasty guess.

"But what are you talking about, Babe?" said Tony. "Who's going to be reported, and who's going to report?"

The Babe briefly explained the situation.

"If the man," he said, "reports Charteris, he may get run in to-morrow, and then we shall have both our halves away against Dacre's. Charteris, you are an ass to go rotting about out of bounds like this."

"Nay, dry the starting tear," said Charteris cheerfully. "In the first place I shouldn't get kept in on a Thursday, were it ever so. I should get shoved into extra on Saturday. Also I shrewdly conveyed to the Bargee the impression that I was at Rutton by special permission."

"He's bound to know that can't be true,"

said Tony.

"Well, I told him to think it over. You see, he got so badly left last time he tried to drop on me-have I told you about that business, by the way ?--that I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he let me alone this trip?"

"Let's hope so," said the Babe, with gloom. "That's right, Babby," remarked Charteris

encouragingly, "you buck up and keep looking on the bright side. It'll be all right, you see if it won't see if it won't. If there's any running in to be done, I shall do it. I shall be frightfully fit tomorrow, after all this dashing about to-day. I haven't an haven't an ounce of adipose deposit on me. Upon my word, it seems to me unpardonable vanity, and worse than that, to call one's fat an adipose deposit. I'm a fine, strapping specimen of sturdy young English manhood. And I'm going to play a very selfish game tomorrow, Babe."

"Oh, my dear chap, you mustn't."

The Babe's face wore an expression of pain and horror. The success of the house team in the final was very near to his heart. He could not understand anyone jesting on the subject. Charteris respected his anguish, and relieved it speedily.

"I was only ragging," he said; "considering that we've got no chance of winning except through our three-quarters, I'm not likely to keep the ball from them, if I get a chance of getting it out. Make your mind

easy, Babe."

The final house match was always a warmish game. The rivalry between the various houses was great, and the football cup especially was fought for with immense keenness. Also, the match was the last fixture of the season, and there was a certain feeling in the teams that if they did happen to injure a man or two it would not much matter. The disabled sportsmen would not be needed for school match purposes for another six months. As a result of which philosophical reflection the tackling ruled slightly energetic, and the handing-off was done with vigour.

This year, to add a sort of finishing touch, there was just a little ill-feeling between Dacre's and Merevale's. The cause of it was the Babe. Until the beginning of the term he had been a day-boy. Then the news began to circulate that he was going to become a boarder, either at Dacre's or at Merevale's. He chose the latter, and Dacre's felt aggrieved. Some of the less sportsman-like members of the house had proposed that a protest should be made against his being allowed to play, but, fortunately for the credit of the house, Prescott, the captain of Dacre's fifteen, had put his



A straight left between the eyes staggered Charles, then Charteris let him have a beautiful right to the "mark." The hooligan gasped and then collapsed like an empty sack—after which Charteris rolled him into the ditch out of the way. (See page 67.)

suggestive with an emphatic bang at the suggestion. As he had sagely pointed out, and the and this was one of them. If the team wanted do it and their disapproval, said he, let them He now the field by tackling their very hardest. He personally was going to do his best in that direction, and he advised them to do the same.

The rumour of this bad blood had got about the school, and when Swift, Merevale's only first fifteen forward, kicked off up hill, a large from the lining the ropes. It was evident from the first that it would be a good game. Dacre's were the better side as a team. They had no really weak spot. But Merevale's extraordinarily strong three-quarter line made up for an inferior scrum. And the fact that the Babe was in the centre was worth much.

Dacre's pressed at first. Their pack was unusually heavy for a house team, and they made full use of it. They took the ball down the field in short rushes till they were in Merevale's twenty-five. Then they began to heel, and if things had been more or less exciting for the Merevalians before, they became doubly so now. The ground was dry, and so was the ball, and the game consequently waxed fast. Time after time the ball went along Dacre's three-quarter line, only to end by finding itself hurled, with the wing who was carrying it, into touch. Occasionally the centres, instead of feeding their wings, would try to get through themselves. And that was where the Babe came in. He was admittedly the best tackler in the school, but on this occasion he excelled himself. His normally placed temper had been ruffled early in the game by his being brought down by Prescott, and this had added a finish to his methods. His man never had a chance of getting past.

At last a lofty kick into touch over the heads of the spectators gave the teams a few seconds

rest.

The Babe went up to Charteris.

"Look here," he said, "it's risky, but I think we'll try having the ball out a bit."

"In our own twenty-five?"

"Wherever we are. I believe it will come off all right. Anyway, we'll try it. Tell the forwards."

So Charteris informed the forwards that

they were to let it out, an operation which, for forwards playing against a pack much heavier than themselves, it is easier to talk about than perform. The first half-dozen times that Merevale's scrum tried to heel, they were shoved off their feet, and it was on the enemy's side that the ball came out. But the seventh attempt succeeded. Out it came, cleanly and speedily. Daintree, who was playing half instead of Tony, switched it across to Charteris. Charteris dodged the half who was marking him, and ran. Heeling and passing in one's own twenty-five is an excellent habit if indulged in in moderation. On this occasion it answered perfectly. Charteris ran to the half-way line, and handed the ball on to the Babe. The Babe was tackled from behind, and passed to Thomson. Thomson dodged his man, and passed to Welch. Welch was the fastest sprinter in the school. It was a pleasure—if you did not happen to be on the opposing side-to see him race down the touchline. He was off like an arrow. Dacre's back made a futile attempt to get at him. Welch could have given him twelve yards in a hundred. He ran round him in a large semi-circle, and, amidst howls of rapture from the Merevalians in the audience, scored between the posts. The Babe took the kick, and converted without difficulty. Five minutes afterwards the whistle blew for half-time.

The remainder of the game was fought out on the same lines. Dacre's pressed nearly all the time, and scored an unconverted try, but twice the ball came out on Merevale's side and went down their line. Once it was the Babe, who scored with a run from his own goal-line, and once Charteris, who got it from halfway, dodging through the whole team. The last ten minutes of the match was marked by a slight excess of energy on both sides. Dacre's forwards were in a murderous frame of mind, and fought like demons to get through, and Merevale's played up to them with spirit. The Babe seemed continually to be precipitating himself at the feet of rushing forwards, and Charteris felt as if at least a dozen bones were broken in various parts of his body. The game ended on Merevale's line, but they had won the match and the cup by

two goals and a try to a try.

Charteris limped off the field, cheerful but damaged. He ached all over, and there was a large bruise on his left cheek-bone, a souvenir of a forward rush in the first half. Also he was very certain that he was not going to do a stroke of work that night.

He and the Babe were going to the house, when they were aware that the headmaster

was beckoning to them.

"Well, MacArthur, and what was the result

of the match?"

"We won, sir," beamed the Babe. "Two goals and a try to a try."

"You have hurt your cheek, Charteris."

"Yes, sir."

"How did you do that?"

"I got a kick, sir, in one of the rushes."

"Ah. I should bathe it, Charteris. Bathe it well. I hope it will not be painful. Bathe it well in warm water."

He walked on.

"You know," said Charteris
to the Babe, as they went
into the house, "the Old Man
isn't such a bad sort, after
all. He has his points, don't
you think so?"

The Babe said that he did.

"I'm going to reform, you know," said Charteris confidentially.

"It's about time. You can have the first bath, if you like. Only buck up."

Charteris boiled himself for ten minutes, and then dragged his weary limbs to his study. It was while he was sitting in a deck-chair, eating mixed biscuits, that Master Crowinshaw, his fag, appeared.

"Well?" said Charteris.

"The Head told me to tell you that he wanted to see you at the School House as soon as you can go."

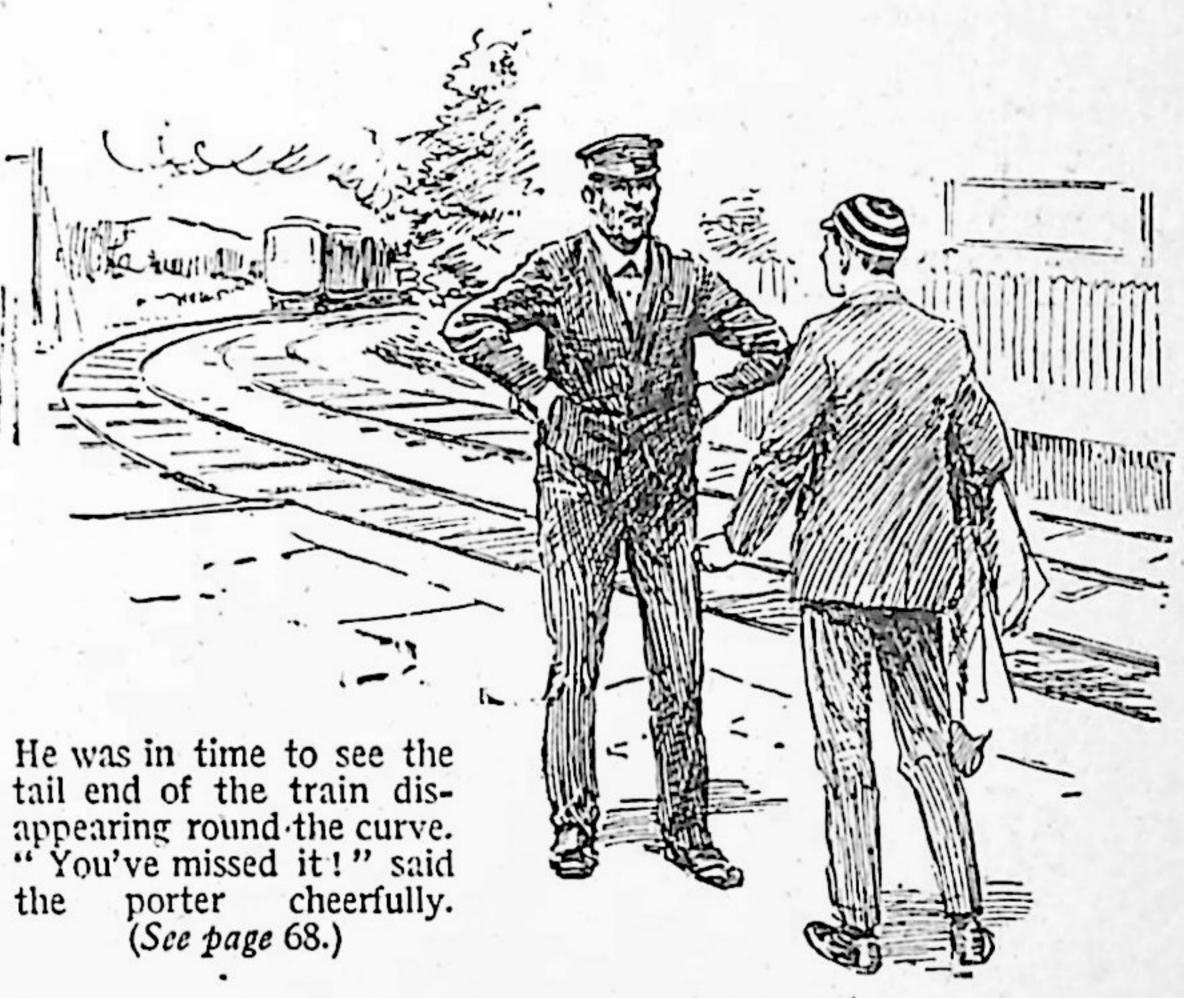
"All right," said Charteris; "thanks."

"Now what," he continued to himself, does the Old Man want to see me for? Perhaps he wants to make certain that I've bathed my cheek in warm water. Anyhow, I suppose I must go."

A few minutes later he presented himself at the head-magisterial door. The sedate Parker, the Head's butler, who always filled Charteris with a desire to dig him hard in the ribs just to see what would happen, ushered him to the study.

The headmaster was reading by the light of a lamp when Charteris came in. He laid down his book, and motioned him to a seat. After which there was an awkward pause.

"I have just received," began the Head at last, "a most unpleasant communication. Most unpleasant. From whom it comes I do not know. It is, in fact—er—anonymous. I am sorry that I ever read it."



He paused. Charteris made no comment. He guessed what was coming. He, too, was sorry that the Head had ever read the letter.

"The writer says that he saw you, that he actually spoke to you, at the athletic sports at Rutton, yesterday. I have called you in to tell me if that's true."

He fastened an accusing eye on his companion.

"It is quite true, sir," said Charteris steadily.

"What," said the Head sharply, "you were at Rutton?"

"Yes, sir."

"You were perfectly aware, I suppose, that you were breaking the school rules by going there, Charteris?"

"Yes, sir."

There was another pause.

"This is very serious," said the headmaster.

"I cannot overlook this. I---"

There was a slight scuffle of feet outside in the passage, and a noise as if somebody were groping for the handle. The door flew open vigorously, and a young lady entered. Charteris recognised her in an instant as his acquaintance of the previous afternoon.

"Uncle," she said, "have you seen my book anywhere? Hallo!" she broke off as she caught sight of Charteris.

"Hallo," said Charteris affably, not to be outdone in the courtesies.

"Did you catch your train?"

"No. Missed

"Hallo, what's the matter with your cheek?".

it." I got a kick on

"Oh, does it hurt?"

> "Not much,

thanks." Here the headmaster, feeling perhaps a little

out of it, put in his oar.

"Dorothy, you must not come here now. I am busy. But how, may I ask, do you and Charteris come to be acquainted?"

"Why, he's him," said Dorothy lucidly.

The Head looked puzzled.

"Him-the man, you know."

It is greatly to the credit of the Head's intelligence that he grasped the meaning of these words.

"Do you mean to tell me, Dorothy, that it ing his book again, turned over a new leaf. was Charteris who came to your assistance yesterday?"

Dorothy nodded energetically. Charteris began to feel exactly like a side-show.

"Dorothy," said her uncle, "run away." Dorothy retired in good order. The · Head was silent for a few minutes after she had gone. Then he turned to Charteris again. "You must understand, Charteris, that you have committed a serious breach of school rules, and I must punish you for it. You will, therefore, write me out -er-ten lines of Virgil by to-morrow evening, Charteris."

"Yes, sir!"



"It is very serious," said the Head sternly, as he gazed at Charteris. "I cannot overlook--" He broke off; both turned to the door as it opened and a young lady entered. (See this page).

"Latin and English," continued the Head.

"Yes, sir."

"And, Charteris-I am speaking now-er -unofficially: not as a headmaster, you understand—if in future you would cease to break school rules simply as a matter of principle-I-er-well, I think we should get on better together, Charteris. Good-night, Charteris."

Good-night, sir."

The Head extended a hand. Charteris took it, and his departure. The headmaster, open-

So did Charteris.

THE END