

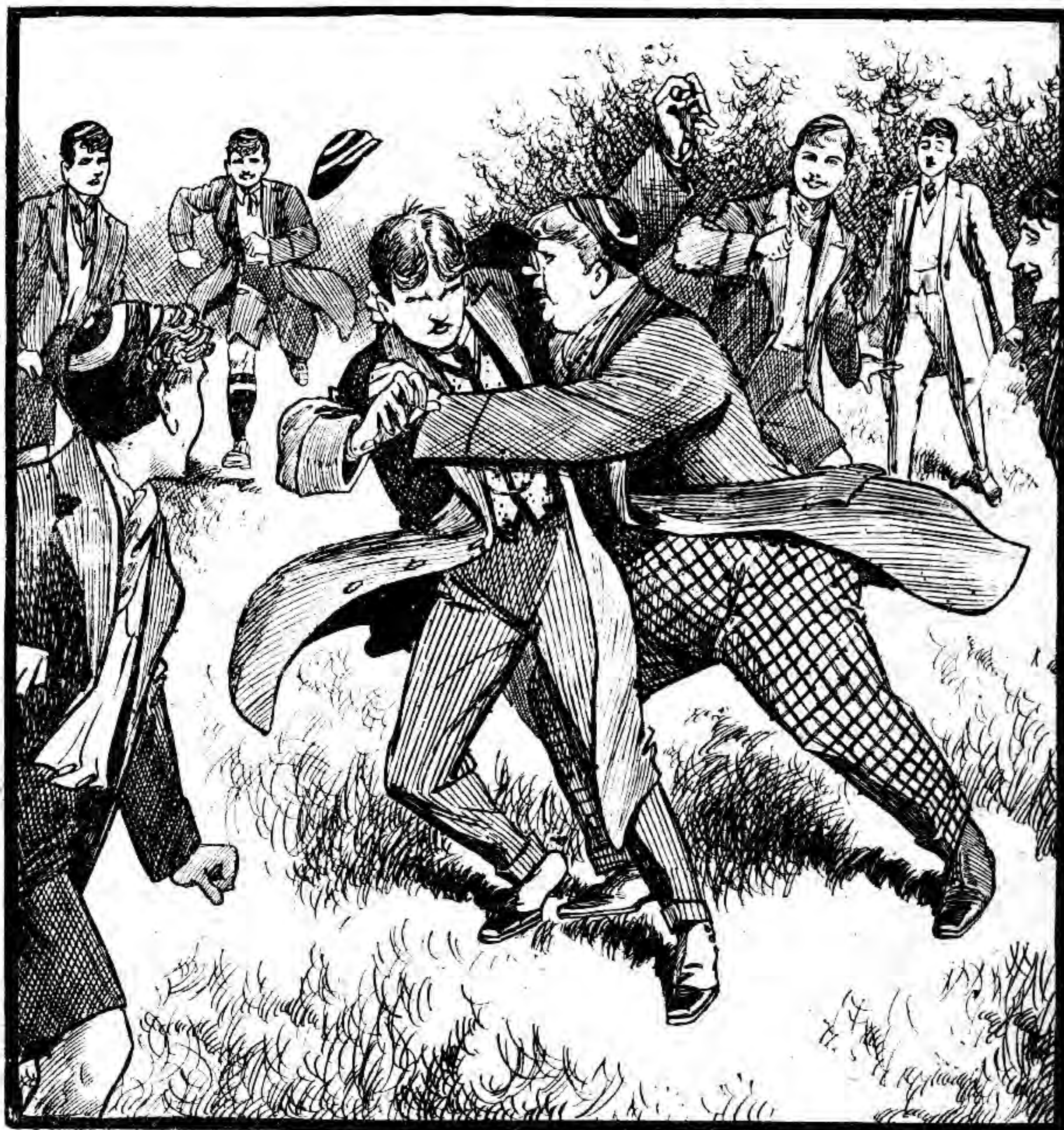


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THE BLACK SHEEP OF HIGHCLIFFE!



PON GETS IT IN THE NECK!

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By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Chance for a Rogue!

HAROLD SKINNER tapped at the door of Study No. 1 in the Remove and looked in.

Wharton and Nugent were at work at their prep at the study table, and they glanced up as the door opened.

Harry Wharton dropped his eyes to his work again as he saw that the caller was Skinner. But Nugent, who was perhaps a little more urbane than his study-mate towards fellows he did not like, gave Skinner a nod.

"Hallo!" he said.

"I suppose I can come in?" grunted Skinner.

"Oh, yes, if you like!"

Skinner came in.

"Busy?" he asked, with a glance at Wharton, who had resumed his work.

"Well, yes. You ought to be busy, too, oughtn't you?" said Nugent.

"Oh, never mind prep!" said Skinner.

"I looked in to speak to you fellows about the Lantham match."

Frank Nugent glanced at his study-mate, but Wharton went quietly on with his work. Apparently he had no time to waste in talking football with Skinner. Which was really not unnatural, for Skinner's interest in footer seldom went beyond making bets on the result of a match. But the good-natured Nugent rose to his feet, prepared to sacrifice a few minutes for the sake of politeness.

"Well?" said Frank.

"Lantham are coming over here on Saturday," said Skinner. "I hear that you fellows are not expecting it to be an easy match."

"Pretty tough, I think," said Nugent. "They're an older team, you know. But we hope to beat them."

"Oh, of course! The team's settled already, I suppose?"

Again Nugent glanced at his study-mate. It was for Wharton, the captain of the Remove, to answer that question. But Wharton did not seem to have heard it.

"I don't know about settled," said Nugent, answering, as Wharton did not speak. "Of course, the best men will go in as it's a tough match. Wharton, Johnny Bull, Bob Cherry, Squiff, Tom Brown, Smithy, Mark Linley—they're all certs. I don't know about the rest."

"A good team, anyway?"

"Oh, yes!"

Skinner looked thoughtful, and Nugent looked surprised and a little amused. Skinner's sudden interest in a Remove football fixture rather perplexed him.

"Speaking impartially, would you say the Remove had an equal chance?" asked Skinner.

"Well, I don't know. We hope to beat them. But as they're an older team and a good lot, I dare say anybody outside Greyfriars would think they were booked

to win. We're playing on our ground, though, and that's to the good."

"I've just been over at Highcliffe," remarked Skinner. "Ponsonby was talking about the match. He thinks Lantham will beat you hollow."

"He's welcome to his opinion."

Skinner was silent again for a moment or two, and Frank looked at his interrupted work. But there was evidently something on the mind of the black sheep of the Remove and he had not finished yet. Nugent waited.

"Suppose you were a betting chap, Nugent—" began Skinner.

"I'm not."

"I know you're not; but suppose you were, would you lay your money on the Remove?"

"Blessed if I know! Haven't thought of it."

"Suppose somebody offered two to one on Lantham—only suppose, of course; I know you don't bet—but, putting it like that, would you think it good business to lay one quid on Greyfriars against two on Lantham?"

"I suppose I should," answered Frank. "I dare say an impartial judge would think Lantham had the best chance of winning; but hardly a two to one chance."

"All the same, you hope to beat them?"

"Of course. In fact, we very likely shall beat them. It's an uncertain game, you know, and all our best men are at the top of their form just now."

Skinner nodded slowly.

"It's not good enough," he remarked.

Nugent gave him a quick look. The thought came into his unsuspecting mind at last which had entered Wharton's mind at once.

"Dash it all, Skinner!" he exclaimed hotly. "Do you mean to say you've been betting at Highcliffe on the match, and you've come here on that account?"

Harry Wharton looked up at that with a frowning brow.

"Couldn't you see that to start with, Frank, you ass?" he said. "What does Skinner care about football, excepting for his rotten bets?"

"Well, I think it is like his cheek to come here and tell us about it! There's the door, Skinner!"

And Nugent sat down again.

Skinner's thin lip curled.

He had gained the information he wanted, and that was enough for him.

"Sorry!" he said. "I know it's awful of me to contaminate the high moral atmosphere of this study. Still, it may comfort you to know that I haven't been making bets on the match. Ponsonby's offered two to one on Lantham; but I wanted to make sure before I took him on. Upon the whole, I don't think I shall back the Remove to win. Not good enough, even at two to one."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Have I dropped

into Tattersall's by mistake?" asked Bob Cherry's voice at the door.

Bob glanced into the study in surprise. A discussion of the odds on a footer match was decidedly unusual in Study No. 1.

"Only Skinner's rot!" growled Wharton.

"Letter for you, Franky," said Bob, tossing an envelope on the table. "I thought I'd bring it up."

"Thanks!"

"As I happened to notice that the post-mark's Lantham, I'll wait and see whether there's any news," said Bob. "May be something about the match."

"It's Simpson's fist," said Frank, taking up the letter. "He's their sec. I hope there's nothing wrong. It's a bit late to fix up anything else for Saturday if they don't come over."

Harold Skinner was moving to the door.

He stepped out of the study, but he did not close the door, and he did not walk away.

The chums of the Remove did not heed him.

It mattered nothing to them whether Skinner heard what was said in the study, and they did not even think for a moment that he was lingering outside the door.

Frank Nugent opened the letter, and glanced over the contents.

"Too bad!" he exclaimed.

"Anything up?" asked Wharton.

"Yes. Simpson says there's no end of 'em in Lantham, and a lot of the team are down with it. They're sending an eleven over all the same on Saturday, though," said Frank. "They're not going to scratch. A team of sorts, Simpson says. It won't be much of a match."

"Hard cheese!" said Bob Cherry sympathetically.

Outside the study Harold Skinner drew a deep, deep breath. His eyes were glittering.

He trod away softly on tiptoe.

"Oh, what luck!" he murmured to himself. "What rippin' luck! Straight from the horse's mouth. It's the chance of a lifetime!"

And when he was in his own study Skinner chuckled aloud. His study-mates, Snoop and Stott, were at prep, and they looked up as Skinner chuckled.

"What's the joke?" asked Snoop.

"What are you cackling at?" asked Stott.

"Was I?"

"Yes, you were."

"Oh, nothing!"

Skinner chuckled again as he spoke. "I say, can you fellows lend me any tin? I've got a good thing on, and I simply must have some tin."

"Threepence any good?" asked Stott, with a grin.

"Oh, rats!" said Skinner crossly.

"I can put three-halfpence to it!" suggested Snoop.

"Br-r-r-r!"

Skinner sat down to the table, and took his books; but he pushed them aside again. He could not put his mind into prep.

Even the fear of Mr. Quelch's acid tongue in the morning could not spur him on to work just then.

He rose from the table at last, and moved restlessly about the study.

What he had heard in Study No. 1 haunted his mind. It was the chance of a lifetime for an unscrupulous fellow like Skinner.

But, as was often the case with the sportive Skinner, he was short of money.

It would be a sheer waste, a crying shame, to put nothing better than a half-quid on a chance like that. It was worth a fiver at least, and there was really no risk. Unfortunately, there was also no fiver.

"Look here," exclaimed Snoop irritably, "how's a fellow to work with you buzzing about the study like a wasp? Can't you keep still?"

"Hang work!" growled Skinner. "Chuck that rot for a bit, you chaps. I'm on to a good thing, and we've got to raise the tin."

"I know your good things," said Stott. "The last good thing you told me of cleared me out of cash for a fortnight."

"It's no greegees this time."

"What is it, then?"

"Football."

"Backin' the Remove on Saturday? They can't win—it's like their cheek to take on Lantham Ramblers at all."

"And if you're thinking of backing Lantham, it's N.G.," said Snoop. "You won't get any takers."

"Ponsonby's offered two to one on Lantham," said Skinner.

"Anybody would who knew their form."

"But"—Skinner sank his voice to a whisper—"suppose I'd got information that Lantham couldn't possibly win?"

"Rot!"

"Straight from the horse's mouth!" said Skinner, his eyes glistening. "You see what a chance it is. We've got to raise all the tin we can, and we'll go into it together—before Ponsonby knows."

"My hat! But are you sure?"

"Dead sure. And Pon thinks Lantham's a cert, and so it would be but for what I've found out. He hasn't heard yet—it's not an hour since he offered me the odds. If we book the bets before he knows—"

"Phew!"

"Once we get the money put up Pon can't cry off, even if he gets to know the facts. Think of it! Pon's got plenty of tin!" Skinner's voice was almost husky with the eagerness of the gambler. "Think of it! You fellows, we've got to put our heads together and raise the wind—beg, borrow, or steal—and plank down a fiver—a tenner if we can—"

"But is it certain?"

Skinner explained, and Snoop and Stott listened with eager ears. Prep was forgotten in Study No. 11. The three young rascals were chancing it with Mr. Quelch in the morning, while they discussed their scheme for over-reaching their dear friend, Cecil Ponsonby, of Highcliffe School.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Raising the Wind!

HARRY WHARTON looked rather sharply at Skinner when the Remove came out of the dining-room the next day.

As a rule the captain of the Remove did not take much note of Skinner; he

did not like him or his ways, and certainly never cultivated his society.

But just now Skinner had drawn his attention.

There had been a regular campaign of raising the wind in the Remove that morning and the previous evening.

Skinner, Snoop, and Stott, the three blackest sheep of the Remove, seemed to have been smitten all at once with a severe attack of hard-upness.

All three of them had been going up and down and to and fro in the Remove seeking to raise funds.

There was hardly a fellow in the Form Bunter being tackled—though unsuccessful—they had not tried to borrow of, even fully.

And that was not all. Fisher T. Fish, the merchant of the Remove, who was always prepared to buy anything for half its value, had been doing quite a brisk business with the trio. They had sold bats and fishing-rods and other things to Fishy, and some articles to other fellows who were not such keen bargainers.

In fact, the affair was already growing a joke in the Form, and there seemed an actual famine in cash in Study No. 11.

Skinner met Harry Wharton's glance as they came out after dinner, and smiled slightly. He came towards the captain of the Remove as Wharton was going out into the quad.

"I suppose—" he began.

"Well?" said Harry drily.

"I happen to be rather hard up," remarked Skinner.

"I think all the Form knows that by this time!"

"You've noticed it? Well, it's rather kind of you to take an interest in me like this," said Skinner, smiling. "I suppose you couldn't lend a hand?"

"What do you want?"

"A sovereign, till Monday," said Skinner.

Harry Wharton paused, and looked straight at him. Skinner met his gaze with the same lurking smile. Stott and Snoop were looking on, almost awed by Skinner's cheek. Harry Wharton was the last fellow they would have thought of trying to extract a loan from, with such an object as they had in view.

"I think this is pretty cool, Skinner," said the captain of the Remove plainly. "But if you're in a fix, I could do as you ask."

"You're so good!" said Skinner amiably.

"But as I happen to know the kind of fellow you are, I can't help thinking that you want money for some of your betting rot," said Harry. "If you're trying to raise money to back a horse—as you've done before—"

"Not at all!"

"Or to make bets on football!" said Wharton sternly.

"My dear chap!"

"Then it isn't that?"

"Not at all," said Skinner smoothly. "The fact is, I've run up an account at Uncle Clegg's, and he's dunning me for it. Snoop and Stott are helping me out, like bricks. But I can't quite meet the bill."

Wharton compressed his lips.

"Do you expect me to swallow that, Skinner?" he asked. "Uncle Clegg wouldn't let you run up a bill for pounds."

"Well, he let it run, you see."

"Very well! I can't quite swallow that, Skinner—excuse me! But I'll tell you what I'll do. Show me Uncle Clegg's bill and I'll stand you a quid towards paying it, if it's a bill for pounds."

"Ahem! I haven't a bill—it's just the account—"

"Clegg would give you a bill if you asked for it—that is, if you owe him the money," said Harry.

Skinner smiled again.

"My dear man, if you don't take my word, I certainly shouldn't take your money!" he answered. "Do you usually put a fellow through a catechism when he wants to borrow of you?"

"Not a fellow whose word I can take," said Wharton bluntly. "The fact is, Skinner, you're pulling my leg, and so plainly that it wouldn't take in a baby. You want the money for some of your shady games."

"That shows how perspicacious a chap gets when he leads a really good life," answered Skinner imperturbably. "You are quite bright, in fact. Really, a shining light, old scout!"

Harry Wharton walked away without answering that.

Skinner grinned as he joined his chums. He had not had much expectation of touching Wharton for a loan; but it would have been very amusing to borrow Wharton's money, considering what it was for.

"Nothing doing?" asked Snoop, with a grin.

Skinner shook his head.

"No; his Magnificence had his doubts. He thinks I'm trying to raise money to gamble with. Shocking, ain't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's see what we've got," said Skinner. "Come under the trees. I've got to bike over to Highcliffe before lessons. Mustn't leave it too late, or Ponsonby may get wind of the Lantham bizney."

On a bench under the old elms the three young rascals pooled their resources in a cap, and counted them over.

The borrowing campaign had panned out very well.

The trio were indebted on all sides in their Form; but that, as Harold Skinner remarked, did not matter very much, as this time it was an absolutely dead cert. They had parted with some things they wanted to keep, too; but re-purchase would be easy, after they had swindled their dear friend Pon.

"Five pounds five-and-six!" said Skinner, when the counting was finished. "A nice little sum, my infants. We can put a fiver on Greyfriars for Saturday's match; and by the same token, Pon will have to put up a tenner. He'll jump at the chance."

"If he doesn't smell a mouse!" remarked Stott.

"Why should he? Last evening he was badgering me to back the Remove—he asked me where my giddy patriotism was. Well, I've decided to take him at his word, that's all—backing my own school, as a patriotic fellow ought to do."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner slipped the money into his pocket, and went for his bicycle. He rode away cheerily for Highcliffe School at a good speed.

Snoop and Stott strolled down to Little Side, where Harry Wharton & Co. were snatching some football practice before lessons.

Bunter of the Remove was at practice with the rest, showing form that never ceased to surprise the Removites.

Snoop and Stott looked on for some minutes with considerable satisfaction. As a rule they were little interested in Remove football, but now they were glad to see that Harry Wharton's men were in great form.

There was not much doubt how the Lantham match would go, and the rascals of the Remove rejoiced at the prospect. More than once the astute Ponsonby had done them; but this time it certainly looked as if Ponsonby of Highcliffe would be done—brown.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Spoiling the Egyptians!

PONSONBY & CO. were lounging idly in the quadrangle of Highcliffe when they sighted Skinner at the gates. Skinner left his machine at the porter's lodge, and came towards them.

"Quite an unexpected pleasure, dear boy," remarked Ponsonby. "Have you thought better of the offer I made yesterday?"

"Well, I don't know about that," said Skinner cautiously. "I've certainly been thinking about the matter, and I want to speak to you. Come up to the study."

"Right-ho!"

Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Monson minor went into the house with Skinner, and they proceeded to Pon's study.

Courtenay, the captain of the Highcliffe Fourth, was standing by the window in the Fourth Form passage chatting with De Courcy. He did not look at the nuts of Highcliffe; but the Caterpillar gave them rather a droll look as they passed. He knew what it generally meant when Skinner of Greyfriars called on Ponsonby & Co.

"Shockin'!" murmured the Caterpillar, as the four juniors disappeared into Ponsonby's study.

Courtenay raised his eyebrows.

"I don't quite follow you," he said. "What is there shocking about fixing up a match with the Fifth?"

"Ahem! I wasn't alludin' to that, dear boy."

"That's what we were speaking of."

"H'm! Quite so. Let's go on speakin' of it, old nut," said the Caterpillar cheerily. "Now, as you were sayin'—"

Courtenay smiled, and went on with his subject, the Caterpillar listening with an air of rapt attention, which was possibly more due to friendship than to keen interest in the winter game.

Meanwhile, Ponsonby & Co. were in their study, and the elegant Pon opened a box of cigarettes and pushed it towards Skinner.

"Light up, old chap!"

"Thanks!"

Skinner lighted up.

The three nuts eyed him rather curiously.

Ponsonby, who would have made bets on anything, from a football-match to a funeral, had been very keen to banter Skinner into laying money on the Lantham match. He hadn't the slightest doubt that Lantham Ramblers would walk over the Greyfriars Remove, and he was willing to back his certainty with the odds of two to one.

But Skinner was a shy bird, as it happened. He did not feel sure of his ground to take Pon's offer till he had obtained that important information in Study No. 1. Now he was keen to lay against Lantham; but he realised the importance of not allowing Pon & Co. to suspect the reason.

He sat down, and blew out a little cloud of smoke in quite a doggish manner. Ponsonby's study was nothing if not doggish. The three nuts were smoking, too.

"I've been thinking over your offer," said Skinner at last. "I don't see that Lantham have a two to one chance."

"All the more reason why you should back your school, dear boy."

"They're an older team, certainly—bigger, too. But the Remove have some jolly good men."

"Quite so," agreed Gadsby. "The fact is, Pon is givin' money away in

backin' Lantham two to one. Why don't you take him on?"

"Well, I'm not a suspicious chap," began Skinner, looking at them over his cigarette.

"Not at all, old scout."

"But the fact is," said Skinner, "I'd like to know why Pon is offering two to one. I want to know whether he's got any special information."

"My dear man, nothin' of the kind," said Ponsonby at once. "I've seen Lantham play, and I've seen the Remove play, and I think Lantham will walk all over Greyfriars. I'm ready to back my opinion, that's all."

"Well, I've seen the Remove at practice, and I like their form," said Skinner.

"But, look here, Pon, to be quite frank, is there anything special on? Have Lantham got a new recruit who's a terrific corker, or anything of that kind? Anything that makes it a walk-over?"

"Not that I'm aware of. I haven't seen them at practice," said Ponsonby.

"In fact, I don't know anythin' about them, exceptin' their reputation. On their reputation, I think they'll beat your lot. I think they're certain to. No good sayin' I don't think so when I'm offerin' the odds on them. But, as a Greyfriars fellow, you might think differently; and, if you do, put your money on your own team. That's all there is about it."

"Well, that's all right," admitted Skinner. "Mind, I don't say I'd lay even money. But, in my opinion, it's all rot to say Lantham have a two to one chance."

"I'm backin' that opinion, if you choose."

"Same here," said Gadsby.

"And here," remarked Monson. "Here's a chance for you giddy patriotism, Skinner."

"Then I'll take you on," said Skinner at last, as if making up his mind after a sort of mental struggle.

"Quids?" asked Ponsonby, his eyes glittering.

"Anything you like."

"Well, I'd like fivers, if you come to that," said Ponsonby, laughing. "But that's a bit above your weight, isn't it?"

"I'm not shedding banknotes from the pores of my skin, like you," said Skinner, with a slight sneer. "But I can put up a fiver."

"Done!" said Ponsonby instantly.

He took out a little Russia-leather-covered book to make an entry.

Skinner smoked on quietly.

He intended to have the stakes placed in reliable hands; but he did not choose to suggest it. He knew that the suggestion would come from Ponsonby, who did not trust him any more than he trusted Pon. The young rascals prided themselves upon their sporting proclivities, but they were bad payers when losers.

"Two to one on Lantham, Saturday's match, in fivers," said Ponsonby, as if to make all clear.

Skinner nodded.

"It's a go," said Ponsonby. "And now, what about the stakes? Of course, I know your word's as good as gold, Skinner—ahem!—still, it sometimes happens that it's not convenient to pay up, and that leads to bother. I suppose you're ready to put up your money?"

"I don't mind, either way," yawned Skinner. "Still, as you say, it's the satisfactory method. Who's stakeholder?"

"We'll ask Vavasour. These chaps are in with me. We're whackin' out the bet, you see."

Skinner smiled.

"Needn't ask Vavasour," he said.

"Thinkin' it out, I suggest Stott, of my Form at Greyfriars."

Ponsonby coughed. He was as likely to trust Skinner's chum as stakeholder as Skinner was to trust his chum. Monson came to the rescue.

"Always more satisfactory to get an outside chap to hold the stakes," he said. "An Upper Form fellow, for instance."

"What about De Courcy?" asked Skinner. "He's a bit of a card, but as straight as a string."

"I don't know if he would. He's so thick with Courtenay, who's down on anythin' of this kind. We'll ask him, if you like."

"Let's ask him, anyway," said Skinner.

"All right; he's just outside."

Ponsonby put his head out of the study, and called out to the Caterpillar, who was still chatting with his chum at the corridor window.

"Will you step in here a minute, Caterpillar?"

"Certainly, dear boy," said De Courcy, with alacrity. "Come on, Franky!"

"I'm not wanted, am I?" asked Courtenay.

"Certainly you are. Pon's study would contaminate me if I go there without my guide, philosopher, an' friend," answered De Courcy.

"Look here, you duffer—"

"Come on, dear boy!"

De Courcy took his chum's arm, and walked him into the study, rather to the annoyance of the nuts.

They were well aware of Courtenay's opinion of such transactions, and of his influence over his chum.

"Well, what's the row?" asked the Caterpillar urbanely. "You want me to act as referee? You're goin' to fight Skinner, Pon?"

"No, of course not!" snapped Pon.

"Oh! You're goin' to fight Skinner, Gaddy?"

"Don't be an ass, Caterpillar, old chap," said Ponsonby. "We've got a wager on, and we want you to hold the stakes—that's all!"

Frank Courtenay's brow darkened, but he did not speak. De Courcy glanced at his chum, with rather a comical look, and then he shook his head.

"Sorry, gentlemen, you'll have to excuse me," he said. "Since Franky took me up, an' plucked me like a merry brand from the burnin', I've never dabbled in such things. I've forgotten what a bet is, an' I don't know how to hold stakes; couldn't do such a thing if I tried. Awful sorry! Come on, Franky! We shall grow reckless an' naughty if we listen to this!"

"You silly ass!" roared Ponsonby.

The Caterpillar looked back in the doorway.

"Sorry!" he repeated. "But if I may make a suggestion—"

"Well?" snapped Pon.

"Give it up, dear boy—an' come along an' listen to Franky talkin' footer. It's ever so much better for you. Edifyin', in fact!"

Slam!

"Dear me!" said the Caterpillar. "I seem to have annoyed Pon, somehow. Do you know why Pon is annoyed, Franky?"

"Fathead!" was Courtenay's reply.

The chums walked away together, the Caterpillar smiling, and Courtenay frowning a little. There were scowling faces in Ponsonby's study.

"I knew he wouldn't do it," growled Gadsby. "Let's ask Monson major."

"Yes; my brother will do it," said Monson.

Skinner shook his head. He had a lurking doubt about being able to collect his

winnings from Monson major of the Fifth.

"Oh, one of the Sixth will do it for us," said Ponsonby impatiently. "I suppose that'll suit you?"

Skinner opened his eyes.

"My hat!" he said. "I wouldn't care to ask one of the Sixth at Greyfriars—even Loder or Carne!"

"The Sixth here are not quite so goody-goody!" sneered Ponsonby. "I've played bridge with Spencer in his study, with his set. Spencer will do it like a shot!"

"Let's see Spencer, then," agreed Skinner.

Ponsonby opened the door again, and they left the study together, and proceeded to the Sixth Form quarters.

They found Spencer of the Sixth in his study—a very elegant and expensive apartment. Beauchamp of the same Form was with him, and the two seniors were smoking cigarettes over a game of poker.

It was rather an extraordinary occupation for two prefects—to anyone who did not know Highcliffe, and the manners and customs thereof. There was dry rot in Highcliffe School from the Sixth to the Second; and Pon and Co., the nuts of the Fourth, were only followers and imitators of their elders in the senior Forms.

Spencer pointed to the door with his cigarette.

"Cut!" he said.

"Just a word, Spencer——"

"You're interruptin' the game," said Spencer. "Shut up till we're through. Shut the door! I'm not advertisin' this!"

Ponsonby shut the door, and the juniors waited, looking on, till the poker game was through. Skinner's eyes opened as he watched. There were reckless fellows in the Sixth Form at Greyfriars, but this kind of thing made him stare—especially when Beauchamp, who won the pot, collected about seven pounds.

"Now, what is it?" asked Spencer, as he shuffled the cards.

Ponsonby explained, and the senior nodded.

"All serene! I'll do it for you!" he said. "Shell out, and then clear out!"

Skinner produced his five pounds—made up of currency notes and silver, just as the money had been collected in the Greyfriars Remove. Ponsonby handed out a five-pound note with a flourish, and Monson and Gadsby two pounds ten shillings each. The three nuts were standing in together in the transaction.

Spencer thrust the money carelessly into his pocket, and proceeded to deal the cards. He was deep in poker again before the juniors were fairly out of the study.

Skinner returned to his bike, and rode away for Greyfriars, putting on speed to arrive there in time for lessons. Ponsonby & Co. smiled as they watched him go.

"That's a fiver for us three!" remarked Ponsonby. "Why, the Remove hasn't a dog's chance against Lantham, if Lantham are anything like their usual form."

"No reason why they shouldn't be."

"It's the two to one that fetched him," remarked Monson. "Silly ass—three or four to one would have been safe enough. That fiver's ours."

"He's been scrapin' it up on all sides, to judge by the collection he handed over to Spencer," said Ponsonby, laughing. "Never mind—it's ours; an' I'm sorely afraid poor old Skinner will never see our tenner!"

And the nuts of Highcliffe laughed as they sauntered elegantly back into the quadrangle.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Tea in Study No. 1!

"I SAY——"

Five voices answered Bunter of the Remove, in chorus, before he could get any further:

"Cut!"

The fat junior was blinking into Study No. 1 over his big glasses.

It was the day following Skinner's visit to Highcliffe; and Harry Wharton & Co. were expecting a visit from their friends at that school—needless to say, not Ponsonby & Co.

Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar were coming over to tea, and preparations were going on in No. 1. The juniors were not surprised to see Bunter's fat face at the door.

Billy Bunter's scent for a feed was famous in the Remove; and the Greyfriars fellows were still blissfully unsuspecting of the fact that the Bunter they had to deal with was not Billy at all, but his cousin and double, Wally.

"Cut!" repeated Wharton, pointing to the passage. "And sharp!"

were a fag in the Second Form. We know it's just on the point of arriving. And we're not going to cash it for you in advance. See?"

"I'm not expecting a postal-order——"

"Wha-a-at?"

Bob Cherry staggered. He seemed quite overcome.

"Fan me, somebody!" he murmured.

Bunter blinked wrathfully at the Famous Five.

"You silly asses!" he said. "I looked in here to——"

"Borrow half-a-crown," said Nugent. "Half-crowns are off; and it's time you were off, too!"

"Nothing of the sort! As the Highcliffe chaps are coming to tea, I thought I'd offer——"

"To do the cooking—and help yourself in the process!" grinned Bob. "We know—we know! But there isn't any cooking. Funds are short, likewise grub. Nothing for W.G.B. Travel!"

"I knew you were short of tin, as you borrowed two bob of Toddy, in my study. That's why I've come to offer——"



Bunter has had a remittance! (See Chapter 4.)

"But, I say——"

"The too-muchfulness of the esteemed Bunter is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The buzzfulness is the proper caper!"

"But——"

"Disappear!" roared Bob Cherry.

"I understand that you've got friends coming to tea," said Wally Bunter, unheeding.

"Of course! It's marvellous how you scent out anything of the sort!" said Johnny Bull. "But we're not inflicting porpoises on our visitors, so you can do the vanishing trick. Roll off!"

"But——"

"Do buzz away, Bunter!" said Harry Wharton.

"I haven't come to tea!" roared the fat junior indignantly. "I wouldn't stay to tea if you asked me, you silly asses!"

"Rats!"

"Gammon!"

"Buzz!"

"I was going to say——"

"My dear chap," said Bob Cherry, in a tone of great patience, "we know you've been expecting it ever since you

"To spend the two bob for us! Thanks for nothing!"

"To offer you a loan, you silly chumps!" roared Bunter.

"What?"

The Famous Five stared blankly at Wally Bunter. This was something new from the Owl of the Remove!

"I've had a remittance," continued the fat junior.

"Eh?"

"And if five bob's any good to you, here it is."

"Great pip!"

The Co. looked quite dazed as Bunter held out a fat hand with five shillings glistening in the palm.

"Well, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"The hatfulness is terrific!" gasped the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The surprisingness is also great!"

"Well, do you want it?" asked Bunter.

"Whose is it?" asked Bob Cherry humorously.

Wally gave him a glare.

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"Mine!" he hooted. "Do you think I've pinched it, you silly chump?"

"Ahem!"

"Well, my hat!" said Wharton. "You must excuse us for being surprised, Bunter. You've taken our breath away, you know. Thanks for the offer, if you really mean it!"

"Of course I mean it!" growled the fat junior.

"Well, thanks, then! We can manage all right."

"The thankfulness is terrific, my esteemed Owl!" said Hurree Singh.

Wally frowned.

"You mean you won't borrow my money?" he snapped.

"Well, we can manage all right, thanks!" said Wharton. "We're much obliged, all the same, Bunter."

Wally jingled the shillings back into his pocket, and turned to the door. He left the study without speaking again, but the cloud on his face made the chums of the Remove look at one another rather queerly.

"I—I say, it's rather a shame!" murmured Bob Cherry. "I never suspected Bunter of having any feelings before, but—but if he's got any we don't want to hurt them."

Wharton nodded.

"Let him make us a loan if he likes," he said. "Cut after him, Bob, and tell him we'll be glad to borrow the bobs. After all, they'll be jolly useful, considering the state of the merry exchequer."

"Ask him to tea," suggested Nugent.

"May as well go the whole giddy unicorn," said Wharton, laughing. "Ask him, by all means, Bob! If Bunter's growing sensitive, it's a bit unexpected, but we don't want to hurt any chap's feelings."

Bob Cherry ran out of the study, and looked round for Bunter.

The fat junior was at the window at the end of the passage, staring out rather gloomily into the quad.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry clapped him heartily on the shoulder. "Bunter, my fat tulip—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" muttered Wally.

"Will you lend us that five bob, old chap?" asked Bob, quite cordially.

Wally blinked at him.

"I will, if you'll take it," he said.

"My dear chap, that's what I've run after you for."

The fat junior's fat face brightened, and he slipped the five shillings into Bob's hand.

"Come along!" said Bob cheerily. "You're coming to tea, kid?"

"I'm not!" said Wally coolly.

"Yes, you are! I've brought you a special invitation!"

"Thanks! But I'm not coming! Ta-ta!" said the fat junior, and he rolled away to the staircase, leaving Bob Cherry blinking.

Bob returned to Study No. 1 with the five shillings in his hand and an astonished look on his face.

"Here's the tin!" he said.

"And where's Bunter?"

"He won't come."

"Eh?"

"Blessed if I understand it!" confessed Bob. "When it comes to Bunter lending money, and refusing to come to a feed, I give in! It's time for the skies to fall next!"

"He—he—he won't come!" stuttered Johnny Bull. "Then he didn't come here scouting after the grub?"

"Apparently not," said Wharton, with a laugh.

"Well, it beats me!"

"The beatfulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Singh. "I hope there

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is nothing wrong with the esteemed Bunter's honourable and ridiculous brain."

"It really looks like it," said Nugent.

There was astonishment in Study No. 1. It really did not seem as if Bunter was still the Bunter they knew!

But the five shillings were useful, there was no doubt about that. Nugent made a hurried excursion to Mrs. Mumble's shop, and returned with quite a handsome parcel. And when the guests arrived there was a spread on the study table quite worthy of the occasion.

Courtenay and De Courcy were warmly welcomed by the chums of Greyfriars. During tea Bunter was forgotten, but once or twice the juniors thought of him, and when they thought of him they expected to see the fat face looking in at the door.

But the fat face did not appear. Bunter was evidently not in search of a spread. Neither was he in search of the Caterpillar, which was almost surprising.

Billy Bunter had always been most attentive to that wealthy and well-connected youth, and the Caterpillar's urbanity had been put to a severe strain in keeping him at arm's length.

But now he did not seem to care whether he met the Caterpillar or not.

Talk over tea ran chiefly on football—a subject in which at least six of the seven juniors were keenly interested. But no one would have guessed, from the Caterpillar's expression of urbane interest, that he ever got tired of "football jaw." And on one occasion, at least, the Caterpillar's interest was genuine enough, and that was when the Lantham match was mentioned. Courtenay, who had no game on for Saturday, was thinking of coming over to see the match, which was likely to be interesting—a Lower School team against an eleven that had quite a wide celebrity in the county. Harry Wharton explained why the Lantham match, on this occasion, was not likely to amount to much, the eleven being made up chiefly of reserves or new recruits, owing to the players being mostly down with influenza.

Then the Caterpillar smiled.

"Lantham won't have much chance, then," he remarked.

"None at all," answered Wharton. "They'd be justified in scratching, under the circumstances; but I suppose they don't like to leave us with a vacant date so late in the day. It will be a match of sorts; but Simpson has told Nugent Nugent knows him—that it won't be anything like the Ramblers' usual team. It's a disappointment to us. We were looking forward to a good game. Of course, we'd rather play a scratch lot than waste the afternoon."

"What jolly interesting news to a fellow who had backed Lantham for the match, by gad!" said the Caterpillar.

"He would get left, and no mistake!" said Johnny Bull. "Serve him jolly well right, too, if there is such a fellow!"

"There are such reckless persons," said the Caterpillar gravely. "In fact, I know some. But for Franky's protectin' care I might be doin' the same kind of thing myself. It's awful to contemplate!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Rupert, old chap!" said Courtenay.

"Can't help it, dear boy. Asses are born, not made."

The Caterpillar's smile was a smile that would not come off as the chat went on in the study. He was thinking of something that was evidently entertaining, if the others had noted it. But they were too deep in their favourite

topic to bother about what the Caterpillar might be thinking.

When the chums of Highcliffe took their leave, and walked away in the dusk homeward, the Caterpillar burst into a chuckle.

"Franky!" he murmured.

"Hallo?"

"Do you remember that I used to be a roarin' blade, like dear old Pon an' gay old Skinner, before—"

"Chuck it, old fellow!"

"I'm mentioning it, dear boy, so that you won't be surprised at what I'm goin' to do this evenin'."

"Well, what are you going to do?" asked Courtenay, with a smile.

"I'm goin' to paint Pon's study red," said the Caterpillar impressively. "I'm goin' to borrow all your money, Franky, an' go to Pon's study an' lay bets with him—bets galore!"

"Rupert!"

"An' you're coming with me, dear old chap! Change is good for you, you know, and it will be a change for you after bein' a sober old judge so long. Don't you think so?"

"Look here, Caterpillar."

"You'll come?" pleaded the Caterpillar. "Think how long it is since I've kicked over the traces and gone in for bein' a roarin', ragin' blade!"

"I suppose this is a joke?" said Courtenay, after a pause.

"Dear old infant, that supposition does credit to your brain-power," said the Caterpillar affectionately. "Did you have a brain-wave?"

Courtenay laughed.

"I don't quite see the joke!" he said.

"That's your weak point, Franky—you've got enough good qualities for a whole giddy Bench of Bishops, but you're a bit slow in the uptake when it comes to a joke. But you'll come with me to see Pon, won't you, and watch me make his hair stand on end?"

"Oh, I'll come!" said Courtenay.

"That's a good infant!" said the Caterpillar approvingly.

And the whimsical youth chuckled several times as they walked home by the dusky lanes to Highcliffe. Whatever his little joke was, the contemplation of it seemed to afford him rare entertainment.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Pon is Pleased.

"HANG prep!"

Cecil Ponsonby made that remark as he pushed his books away.

Pon had fooled with prep, as he fooled with most things that were connected with work. But the elegant Pon could always depend upon the tolerance of his Form-master, Mr. Mobbs. Where Mr. Mobbs had sharp words or the pointer for less lucky members of the Fourth, he seldom had anything but a smile for Ponsonby—at the worst a murmured word of gentle reproof.

Gadsby threw aside his books. Vavasour and Monson were standing by the mantelpiece smoking cigarettes. Drury was yawning in the armchair.

"Thank goodness you've chucked it, Pon!" remarked Drury. "Dash it all, you can always depend on Mobby!"

"The Head might come down on a fellow," said Ponsonby. "He did once."

"He's too jolly sleepy!" chuckled Monson. "Precious little risk of that. Thank your lucky stars you weren't sent to Greyfriars! I can tell you they make fellows work there! If a chap smokes a fag in his study he does it in fear an' tremblin'."

Ponsonby's lip curled.

"That's what Courtenay would like to see here," he remarked.

"Frightful old Puritan, Courtenay!" said Monson. "And he's makin' the Caterpillar as bad as himself. De Courcy used to be a wild beggar."

"I fancy De Courcy isn't so tame as Courtenay thinks, all the same!" remarked Drury. "We'll see him breakin' out again yet. By the way, he's comin' here, Pon."

"Comin' here? What the merry dickens for?"

"Give that up! But he asked me if you were at home when I passed his study comin' along."

"Well, he can come if he likes; but I'll bet you Courtenay won't let him!" said Ponsonby.

Tap!

"Come in!"

The door opened, and Rupert de Courcy stepped in. To the surprise of the nuts, Frank Courtenay followed him.

The Caterpillar was urbane, as usual; Courtenay wore a slightly puzzled look. He was not on friendly terms with the nuts, though they generally contrived to be more or less civil.

"All the merry family at home, I see!" remarked the Caterpillar. "I hope we're not interruptin'?"

"Not at all!" said Ponsonby. "We haven't started yet!"

"Not started prep?"

"Bosh! We've done prep—all we're goin' to do, anyway. If you like to take a hand, Caterpillar, you're welcome. Too many for bridge; we'll make it poker, if you like."

The nuts grinned as they watched for the effect of that remark in Courtenay's face. But the captain of the Fourth gave no sign. It was plain from his manner that he had simply come with his chum, and that he did not yet know what De Courcy wanted there.

"Poker," said the Caterpillar gravely, "was one of my early sins. I've given it up, Pon. Likewise geegees! But there are chaps—reckless, roarin' chaps—who go in for bettin' on football matches. Shockin', but true! I was wonderin' if any of you game birds would care to back the Greyfriars Remove in a match they're playin' next Saturday?"

"No jolly fear!" said Ponsonby, with a laugh. "They've not got an earthly against Lantham Ramblers!"

"You think not?"

"I'm quite sure not!"

"Then you won't put your money on them if I back the Ramblers?" asked the Caterpillar, with a sigh.

"My dear infant, you'll have to find a more innocent study than this!" said Gadsby, laughing. "We're a bit too wide, you know!"

"Well, it seems a shame that I shouldn't have my little flutter, when I've made up my mind to it!" said the Caterpillar. "Isn't anybody here game to lay his money on Greyfriars?"

"Ha, ha! No!"

"I'm an accommodatin' chap," said the Caterpillar. "I'm determined to lay somethin' on that match. If you won't back Greyfriars, will you back Lantham?"

"What-ho!" came in a chorus from all the nuts at once.

"Done, then!"

"I suppose you're pullin' our leg?" remarked Ponsonby. "You know very well that Lantham will walk all over the Greyfriars Remove, De Courcy!"

"I've seen Wharton this afternoon, and he thinks quite differently."

"Wharton's a conceited ass!"

"Well, do you know, he never struck me in that light!" said the Caterpillar gravely. "He thinks he's goin' to win. Cherry thinks so, too."

"Cherry's a crass idiot, then!"

"But they know somethin' about the game, I believe?"

"That's so. And if it wasn't their own team concerned they'd know very well Lantham would win. But there's none so blind as those who won't see!"

The Caterpillar nodded.

"That may be it, of course. Still, if you won't back Greyfriars—"

"No fear!"

"Then I will!" said the Caterpillar.

"After all, football's an uncertain game, and good teams get beaten sometimes by bad teams. I've heard of such things. What's the odds on Lantham?"

Ponsonby gave him a keen look.

Courtenay stood silent; he had not spoken at all. What he thought of this singular behaviour on the part of his chum could not be read in his face. But his lips were tightening just a little.

If he had been brought there to be witness to a betting transaction it was probable that he would have something to say to the Caterpillar later. But he had promised to come there and give the Caterpillar his head, as De Courcy expressed it. And so he was silent.

"Does Uncle Frank approve of this?" asked Gadsby. And there was a chuckle in the study, and then Courtenay flushed just a little.

"Franky's lettin' me have my head for once," explained the Caterpillar urbane. "I've made him promise, an' you know Franky's a slave to his word. Franky's got to see this through without raisin' an objection—he's said he will."

"You said there was a joke of some kind—" began Courtenay.

"Did I?"

"Yes, you did, Caterpillar!"

"Well, if I hadn't you wouldn't have come, would you? Besides, it is rather a joke to diddle you into enterin' into these wicked transactions—you're such a solemn old judge! I appeal to your sense of humour, Franky."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the nuts.

Frank Courtenay's face was a study at that moment.

The Caterpillar smiled gently.

"I'm sure Franky will see the humour of the situation later," he said. "Meanwhile, let's get on with our rascally proceedin's, like the set of merry blackguards we are! Did you say you were backin' Greyfriars, Pon?"

"No; Lantham, you ass!" said Ponsonby, laughing.

"Oh, yes—Lantham!" said De Courcy, with a nod. "Odds, or even money?"

Ponsonby was quite prepared to lay odds on Lantham, if necessary; but he answered at once:

"Even money, if you've the nerve to back Greyfriars!"

"My dear man, I've nerve enough for anythin'—even to make wicked bets, with Franky lookin' as if he's just goin' to fall on my neck an' weep!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the nuts, in delight.

Courtenay made a movement towards the door.

"You don't want me here, Caterpillar!" he said abruptly.

"But I do, dear boy, an' I think I bagged your promise to see me through. I'm goin' to trouble you to keep it."

Courtenay hesitated, and stopped.

"A promise is a promise!" he said.

"But I didn't reckon on this!"

"It's too bad, old scout—I acknowledge it! But it's funny, all the same—all these fellows can see that it's funny!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Courtenay stood silent, with compressed lips. Even yet he could not believe that his volatile chum had tricked him into becoming a party to a gambling transaction—though what other explana-

tion there could be was a mystery to him.

Ponsonby & Co. were enjoying the situation; Courtenay's look was a sheer delight to them. They almost loved the Caterpillar at that moment.

"Besides, Franky, you're such a trustworthy chap," urged the Caterpillar. "I want you to hold the stakes."

"What?"

"I'm sure the chaps will trust you with untold gold—"

"Yes, rather!" chuckled Ponsonby.

"Absolutely!" grinned Vavasour.

And the nuts chuckled in delight at Courtenay's look. To make him stakeholder for a gang of betting young rascals was really the climax. Ponsonby was inclined to hug the Caterpillar for thinking of it. It really looked as if Rupert de Courcy was going back to his old ways at last—with a crash!

Courtenay bit his lip hard.

"I promised, Rupert," he said. "I didn't expect this—but I promised. If you hold me to it—"

"I do!"

"Very well!"

And Courtenay stood where he was, silent again, but with lowering brow. And Ponsonby & Co. chortled joyously.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Caterpillar's Little Joke!

"HA, ha, ha!" "Yaas, it's funny, isn't it?" smiled the Caterpillar. "Poor old Franky's fairly caught—and he's not only goin' to witness a shockin' transaction, but he's goin' to be a party to it. It's horrid of me, I know. But I'm sure Franky will see the joke himself later."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Courtenay did not speak.

"But to come down to cold business," resumed the Caterpillar, "I'm layin' even money on Lantham—or Greyfriars, isn't it?"

"On Greyfriars, if you lay it in this study."

"Greyfriars, then," assented the Caterpillar. "As it happens, I'm in funds—owin' to Franky keepin' me off the naughty geegees so long. How many of you merry pippins are takin' me on, in fivers?"

"Phew!"

"I'm your man!" said Vavasour at once. "Absolutely!"

"Done!"

"You'll have to let us down more lightly," said Ponsonby. "We're in rather deep on that match already. Make it two quid all round, and I think we can see you."

"Good enough!" assented Drury.

"All the same to me," said the Caterpillar. "We place our money in the hands of Franky, as a thoroughly reliable chap. Let me see—five for you, Vav—" "Absolutely."

"Two each for Pon, and Gaddy, and Monson, and Drury—"

"That's right."

"That's thirteen quids in all," said De Courcy. "Thirteen—an unlucky number for somebody! For you, perhaps, Pon!"

"I'll chance that!" grinned Pon.

"Well, here's the lucre!"

The Caterpillar carelessly turned out two five-pound notes and three pound notes. He laid them on the table close by Courtenay's hand, which rested there.

"Shell out, you chaps!" said Pon.

The nuts shelled out willingly enough. They were delighted to book bets on what they believed to be assured terms; and they were still more delighted at the

Caterpillar's impish trick in making Courtenay a party to the shady business.

A fiver—from Vavasour—and the rest in currency notes from the others made up the sum. Frank Courtenay looked at the little heap of money.

Courtenay reddened.

"Put it away safe, Franky," murmured the Caterpillar.

"Do you really mean this, Rupert?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Naturally!"

"I told you I'd do whatever it was you wanted. But—"

"Well, do it, old chap! You're wastin' time."

Courtenay, with set lips, picked up the notes and placed them in his pocket-book, which he slipped back into his pocket.

"Now you'll sit down an' try your luck at poker?" suggested Ponsonby.

De Courcy shook his head.

"No; I'm goin' to do some work before I go to bed. Besides, Franky's lookin' so shocked already that I'm afraid he may have an attack of apoplexy, or somethin'. Do you feel it comin' on, Franky?"

"Let's get out of this, Rupert!"

"Certainly." De Courcy moved towards the door, and then he turned back, as if struck by a sudden thought. "By the way, I heard some news to-day at Greyfriars that may interest you fellows—from Lantham, you know."

There was something so curiously mocking in the Caterpillar's tone that Ponsonby gave him a quick, uneasy look.

"What news?" he asked.

"They seem to have a lot of 'flu at Lantham."

"Who cares?" said Ponsonby, shrugging his shoulders.

"Exactly—why should you care?" assented the Caterpillar. "So long as they don't give you the 'flu, dear boy, what does it matter? But I thought you'd be interested, because nearly all the Lantham team are down with it."

"What?"

"And they're sendin' quite a scratch lot over to Greyfriars on Saturday—an awful crew, from what I hear," pursued the Caterpillar, apparently ignoring the expression that was growing on the faces of Ponsonby & Co. "Simply sendin' the men over, you know, because they don't want to leave Greyfriars in the lurch by scratchin' the fixture at the last minute. Wharton expects to walk all over them—as I think I mentioned."

A dead silence followed the Caterpillar's words.

De Courcy broke it.

"Time we were gettin' along, Franky," he remarked.

Ponsonby sprang forward, with an oath on his lips.

"Caterpillar, is that the truth?"

"My dear man," said De Courcy, slightly raising his eyebrows, "may I remark that that is a rather uncivil question?"

"Oh, don't give me any of your gas now!" exclaimed Ponsonby savagely. "Is it the truth? Are Lantham crooked, and is the match a walk-over for Greyfriars?"

The Caterpillar nodded.

"To the best of my belief that's the state of the case," he answered. "Does it matter?"

"Does it matter!" shouted Ponsonby furiously. "You've come here and diddled us into layin' bets on Lantham when you knew they were done for before the match started—when you'd got information—secret information—"

Ponsonby almost choked with rage.

"It's a swindle!" yelled Monson.

"My dear, innocent young friends!"

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murmured the Caterpillar. "Oughtn't you to ascertain the facts before you lay your merry quids on a football team? Is it my bizney to dig up information for you?"

"Look here—"

"Besides, I offered to lay money on Lantham, you know," smiled the Caterpillar. "I suggested it, and you refused it—you wouldn't lay odds against Lantham. I really gave you your choice, didn't I? You bagged Lantham, and left me Greyfriars. I really don't see where the grumble comes in."

The nuts of Highcliffe glared at the cool, smiling Caterpillar with deadly expressions.

They understood now—and Ponsonby understood, too—why Skinner of the Remove had come over specially to book bets. Skinner evidently had known what the Caterpillar knew now.

Cecil Ponsonby clenched his hands till his finger-nails were white.

He had never, in all his career as an



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amateur sportsman and blackguard, felt so completely and hopelessly done.

The Caterpillar surveyed the crowd of nuts with a slow, provoking smile.

"Franky!" he yawned.

Courtenay looked at him.

"I've got a sort of suspicion," murmured the Caterpillar, "that our dear an' sporting friends would like to call those bets off. Is that the case, Pon, dear boy?"

"You know it is!" snarled Ponsonby. "But you've come here to diddle us, and you know that, too. I call it a swindle, if you knew in advance that Lantham were crooked with 'flu.'"

The Caterpillar nodded calmly.

"My dear man, it would be a swindle, of sorts, if it wasn't simply a little joke to pull your sportive leg," he answered. "Franky, lay the money on the table; I've finished amusin' myself with these festive game-birds, an' they're beginnin' to bore me."

"Oh!" exclaimed Courtenay.

He understood now, and a flush came into his face—a flush of shame for having doubted his chum.

This, after all, was the whimsical fellow's joke. The whole scene had been for the purpose of pulling Ponsonby's leg.

Courtenay burst into a laugh as he laid the money on the table, and handed back to the Caterpillar his own stakes.

De Courcy smiled at Ponsonby.

"Sure you want to call it off, Pon? I'll stick to the bargain if you like, of course."

"Call it off!" said Ponsonby, between his teeth.

"Do you know," said the Caterpillar confidently, "I thought you'd take that view when I mentioned that Lantham were crooked an' couldn't win. Quite prophetic of me, wasn't it? You seem annoyed, Pon. Has anythin' happened to disturb your noble serenity?"

"Hang you!" growled Ponsonby.

He realised now how the whimsical Caterpillar had fooled him, and led him on to betray the suspicious meanness of his nature—never intending at all to make the bets seriously. The nuts looked red and uncomfortable as they gathered up their money, though they were glad enough to gather it up. Had the bets stood, certainly the Caterpillar could have claimed the whole sum from the stakeholder after the match. And, annoyed as they were, and ashamed of the excitement they had shown when they believed the money gone for ever, the nuts were glad that it had only been one of the Caterpillar's curious jokes after all.

"Gentlemen," said the Caterpillar, still smiling, "havin' pulled your excellent legs, and found a little harmless an' necessary amusement in doin' so, I have the honour to retire from this respectable and moral study. I may remark, in passin', that you must be rather dense to have your esteemed legs pulled so easily. If I were goin' to play the goat in earnest, I shouldn't bring Franky with me, an' give him shocks to the system. I should hide it from Franky, an' avoid bringin' down his grey hairs with sorrow. Good-bye, dear boys! Go an' eat coke!"

And the Caterpillar strolled gracefully out of the study.

He chuckled as he sauntered along to his own quarters. Courtenay followed him into the study they shared, a very curious expression on his face.

"Rupert, you ass!" he said, half laughing, but with very evident relief in his look.

The Caterpillar shook his head at him reproachfully.

"You very nearly spoiled the whole thing, Franky," he said. "Very nearly! Didn't I warn you in advance? I was goin' there to pull Pon's leg?"

"Yes. But—"

"An' you nearly gave it away. I barely had the heart to keep on when I read so much anguish in your speakin' countenance, dear boy!" The Caterpillar chuckled. "I say, did you notice how that merry sport, Pon, looked when I mentioned about Lantham bein' down with the 'flu? What a chivvy, you know! An' he made remarks that were really quite ill-bred—weren't they?"

Courtenay laughed.

"It's a strain on a chap's politeness, bein' a merry sportsman an' gettin' caught," remarked the Caterpillar. "I think Pon's manners suffer in consequence. Their faces were an entertainment when they thought I was goin' to walk off with all their money! Franky, old scout, I really think this may be a lesson to those misguided youths, an'

they may turn over a new leaf, like me, an' become good and upright and stainless—like me! Do you think so?"

"Fathead!" was Courtenay's reply.

During the remainder of the evening the Caterpillar continually burst into spasmodic chuckles, from the remembrance of the peculiar scene in Pon's study. But in that study there were wrath and bitterness and savage malice, as Ponsonby and Gadsby and Monson took council together.

The affair with the Caterpillar had been only a joke, but the bets made with Skinner were far from a joke. Skinner was in deadly earnest, that was certain, and, so far as the enraged nits could see, he was going to bag their tanner when Harry Wharton & Co. had defeated the scratch Lantham team on Saturday.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Ponsonby Looks In!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! His Highness—in a merry wax!" Bob Cherry made that remark, the following day after morning lessons.

The Famous Five were sauntering in the quadrangle at Greyfriars, after the Remove had been dismissed by Mr. Quelch, enjoying the keen wind from the sea after work in the Form-room.

Bob Cherry's remark was called forth by the sight of Cecil Ponsonby of Highcliffe wheeling his bicycle in at the gates.

Harry Wharton & Co. glanced carelessly at the dandy of Highcliffe.

Judging by his expression, Cecil Ponsonby certainly was in a wax, as Bob expressed it.

His brows were knitted, and his eyes gleamed under them. He was in a savage temper, and took no trouble whatever to conceal it.

Leaving his machine at the gates, he glanced round him, and walked directly towards the Famous Five.

"Skinner about?" he asked.

Harry Wharton made a gesture towards the old elms, under which Skinner and Snoop were talking together.

"There's Skinner," he said curtly.

Ponsonby was turning away, but he turned back.

"Just a minute, Wharton!"

The captain of the Remove stopped.

"Well?" he said.

"You're playing Lantham to-morrow—Saturday?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"Is it true that they are crooked with influenza, and are sending over a scratch team that don't amount to anythin'?"

"Yes."

"That's official, I suppose?" asked Ponsonby. "I've a reason for asking, if you don't mind tellin' me."

"I don't see why I should mind," answered Wharton. "Nugent knows Simpson, their sec, and the chap wrote to him about it. Nearly all the men are down with 'flu, but they're making up an eleven out of the reserves and some junior players. I dare say they think they'll be able to play a junior school team, but I don't think they've any chance, myself."

"They've no chance unless they're a good strong eleven, I know that. And they're not?"

"Well, they can't be, in the cirs."

"Thanks. That's what I wanted to know."

And Ponsonby nodded curtly, and walked away towards the trees.

"Pon seems jolly interested in our footer fixtures all of a sudden," said Bob Cherry, puzzled.

There was a snort from Johnny Bull.

"Can't you see he's got some rotten bet on with Skinner?" he growled.

"That's what he's anxious about."

"Oh!" ejaculated Bob.

"Skinner's backing his own school, I suppose," said Wharton. "Rather queer that he should do that. He never believed we had a chance against Lantham."

"Not so jolly queer, since Simpson's letter came," said Nugent. "I'm afraid Skinner knew that, and has dished Pon."

"Phew!"

"I—I say, that's playing it rather low down, even for a fellow like Skinner," said Wharton. "If he knew that, would he diddle Ponsonby into laying money on Lantham?"

"Just one of his tricks!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Look at them now!"

The chums of the Remove looked at the juniors under the elms. The interview between Ponsonby and Skinner was growing excited.

Sidney James Snoop had strolled

"What I knew doesn't matter, my boy! You offered the odds, an' I took them. What have you got to complain of?"

Ponsonby set his teeth.

The trick Skinner had played on him was just such a trick as he might have played Skinner; but that was no comfort to him. The tanner laid on the match was simply thrown away, as matters stood; he hadn't a chance for his money. And that knowledge filled him with malicious bitterness. But the loss of the money was not so bitter as the knowledge that he had been overreached by a fellow he despised.

"You won't call the bet off?"

"Certainly not!"

"I'll speak to Spencer! I'll explain to him—"

"I don't think you'll get Spencer to hand back your money now you've changed your mind," sneered Skinner. "If I couldn't rely on that I wouldn't have trusted him."

Ponsonby breathed hard.

"You've done me!" he said.



Poor old Pon! (See Chapter 6.)

away, whistling, leaving Skinner to deal with the enraged Highcliffian.

Skinner had his hands in his pockets, and a sneering smile was on his face, though his cheeks were rather flushed.

Ponsonby was pale with rage, and as the Removes looked at him he shook his fist in Skinner's sneering face.

"Looks like war, by Jove!" murmured Bob Cherry. "The merry sportsmen are falling out!"

"The fall-outfulness seems to be terrific!" grinned Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh, as Skinner jumped back just in time to escape a fierce drive of Ponsonby's fist.

"Phew!"

Skinner backed away from the Highcliffe junior, his eyes glittering. Pon followed him up.

"You swindlin' cad!" His angry voice could be heard where the Famous Five stood. "You diddin' rogue! Will you call it off, then?"

"No, I won't! Be a sport," said Skinner contemptuously. "You've laid your money of your own free will. Stand to it!"

"You knew in advance—"

"Not at all," said Skinner airily. "I knew nothing about Lantham bein' down with 'flu, an' so on. I've only got your word for it now. How should I have known? I don't know any Lantham chaps."

"It was known here. Wharton knew!"

"Wharton doesn't tell me things."

"You knew!" said Ponsonby. "I dare say you were at a keyhole; but you knew, and that's why you came over and—"

"My dear man, you're talking out of the back of your neck," yawned Skinner. "You shouldn't lay bets if you're afraid of losin' your money!"

"You—you thief!"

Ponsonby, quite losing control of his temper, sprang at the cad of the Remove, hitting out savagely. The next moment a strong pair of hands grasped him, and he glared round, to find himself in the grip of Bob Cherry.

"That'll do!" said Bob curtly. "You can get out, Ponsonby."

"Let me go, hang you!"

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"I'll let you out," said Bob. "This way!"

Ponsonby clenched his hands, but he did not hit out at Bob. He was only too well aware that the consequences would have been very painful—not to Bob Cherry.

Bob gripped his arm, and led him back to his machine.

"Good-bye!" he said.

And the dandy of Highcliffe, without a word, but with an almost homicidal look, mounted his bicycle and pedalled away. Bob Cherry grinned as he rejoined his chums.

"His Highness is quite waxy," he remarked. "But we don't want blackguards of his kidney kicking up a shindy here. I say, it would be rather a good idea to give Skinner a jolly good bumping."

"Good egg!" said Johnny Bull heartily. And he looked round for Skinner.

But Skinner had vanished.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter is Wanted!

PONSONBY'S face was dark when he arrived at Highcliffe. Monson and Gadsby were waiting for him, but the dinner-bell was going, and they had to go in. The moment they were out of the dining-room, however, Pon's chums joined him, with eager questions.

"I've seen Skinner," muttered Ponsonby. "He sticks to it. He knew, of course, an' he came over specially to diddle us. I've asked Wharton, and it's true about Lantham—just as the Caterpillar said. That tenner is Skinner's, just the same as if we'd made him a present of it, by gad!"

"Two-pound-ten out of my pocket!" said Gadsby. "Well, it can't be helped. It was sharp of Skinner, but—"

"It's got to be helped!" said Ponsonby, between his teeth. "It's not only the money—though a fiver's a fiver, all the same. If you want to lose your two-ten, I don't want to be robbed of my five."

"I don't want to, of course; but I don't see—"

"It's not only the money—but to be done brown like this by a sneakin' cad like Skinner—to let him have the laugh of us!" Ponsonby gritted his teeth. "I tell you I won't have it! I'm goin' to see Spencer! Come on!"

"But—"

"Oh, dry up, an' come on!"

Spencer of the Sixth had gone to his study after dinner, and Ponsonby & Co. followed him there.

They found Spencer walking up and down his study alone, with a deep wrinkle in his brow.

He stopped, and stared angrily at the juniors as they entered.

Spencer was generally a good-natured and easy-going fellow—far too easy-going for his own good. But, like most weak natures, he had a quick and passionate temper. Something was evidently a little wrong with Spencer now, for he broke out irritably and savagely.

"What the thump do you want? Can't a fellow be left alone in his own study without a gang of fags runnin' him down? Clear off!"

Ponsonby backed away a little, quite unprepared for that outburst. He guessed that the cards had not been going well for Spencer.

"Cut off!" snapped the senior.

"I—"

"Cut off, I tell you!"

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"It's about those stakes you are holding for us, Spencer," said Ponsonby, standing his ground.

Spencer stood quite still. His irritation vanished all of a sudden, and a curious scared look glimmered in his eyes for a moment.

"The stakes!" he repeated. "What do you mean? I'm keeping your stakes till after the football match at Greyfriars. That's to-morrow—Saturday."

"Yes; but we want to call the bet off," explained Ponsonby. "We find that Lantham are down with 'flu, an' a measly scratch team of reserves are playin' the Remove—not their usual lot. It's a swindle, you know. Skinner knew!"

"Does Skinner agree to calling the bet off?"

"No. But—"

"Then shut up!" said Spencer savagely. "Do you think I'm goin' to cheat Skinner to please you? You shouldn't have asked me to hold the stakes—you know you shouldn't! Hang you, what did you bother me at all for?"

"You've done it before!" said Ponsonby sullenly.

"An' I was a fool for my pains. I ought to have known better! Look here, Ponsonby, there's too much of this kind of thing at Highcliffe! It's got to stop! After all, I'm a prefect! I'm down on it—do you hear?—down on it, and it's got to stop!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Mind what I say! I'm down on it—and you, too, for that matter. Let me hear of anythin' of the kind again an' I'll march you in to the Head by the scruff of the neck. Now, get out of my study!"

"Look here, Spencer—"

The Sixth-Former interrupted him by bundling him out of the study. Gadsby and Monson dodged out, and the door slammed on them.

In the passage Ponsonby set his elegant necktie straight, and breathed hard with rage. Monson whistled.

"What on earth's old Spencer got his rag out like that for?" asked Monson. "Talkin' of reform, too! Is he potty?"

"Losin' money!" sneered Ponsonby. "I'd an idea before that Beauchamp had cleared him out at poker. That's what it means."

"Phew! He must have been hard hit to get his rag out like that."

"He wouldn't have handed back the stakes, anyhow," remarked Gadsby. "You couldn't expect it, Pon. He couldn't decently do it."

"Well, it was a chance. That's failed, and we've got to think of somethin' else."

Ponsonby left his chums with that, and went to his study. There he smoked cigarette after cigarette, perhaps as an aid to thought. When he came into the Form-room for lessons he was looking pale and sickly. Mr. Mobbs glanced at him quite concernedly.

"You do not look well, Ponsonby," said the Form-master.

"A bit of a headache, sir," said Pon. "If you'd be kind enough to excuse me, sir, I don't feel equal to work this afternoon. I've been rather sloggin' at—at Horace lately."

"My dear boy, you must not overtax your strength with too assiduous study," said Mr. Mobbs gently—a remark which put rather a strain on the gravity of the Fourth. "You may walk in the quadrangle, if you wish, Ponsonby, and do not return unless you feel better."

"Thank you, sir!" murmured Pon.

And he left the Form-room, followed by envious glances.

Ponsonby walked in the quad for a time, and then went to his study to smoke. He was bitterly, savagely determined to defeat Skinner's scheme, and

that was a problem that occupied all his thoughts. Apparently he found a solution to the problem at last, for he rose and left his study with a settled expression of determination upon his face. He was strolling aimlessly in the quadrangle when the Fourth were dismissed, and Gadsby and Monson joined him.

"I've got it!" said Ponsonby, with a dark look at his chums. "I've thought it out, an' I've got it. Come on!"

"Where?" asked Gadsby.

"We're goin' over to Greyfriars."

"No good seein' Skinner again that I can see."

"We're not goin' to see Skinner."

"Who, then?"

"Bunter!"

"What the merry thunder are we goin' to see that fat owl for?" exclaimed Monson, in astonishment.

"Because he's goin' to be useful to us."

"Not likely—when we've ragged the fat boulder more times than I can remember."

"Rot! The fat cad will do anythin' for a feed."

"That's so. But—"

"I'll explain," said Ponsonby, lowering his voice, as they turned out at the gates. "Skinner's got us in a cleft stick. Well, I'm goin' to beat Skinner, an' save that tenner—I'd do it if it cost twice as much."

"I don't see much sense in that."

"That's how I feel, anyhow. An' it can be done. As the matter stands, the Greyfriars Remove will walk over Lantham, an' we shall lose our money. There's only one thing to be done."

"And what's that?"

"Greyfriars has got to lose."

"I think you're wanderin' in your mind, old scout! You've just said yourself that Wharton's lot will walk over the Ramblers."

"Not if they're prevented."

"An' how are you goin' to prevent them?"

"That's where Bunter comes in. The fat cad would sell his grandfather for a quid. I've got a bottle in my pocket—nothin' dangerous in it," added Ponsonby, with a sneer, as his companions stared at him, startled. "Only stuff to make a chap sleepy—your merry chemist relation gave it to us, Gaddy—you remember—"

"I remember you had a scheme like that before, an' it failed," said Gadsby gruffly. "I'd rather chuck the stuff away!"

"It's too jolly useful for that. It won't hurt anybody—only a dose will make a chap heavy an' seedy for some hours; and if Wharton's players got it down their necks a team of Second-Form fags would beat them. They won't even know what's the matter with them, and it will wear off and leave them as merry an' bright as ever the next day."

"I—I say, I don't like the idea—it's too jolly risky!"

"No risk for us if Bunter does it."

"But will he?"

"I'm sure he will—he's too fat-headed to know how serious it would be—not that it's so jolly serious, either. He's hard up, and would do anything for a quid. I'll tell him it's a joke on them, an' he'll pretend to believe it, an' I'll lend him some quids—not to be paid back. I know how to manage the fellow. And he could dose them as easy as winkin'—he's only got to stand them ginger-pop after dinner to-morrow—"

"I—I say, Pon, I'd rather not—"

"Please yourself! I'm goin'!"

Ponsonby strode on. Gadsby and Monson looked at him, and looked at one

another; and then they quietly turned and walked back towards Highcliffe.

Cecil Ponsonby shrugged his shoulders, and strode on alone towards Greyfriars.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Chance for Bunter!

PETER TODD looked into Study No. 7 in the Remove passage, where Bunter was sedately opening a tin of bloater-paste.

"Chuck it, Billy!" said Peter.

Wally Bunter looked up over his glasses.

"We're asked out to tea, my fat tulip," explained Peter—"Tom Dutton and myself, and I've put in a word for you. Squiff and Johnny Bull desire the honour of our company. So chuck that, and come on."

"You've put in a word for me, have you?"

"Just so."

"Well, I won't come, thanks."

"Oh, don't be funny, Bunter! There's jam and pickles—"

"Next time you're asked out to tea, Peter, you needn't put in a word for me. Now, take your face away and bury it! It worries me, old chap!"

Peter Todd gave a slight shrug, and went along the passage. Nobody had ever suspected Billy Bunter of being proud; but undoubtedly the Owl of the Remove had been displaying an unsuspected pride of late. The explanation was simple—if the Remove fellows had only known it.

Wally Bunter grunted when he was left alone in the study. He liked Greyfriars, and was glad to be in Billy's place there; but the change of identity brought its worries, too.

He settled down alone to a frugal tea, which was interrupted a little later by a tap at the door.

"Come in!" sang out the fat junior.

It was Cecil Ponsonby, of the Highcliffe Fourth, who entered. Wally Bunter blinked at him in surprise.

"If you want Toddy, he's in No. 14," he said.

"I don't want Toddy. I've dropped in to see you, old chap," said Ponsonby affably. "Welcome, I hope?"

"There's a chair," said the fat junior, more and more surprised.

Ponsonby sat down, with a smile.

"Keep on!" he said. "Don't let me interrupt your tea."

"I won't!" assented Bunter. "Had your tea?"

"That's all right. The fact is, I want a little chat with you, Bunter."

"Go ahead!"

"You're such a good-natured chap—such a gentleman, in fact, that I'm sure you don't bear any malice for any little trouble we've had in the past," remarked Ponsonby.

Wally grinned.

Certainly he was not likely to bear malice for any trouble Ponsonby had had with his cousin Billy.

"Right on the wicket!" he said, with a nod.

"You haven't been over to see us for a long time," went on Ponsonby. "The fellows are beginnin' to feel rather neglected."

"Are they?"

"Of course, I know you have no end of engagements, but you might spare an hour or two for us sometimes, Bunter."

Wally blinked at him. Ponsonby's flattery would have made Billy Bunter purr with pleasure and swank; but it did not have that effect on Wally. The fat junior was quite keen enough to see that Ponsonby had some motive—probably not a very worthy one—for buttering him like this.

"I suppose you're in the Remove team for the match to-morrow?" went on Ponsonby.

"No!"

"No? You surprise me. They're not really leaving out a player of your quality?" exclaimed Ponsonby, with a look of astonishment that was really artistic.

Wally nodded, with a grin. It rather amused him to let Ponsonby run on, under the impression that he was being taken seriously.

"They'll lose the match, then," said the Highcliffe junior.

"Naturally!" assented Wally.

"I say, it's too bad; but I always knew Wharton was jealous of your form as a footballer. That's the reason, of course. And they think they're goin' to beat Lantham!"

"They think so!" agreed Wally Bunter.

"Jolly good joke on them if they lost," said Ponsonby. "I'll tell you what, Bunter—this is in confidence, of course—but suppose a chap knew a dodge for making them lose the match? What a lark!"

Ponsonby was smiling genially, but his eyes were very keenly on the fat face of the junior at the table.

He knew Billy Bunter pretty well; but he was not absolutely certain of how even Bunter might take a suggestion of this sort.

He was soon relieved.

Wally gave him one penetrating look, and then a fat and fatuous smile came over his face, which made him look more like his cousin Billy than ever.

"What a lark!" he repeated.

"Are you game?" asked Ponsonby. "Look here, I'll bet you two to one, in quids, that you wouldn't do it, if I showed you the way!"

"Then I should bag two quids if I did it?"

"Exactly."

"What a lark!" grinned Wally. "But I'm blessed if I know how it could be done, Pon."

Ponsonby was quite reassured now; his faint lingering doubt was gone. It was only too evident that Bunter was prepared to do anything for two quids, salving his conscience with the feeble pretence that it was a lark.

The dandy of Highcliffe, lowering his voice cautiously, went on to explain.

Wally listened to him with the same fat smile.

His eyes glinted a little over his glasses as Ponsonby produced a little phial from his pocket. But the fatuous smile remained.

"What a shriekin' joke!" he said. "I say, Pon, old chap, you are a corker! I'm to give them some of this?"

"Hush! Yes. A few drops each in a glass of ginger-beer, or coffee, or anything you like."

"And they'll die?"

"Wha-a-at?"

"They'll die, I suppose?"

Ponsonby fairly blinked at the fat junior. He had never supposed that even Billy Bunter was such an idiot as this.

"Of course not!" he gasped. "You young imbecile! I—I mean, of course not. It's only an opiate. People take it when they have insomnia. Doctors order it for them. It simply makes them heavy and sleepy. They're as right as rain afterwards."

"Oh, I see! Suppose I gave them an overdose?"

"They'd go fast asleep. But you don't want to do that. Three drops each will make them unfit for play, and Lantham will walk all over them," said

Ponsonby. "You could manage it—a clever chap like you, Bunter!"

"If I couldn't, you'd find some other way of getting at them, I expect."

"Yes—I mean— It's only a lark, of course, just to punish them for leaving you out. If you do it, you win two quid."

"Two quid is a lot of money. I've been disappointed about a postal-order, too," remarked the fat junior solemnly. "You think this would be quite fair, Pon?"

"Oh, quite!"

"Serve them right, too, wouldn't it?"

"Of course. They don't treat you well, Bunter, by gad! I'll tell you what. I'll come over and see the match to-morrow, and you can come back to Highcliffe with me—a little party in my study, you know. You'll meet some fellows you like."

"Ripping!"

"Keep it dark, of course."

"Well, naturally, I sha'n't sing it out in the passages," said the fat junior. "Some fellows might think it wasn't justified."

"They—they might," assented Ponsonby, inwardly wondering what Bunter was doing outside a home for idiots. "Keep it dark. How will you manage to let Wharton and his lot have it?"

"Well, what about standing them ginger-pop after dinner?" said Wally cheerily. "That wouldn't look suspicious."

"Good egg! You're a jolly clever chap, Bunter!"

"My dear chap, I'm the clever one of our family," said the fat junior. "Brains, you know."

"Ha, ha! I mean, exactly," stammered Ponsonby. "I can rely on you, Bunter?"

"You can rely on me treating those fellows exactly as they deserve, if that's what you mean, Pon."

"Good enough." Ponsonby rose to his feet. "Bunter, old man, you're a brick! You won't forget to keep to-morrow open for me, will you? I've got a little party in my study, after the match; an—an' I really want you. You're the making of a party."

"I'll remember. Not going?" asked Wally.

"I think I'll cut off now," said Ponsonby. "Good-bye, old chap! Keep that bottle out of sight, of course. See you to-morrow."

And, with a genial nod, Ponsonby left the study. After he had gone Wally Bunter sat staring at the door which had closed on him for some minutes.

"Well, my hat!" murmured Wally at last. "I—I wonder whether that awful cad could have fooled poor old Billy into playing such a dirty trick? I wonder? I almost believe Billy's idiot enough! It's rather lucky for Wharton that I'm not."

Quite unconscious of the reflections of the fat junior, Ponsonby walked home to Highcliffe in great spirits.

Gadsby and Monson met him at the door with clouded faces. Ponsonby's bright look of satisfaction showed them that he had been successful.

"All serene," said Ponsonby. "Right as rain! That fat scoundrel jumped at the chance."

"Then—"

"He was on it like a bird, the dingy, bloated beast! I've bet two quid he won't do it, you see."

Gadsby and Monson laughed.

"Worth two to save ten, and to dish Skinner!" grinned Ponsonby. "It's rather a joke on Wharton's crowd, too, bang them! I fancy we shall be rather

amused to-morrow afternoon, my infants."

And on the morrow afternoon, when Courtenay and the Caterpillar started for Greyfriars, to see the Lantham match and their friends there, they were surprised to find Ponsonby & Co. on the same route.

"You fellows going to Greyfriars?" asked Ponsonby as they started.

"Yes," said Courtenay.

"How odd! So are we."

"By gad!" The Caterpillar glanced at the smiling nuts under his sleepy eyelids. "Have you been bettin' on the game, after all, you bad boys?"

"Why not?" smiled Ponsonby. "Anythin' for a little excitement. In fact, Caterpillar, I was rather in a hurry to call those bets off yesterday; an' I'll have them on again, if you like."

"Anythin' happened to Wharton's crowd?" asked the Caterpillar at once.

"Not that I know of. Just for the sport of the thing, I mean."

"Yes, have them on again, Caterpillar," urged Gadsby.

"Not in Franky's presence, dear boys. Franky's lookin' shocked already—ain't you, Franky?"

"Oh, come on!" said Courtenay abruptly.

"Franky—what?" asked Ponsonby, with a sneer.

"My dear man," yawned the Caterpillar, "I don't know why you think Greyfriars are goin' to lose, after all, but you do think so, Pon. What little game have you been up to?"

"Oh, rats!" snapped Ponsonby.

And he walked on quickly with his comrades. The Caterpillar turned a curious look upon Frank Courtenay.

"Franky, there's somethin' in the wind," he said. "Pon's been up to somethin'. Why the thump, Franky, does he think Greyfriars are goin' to lose, after all? He can't have hounded the team, can he—even Pon?"

"Oh, bother Ponsonby!" answered Courtenay.

And the Caterpillar said no more; but he wore a very thoughtful look as he walked on to Greyfriars with his chum.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Something Like a Surprise!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were looking very fit and well when they turned out on Little Side that afternoon. Owing to the news from Nugent's friend at Lantham they were not looking forward to much of a match; but it was a bright, cold afternoon, sharp and clear, and anything in the shape of a football-match was welcome.

The Remove players were punting a ball about while they waited for the Lantham brake to arrive, when Courtenay and the Caterpillar came on the ground.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here you are!" called Bob Cherry cheerily.

The Caterpillar eyed him.

"Feelin' fit?" he asked.

"Eh? Fit as a fiddle."

"Anythin' wrong with the team?"

"No. Why?" asked Bob in astonishment.

"You're goin' to win, then?"

"I expect so. Not much doubt about it, in fact, after what we've heard from Lantham. The match is just a stop-gap," said Bob. "I hardly think the Ramblers will expect to beat us, under the circumstances."

The Caterpillar looked more thoughtful than ever. Ponsonby's offer to

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renew the called-off bets puzzled him extremely, now that he saw the Greyfriars footballers looking at the top of their form.

Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Monson came on the ground a few minutes later. Pon ran his eyes over the Remove players, and started a little. He had not expected to see them looking so bright.

For a moment a black doubt smote him.

Had Bunter failed him?

He looked round for the fat junior. Bunter was there, and he nodded to Ponsonby, and closed one eye in a fat, reassuring wink.

"Like some more ginger-pop, Wharton?" he called out.

Wharton smiled, and shook his head.

"Thanks, Bunter; enough's as good as a feast," he answered.

"Bunter's been standing ginger-pop all round," said Bob Cherry. "You'd hardly know our merry Bunter, he's changing so fast."

"By gad!" said the Caterpillar, looking curiously at Bunter.

Ponsonby was smiling again now.

Bunter had evidently done the business, after all.

"They don't look much the worse for it, Pon," murmured Gadsby in his leader's ear.

"It hasn't had time to take effect yet," said Ponsonby, completely reassured. "You heard what Cherry said."

"You're sure of the stuff?"

"Quite; I've tried it. They'll be falling over one another in the first half."

Skinner, Snoop, and Stott came strolling on Little Side when the Lantham team arrived. Skinner grinned at the sight of Ponsonby, but he did not approach the group of Highcliffians.

"Poor old Pon!" he murmured. "He's jolly anxious about the tenner—he's come to see if there's a ghost of a chance left."

"He doesn't look anxious!" remarked Stott.

"That's only his swank!"

"Lantham look a scrubby lot!" remarked Snoop.

Skinner chuckled.

"They couldn't beat our Third Form—that lot!" he said.

Certainly, the eleven that had come over from Lantham was not much like the Lantham Ramblers when they were on the war-path. Perhaps they fancied the team was good enough to play a junior school team. If that was their idea, they were likely to be undeceived when they started with the Remove.

Courtenay and the Caterpillar looked on as the match started, rather wondering at the smiles of Ponsonby & Co., who stood near at hand. Skinner & Co. were smiling, too, from a different cause. And Wally Bunter's fat face was wreathed in smiles—from another different cause. Indeed, there were several parties on Little Side at Greyfriars that day who were greatly entertained for different reasons.

That Lantham were nothing like their usual form was clear from the start. Vernon-Smith put the ball into their goal in the first ten minutes, and Harry Wharton followed it up with another goal.

Ponsonby still smiled.

He was waiting for the effect of the opiate to show. He was a little puzzled that there was no sign of it so far. Perhaps the keen air and the healthy exercise was keeping off the effects; but it was rather perplexing, all the same.

At the end of the first half the Remove were two goals to the good, and looking a little breathless, but quite fit.

When the second half started Ponsonby was beginning to feel anxious.

"You're sure that stuff was good?" Gadsby whispered.

Pon made an irritable gesture.

"I tell you I've tried it! It was all right!"

"And you're sure of Bunter?"

"Of course! Do you think I'm a fool? Besides, you heard Cherry say that Bunter had stood them ginger-pop all round, as we arranged!"

Gadsby nodded, and was silent.

But there was black care in Ponsonby's brow, in spite of his words, as the second half wore on, and the Remove players continued to walk over the makeshift team from Lantham.

Another goal, this time from Frank Nugent, came along—and still Lantham had not scored. And then another, added by Wharton. The merry men from Lantham were looking rather rueful now. They had not expected play of this quality from the Remove, and possibly they were regretting, by this time, that they had not scratched the fixture.

Ponsonby looked worried, and gnawed his underlip incessantly.

Even if the opiate produced its effect now, Lantham were not likely to make up so much leeway. And still there was no sign of it. Ponsonby looked round at Bunter; but it was impossible to question him in the crowd, where every word must have been overheard. Wally Bunter gave him a smile and another fat wink—which Pon answered with a black scowl.

"Looks like a tenner for us—what?" murmured Skinner to his chums. "Pon doesn't look quite so rosy now—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Five minutes to go, Franky!" yawned the Caterpillar. "I've a good mind to ask Pon to put those bets on again! I wonder if he'd agree?"

Courtenay laughed.

"Hallo, there's the finish!" said the Caterpillar, when the whistle shrilled.

There was a roar of cheering round Little Side, mingled with some laughter. Greyfriars Remove had beaten Lantham Ramblers by four goals to nil.

Ponsonby fixed his eyes on Bunter as the players came off. Necessary as it was to keep his rascally plotting dark, he could scarcely restrain his fury. The fat junior came towards him, grinning.

"You—you fat bound!" muttered Ponsonby, his lips trembling with rage.

To his horror and utter consternation Bunter held out a fat hand with a small bottle in it.

"There's your bottle, Ponsonby!" he said in a loud, clear voice that reached a hundred ears. "I've chucked away the drug; but there's the bottle!"

Ponsonby stood transfixed.

A hundred eyes were upon him and Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Wally Bunter held up the bottle.

"Dear old Pon called on me yesterday," he explained calmly. "He wanted me to hocus the Remove team by putting this stuff in some ginger-pop before the match. Don't you want the bottle back, Pon?"

Ponsonby stood dumb.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"So that was it?" murmured the Caterpillar. "Dear old Pon! Always schemin' some merry little scheme, and always puttin' his foot in it!"

Courtenay's face was red with anger and shame.

"Ponsonby!" he exclaimed. "You—you dared—"

"All serene!" said Wally Bunter. "I was only pulling Pon's leg when I let him give me the stuff. I thought that if I refused he might be able to get

up to some other trick—and it was rather amusing to lead him on, too. He's been looking as if he was enjoying himself this afternoon—haven't you, Pon?" The fat junior chortled. "You silly, sneaking, rascally duffer, to think a Greyfriars fellow would play a trick of that kind! But I think you're pretty well shown up now!"

Harry Wharton's hand dropped on Ponsonby's shoulder. The dandy of Highcliffe started back, white to the lips. Gadsby and Monson were already running. They were anxious to get away before the storm burst.

"Don't you want the bottle, Pon?" smiled Bunter. "It may come in useful another time—if you get some more stuff in it. I suppose this isn't your last swindle, is it?"

Still Ponsonby did not speak. He could not. The exposure was so open, so complete, and so utterly unexpected that the rascal of Highcliffe was stricken dumb. His face was like chalk, and his eyes had a hunted look.

"Well, my word!" murmured Skinner. "That's why he looked so rosy at the start. He thought that Bunter—My word!"

"But why didn't Bunter?" murmured

Snoop, in amazement. "Pon must have offered him something—"

"Two quid!" said Wally Bunter, catching the words. "That was the price, dear boys! Won't you take your bottle, Pon? Then I'll give it to you!"

And with a spring the fat junior grasped Ponsonby, and shoved the bottle down the back of his neck. Then he rolled away, chuckling. Ponsonby staggered, and made a sudden run to escape. But Wharton's grasp was upon him—and the grasp of many other hands was added.

"No, you don't!" said Bob Cherry grimly. "You're going through it first, you plotting rascal!"

"Let me go!" panted Ponsonby, finding his voice at last. "I—I—"

He had no chance to say more.

Ponsonby travelled away from Little Side with so many football boots behind him that the fellows almost fell over one another, and several kicks landed on the wrong persons. But Ponsonby got most of them—more than he wanted. He was feeling as if he had passed under a motor-car by the time he escaped into the road, and fled, dishevelled, dazed, and hatless, for Highcliffe.

Harry Wharton & Co. celebrated their victory in Study No. 1; and Courtenay and the Caterpillar were guests at the spread. But the most honoured guest was Bunter of the Remove.

Bob Cherry rushed into No. 7 for him and dragged him out, declining to listen to refusals, and the fat junior arrived in Study No. 1 rather breathless, but grinning cheerfully; and he found himself made much of on all sides.

And while the chums held high revel in No. 1, there was satisfaction also in Skinner's study—in that case caused by the success of sharp practice.

But had it been quite so successful?

Skinner jubilantly told his chums that he was going over to Highcliffe on the morrow to collect the tenner—but the collection of that tenner was destined to be a more troublesome matter than the cheery Skinner anticipated; and Skinner's satisfaction was destined to be short-lived.

But that is another story.

(Don't miss "WHEN ROGUES FALL OUT!"—next Monday's Grand Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co., by Frank Richards.)



Goggs Grammarian

By Richard Randolph

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Four New Boys.

"GAY!" It was Mr. Adams, the master of the Fourth Form at Rylcombe Grammar School, who spoke.

"Yes, sir?" replied Gordon Gay, captain of the Form.

"Four new boys are expected to-day. I have only just heard from Dr. Monk of their coming. They will all be in this Form, I understand."

The Fourth were naturally interested. It was some time since any new boy had come along to swell their numbers. Now, it seemed, they were called upon to welcome four all at once.

"Would you like some of us to go and meet them, sir?" inquired Gordon Gay respectfully.

"That was what I was about to suggest, Gay. I trust that there will be no—er—japing, I believe you call it. You are rather too prone to that kind of thing; but I greatly doubt whether it is really conducive to the comfort or happiness of new-comers in our midst."

"We sha'n't hurt them, sir!" Gay answered cheerily.

He knew that Mr. Adams did not expect from him any solemn promise to mother or dry-nurse the new-comers. The master of the Rylcombe Fourth understood boys fairly well; and he was aware that, in spite of his japing propensities, Gordon Gay was to be trusted to take no really unfair advantage.

"They are to arrive by the half-past twelve train," Mr. Adams said. "The Form may dismiss."

And the Form dismissed, with much clatter of feet and some friendly bargaining about.

"Hi, Monkey! The Head wants you!" yelled a small and cheeky fag across the playground.

"And you've got to go when Daddy says so, Monkey!" sang out another of the same species.

Frank Monk, son of the Rylcombe headmaster, hurried off. Dr. Monk was a good father and a kindly Head; but the fellow who finds united in one person the Head and the father is not often left in any doubt as to the necessity of prompt obedience.

The rest of the Form crowded around Gordon Gay.

"Wonder what these chaps will be like?" said Carboy.

"Oh, soft, silly kids, I suppose!" grunted Carker, who was not exactly a pleasant person.

"Can't be kids," remarked Jack Wootton—Wootton major.

"Why not?" asked Carker.

"They're coming into the Fourth," said Harry Wootton—Wootton minor.

"I don't see that that proves anything," Carker observed.

"A kid isn't put into the Fourth," said Gordon Gay. "There are chaps in the Form we could do just as well without."

"Yes; Lacy for one!" sneered Carker.

He knew that Algernon Lacy was not precisely popular, and he dearly loved a cheap and safe sneer.

"I didn't mention Lacy," replied Gay. "And if he's one, there are others—as you ought to know, Carker. What matters is whether these new fellows will be the right sort to help us keep up our end against the St. Jim's bounders."

"That's knocked on the head for the time being," said Wootton major gloomily. The feud between the St. Jim's juniors and those of Rylcombe Grammar School was an old one, and very dear to the hearts of both schools.

It did not prevent real friendship between the decent fellows on both sides. But at times there were incidents in it upon which

no headmaster could be expected to look with approval.

One such incident had occurred quite lately, and the consequence of it was that Dr. Holmes and Dr. Monk had put their heads together, and had restricted bounds narrowly with the object of preventing another collision for some time to come.

A line was drawn—an imaginary line, like the Equator, be it understood—between the two schools, and no junior on either side was allowed to pass over it. Rylcombe village was out of bounds for the Grammarians on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; and for the St. Jim's fellows on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Severe penalties were threatened for breaking these bounds, and it was known that both headmasters meant what they said.

"Oh, that won't last more than a week or two, old top!" Gordon Gay answered hopefully. "When the beaks begin to realise that we really didn't mean to do those bounds in, and that they didn't really mean to do us in, they'll relent. Meanwhile—Hallo, here comes Frank!"

Frank Monk's interview with his father had not been a long one, but he had gathered a considerable amount of information in the course of it.

"Tell you as we trot along!" he said. "Who's coming?"

The two Woottons signified that they were. Carboy said he did not see the use of doing the polite to new kids, and it seemed that Adams barred their doing the other thing, so he rather thought he would not go. Mont Blanc, the French junior, said "Non, non!" He had lines to do. Lane didn't care about it. Tadpole was busy with other matters; and Carker wasn't asked.

"Got their names down here," said Monk, as the four left the gates. "All from the same school. Place been burned down, or

something, and can't be rebuilt for terms and terms. I forget the name of it, though it's one I've often heard, too."

"Never mind the name of the school," Gay replied. "That's no odds. What are the names of the new merchants?"

"I don't see that they're any odds, really," remarked Wootton major.

"Goggs, Blount, Trickett, and Waters," Frank Monk read from the back of an old envelope.

"Sounds a pretty job lot!" growled Wootton minor.

"Goggs would be a soft sort of Johnny," said Monk. "Couldn't be off it, with a name like that."

"But Blount sounds all serene," Gordon Gay said. "Where's that name come in? Oh, I know—that 'Marmion' stuff we had to do for the last English Literature exam! Not half bad. Blount and FitzEustace were Marmion's esquires."

"Brrrr!" growled Wootton major.

"Bless Marmion!" said his minor. "We had enough of that boulder last term! Bit of a sweep, as far as I can make out. But I don't mind Blount."

"And Trickett; that's the kind of name that ought to belong to a chap up to all sorts of japes," remarked Frank Monk.

"But Waters doesn't sound much," said Wootton major. "Bit of a wash-out, I reckon."

"So, taking it altogether, two out of the four may be expected to turn out all right, and the other two to be not-muchers," summed up Gay.

"That's about the size of it," agreed Frank Monk.

But they were to find before long that it is unsafe to judge people by their names.

"Goggs—Goggs," said Gay musingly. "I've heard that name before, I'm certain."

"Well, you didn't get any change out of hearing it," Wootton minor answered. "Blessed fool-name, I call it!"

"I've remembered what their old school was now," said Monk. "Franklingham; that's it!"

"Of course! It was all in the papers at the time. Some of the chaps behaved rather specially well—quite giddy heroes they were, in fact!"

"We sha'n't get any of the hero breed, Gordon," answered Monk, with a grin. "Or, if we do, it won't be Goggs. How could a chap called Goggs be anything in particular?"

But that again was a groundless assumption. For Goggs, who was at that moment looking out of the window of a railway compartment, and pointing out to his chums the distant building of St. Jim's, which had just become visible from the train, was a boy somewhat out of the common.

And St. Jim's knew that—knew it very well indeed.

But it chanced that during his brief visit to St. Jim's Johnny Goggs had not happened to run against any of the Grammar School crowd; and it also chanced that Gordon Gay & Co. had heard nothing much of his doings while there. The name would have called up very definite associations in Gay's mind had he ever heard the story in full.

Three other schools knew Goggs well. There was Franklingham, no longer in existence as a school, though it would rise again from its ashes before long.

There was Highcliffe. Goggs' stay there had been brief; but he had made his mark during that brief stay, and Highcliffe would not easily forget him.

And there was Greyfriars. He had never spent a night under the roof of that ancient foundation; but he was thoroughly well known there. And if the Greyfriars fellows had been aware that he was now on his way to Rylcombe Grammar School they would have prophesied lively times at that seat of learning.

"Pity we aren't going there!" observed Bertram Bagshaw Blount, who had been known at Franklingham as "Bags," when Goggs pointed to the old towers. "It's a bigger show than Rylcombe, isn't it?"

"That is correct, Bags. But bigger and better are not necessarily synonymous," replied Goggs, in his mild, precise manner.

"Aren't whatter?" demanded Waters, otherwise "Wagtail."

"Don't show your ignorance, old chap!" said Trickett, alias "Tricks." "Goggles

means—er—I can't exactly explain, but any fellow with any sense knows!"

"I see; that's why you can't explain, Tricks. I say, though, Goggs-bird, I thought you thought a heap of St. Jim's?"

"I did, my child, and I do. But we are not bound for St. Jim's. Our late esteemed Head, having the needed temporary arrangements in our cases left in his admittedly efficient hands—"

"Oh, let's have it in English!" sighed Waters.

"Has looked us for Rylcombe," continued Goggs, without taking any notice of the protest. "To Rylcombe our allegiance is therefore due; and to prefer St. Jim's would be futile. Moreover—"

"Sixthly and seventhly," put in Trickett, grinning.

"I knew there was something else," said Blount, with a cheery smile. "The Johnny-ass has something up his sleeve beyond the dull understandings of you two chumps!"

"Has he told you?" snapped Wagtail.

"Well, no!"

"Three chumps, then!"

"Moreover," repeated Goggs, "at St. Jim's I am known. There I could not—shall I speak in very plain English, Wagtail?—persuade them that I am such a silly ass as I look. Nearly, perhaps, but not quite! At Rylcombe, however—"

"Bet you they'll have heard about you!" said Tricks.

"I doubt it, dear boy. I understand that Merry and the rest are more apt to exchange punches than confidences with our—er—new playfellows. I do not think that my—er—fame—"

"Oh, cut it short!" said Blount. "What's the dodge?"

"I should like you fellows to represent me as being—shall we say only just short of mentally defective?" answered Goggs. "Do not consider my feelings in the matter. Take me as being deaf as well as half-blind—"

"You can see farther than any of us, you swizzler!" growled Waters.

"When a millstone is in question I can see as far, certainly. But why do I wear glasses if not short of sight?"

"Because you are a swizzler—that's why!"

"Be it so! I propose to continue for a brief space to be a—er—swizzler. Do you know, Waters, I do not believe that word will be found in a really good dictionary? I propose to—er—swizzle—if I must use the word—more than ever. For a brief space, that is. My slight talent in the ventriloquial line—"

"Listen to the boulder! His slight talent!"

"That is what I said, Bags. Let us ever endeavour to avoid unseemly exaggeration. I have also some small skill in ju-jitsu, an art which may not be in constant practice at Rylcombe. And—"

"Oh, we twig, old Preachibus, and we'll play up! See here, let's make out that you lost your giddy wits—what little you had—in the fire!"

"But that would not be quite veracious, Bags," said Johnny solemnly.

"I should rather guess not!" Waters said. "If there was one chap in the whole blessed school who was cooler than all the rest, it was our old Johnny-ass!"

"Never mind, it's good enough for a yarn—need only hint at it," said Trickett. "Hallo, the train's slowing down! We must be nearly there."

"I say, Goggles, I'm your special keeper, you know," said Blount.

"It is very kind of you, my dear Bags—beg pardon, my silly mistake—I'm always making them—my Bagshaw, I mean," replied Goggs, in a high, shrill treble, and with a simper that only fell short of being absolutely idiotic.

"Somebody to meet us!" said Waters, as the train rolled alongside the rural platform of Rylcombe station.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Blount Explains.

BLOUNT got out of the train first. Waters and Trickett followed, both looking as solemn as they knew how.

Then Blount, with an exaggerated air of anxiety, held out his hand to Johnny Goggs.

"Are you quite sure it is safe, my dear

Bagshaw?" asked Goggs, in a mild and quavering voice.

"Of course, chump! It's stopped, hasn't it?" returned Blount.

"It certainly appears to have stopped, Bagshaw. But it may go on again. Trains do sometimes."

"They do," said Trickett. "If they didn't they would never get anywhere."

"That is quite correct. I had not thought of that. What a brain you have, my dear fellow!"

The Three Wallabies—as Rylcombe called Gay and the two Woottons, who all came from Australia—and Frank Monk, were grinning almost round to the backs of their necks by this time.

They scented entertainment from Goggs.

And they were to get it, though not exactly in the manner they anticipated.

Goggs stepped out in a very gingerly fashion. He seemed much relieved when his feet touched terra firma.

He looked curiously at the four Grammarians.

"I—I am not quite sure that I like their faces, Bagshaw," he murmured, just loud enough for the quartet to hear. "They—do you not consider that they look rather fierce?"

"H'm! No, I shouldn't say they look exactly fierce," answered Bags, with a huge wink at Gordon Gay.

"I wish they had sent a smaller one—only one smaller one," said Goggs, speaking as if to himself.

"Eh? Why?" asked Frank Monk, in surprise.

"I really cannot speak to you until we have been introduced," said Goggs primly.

"My hat!" gasped Monk.

"A cap," said Goggs, with a glance at Monk's headgear, "is not a hat."

"He's awfully precise and particular!" whispered Blount.

"Why do you want a littler one, Goggles?" inquired Waters.

"To fight, of course. Is not the question rather an absurd and unnecessary one?"

"But why do you want to fight him, fat-head?"

"My head is not fat, Trickett; and I do not wish to fight anyone!"

"But you said—"

"It was not I who desired to engage in fistic warfare."

"Who was it, then?"

Goggs gave a wave of his arm towards the four Grammarians.

"They, of course," he said. "But I consider that they really should have brought a smaller one for me. I am not very strong; and they really look so exceedingly large and fierce. That one in particular—he pointed to Gordon Gay—"has a very threatening cast of countenance. Observe his beetling brow, his bloodshot eyes, his cruel mouth—"

"Here, easy does it, you Chinese image!" rapped out Gordon Gay. "I'm not claiming first prize in just any beauty show; but—"

"He is talking to me, Bagshaw, and I have not been introduced to him!" almost wailed Goggs. "It is really very improper on his part!"

"Let's get the introductions over," said Blount to Gay. "Then our tame ass can explain what he means without being shocked. I'm Blount. This chap is Trickett. This one is Waters. We're just common or garden specimens—nothing out of the way about us. But the chap with the face and the glasses is Goggs—Johnny Goggs; and he's—well, you'll find out what he is in time!"

"I rather fancy we have a notion already," replied Gay.

But that was where he was wrong. They had no notion at all. Nature had been kind to Goggs in one way, if she had failed him in another. He was certainly the plainest fellow of the eight gathered on that platform; but his face was just the sort of face that helped him to play the part he loved to play.

"I dare say you may have," said Bags. It was at Waters and Trickett he winked this time.

"My name's Gay," said the Grammar School leader. "This is Monkey—sometimes, but not often, called Monk. His pater's our Head; but he is never called Monkey—at any rate, never when he can hear. This fellow is a

Wootton from the Never-Never land—Jack Wootton—Wootton major—any old Wootton, in fact. The other is Harry Wootton—Wootton minor. Now you know."

"And why do they call it the Never-Never land?" inquired Goggs, with his head on one side.

"Because they never, never do what they ought not to do there," Gay answered solemnly.

"I think I shall like the Woodens," said Goggs, looking pleased.

"Woottons!" growled the elder of the brothers. "And I don't think!"

"My silly mistake—I'm always making them!" said Goggs humbly.

"What did you mean about fighting?" asked Frank Monk.

"Do you not fight at Rylcombe?"

"Oh, sometimes, of course! We aren't always at it, you know."

"But do you not always force new boys to fight, Monkey?"

"Monk, please! Don't be cheeky!"

"I really could not, I assure you, Monkey—er—pardon! My silly mistake. I'm always making——"

"It's a habit you'd better get rid of, old top!"

"I fear—I greatly fear—that that is impossible. But you will make excuses for me, I am sure. About the new boys, now, and your forcing them to fight?"

"Well, of course, a new chap has to go through it," said Gordon Gay.

"Oh! Then, please, may I have quite a small, weak boy to fight with? I am sure you are all much too big and strong for me. And getting hurt pains me extremely. My dear grandmother——"

"Brought her with you?" asked Harry Wootton.

"I regret to say, no. Do they allow grandmothers at your school?"

"Only your sort!" growled Jack Wootton.

"My sort of grandmother? Oh, then, I will write to her to come at once! That will be delightful, for then I shall have some congenial society, and there will be someone to protect me if my schoolfellows get too rude and rough. But how did you know what sort of a grandmother mine is, Hotun?"

"Wootton, you object!"

"Pardon, my dear fellow! My silly mistake—I'm always making them. I shall remember in future. Let me see—there is nothing like system. You and your brother are not wooden-headed, although you may appear—Ahem! You are not Hottentots although—er—I should say you are not Hottentots; and so I can remember that your name is not Hotun, which really does suggest Hottentot to my mind. So that is quite all right. And in future I shall always call you—er—pardon! What did you say your name really was? I seem to have got rather mixed."

Goggs looked so apologetic and so pathetic that the Wootton brothers could not help thinking him sincere, though at first they had believed him guilty of pulling their legs.

Second thoughts, by the way, have not always the advantage over first that the old saw represents them as having.

"I'll see about your traps," said Frank Monk.

And he went off to interview Trumble, the veteran porter.

"Traps?" said Goggs, as if puzzled. "But we have no—Ah, I see! It is a slang term here for our impedimenta. I might have expected that they would talk in slangy fashion here, as was most unfortunately the custom at Franklingham. The deep well of English undefiled——"

He stopped, for he found that he had no auditor.

In that connection his own chums would have been of no use to him. They knew his fine flow of speech from of old.

But, anyway, Trickett and Waters had accompanied Monk, and Blount had moved away from him with the other three Grammarians.

Goggs sat down and fanned his face with his handkerchief. It was not at all a hot day, and he did not look hot. But he saw Gay glance across at him, and he fanned more vigorously than ever.

"What's the matter with him?" growled Jack Wootton.

The Grammarians had taken three of the newcomers, on their faces, as fellows of their own sort, which they naturally regarded as the right sort.

But none of them knew what to make of Goggs.

Yet they might have suspected. They themselves were by no means without guile. Gordon Gay was one of the most elaborate of spoofers,

and the other three were quite capable of backing him up handsomely.

Blount tapped his forehead.

"Potty?" asked Harry Wootton.

"Well, not so bad as that. But he's—well, not quite like other fellows. I've been commissioned to look after him."

This was true. Goggs had commissioned Blount to look after him. He was very completely capable of looking after himself, it is true. But that was a mere detail.

"Could they stand him at Franklingham?" inquired Gay.

"Oh, yes; we stood him all serene! He's really not at all a bad sort, you know," answered Blount, hard put to it to keep his countenance.

What would these fellows say if they were told that Johnny Goggs had been quite the most popular fellow at Franklingham, with a reputation for doing everything better than any fellow of his own age or near it in the school, and able to do several things that others could not do at all?

In the Fourth—the Form which he had honoured with his presence—it was generally believed that Johnny might have been in the Sixth had he chosen. Goggs himself knew that he might; but he had never said so. It suited him better to devote his mind to japes than to swotting.

"I dare say he's funny," said Wootton minor.

"Oh, he's funny all right!" Blount said.

Gordon Gay gave the eccentric new boy a glance of disparagement.

"That way of being funny jolly soon palls," he remarked.

"We never found Goggles pail on us," Blount answered, grinning.

"We shall!" Gay said, with conviction.

"Oh, I don't think so! Franklingham wasn't the same place after old Goggs blew in."

"You fancied it had become a home for incurable idiots, didn't you?" Gay said.

"Oh, not so bad as that! One swallow doesn't make a summer."

"But one chap like that is a pretty fair start for what the Americans call a foolish house."

"You don't seem to take to Goggles much, Gay," said Blount.

"Could anyone?"

"I think so. I tell you straight I like the bounder no end. You can hardly judge him by to-day. The fire, you know——"

"Did that send him potty?" struck in Wootton minor.

"Nunno! Not exactly potty. But——"

"Does he always talk the sort of stuff he was giving us?" asked Wootton major.

Blount willingly left the subject of the fire, having produced the impression desired—which was that it had upset the mild Goggs badly. These fellows could be told the truth some day; and then they might see Goggs as Franklingham had seen him—with a courage that never faltered and a coolness that was never taken aback. There had been more than one hero at Franklingham that night of the fire; Blount himself had done his share. But no one had done more than Goggs.

"Almost always," replied Bags. "Had the misfortune to swallow a dictionary in his childhood, you know. And he's always polite, too—been nicely brought up."

"By his granny—ha, ha!" cackled Wootton minor.

"That's it!" said Blount.

He thought of the uncle whom Goggs persisted in calling his grandmother—the keen-eyed, lean-faced detective who had been all over the world, and had faced perils innumerable without turning a hair.

"Let's kid him that he can have his dear old granny here!" said Harry Wootton eagerly.

"Yes, do!" said Blount.

"If you can!" he added mentally.

"Hardly worth while. You could kid that image to anything," remarked Gordon Gay. "Look at the silly ass fanning himself as if he were hot!"

"Ought not to be, ought he? He's being a good deal left out in the cold," Blount replied, with a distinct touch of sarcasm.

"What licks me," observed Jack Wootton, not without keenness, "is that you really seem to think quite a lot of the hopeless chump."

"I do," said Bags.

"Don't see how you can," Gordon Gay said.

"Oh, you'll see some day, all serene! I say, that's St. Jim's over there, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's St. Jim's. Next best school in England to Rylcombe, you know. But just now St. Jim's is rather off the map for us."

"How's that?"

Gay proceeded to relate how that was. By

this time the three who had been looking after the luggage had joined the rest, and Goggs had also ventured to approach.

He heard the whole of Gay's story—or, rather, the joint story of the four, for Monk and the Woottons were not silent.

"It's one of the days when they're barred from the village, so we aren't likely to see any of them," Gay concluded his explanation.

"Kim on!" said Monk. "We shall be late for dinner!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Very Mysterious.

WHEN the eight started from the station, six of them went in front. Goggs was one of the two in the rear, and the other was Trickett.

"It's working, Goggles," said Trickett, with a cheery grin.

"It could hardly fail to work, I think," replied Goggs sedately.

"Well, you do look it, you know, old top—when you want to."

"It is my misfortune, Tricks, to look it whether I like or not."

"Rats! If you take your giddy glasses off and shove that silly expression off your dial——"

"But the silly expression is my natural one. Tricks, dear boy."

"More rats! It's not, I say, though, it's a bit of luck that our new crowd and the St. Jim's lot are out just now. I suppose the fellows you've told us about—Merry and D'Arcy and Dane and the rest of them—would spot you in a jiffy."

"They could not help doing so, Tricks. Is there in all the wide, wide world another face like mine?"

"There isn't another bounder so wide and so deep as you are, anyway. But this really is luck. You couldn't have kept it up for five minutes after the St. Jim's fellows had recognised you. But now——"

"Now, my son, I count upon keeping it up until normal relations between the two schools are resumed."

"That's the game. My word, we'll take it out of these bounders! They're decent enough chaps, I'm sure; but they're a bit too swanky, and they need taking down a peg or two—or fifty."

"I don't think they are really swanky. Like the rest of the world, Tricks, they judge by appearances, and appearances are against me. That is all. Do you think they would have more sympathy with me if I wept? I am quite prepared to weep if necessary."

"It might be worth while; but it wouldn't get you any more sympathy, old bean. I——"

"Grammar School bounders!"

The shout came—or seemed to come—from behind the hedge to the right. They were now well clear of the village.

The four old hands pulled up at once.

"That was Tom Merry's voice!" said Gordon Gay, looking about him.

"Where are they?" said Frank Monk, in bewilderment.

There was no sign of Tom Merry, or of any other St. Jim's fellow.

"Ready, you chaps! Kim on!"

"That's Blake!" said Wootton major.

"Wash them, deah boys!"

"And that's that ass D'Arcy!" said Wootton minor.

But no rush followed.

"It's an ambush, I suppose?" remarked Blount.

"Looks like it. But it isn't much in the line of those bounders to give the game away like that," said Gay doubtfully.

"You fellows game for a scrap when they rush?" asked Monk.

"We are," said Waters. "But, of course, you can't expect poor old Goggles——"

"Oh, cut Goggles out! He'd be no use in a scrap, anyway."

Bags and Wagtail grinned at one another. Gordon Gay was very far astray in that supposition.

Tricks also grinned. But the face of Goggs was as solemn as ever.

The two had now drawn up to the half-dozen ahead.

"I do trust that—that—in short, that there will be no rough and tumultuous proceedings," said Goggs, looking frightened.

"If that's short, say it in long," growled Harry Wootton.

"They don't seem to be coming," Monk said.

"Well, we're not going to run away from them," said Gay.

"Do you not think it would be wiser, Joy, to—er—hasten our footsteps?" said Goggs. "I

would not suggest actually running away, though my dear grandmother has always been emphatically of opinion that discretion is the better part of valour; but—

"Oh, shut up! And my name's Gay, not Joy."

"Pardon! My silly mistake. I'm always making—"

"Go for them!"

The yell seemed to come from behind the hedge. It also seemed to break in upon the speech of Goggs. But his chums knew that trick of his. He could carry it so far that those not in the secret could almost have sworn that he and the person whose voice he imitated were speaking together. But that, of course, was mere illusion.

"That was Noble," said Jack Wootton.

"They seem to be in force," remarked his brother.

"Do you not really think we had better—or retire?" asked Goggs.

"You can if you like!" snapped Gay.

"Then I really think I will," said Goggs brightly.

But he did not start.

"Aren't you going?" demanded Wootton major.

"I do not know in which direction I can go to be safe," replied Goggs.

"Better follow us," said Frank Monk, with a grin. "Come along, you chaps! As they won't show up, we'll go to them!"

They made a rush for the hedge from behind which the voices had seemed to come. It was high enough to provide cover, but not too high to be looked over.

"There's nobody here!" cried Bags.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came—or seemed to come—from behind the other hedge.

Goggs had not moved. He seemed to Gordon Gay & Co. in too deadly a funk to move.

The other seven darted across the road.

"Come on, you cripples!" roared a voice that sounded exactly like Jack Blake's.

The four Grammarians to whom the secret of Goggs' ventriloquism was unknown quite expected to have a rush to meet and heavy odds to face.

Bags and Tricks and Wagtail only pretended to expect it. But they pretended very well indeed. Goggs highly approved of their show of complete earnestness.

"There's no one here, either!" said Harry Wootton.

"My hat!"

"This fairly takes the giddy cake!"

"They must be somewhere!" said Gay.

"Yes—they must be somewhere!" echoed Bags, in a very mystified tone.

"That," said Goggs primly, "is an incontrovertible philosophical proposition. Assuming—as in politeness I must assume—that the persons whom you seem to be expecting have actual objective existences, it can hardly be denied by any impartial reasoner that they must be—"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Gay. "I say, you chaps—"

"Aren't you coming?"

"I'll swear that was Tom Merry!" said Jack Wootton.

"I never swear," murmured Goggs. "But I am prepared to affirm that it was not!"

"What did you say, putty-face?"

"That is rude, Hotun!"

"Wootton, you prize idiot!"

"Beg pardon—my silly—"

"Oh, dry up, do, or there'll be a dead lunatic about!"

"But you should not be rude, Wooden! It is wrong to be rude. My dear grandmother—"

"Bless your grandmother!"

"That is kind of you. A sincere blessing is never wasted. My grandmother would appreciate it. I am sure. I will tell her of it when I next write."

"Where on earth can those bounders be?" asked Gordon Gay, turning his back upon the voluble new boy.

"That's what I want to know," said Monk, gazing all around in bewilderment.

"We certainly heard them Merry and Noble and Blake and D'Arcy, anyway," said Wootton minor.

"And that means there would be a dozen or so there—Manners and Lowther, Herries and Digby, Glyn and Dane, if no more," remarked Wootton major.

"That only makes ten," said Goggs precisely.

"Oh, do dry up, imago! What are we going to do about it?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Check for the gay Gordons! You can't do anything!"

"That was Cardew," Monk said.

"Thirteen," said Wootton minor. "Clive

and Levison are sure to be there if Cardew is."

"Twelve and three make fifteen, my dear Wooden," Goggs reminded him.

"Well," said Bags, "if they won't show up we can't do anything, can we? It all seems jolly mysterious to me."

"I don't see where they can be hidden," Tricks said.

"I never saw such duffers in my life!" growled a voice that appeared to come from the ditch at the left side.

"Grundy!" said Wootton minor. "Sixteen!"

"But surely Grundy, or whatever the individual's name may be, does not count as three," objected Goggs.

"Will you dry up? If Grundy's there Wilkins and Gunn are certain to be, aren't they, ass?"

"I really do not know. I am prepared to take your word for it, though the basis of your deduction eludes me. But—is anyone there?"

"Didn't you hear them, you silly chump?" hooted Monk.

"Hear whom?"

"The St. Jim's fellows, of course!"

Goggs shook his head.

"Are you deaf, imago?"

Goggs put a hand to his ear.

"Eh?" he said, his face very blank.

"Is he deaf as well as a fool?" asked Gay of Blount in utter impatience.

"Just about as much," answered Bags, with a double meaning that Gay did not follow.

"You heard those bounders, didn't you?" asked Wootton minor. "Oh, hang it all, you couldn't be off hearing them!"

"I certainly heard voices that seemed to come from behind the hedges—both hedges."

"And you mean to say you didn't, thick-head?" snapped Gay at Goggs.

Goggs shook his head, with an expression of patient humility upon his face.

"I do not wish to infer that you are suffering from delusions," he said. "It would be more than singular if all of you were to suffer in that way at one and the same time. But certainly I heard no one speak who was not in-sight."

Gordon Gay & Co. stared at him. His three chums felt anxious. It seemed to them that Goggs was risking the giving away of the whole game.

But he was not. Lacking the clue, the four old hands were most completely mystified. They did not doubt that Goggs was speaking the truth. He seemed so candid and so simple that it was hard to doubt that.

The truth, however, as he saw it, and as they naturally imagined it, were two very different things.

"Oh, come on!" said Gay. "There will be a row if we're late for dinner. As for those chaps—silly bounders, I call them—if they won't show up they can't very well make out that we ran away from them."

The eight moved on.

From over the edge to the left seemed to come a mocking cry of

"Good-bye-eeee!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Seeing the Head.

GORDON GAY, Frank Monk, the brothers Wootton, and the four new boys only just escaped being late for dinner. There was but scanty time for washing hands and brushing hair, and no time at all to spare for taking the new fellows to the Head or Mr. Adams, or for making them known to the rest of the Form.

Many curious looks were cast upon them as they sat in their places at one of the long tables in the great dining-hall.

The general opinion about Blount, Trickett, and Waters was favourable on the whole. Those three presented nothing out of the ordinary way to call for criticism, though one or two fancied that Waters was inclined to swankiness, a judgment that was not altogether without foundation.

Waters had not been nicknamed "Wagtail" for nothing. Of all birds the water wagtail is the most conceited. The lordly rooster, lord of the farmyard, on his own dunghill, is less arrogant than the wagtail.

But Goggs had taken some of the conceit out of Waters in the early days of their association, and it was not so prominent now.

Blount and Trickett were the kind of fellows likely to fall on their feet at any decent school, and they looked it.

It was otherwise with Goggs.

He was doing his best—or his worst—with that face of his.

He looked—most an imbecile. No one who did not know him could have guessed that he had brains enough to fit out half a dozen ordinary members of the Rylcombe Fourth, or that his lean limbs possessed muscles that, slight as they might seem, were like steel and whipcord, or that the disfiguring glasses hid a pair of the brightest of blue eyes. No one could guess, and no one would have believed had they been told.

"Crums! Of all the soft chumps he's the softest!" whispered Larking to Carpenter and Snipe.

"Hope they put him in our dorm," said Snipe, with an unpleasant leer.

"They can't very well be off it, if the four are to keep together," said Carpenter. "It's the only one that has so many empty beds in it."

"We'll make the silly sheepface sit up!" Snipe replied.

These three were by no means among the nicest fellows in the Fourth. But they were not all of quite the same type. The shambling, sallow Snipe was an out-and-out rotter, and a sneak to boot. Larking, bolder and more reckless than Snipe, was hardly more pleasant. Carpenter, a good-looking, fair fellow, was too weak to take a line of his own; he was far more decent than the other two.

There was one member of the Fourth who regarded Goggs in a different light from the rest, however.

This was Horace Tadpole.

Tadpole was somewhat the same sort of fellow that the Fourth imagined Goggs to be.

(To be continued.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday:

"WHEN ROGUES FALL OUT!"

By Frank Richards.

Next week's fine story is a sequel to that which appears this week. Skinner & Co. have won their bets with the nuts. But winning a bet and collecting the proceeds are not one and the same thing; collection does not follow winning as inevitably as night follows day. It should have been easy enough in this case, as the cash was held by a neutral; but it does not prove easy. And, in the upshot, there is a big row about it; and the whole story comes to ears that Skinner and the other sportive young gentlemen would hardly have wished it to.

OUR NEW SERIAL.

This will come as something of a surprise to most readers. Not as a complete surprise, perhaps, for I have given several broad hints as to what you might expect when we had another serial.

But there was no preliminary formal announcement such as you have been used to.

I don't think that will matter. The story will speak for itself.

Nearly everyone wanted a school story. A very large number of readers asked for a story with Johnny Goggs in it. And there were also many who desired a Rylcombe yarn.

In "Goggs, Grammarian," you have all three of these things.

If you like the story tell your friends about it. Anyone can get a grip on it without knowing all about Goggs and Gordon Gay and the rest of them beforehand. The first instalment will "put wise"—as our friends across the Atlantic say—even those who have never heard of any of them.

"Goggs, Grammarian" does not mean that the eccentric Johnny is quite eccentric enough to pose as an authority on the subject of grammar, of course. You old readers will understand that; you have been used to seeing Gordon Gay and his crowd written of as the Grammarians. But don't let any of your friends imagine that the story in any way hinges upon the discussion of intricate points of grammar. I can answer for the correctness of that side of it, as far as it matters; but it is not the subject of the story, by long odds.

YOUR EDITOR.