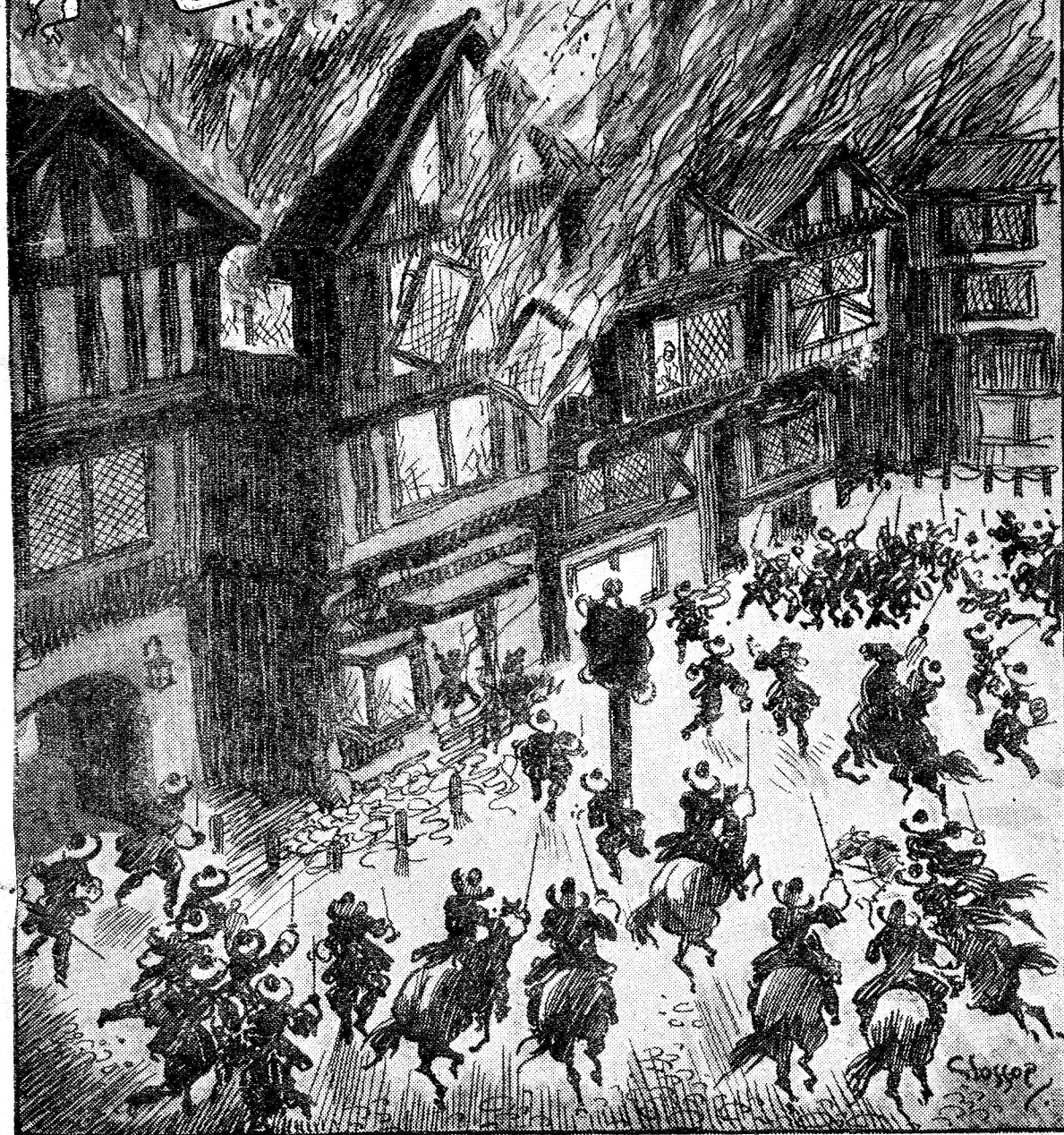


WONDERFUL OFFER—£300 IN CASH PRIZES—INSIDE!

WEEK ENDING
JULY 28th, 1923

NEW
SERIES
No. 236

The POPULAR 2^D



ON THE EVE OF THE GREAT REBELLION!

(A Dramatic incident from the New Romantic serial inside.)

2 Our Wonderful New Romantic Serial is making a GREAT SENSATION!

BETRAYED!

With a promise of an earldom from King James II, a member of the League betrays his comrades, and it is at this precise juncture that Dick Trevor steps upon the scene. He finds himself in a position of extreme peril, but he puts all his faith in the mysterious Captain Harry Lavender!

COMBING THE CITY FOR CONSPIRATORS!

THE LEAGUE OF SEVEN!



A WONDERFUL STORY
OF THE GREAT
**MONMOUTH
REBELLION**

By
MORTON PIKE

Author of *THE OUTLAW KING*

Pictured by

Cecil Clopp

AMAZING NEWS FROM LYME—THE DUKE OF MONMOUTH LANDS!

"Forward The League of Seven!"

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

DICK TREVOR, nephew of Sir Anthony Trevor, who has come to London to seek his fortune, is walking through the city, visiting the places of interest, when he comes across a purse lying in the gutter. He picks it up, and, turning a corner in a road, is just in time to see a man running for his life down the street, and behind him he sees a crowd of yelling townsfolk bearing down upon him. They see the purse in Dick's hand, and at once take him to be the thief they are pursuing. Dick realises his peril, and, thinking discretion the better part of valour, turns and flees from the mob. He comes to a large house near the river, and finding the door open, slips into the dark passage beyond. Suddenly out of the darkness a hand clutches his wrist, and he finds himself confronted by the mysterious gentleman he had the day before rescued from the clutches of two highwaymen, whilst on his way to London. Captain Harry Lavender hears Dick's story, then, taking him by the hand, leads him through the house into a room at the back. On the way they had passed through a long chamber, in which were gathered several mysterious-looking men. Afterwards Dick learns from Lavender they are conspirators, members of a league, plotting against the throne of King James II, for the Duke of Monmouth. Lavender is the leader of the strange company.

Almost immediately upon Dick's arrival, the house is raided by the King's Guard. But, through secret passages, the League manage to escape, young Trevor with them, to another hiding-place, the Red Dog Inn. Here they meet Ned and Peter Pouch, friends of Captain Lavender. The soldiers follow them to the Red Dog under cover of the darkness. Through the back of the stable in the rear of the inn Capt. Lavender and Davenport, his brother officer, escape on horseback, leaving Dick and Ned to follow later when the coast is clear.

**SIR ANTHONY
TREVOR.**

THE POPULAR.—No. 236.

(Now Read on.)

A Strange Meeting Under Strange Circumstances. A Bid for Freedom. Dick's Clever Ruse.

DICK TREVOR felt a sudden loneliness; but his stout nature overcame it in an instant, and he followed Ned Pouch down into the stable, which he now found to be divided into two by an ancient tapestry hanging that had been partly drawn aside when the conspirators rode out.

The moonlight poured through the chinks of the door, and, bending to one of them, he saw a dismounted Lifeguard standing thirty paces away, nursing his bright-barrelled carbine.

The man was suddenly obscured as a dark object came between him and Dick, and the latter was conscious that two eyes were peering into the darkness within.

He drew a pistol from his breast, and suppressed his breathing.

It was the gentleman in brown velvet, who, laying his hand upon the door, was evidently astonished to find it open under his touch, for he stopped on the threshold, half in, half out.

Like the lightning's flash, Dick's grip fell upon his gullet, and, drawing him inside, pinned him against the wall, while the pistol pressed hard upon his temple.

"One cry, one sound from your lips, Uncle Anthony," he whispered, "and you are a dead dog!"

Sir Anthony Trevor reeled against the stable door, and glared like one who has seen a ghost, his rapier falling noiselessly upon the soft litter on the ground.

The moonlight showed Dick Trevor that his uncle was grey as a corpse. Nor is it surprising, when one reflects that the treacherous baronet had thought Dick safe in far-off Somerset.

"By heavens, I must be losing my senses!" muttered the bewildered man, recovering his voice, though his throat ached from the pressure of Dick's powerful grasp.

"You must, of a truth, Uncle Anthony, unless you speak in a lower tone," whispered Dick, with a calm born of the strange situation and the deadly peril which menaced the conspirators. "I repeat my words: You are a dead dog if you utter one cry to alarm yonder troopers!"

Sir Anthony Trevor's visage was not pleasant to see. It was a cunning, crafty face at the best of times; but now bewilderment and terror rendered it absolutely livid.

"What do you here, sir?" he demanded at length, though in a tone that was scarcely audible.

"I might repeat that question, Uncle Anthony," replied Dick coolly, "if I did not already know that you are doubly a traitor, that you first betray your sovereign, and then, thinking to line your own nest, betray us!"

"Us!" exclaimed the wretched man. "Whom do you mean by 'us'?"

"Your fellow-plotters—the League," whispered Dick. "I wonder, had you known of my existence in the conspiracy, whether my name would have figured among those for whose betrayal the King was to give you an earldom?"

Dick's whisper increased in sternness, and the pistol drew more menacingly near to his uncle's forehead, on which the great beads of fear were gathering.

"You have never done over-much for me, Uncle Anthony, in spite of all your promises," he went on; "nothing, in fact, save to rob me of what was mine by right. But you shall pay the full score now, and save my life, or lose your own. 'Tis a bargain, and I will give you until I have counted six to decide. One!"

The scheming rascal, still bewildered at the extraordinary turn of Fortune's wheel, and not yet fully realising the position, drew himself up, and motioned away the pistol with a gesture of his hand.

"Two!" said Dick, quite coolly.

"By my soul!" exclaimed Sir Anthony.

"Three!" said his nephew.

"Richard, what midsummer madness is this?"

"Four!" said Dick, without a tremor in his voice.

"Nay, this is too much!"

"Five!" said Dick, his face terribly set now, and his eye dilating.

Sir Anthony's hands tightened convulsively.

"What is it you would have me do?" he gasped hoarsely.

"Borrow the scarlet cloak from yonder sentinel, and send him to the tavern for a flask of wine."

Their eyes met, and the traitor, craven

at heart, read instant death in his nephew's gaze unless he complied.

"Come hither to me, sentinel!" said Sir Anthony.

Dick's grasp closed on the traitor's wrist for one moment.

"You will advance two strides into the moonlight," he whispered, "and you will speak in a loud voice. If there is an instant of pause in which you might give an alarm,

**KING JAMES II.
OF ENGLAND.**

The Coming of the DUKE OF MONMOUTH . . . see next week's instalment ! 3

I shall shoot you where you stand, even if I die upon the spot! Now, go!"

And Sir Anthony Trevor left the stable door.

Dick glued his ear to the shutter, and heard him speak to the sentinel.

"Tis a dry watch, my friend, and like to be a long one," said Sir Anthony. "Hast a mind to fetch me a flagon of right good wine from the tavern, and to lend me thy cloak the while? I have taken some chill in this kennel."

"Odds life, Sir Anthony!" laughed the trooper, who was by birth a gentleman. "I have all the mind, but never a groat in my pocket. As to the cloak, thou art welcome; an thou pay for the burgundy."

"Gladly!" replied the baronet, his teeth chattering. "Here's for the reckoning!" And he handed a coin to the Lifeguardsman, who in turn unclasped his red cloak and threw it round Sir Anthony's shoulders.

"Twill be one tick of the clock. Do you keep strict ward, though." 'Tis said this tavern of the Blue Dog is full of hiding-places as a coney-warren."

And with a great clatter of boots and spurs and sword, the man disappeared round the corner.

"Richard," said Sir Anthony, making one last appeal, in the vain hope that while they were conversing the Lifeguardsman might return, and the case be altered, "you forget your duty to me—I, your father's brother and your uncle."

"As for that," replied Dick, as he took the scarlet mantle, lined with shalloon, "I think the less you say the better, else may I have more to add than you will have relish for. Ned!"

And Ned Pouch came from behind the hanging.

"What is next to be done?" whispered Dick. "The way is clear now."

Ned replied by disappearing, and the next moment returning into the outer stable, leading two horses—Beauty, and a wiry grey with a shabby saddle.

"We must thread the lanes betwixt this and Clerkenwell Fields," he said in a low voice. "'Tis not likely that the patrols will be out so far. And the gentlemen will await us there—if they have not been taken before this."

Dick still held the pistol breast high, and covered his uncle, whose face showed every shade of terror and baffled rage.

The scheme he had laid so artfully had failed.

The men he had betrayed would henceforward be his mortal enemies, and the future looked gloomy enough to his craven heart.

Bitterly did Sir Anthony Trevor curse the day he went plotting for his own ends, and still more bitterly would he have to curse it in the years that were to come.

"There is a great bolt upon the outside of the door," whispered Ned. "He must not give the alarm while we are yet within earshot."

Dick, enveloped in the scarlet mantle, swung himself on to Beauty's back.

He pointed to the far end of the stable, and the traitor understood.

With a scowl of the deadliest meaning, he slunk towards the tapestry hanging, and Dick, keeping his eyes upon him, sidled his mare out into the moonlight.

In an instant Ned Pouch was beside him, and Sir Anthony heard the bolt shoot into the staple with a sharp snap.

As Ned mounted, they heard the sound of heavy footfalls on the stones of the yard.

"Tis the trooper returning with the flask of wine!" exclaimed the tavern-keeper's son. "We are lost!"

"Not so," replied Dick calmly. "We shall escape them yet if we are cool. Get upon my other hand, and show me the way we are to take."

"Yonder alley by the white wall," said Ned Pouch.

"Very well," returned Dick, "set out at a walk, and ride even with me, so that he sees my cloak only."

Dick spread the folds of the mantle over his holsters, and made him appear as large as possible. The next moment they were crossing the paved lane, and came in full view of the trooper.

He had halted in the shadow of the stable, and was helping himself to a long, swinging drink at the flask.

He lowered it as he saw them, and

laughed, a little shamefaced, thinking it one of his comrades.

"Hallo, Martin!" he cried. "Aught of the rogues yet?"

Dick, making a gesture with his arm that might have meant anything, rode leisurely on into the alley, where the darkness swallowed them up; and the trooper, after wiping his lips on the back of his gauntlet, turned the angle to find Sir Anthony no longer there.

"Odds blood," he cried, looking about him, "the bird has flown! And if he comes not at the first call, then shall the rest of this glorious grape be mine! Ho, ho, Sir Anthony Trevor! Where, in the plague's name, art thou?"

THE MEETING OF UNCLE AND NEPHEW!



Like a flash of lightning Dick Trevor sprang forward upon the gentleman in brown velvet, pinned him against the wall, and pressed his pistol against his temple. "One cry, and you are a dead man, Uncle Anthony!" cried the boy. (See page 2.)

"Here!" said a muffled voice close to the guardsman's elbow.

The man gazed about him, but saw nothing.

The moon, sinking behind a huge stack of twisted chimneys, no longer flooded the spot with silver radiance, and the trooper was nonplussed.

"Where is here?" he called, growing alarmed.

Sir Anthony replied by loudly tapping on the bolted door, and the trooper instantly seized his carbine, gave a yell that brought answering shouts from the tavern yard, and, opening the barrier, threw forward his piece, expecting the conspirators to spring forth.

Instead, the white face of Sir Anthony glowered at him from the darkness, a warning finger raised to his lips.

Twice, in as many minutes, had Sir Anthony changed his mind.

Once he had hissed between his set teeth, "The young whelp shall die! I will

denounce him to the King!" Then, on second thoughts, he had muttered, "No; 'twere best that he should disappear quietly, lest folk look askance at an uncle who delivers up his nephew to justice. Captain Mike is the man for my purpose. He shall deal with Master Richard after his own manner. Would that the rogue had been here to-night!"

"A few gold pieces will close this fool's lips," he thought. But now his cry of alarm had spoiled everything; and Sir Anthony, hearing the rush of feet and the gallop of horses, set his wits to work to explain away how he came to be a prisoner in the stable.

"Quick!" he shouted, dropping his hand instinctively. "They are but this instant fled, and I half stunned by a foul blow that came near to end my life; after which they made off, first locking the door upon me."

"Which way? And how many?" demanded an officer, who pulled the trooper aside.

"I know not which way; but there were eight of them, all mounted and armed."

The trooper looked at Sir Anthony, and missed his cloak.

"Then went they yonder road!" he cried, pointing to the alley. "For I did see one whom I mistook for Martin, clad in red. Am I not right, Sir Anthony?"

"Tis so," faltered Sir Anthony, affecting to lean against the wall, as if in pain.

"Mount and ride away!" cried the captain of the Lifeguard of Horse, leaping into the saddle; and, followed by a dozen troopers, he thundered in hot pursuit.

"The foul fiend save him!" said Sir Anthony to himself. "If they catch him, the boy will talk. 'Tis a matter for Mike to stop his tongue for ever!"

The Last of the Blue Dog. The Chase through the Night. A Dramatic Interruption. A Reunion.

DICK TREVOR and his companion passed quickly along the alley, and in rear of the high-roofed buildings known as Staples' Inn, which may still be seen to-day on the south side of Holborn.

The way was winding and narrow, and Ned Pouch took the lead.

After they had gone some five hundred yards or so they pressed their horses into a trot, and were about to cross Fetter Lane, when Ned looked back over his shoulder.

"Listen!" he whispered.

A confused roar of shouting came upon the night wind behind them, mingled with the muffled thunder of hoofs.

"Now, Ned, my friend, we must to it with a will!" cried Dick. "'Tis time for all your shortest cuts and crooked turnings."

"Never fear, Master Richard," laughed Ned Pouch. "I can lead them a pretty dance! Yet must we be wary, lest they have a patrol at the bottom of Holborn Hill."

Now to the left, now to the right, now grazing their stirrups in the narrowness of the winding way, the son of the tavern-keeper twisted and turned through the squalid quarter that had grown up on the rising ground along the west bank of the Fleet River.

Again they heard windows open, and folk about to each other at the unwonted sound of galloping.

"Have a care!" said Ned. "We shall out at the bridge now, and all depends whether it be guarded."

Dick had placed the pistol in his breast again, but at Ned's words he drew his rapier.

The next moment he knew that he would have to use it.

Two scarlet horsemen sat in their saddles where the road crossed the little river, and they were gazing at something intently.

Their upturned faces were lit by a strange glow, which shone redly on the buckles of their baldricks and their bright cuirasses, and Dick instantly guessed its cause.

The Blue Dog was on fire!

Ned had reined in as he turned the corner, not fifty paces from the Lifeguardsmen; Dick was six horse-lengths behind, and his eyes suddenly sparkled.

"Spur, Ned!" he cried; and immediately raising his voice to a wild shout, yelled:

"Stop him, lads! 'Tis one of the traitors!"

THE POPULAR.—No. 226.

Dick Trevor Has Been Enrolled into the League ! Exciting Times to Come !

Ned understood his meaning, and lay flat on the neck of the grey horse. Before the astonished soldiers could draw across the road, the grey horse was abreast of them, and, as they brought their carbines down and discharged them at random, the balls whistled harmlessly over Ned's head.

The troopers wheeled about as Dick reached them, and, deceived by his mantle, all three rode after the supposed fugitive with loud cries.

One of the Lifeguards, being better mounted than his comrades, forged ahead, and Dick, pulling upon Beauty's mouth, suddenly turned to the man beside him.

His heart revolted at the task before him; but it was life or death, and already he could hear the clamour of those behind who had reached the high road, and would follow up the pursuit.

Twice Dick shortened his rapier, and the trooper's life quivered in the balance.

He looked down the hill, and saw that the rest were still far off; he looked ahead, and knew that Ned's grey was well-nigh as swift as Beauty herself.

"I will not slay you, sir, but I must ride this course alone!" he said to the astonished trooper.

And, with a sudden swoop of his weapon, he severed the man's reins within an inch of his bridle hand, cutting deep into his holsters.

"Odds blood!" gasped the gentleman of the Lifeguards of Horse, his steed rearing, and coming to a floundering halt.

But Dick had shot away like a bullet from a musket, and reached the second trooper at the moment that his comrade's cry came to his ears.

Dick's borrowed plumes floated from his shoulders as the fastening of the scarlet cloak snapped, and the second trooper realised all was not as it should be.

"Hold!" he cried, wheeling his horse across the roadway.

"My friend," quoth Dick Trevor, "if you must have it, you must!" And he lunged forward with his sword.

The trooper sank on the horse's neck, and rolled to the ground, the animal turning, terror-stricken, and galloping down-hill, dragging the unfortunate man in the stirrup.

"Thank Heaven, Master Richard!" cried Ned, as they tore on side by side. "Yonder is St. Sepulchre's Church, and we shall gain Smithfield in time to breathe my nag, who is stout enough on the level, but sorely laboured at a hill. Would I could use the sword like you, sir!"

"If you go with us, friend Ned, I will teach you a pass or two," replied Dick. "But we are not yet out of peril. Their gallop sounds nearer than I thought, and I pray Captain Lavender be not far off."

"They wait us nigh to St. John's Gate-house, whence 'tis all open way to Islington Village, which is the road they are to make, and where I shall leave you,"

said Ned, in a regretful tone. "Turn to the left, here, sir. Yonder is Smithfield; and by this way the knights used to ride to the Tournament, so the story hath it, for which reason 'tis called Giltspur Street."

Looking down the hill up which they had just ridden, they saw a fierce conflagration raging on the opposite side of the valley, and the sparks dancing merrily.

But, what was of greater moment to them, they caught a glimpse of mounted men against the glow—one far ahead of the rest, and near enough for the galloping of his horse to be plainly heard.

The custodians of old Newgate Prison, out upon the leads to view the fire, saw them, and shouted, and when the pursuit reached the spot they pointed out the way they had gone.

Of the dozen that had set forth from the back of the inn, five only had survived the hard-going—an officer and four private gentlemen, and as these entered Smithfield on the one side, Dick and his guide left it on the other.

Ned's grey was breathing heavily.

"I doubt we that he can hold out!" panted Ned. "If he falls, Master Richard, bear straight onward. I shall shift for myself afoot."

The words were scarce spoken when the grey horse crossed his forelegs and went down like a stone.

Dick laid Beauty upon her haunches in a moment, and peered anxiously through the darkness.

"Are you hurt, Ned?"

No answer.

"Ned, for mercy's sake, speak! Where are you?"

A faint groan was the only reply, as the grey horse struggled up and stood trembling like a leaf.

Dick sprang to the ground, and, bending low, found his companion, stunned and senseless, a yard away, and raised him in his arms.

As he did so a horseman galloped up, reined in, and, shouting to his followers, discharged a pistol point-blank at Dick.

The flash lit up the darkness for an instant; the ball cut the feather from the boy's hat.

"Cowardly ruffian!" cried the young conspirator, laying Ned back upon the stones and running forward with his bared sword.

He saw the four private gentlemen not twenty yards behind their leader, and knew that what he did must be done on the instant.

A slash set the officer's horse rearing, a thrust sent the rider back over his croup; then Dick clenched his teeth and bent low to get the others against the sky.

The first man cut savagely at him, and though he parried the stroke, Dick's rapier did not more than bring a shower of sparks from the man's corslet.

He pulled up two lengths beyond him, and spurred back upon the lad.

Dick was between two fires, but his agility saved him.

Both troopers uttered a loud shout of exultation as they bent out of their saddles for the death-thrust; but Dick dropped on to one knee, and their blades crossed immediately above his head.

Swift as thought he lunged upward, and wounded one man in the thigh, and, drawing a pistol, fired at the other's horse, which, receiving the ball somewhere in the girths, plunged, unmanageable, and well-nigh bolted.

But the other two were now upon him, and Dick needed all his skill against such odds—to add to which the officer, who had by this time recovered his feet, came running up.

It was a hopeless combat, one against five, and in another moment the boy would have been either cut down or taken prisoner.

A whistle sounded shrilly some paces away—a curious, wild whistle, that was evidently a signal.

It was answered from the darkness at no great distance, and instantly there was heard the sudden thunder of hoofs.

"Ha, rogues!" cried a voice which Dick recognised as that of Harry Lavender; and the two conspirator captains dashed in to the rescue like a couple of thunderbolts, dealing out destruction on all sides.

Daventry's charger caught the Lifeguard officer, and spun him round like a teetotum, to fall, senseless and bleeding, several yards away. Harry Lavender ran one of the private gentlemen through the heart.

Dick, so unexpectedly reinforced, fell hotly upon the unwounded trooper, and beat him to the ground, and in a few moments the pursuers had been completely defeated.

"'Twas warm work while it lasted," said Harry Lavender, sheathing his weapon. "Had we not crept back in this direction at sound of that first pistol-shot, we had never heard Ned's signal-whistle in time."

"Where is the rascal?" said Daventry, peering around.

"I am here, captain—at least, part of me, for I have not got my senses yet."

Ned tottered up to them, holding his head in both hands.

"Canst sit the saddle, boy?" questioned Harry Lavender anxiously. "We must not leave thee here."

"If the grey's legs are sound, I can ride well enough," answered the plucky lad.

And he staggered along to where the two horses stood.

Never did men examine a pair of trembling knees with keener anxiety than did those conspirators that night; but, in the end, pronouncing the animal un hurt, though sadly cut and shaken, they lifted Ned up, and settling him in the stirrups, turned



"Spur on, Ned!" cried Dick, and immediately raising his voice to a wild shout, yelled: "Stop him, lads!" Ned understood his meaning, and lay flat on the neck of his horse. Before the troopers could draw across the road the grey horse was abreast of them, and the balls they discharged whistled harmlessly over Ned's head. (See this page.)

FIVE TO ONE—DICK TREVOR'S PERIL!



It was a hopeless combat, one against five, and in another moment Dick would have been cut down. A whistle sounded shrilly some paces away. It was answered from the darkness, and instantly there was heard the sudden thunder of hoofs. (See page 4.)

their faces north once more, after listening in vain for sound of further pursuit.

And well it was that no more of those scarlet troopers came swinging in chase, for, before they had made a mile of the way, they had to fall into a shambling trot, the grey threatening every moment to go down again, and Daventry's horse also blowing hard.

"There is naught for it but to trust to our good luck, which has attended us so far through a night of peril," said Harry Lavender. "We can procure fresh mounts at a place I know of not far from here, and then strike across country for the house whither more than one of our friends have gone ere this, I hope, in safety."

And Lavender was as good as his word. At a lonely dwelling, hard by the foot of the great hill of Highgate—a house where tradition has it that Claude Duval once dwelt—Daventry and Ned obtained two serviceable mounts, and, after a cup of wine, the little band turned their backs to the dawn, which was just beginning to break greyly, and rode away at a hard gallop.

They made a wide circuit to avoid any chance patrol that might have been despatched along the roads from London, and, travelling warily, with brief halts to rest their horses, crossed Windy Heath the same evening.

"Ha, Dick lad," laughed Harry Lavender, "strange things have happened to us both since we met here three days ago!"

Dick laughed.

"Very many strange things since we left," he said. "It is very quiet here."

"I warrant me there will be no robbers to-night in the Dog-Fox Spinney," said the captain. "I doubt not that there are watchers waiting for the persons who had dealings with those two highwaymen. Eh, Dick?"

"And you are not far wrong, captain," said Ned, lowering his voice; "there are figures among the pines."

They all laid their hands to their holsters, and drew rein at his words.

"Surely 'tis not an ambush to take us?" said Dick.

Daventry was looking under his hand, and spoke incredulously.

"I see naught, Ned; your wounded pate has set you dreaming," said the captain.

"I never dream," returned Ned quietly. "There are men in the trees—three of them—and they are on horseback."

"Let us press on," said Harry Lavender, touching his steed with the spur. "Twill not serve us to show fear, and three men can do little against us after the damage we have so recently wrought. Keep you on the far side of us, Ned. Be ready with your pistol, Master Trevor." And, breaking into a trot, he led up the sandy track towards the pines.

There was still a great band of red light in the west, and the spinney stood out blackly against it.

The wind was rising, and sang among the gorse bushes and the swaying bracken.

"They deem us too strong in numbers, perchance, yet they may fire as we pass," said Daventry.

"Yes, I saw a head myself," said Dick in a low voice. "Look between the stoutest of the trees and the one with the shorn top. He has ducked out of sight, now!"

Harry Lavender's back presented a stern outline, and his long horse-pistol was held in readiness.

He rode straight forward, his face turned to the pine clump, came abreast of it, passed it, and in a few yards would have commenced the steep descent beyond, when a loud cry rose from the spinney, and they all reined in.

Someone called upon the ex-captain of the Foot Guard by name.

"Harry Lavender, stop!" came a voice; and, with a great crashing of the bushes that surrounded the Dog-Fox Spinney, a horseman issued forth, closely followed by two others, all three bursting into a shout of welcome as they galloped up.

They were the other three members of the League Dick had seen in the house in London.

"By my boots, we are well met!" cried Harry Lavender. "I have had many misgivings that you might, some of you, have fallen into the King's hands; but now we will make what speed we can to the rendezvous, where, if the rest are safe, we can form our plans for the future, in spite of all traitors to the good cause."

The clock in the stable turret told an hour short of midnight, and the mysterious

company who had been disturbed by the coming of the King's troops were gathered in a long room in very serious discussion.

Oak Hall, though possessing none of those marvellous passages that had served them in such good stead in London, was forty miles distant from the metropolis, and unknown to Sir Anthony Trevor as a meeting-place of the men he had attempted to betray.

There, for a few hours, at least, they would be undisturbed, and could look the position sternly in the face.

And they had indeed something serious to discuss. A something which would mean the gaining or losing of a throne for the Duke of Monmouth.

The whole of the force under Monmouth would move at the directions of the League.

Although Harry Lavender was a plain captain of the Foot Guards, he was the leader. A man of magnetic personality, a master of men. Behind those long black curls worked a master-brain of unknown quality.

Captain Lavender was the last to enter the room, and his arm was placed in that of Dick Trevor.

"My friends," said he, a smile struggling through the anxious care that gave an unusually grave cast to his handsome face, "matters have gone somewhat awry since I brought this young gentleman into your presence last night; you were then in a mind to deal out death to him, thinking him a spy; but I have proved to you he can carry himself in the hour of danger, and what he has done with his right hand you already know. I am now going to enrol him in the League. Here stands before you a new member!"

Dick is Made a Member of the League. The Oath. Amazing News from Lyme, "Forward the League of Seven!"

A DEEP silence reigned, and Dick, standing at the end of the table, could almost hear the palpitation of his heart. Every eye was turned upon him.

The leader of the League broke the silence at last.

THE POPULAR.—No. 236.

The Seeds of Rebellion Grow and the Flaming Torch of War is on the Horizon!

"Since he already knows our object," he said, "it only remains to acquaint him with our names in detail, to instruct him in the secret sign between us, and to administer the oath."

"Let it be done without delay," said one of them graciously.

"My friends, I will be brief," said Captain Lavender, presenting Dick in turn to the conspirators, who one and all shook hands with him.

"Now, gentlemen, the sign!" said Captain Lavender.

Every man rose to his feet, took the hilt of his weapon between the forefinger and thumb of his right hand, drew it a few inches from the sheath, and extended the little finger.

"When you meet one who claims to be of our number," said Lavender to Dick, "you treat your rapier thus. And, if 'tis before noon, you will say: 'A merry morning to you, sir.' If he be what he represents himself, he will reply: 'Merry it be.' But should the day be on the wane, then will you say: 'Is there a moon to-night?' And he will answer: 'A merry moon to-night! Canst carry this in mind?'"

"That can I," said Dick. "And since my sword hath a grip of red velvet, though somewhat faded in the wars of King Charles, 'twill serve."

"I will answer for it, boy, that 'twill serve right well," said the captain. "And now, gentlemen, the oath!"

Instantly every man drew his weapon and placed its point on the table.

The six rapiers formed a radiating circle of steel blades, and Dick was told to draw and place his point in the centre, making the seventh.

Then Harry repeated the oath—to promise to work for England's liberty; to help any member of the band, even at the cost of one's own life; and to keep secret the identity of all concerned, and every-

thing that might be agreed upon among them.

"To all of these things you solemnly agree, hand to hilt, and steel to steel?"

"To all of them, most solemnly, by my honour as a gentleman," said Dick, his lips smiling fearlessly, and his bright eyes flashing.

"Heaven defend the right!" murmured every man present, and the rapiers were returned to their sheaths.

"And now, my friends," said the captain, "what is to be done, and how are we to do it?"

Every face was very grave in the candle-light, and for a moment there fell a great silence upon the room.

It was broken, not by human voice—though several had opened their lips to speak—but by a familiar sound not far away—the galloping of a horse up the avenue of ancestral oaks.

On a sudden, from beneath the windows, a shrill whistle rang out, and it was answered by the approaching rider.

The horseman swung round the corner of the mansion, and reined up with a mighty clatter.

"Is there a moon to-night?" cried the deep voice of worthy Peter Pouch.

"A merry moon to-night!" answered the listeners in anxious chorus.

"Ha, this is well!" cried Peter joyfully. "Matchlocks and muskets, but 'tis the merriest moon that has shone these long days, gentlemen! The Duke of Monmouth has landed at Lyme."

There was the sharp hiss of breaths drawn in, and then a loud shout.

"Ride! Ride!" cried Harry Lavender. "To horse, gentlemen! Forward, the League of Seven!"

(A long thrilling instalment of our powerful adventure serial will be found in next week's topping issue.)

RESULT OF LANCASHIRE PICTURE - PUZZLE COMPETITION.

In this competition one competitor sent in a correct solution. The first prize of £5 has therefore been awarded to:

JOHN JONES,
486, Higginshaw Lane,
Oldham, Lanes.

The second prize of £2 10s. has been divided between the following four competitors whose solutions contained one error each:

J. M. Godfrey, 2, Guy St., Leamington Spa.
Alice Pace, 73, Grove Street, Leek, Staffs.
John Budd, Gellygron Road, Pontardawe, Swansea.

Mr. J. R. Wight, 11, Inchafray Street, Perth.

Thirty-one competitors, with two errors each, divide the ten prizes of 5s. each. The names of these prizewinners can be obtained on application at this office.

SOLUTION.

The Lancashire County Cricket Club originated in 1864, although the county had played numerous matches before that. The Red Rose county has reached the top of the Championship ladder six times. At the present period it is one of the best teams in the country, and includes such famous players as John Sharp, Makepeace, Parkin, etc.

GREAT COMPETITION FOR CRICKET LOVERS! FIRST PRIZE £100. SECOND PRIZE £50. THIRD PRIZE £30. AND 120 PRIZES OF £1 EACH.

CAN YOU FORECAST HOW THE COUNTIES ARE GOING TO FINISH UP?

WE offer the above splendid prizes to the reader who is clever enough to send us a list showing exactly in what order the seventeen first-class County Cricket Clubs will stand at the end of the season. For your guidance we publish the order in which each of the clubs stood last year, which was as follows:

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Yorkshire. | 9. Sussex. |
| 2. Nottinghamshire. | 10. Somerset. |
| 3. Surrey. | 11. Derbyshire. |
| 4. Kent. | 12. Warwickshire. |
| 5. Lancashire. | 13. Gloucestershire. |
| 6. Hampshire. | 14. Leicestershire. |
| 7. Middlesex. | 15. Northamptonshire. |
| 8. Essex. | 16. Glamorgan. |
| 17. Worcestershire. | |

What you have to do is to fill in on the coupon on this page your forecast of the order in which the counties will finish up. To the reader who does this correctly we shall award a prize of £100, and the other prizes in the order of the correctness of the forecasts.

In the case of ties any or all of the prizes will be added together and divided, but the full amount of £300 will be awarded.

All forecasts must be submitted on coupons taken from this journal, or from one of the other publications taking part in this contest.

You may send as many coupon forecasts as you like.

They must all be addressed to "Cricket Competition," Gough House, Gough Square, E.C. 4, and must reach that address not later than Thursday, August 16th.

You may send in your forecasts at once if you like, but none will be considered after August 16th.

The decision of the Editor in all matters concerning this competition must be accepted as final and binding, and entries will only be admitted on that understanding.

Employees of the proprietors of this journal are not eligible to compete. This competition is run in conjunction with "Football Favourite," "Sports Budget," "Magnet," "Young Britain," "Champion," "Boys' Realm," "Boys' Friend," "Pluck," "Union Jack," "Rocket," "Nelson Lee Library," "Boys' Cinema," and "Gem," and readers of these journals are invited to compete.

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I forecast that the Counties will finish the Season in this order:

No. 1	
No. 2	
No. 3	
No. 4	
No. 5	
No. 6	
No. 7	
No. 8	
No. 9	
No. 10	
No. 11	
No. 12	
No. 13	
No. 14	
No. 15	
No. 16	
No. 17	

I enter "Cricket" Competition in accordance with the Rules as announced, and agree to abide by the published decision.

Name

Address

Closing date, August 16th, 1923.
P.

Stirring Events in Next Week's Instalment I

A GREAT MYSTERY SOLVED!

With the aid of his bulldog Towser, Herries of the Fourth gets on the track of the missing juniors—but like Tom Merry & Co., he leaves the school and does not return! He has followed his chums into the mysterious mill where they are preparing a bold bid for freedom!



A FIGHT FOR FREEDOM!

BY

Martin Clifford.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
The Amateur Detective!

"**C**OME in!" The deep voice of Mr. Railton uttered that invitation. Herries of the Fourth stepped into the Housemaster's study. The junior looked pale and troubled. And Mr. Railton looked agitated also. It would have been difficult to say which was the more worried of the two.

Afternoon lessons were over at St. Jim's, and Herries had hurried at once to the Housemaster's study.

"What is it, my boy?" asked Mr. Railton kindly.

"I've come to see you about the six fellows who are missing, sir—"

Mr. Railton looked up quickly.

"You have news of them?" he asked.

"No, sir. But I thought you might be willing to let me go in search of them, sir. If you would kindly give me a late pass, in case I should happen to get hung up somewhere—"

"I will do so with pleasure, Herries," said Mr. Railton. "But I fear that your search will end in failure. Ever since an early hour this morning, when it was first discovered that the six boys were missing, search-parties have been scouring the countryside. And where they have failed, it is hardly likely that you will succeed."

"But you forget that I've got a bulldog, sir," said Herries. "Old Towser will pick up the trail. He's got a keen nose for a scent."

Mr. Railton smiled slightly. Herries' sublime faith in Towser's abilities was not shared by the Housemaster. If Towser picked up a scent of any sort, it would be the wrong one. Mr. Railton felt sure of that.

"I can't think what may have happened to those fellows, sir—Tom Merry, and Blake, and the rest," said Herries. "But if they've been kidnapped—and it's just possible—it won't take old Towser long to get on the track of the kidnappers."

Herries' faith in Towser was almost touching. He seemed to regard the dog as a bloodhound rather than a common or garden bulldog. So smart was Towser, in his master's opinion, that Herries wondered why Ferrers Locke, or some other eminent detective, had not offered to buy such an intelligent animal. In the tracking down of criminals, Towser was supposed to be simply wonderful. Monty Lowther, however,

had once declared that Towser was not simply wonderful, but wonderfully simple. "He hasn't the intelligence of a turnip," Monty had said.

Railton wrote out the late pass, and handed it to Herries.

"This entitles you to be out of gates until ten o'clock," he said. "I hope you will meet with some success in your search, Herries; but I cannot help thinking you will return empty-handed."

Herries thanked the Housemaster, and went down into the sunny quadrangle. His face still wore a troubled expression. For many hours, six School House juniors had been missing. And two of them were Herries' bosom chums, Blake and D'Arcy.

The six had taken part, during the night, in a game called Jack-o'-Lantern. And they had never returned to the school. They had disappeared as completely and mysteriously as if the earth had opened and swallowed them up.

Search-parties had been busy since the early morning. They had toured all the villages in the district, but they had not been able to pick up a single clue. Weary and crestfallen, they had returned to St. Jim's.

The Head had telephoned to the police, requesting them to make diligent search for the missing juniors. But the Rylcombe Police Force, which consisted of P.C. Crump, had not been able to solve the mystery.

Herries had been waiting and hoping, all day, that news would come. But since there was no news, he decided to go on the trail himself, with the aid of Towser.

That famous animal was in its kennel, behind the woodshed.

"Come along, old fellow!" said Herries, unhitching the dog's chain. "We're going to find Blake and Gussy, and the others—see?"

Towser wagged his tail vigorously, and there was an expression on his face which seemed to say, "I know exactly what's wanted. You leave it to me!"

Towser ran to heel as Herries strode down to the school gates.

Cardew and Clive stood chatting in the gateway. They looked up as Herries bore down upon them.

"Whither bound?" asked Cardew.

"I'm going to find the fellows who are missing," said Herries. "I'll seek 'em far and wide. Railton's given me a late pass, so I've got tons of time."

"Got a clue of any sort?" asked Clive.

"No."

"Then how do you expect to find them, you dunder?"

Herries pointed proudly to Towser.

"Towsy will do the actual finding," he explained. "Look at him, sniffing the roadway, right along the base of the school wall. He's picking up the scent."

"Rats! He's foragin' for a stray bone, dear man," said Cardew.

And Clive gave a chuckle.

"Yes, you can snigger!" said Herries angrily. "But old Towser will be bang on the trail, in a jiffy. He'll lead me to where those fellows are imprisoned—"

"How do you know they are imprisoned?" asked Clive.

"Because it's quite obvious—except to fellows of your low order of intelligence—that they've been kidnapped," said Herries. "If they hadn't been captured, and shut up somewhere, they'd be back by now. Go along, Towsy! Good dog! Follow the trail, old man!"

"The beast hasn't found one to follow," said Cardew, with a grin.

"Yes, he has!" exclaimed Herries excitedly.

Towser, who had been sniffing at the foot of the school wall, suddenly desisted from this pastime. He glanced towards his master, and then he crossed the road at a canter, scrambled through a gap in the hedge, and set off across the fields, in a due-south direction.

Herries followed with alacrity. And Cardew and Clive gazed after him, grinning. Like Mr. Railton, they had precious little faith in Towser's abilities as a tracker, and they imagined the dog was leading Herries on a wild-goose chase.

Towser ran on, pausing every now and then to sniff the ground, or to look round and make sure that his master was following.

"He's picked up the trail all right!" muttered Herries, in tones of great satisfaction. "Good old Towsy! He's worth his weight in gold."

Through meadows and cornfields, Towser continued to lead the way. There were many ditches to leap, and many hedges to scramble through; but Towser did not falter. The trail seemed endless. Herries, stumbling along in the rear, began to feel fagged. He had to call upon Towser not to go so fast.

Presently, on some muddy ground at the



side of a deep ditch, Herries came across the imprint of a rubber-soled shoe.

"My hat! That's Gussy's shoe!" he ejaculated, stopping short. "I can tell by the pattern. Looks as if Gussy tumbled into this ditch, too. There's a mark where some one has slipped. Well played, Towser! I'm positive you're on the right track now!"

The dog forged ahead, and Herries followed. The discovery of the shoe-print seemed to stimulate the junior's energies. He had already come several miles, but he pushed on with renewed eagerness. "It seems that old Towser's never going to stop!" he panted. "Those fellows must have gone a fearful distance last night."

On and on went Towser, with his master following up.

The buldog showed no sign of exhaustion, but Herries was pretty well "whacked" by the time fifteen miles had been covered.

Herries looked about him in the gathering twilight. Ahead of him were some castle ruins, and not far away stood an old mill.

Towser headed straight for the mill. He halted outside the door, and glanced round to his master as if to inform him that he had reached the end of the trail. Then he set up a deep growling, and kept leaping against the door.

Herries whipped up his flagging energies, and hurried towards the mill. "Is it possible," he muttered, "that the fellows are here—shut up in an old mill?"

For once in a way, Towser had followed the correct trail, and pursued it to the bitter end.

Glancing up at one of the small barred windows of the mill, Herries caught sight of the familiar face of Tom Merry.

"Found!" exclaimed Herries triumphantly. "Towser, old fellow, you're a dog in a thousand!"

He was about to hail Tom Merry, when there was a shooting of bolts, and the door of the mill swung open.

Herries was confronted by an old man, with white hair and a white beard. He would have seemed quite a harmless old man, but for the fact that he carried a revolver. And the gleaming barrel was directed towards Herries.

The St. Jim's junior stood rooted to the ground, his heart thumping wildly.

"Put that thing down!" he panted. But the old man did not lower his revolver. Nor did he seem at all perturbed by the angry snarling of Towser. Ignoring the dog, he kept his gaze upon Herries.

"So you're another of them?" he said, noting the school cap which Herries wore. "Come to search for your stranded school-fellows, I suppose?"

"Yes, and I know they are here, because I saw one of them at the window."

"You shall join them immediately," said the old man grimly. "Step inside!"

"Look here!" began Herries wrathfully, "who are you?"

"Time enough to exchange visiting-cards later on," was the grim reply. "You'd better come inside quickly, in case this little pop-gun should go off accidentally. My finger's on the trigger, you know."

Behind the old man's banter, there was something compelling and insistent.

Herries, eyeing the revolver with some trepidation, promptly stepped into the mill.

"You have shown excellent discretion," said the old man. "Your schoolmates are upstairs."

"You—you're keeping them prisoners?" stammered Herries.

"Yes. One week's imprisonment, of a pleasant nature, without hard labour. A day has already passed, so there are only six days to go. Your friends were asleep a few moments ago, but the growling of your dog evidently awakened them. I shall have to chain the beast up during the time you are here. He shall be properly fed, so you needn't worry on that score."

Slowly it dawned upon Herries that he was to be kept a prisoner in the old mill for six days. But it would not be lonely. There were six fellows up above waiting to welcome him.

Herries had set out to find his school-fellows. And he had found them—thanks to Towser. But his fifteen-miles tramp was futile, for he had walked into the lion's den, and was now a prisoner with the

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others, thus adding to the alarm and consternation which were already being felt at St. Jim's.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Escape!

"HEWVIES, dear boy!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy assisted his chum through the trapdoor into the apartment where the St. Jim's fellows were imprisoned.

"Hallo, Gussy!" said Herries. "Seems as if I've walked into a giddy hornet's nest!"

"How on earth did you find us?" asked Tom Merry.

"Towser led me here. A jolly cute dog, old Towser, although you've never given him credit for it. It must be quite fifteen miles to this place, but Towser followed the scent all the way. But I say, you chaps! How did you come to fall into the clutches of this old man?"

Tom Merry explained all that had happened.

"It's our firm belief," he added, "that the old man isn't nearly so old as he looks."

"But what is he—a hermit, or a lunatic, or what?"

"The leader of a gang of coiners," said Tom Merry, in an undertone.

"My hat!"

"We've discovered that there are vaults underneath this mill, and a tunnel that links up with Branchester Castle. Earlier in the day, I saw the old man coming up from the basement, carrying a tray. There were lots of half-crowns on the tray—spurious ones, I believe."

Herries looked thunderstruck.

"Fine sort of place I've dropped into," he said. "A coiners' den, by Jove!"

"Shush! Speak quietly, or the old man may overhear you. We've planned to get away to-night, if we can possibly manage it."

"But how?" asked Herries, glancing around the room. "These windows are barred."

"We're not thinking of the windows," said Talbot.

"Then what—?"

"We're going to try to get down to the vaults, without disturbing the gang. Then we can make our way through the tunnel, and come out at the castle."

"We fixed on midnight as an ideal time to make the attempt, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus. "We were just twyn' to snatch a bit of sleep, when Towser woke us up. I twust you are not hungry, Hewvies? It isn't likely that the old man will bring up any more grub to-night."

"I'm pretty peckish, but I can hold out," said Herries. "I feel like taking forty winks, myself."

"Then we'll all turn in," said Monty Lowther. "One of us is bound to wake up at the witching hour, when churchyards yawn, and graves give up their dead, and prisoners make a dash for liberty."

Steps were heard ascending the iron ladder. Then the trapdoor was opened, and a couple of blankets were passed through.

"For the newcomer," said the voice of the old man. "Sorry there is no food available. The garrison has run out of supplies. I am arranging to get a fresh lot in to-morrow."

The prisoners exchanged glances, and grinned. They were hoping that when the morning came, the Old Man of the Mill would find that the birds had flown.

"I hope that no more of your school-fellows will find their way to this spot," said the old man, "or it will be a difficult matter to accommodate them all. It's a tight squeeze for seven; and more would be a crowd."

The juniors were silent.

"You are not very talkative this evening," the old man went on. "But no doubt you are sleepy. Good-night—and pleasant dreams!"

The trapdoor fell back into place, and the juniors' captor, chucking softly to himself, descended into the lower regions. Towser, who appeared to be tied up outside, was growling a good deal. But in spite of that distraction the juniors soon fell asleep. And the growling ceased.

A strange silence hovered over the old mill. The muffled whirring of machinery,

which the juniors had heard during the day, was no longer audible.

Darkness had descended over the Sussex landscape. The whole countryside seemed to be asleep.

Tom Merry had concentrated his mind upon waking at midnight; and he did so. He sat up in his blanket-bed, and peered at the luminous watch on his wrist, and saw that it was exactly twelve.

The time was now ripe for the great venture. Tom Merry started to rouse his chums, and in a couple of minutes all were awake.

"First of all," said Tom Merry, "I'll go down and see how the land lies. Then I'll come back and report."

"Mind your eye, Tommy!" said Manners.

The caution was unnecessary. Tom Merry knew that he would have to proceed warily—that a false move would bring disaster.

Already the old man had caught Tom prowling about down below, and he had warned the junior that if it occurred again the prisoners would be trussed up with ropes.

Softly raising the trapdoor, Tom Merry went down into the darkness. When he had gone a few steps down the iron ladder, he paused, and listened intently. But no sound came from below. The ground floor of the mill seemed to be untenanted.

"So far, so good," thought Tom. And he continued to descend the ladder, until his feet came into contact with the stone floor of the mill.

He groped his way to the door, in the faint hope of finding it unlocked. But it was locked all right, and bolted into the bargain.

A wild thought came to Tom Merry of shooting back the bolts, and attempting to pick the lock. But the noise of such a proceeding would have set Towser barking. And the gang of coiners, who were probably slumbering down in the vaults, would have been aroused.

"It's hopeless to think of getting out this way," ruminated the junior. "I must explore the tunnel down below. One of these paving-stones swings open on a pivot, and if only I can do the trick without making a row—"

Tom Merry's reflections came to an abrupt halt. Dropping on to his hands and knees, he observed, for the first time, that the paving-stone was already open. It was swung back, and there was a yawning aperture which gave access to the basement of the mill.

"Lucky! I noticed this," reflected Tom Merry. "I might have fallen through the hole and broken my neck. I expect the old man deliberately left the stone open, so that if any of us came down to explore, we'd come a cropper."

Cautiously he thrust one foot through the aperture, and found a foothold on the rung of a ladder. Then he went down, step by step, into the darkness, scarcely daring to breathe.

The old man and his confederates were probably asleep. But criminals were notoriously light sleepers, and the slightest sound might awaken them.

Tom Merry was handicapped by the darkness, and by the fact that he was descending into unknown depths. A false step would have spoilt everything.

Fortune favoured the junior. He reached the basement, or cellar, without mishap.

The gloom was more intense down here. Tom Merry peered about him, but he could see no recumbent forms. The basement was obviously deserted.

Tom Merry groped his way round the gloomy apartment, feeling the walls as he went.

Presently the wall ceased abruptly, and there was an opening—the entrance to a tunnel.

It was a wide tunnel, as Tom Merry quickly discovered. As he walked along it, he was able to stretch his arms sideways to their fullest extent.

He had proceeded only a few yards, when sounds of deep breathing came to his ears.

To the left of him, opening off the tunnel, was a room—the room in which the coiners worked by day and slept by night. It was not an ideal bedroom, but a certain amount of air filtered through to it.

Tom Merry peered through the opening. With difficulty, he was able to distinguish the figures of four men. They lay asleep

on blankets. Installed in the centre of the room was the machinery which they used in their nefarious work.

Having found out all that he wished to know, Tom Merry made his way, with infinite caution, back to his chums.

A lantern was burning in the upper room of the mill. Around it, six fellows were seated. They looked up in quick expectancy as Tom Merry's head appeared above the trapdoor.

"What luck, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus breathlessly.

"All the luck in the world!" was the reply. "We can get down into the tunnel without any difficulty. The men—there are four of them—are all asleep in a sort of cavern that opens off the tunnel."

"Oh, good!"

"I didn't follow the tunnel right through to the end, but I'm certain it leads to the castle. If we play our cards carefully, escape will be fairly easy, after all."

The juniors were tremendously elated. It really seemed that the door of freedom was opened to them at last!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The End Of The Adventure.

"I 'VE got an idea!" said Talbot. The others listened attentively. When Talbot had an idea, it was generally worth hearing.

"It's only right," Talbot went on, "that these precious coiners should be brought to justice. But if we all escape now, and they wake up and find us gone, they'll promptly clear out, and evade the police."

"But we can't avoid that," said Jack Blake. "It's not very pleasant to think of them going scot-free, but how can we help it?"

"That's where my idea comes in," said Talbot. "What I propose is this. Only one of us need get away now, to fetch the police. The other six can cut off the coiners' escape. Three can stand on the paving-stone down below, and prevent it being lifted. The other three can block up the far end of the tunnel—the castle end. The bouders will be fairly trapped, then."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "That's quite a bwnay wheeze, deah boy. Mattah of fact, I was about to suggest somethin' on the same lines myself!"

The juniors chuckled softly. They were in great spirits now.

It was arranged that Tom Merry should be the one to go and summon the police. Manners, Lowther, and Talbot were to accompany Tom as far as the end of the tunnel. They were to block up the exit in some way, so that the coiners would be unable to escape.

Jack Blake, D'Arcy and Herries were to remain in the old mill. Their united weight on the paving-stone would prevent the coiners from coming up that way. They would be trapped in their underground lair, and would be an easy prey for the police.

"All ready?" asked Tom Merry softly.

There was a general nodding of heads. The critical moment had arrived, and Talbot's scheme was to be put to the test. If it failed, it meant six more days' imprisonment for the St. Jim's juniors—probably six days of hardship, for the Old Man of the Mill was not likely to treat them well, if he caught them trying to escape.

One by one, the seven prisoners went down the iron ladder.

Progress was difficult in the darkness, but the manœuvre was safely carried out. Jack Blake, D'Arcy and Herries remained on the ground floor of the mill. They silently gripped the hands of their school-fellows, as the latter prepared to descend into the basement.

When the Terrible Three and Talbot had passed through the aperture, the paving-stone was silently shut down. If the coiners tried to ascend into the mill, they would find it impossible to raise the stone, since it was kept firmly in place by the joint weight of three juniors.

Tom Merry and his three companions descended the ladder into the basement; and Tom led the way into the tunnel. Talbot was close behind him—touching

THE END OF THE TRAIL!



Glancing up at one of the small barred windows of the mill, Herries caught sight of the familiar face of Tom Merry. "Found!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "Towser, you're a dog in a thousand!" (See Chapter 1.)

him, in fact. Manners was directly behind Talbot; and Monty Lowther brought up the rear of the procession.

They had proceeded only a few paces, when they heard some one moving about in the room which was occupied by the coiners.

Alive to their danger, the juniors quickened their pace. They were walking on tip-toe; but the stone floor of the tunnel was uneven, and Monty Lowther happened to stumble.

Monty recovered himself, but the noise had been heard.

Suddenly the light of an electric-torch flashed out, and the Old Man of the Mill appeared. He stepped out into the tunnel, just as the juniors were about to pass the coiners' den.

The juniors stopped short, blinking in the strong glare of light.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Manners, in dismay.

The Old Man of the Mill uttered a cry of anger, and called out to his companions.

"Wake up, there! The young brats are trying to get away! I've caught them in the nick of time!"

His disengaged hand went to his hip-pocket. But before he could whip out his revolver, Tom Merry leapt upon him with the spring of a panther.

The pair grappled fiercely for a few seconds. Then Tom's chums came to his assistance, and the old man—who had

struggled like a remarkably youthful one—went crashing to the floor.

"Come on!" panted Tom Merry. "Let's make a dash for it!"

The electric torch had fallen from the man's grasp. Talbot stooped and picked it up, and the four juniors fairly raced through the tunnel.

Scrambling to his feet, the old man set off in pursuit.

"Stop, or I fire!"

The voice echoed strangely through the underground tunnel.

Tom Merry and Co. ran on. They expected a revolver shot to ring out at any instant. But none came.

It seemed fairly certain, now, that the old man's revolver was unloaded. He had been playing a game of bluff the whole time.

As the juniors ran, they saw that the floor of the tunnel was gradually sloping upwards. Presently they reached the level of the ground.

The tunnel ended in the ruins of Granchester Castle. There was a heavy iron gate at the end of it, and the juniors had a sickening fear that they might find it locked. But this fear was soon dispersed, for Tom Merry, who was leading, saw that there was a key in the padlock.

It was the work of an instant to unlock the gate. The juniors dashed through to liberty. And then Tom Merry stretched his arm between the bars of the gate, re-locked the padlock, and took away the key.

The juniors were now free. And unless the coiners possessed a duplicate key—which was unlikely—they would be unable to escape from the tunnel at either end.

"Free!"

Monty Lowther uttered the word joyfully.

Talbot flashed the electric-torch towards the locked gate, and saw that the Old Man of the Mill had hurled himself against it. His face was livid with passion; a torrent of wild words rushed from his lips.

"You're fairly trapped, my friend," said Tom Merry. "You'll find it impossible to escape by way of the mill. There are three fellows on the paving-stone, and you'll never be able to raise it. So-long! We'll be back shortly with the police."

The juniors did not wait for the old man's answer. They sped away into the night.

Next day, the early evening papers had some sensational news to record.

A gang of coiners, whose movements had baffled the police for some time past, had been arrested. The leader of the gang was Paul Dysart, who, disguised as an old man, had been keeping guard at the mill, whilst his confederates were at work in the basement beneath.

The report added that the arrests had been brought about by the astuteness of a number of schoolboys.

Tom Merry and Co., having liberated Towser, had travelled back to St. Jim's in a police-van. They had arrived at three o'clock in the morning; and the Head, who had been dreaming troubled dreams about them, had been aroused.

Needless to state, the kindly old gentleman was very relieved at the return of the adventurers. But he was not more relieved than the adventurers themselves.

As to the escape which had led up to the capture of the juniors in the first instance, the Head, like Nelson of old, turned a blind eye upon it. It was very wrong for juniors to play Jack-o'-Lantern in the small hours of the morning; but in his relief at seeing the wanderers safe and sound, the Head took no disciplinary action. For which, Tom Merry and Co. were duly thankful!

THE END.

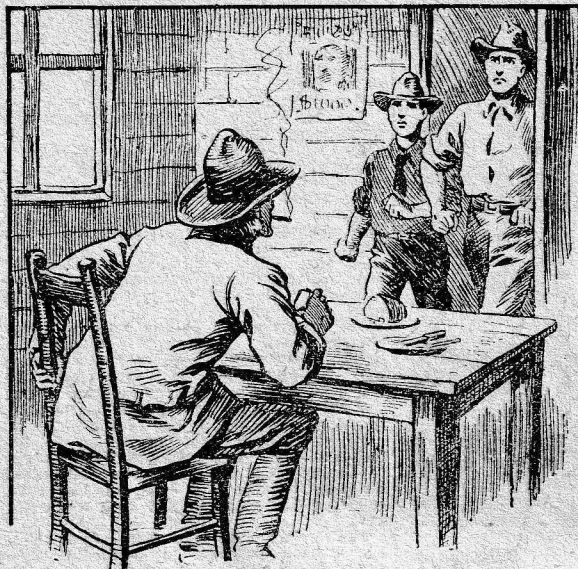
(There will be another long, complete story of St. Jim's next week.)

The DETECTIVE MAGAZINE
THE ONLY MAGAZINE OF ITS KIND IN THE WORLD
THE POPULAR.—No. 236.

Stirring Scenes at St. Jim's School! See Next Tuesday!

FRANK RICHARDS' SCHOOLDAYS!

A story with the very breath of the prairie in it, of the land of wide spaces, wooded hills—and grizzlies! Of men of courage, and of cunning. A place of hope for some, and a place where others try to forget. That is where Frank Richards spent his schooldays—at the lumber school amidst the tall, silent timbers of the Rockies.

TOPPING FAR WEST YARN!

SAVED SON!

By His

Further adventures of Frank Richards and Co., the Chums of Cedar Creek.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.**Startling News!**

"YOU chaps heard?"

Frank Richards and Co. had jumped off their horses outside the gate of Cedar Creek School, when Chunky Todgers rushed up, his fat face ablaze with excitement.

"Heard?" he gasped.

"Heard what, Podgy?" asked Bob Lawless.

"Another row with the Hillcrest chaps?"

"Nunno!"

"Well, what's the news?" asked Vere Beaulerc, with a smile. "It must be something terribly exciting!"

"I guess so—I jolly well guess so!" said Chunky breathlessly. "Then you haven't heard?"

Chunky Todgers was evidently pleased that the chums of Cedar Creek "hadn't heard."

It was a great satisfaction to him to break the thrilling news, whatever it was.

"Suppose you tell us what it is!" suggested Frank Richards.

"It's the limit!" said Chunky impressively. "The real limit! You'd never guess!"

"No need to guess if you can tell us, Chunky. Get it out before the bell rings," said Beaulerc.

"What do you think of road-agents in the Thompson Valley?" demanded Chunky, in a thrilling tone.

"Road-agents?" repeated Frank Richards.

"Robbers!" said Chunky triumphantly.

"Actually?"

"Highwaymen?"

"I suppose that's what you'd call them, Franky. We call 'em road-agents," said Chunky Todgers. "Precious few in Canada—but lots over the line. And there's a gang of road-agents at work in the Thompson Valley—just like the galoots in the Black Hills, you know, or down in California! What do you think of that?"

"Well, my hat!" said Frank.

Bob Lawless whistled.

"There were those two galoots who tried to rob the post-wagon a few weeks ago," he said, "when Franky chipped in, and Gunten of Hillcrest took all the credit. They didn't bring off the robbery, and they've never been seen since."

"I don't know whether it's the same lot," said Chunky Todgers. "But they're at work on the trails, I can tell you."

"How do you know?"

"Why, all Thompson's talking about it!" exclaimed Chunky breathlessly. "A rancher from Silver Creek was held up on the prairie—actually held up with a popgun at his nose, you know, and robbed of five hundred dollars!"

"Phew!"

"And a miner down from the range got

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stopped a mile out from Thompson by two horsemen with their faces covered up with flour-bags," continued Chunky. "He came into Thompson raging, and went to Sheriff Henderson. Two men each time, with flour-bags over their faces—nobody's seen their chivvies. Regular road-agents' style, you know—and in the Thompson Valley! We might fall in with them ourselves, you know!" added Chunky, by way of imparting an additional thrill to his exciting news.

"Better look out, Chunky!" said Bob Lawless solemnly. "They'll be after you."

Chunky jumped.

"After me? Why?"

"It's well known that you've always got ten cents about you," said Bob. "You've been trying to change that bad bit all the term. If the galoots hear of your wealth, they—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Chunky Todgers. "We might fall in with them all the same. Frank came on them once—if it's the same pair of rotters. I dare say it is, I say, I don't feel scared, of course, but I shouldn't like to meet them."

"Any of the fellows scared?" asked Bob, with a grin.

"I guess so. Why, look at the Cherub—he's scared," said Chunky.

"Fathead!"

"Well, he looks scared!" grinned Todgers. Frank and Bob looked rather curiously at Vere Beaulerc.

Beaulerc's handsome face had become so pale that it was impossible to help observing it.

His lip was quivering.

"Cherub," exclaimed Bob, in astonishment, "you're not scared with a yarn about road-agents, are you?"

"Scared?" Beaulerc smiled—a strange and bitter smile that puzzled his chums.

"Scared? Oh, no!"

"You look it!" chuckled Chunky Todgers.

"Let's get in," said Frank Richards.

"The bell will go in a minute or two."

They led their horses in at the gateway.

In the playground of Cedar Creek boys and girls were gathered in excited groups, evidently discussing the news.

It was the first time there had been such a discussion at the school in the backwoods.

The Thompson Valley was an outlying region of British Columbia, and on the verge of vast unsettled regions; but though life there was rough and ready, the section, on the whole, was law-abiding.

Occasionally a "rustler" wandered in from over the American border; but such characters were few, and they did not find the Thompson Valley a healthy quarter.

The attempt to rob the post-wagon, which Frank Richards had frustrated, had caused a

good deal of excitement, but nothing compared with the latest news.

Two robberies had actually taken place now, and the Flour-Bag Gang were still undiscovered, and might be at work again at any time.

The news had spread through all the section like wildfire already.

The Cedar Creek fellows were discussing whether the "road-agents" were likely to turn out to be local worthies, or whether they were rustlers from over the border.

The latter was the favourite theory.

There were a good many rough characters in Thompson, who foregathered at the Red Dog Saloon but nobody was inclined to admit that there were road-agents in the section of native growth.

Chunky Todgers trotted along with the Co. as they walked their horses to the corral.

Chunky was almost bursting with excitement.

"I say, you may see them at the ranch, Bob!" he said. "Lots of pickings at the ranch. Your poppa has lots of dollars!"

Bob Lawless chuckled.

"I guess I'd like to see them visit the Lawless Ranch!" he said. "The cowboys would be glad to see them. I reckon they would come to a sudden end on the branch of a tree."

"Well, perhaps they wouldn't risk it," said Chunky thoughtfully. "They might turn up at Beaulerc's place, though. That's lonely, and there's only the Cherub's poppa there. I say, Cherub, does your father keep any money at the shack?"

Beaulerc did not answer; he did not seem to hear.

"What rot!" said Frank sharply, and with a rather uneasy look at his chum. He could not understand the startled pallor and trouble in Beaulerc's face.

Well he knew that Vere Beaulerc was as brave as anyone could be; that fear was quite unknown to his nature.

Yet the effect of Chunky's news on him had been unmistakable.

His hand was trembling on the bridle as he led his horse.

"Well, they might go to the shack—it would be safe," said Todgers. "If the Cherub's poppa has any money there he ought to be warned. He mayn't have heard the news yet."

Beaulerc stopped suddenly at the opening in the corral fence.

"I—I think I sha'n't go in to lessons this morning, you chaps," he said haltingly. "I—I want to speak to my father."

"But you must come in, kid!" said Frank Richards anxiously. "Miss Meadows will be waxy."

"I can't help it! I'm going home."

Beaulerc drew his horse round.

"Cherub, old chap," exclaimed Bob Lawless,

The Hunt After the Rustlers of the Thompson Valley!

laying his hand on Beauclerc's arm. "You needn't be alarmed about your father. It's utter rot to think that the road-agents would go to the shack. Why should they?"

"I'm going home."

Without saying more Vere Beauclerc jumped on his black horse, and rode away, his chums staring after him in surprise and dismay.

He disappeared out of gates as the bell rang for classes.

"Well, great gophers!" ejaculated Bob Lawless. "What's the matter with the Cherub this morning, Franky?"

"He must be anxious about his father, I suppose," said Frank.

"But what rot! His poppa's in no danger—he keeps a gun at the shack—even if the road-agents did turn up there. And they won't. Why should they? There's nothing to steal there."

"I give it up," said Frank. "Miss Meadows will be waxy I know that. We'd better explain to her."

The chums put their horses in the corral, and then headed for the lumber schoolhouse, with the rest of Cedar Creek.

Miss Meadows noted Beauclerc's absence at once when she came in to take her class.

"Richards!" she called out.

"Yes, ma'am!" said Frank.

"Has not Beauclerc come this morning?"

"He's gone home again, ma'am."

"Is he not well?"

"I—I think so."

"Then why has he gone away without permission?" exclaimed the schoolmistress.

"I think he's alarmed about his father, Miss Meadows," said Frank, rather uncomfortably. "Mr. Beauclerc lives in a very lonely place, and we have just heard about some rustlers—"

"Absurd!" said Miss Meadows. "Beauclerc should not have gone without permission—indeed, he should not have gone at all. Because there has been a robbery in the district, that is no reason why boys should stay away from school."

Frank Richards was silent.

He felt that the reason he had given for the Cherub's conduct was inadequate, but he could think of no other. Beauclerc's action perplexed him.

Lessons began without Beauclerc, and there was no doubt that Miss Meadows was "waxy," as Frank had expressed it, and that she would have something severe to say to Beauclerc when he reappeared at Cedar Creek School.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Father and Son.

THUD! Thud! The hoofs of the black horse beat rapidly on the hard trail.

While his chums were in class at Cedar Creek, Vere Beauclerc had almost forgotten the existence of the school.

He rode fast on the timber trail for home. His face was still pale, his brows knitted, and his heart was beating painfully.

Black and bitter thoughts were in his mind.

The story of the two road-agents had struck him like a blow in the face.

Back into his mind had come at once what he knew of his father's secret—of the remittance-man's ride with Poker Pete of Thompson.

No word had passed his lips to his chums; neither Frank nor Bob had the remotest suspicion of the truth—that one of the masked men who had held up the post-wagon, weeks before, was Vere Beauclerc's father.

Confident that the repentant man was keeping his promise, Beauclerc had had no doubts, no anxiety. In spite of himself the remittance-man had been saved from crime, and he had broken with the sport of Thompson, who had so nearly led him into irretrievable shame.

But now—

There was a misery which words could not have expressed gnawing at Vere Beauclerc's heart as he galloped homeward.

He had to see his father at once—he had to know the truth.

Gallop—gallop!

The black horse was galloping at top speed, and a dozen times the schoolboy narrowly escaped branches that swept over the trail, swaying in the wind.

The shack by the creek came in sight at last.

There was a sound of an axe upon hard logs.

Mr. Beauclerc was at work there, steadily wielding the axe, piling up the split logs for winter fuel.

It was hard work, and the remittance-man had never been given to hard work. Somehow, comfort stole into Beauclerc's heart as he saw his father thus engaged.

Lascelles Beauclerc looked up at the crash of hoof-strokes on the hard ground, and rested on his axe as his son dismounted.

Beauclerc ran towards him.

His face was flushed now, and his breath came thick and fast.

His eyes were upon his father's face, but there he read nothing but surprise.

There was no guilt, no consciousness of a dark secret, in the face of the remittance-man of Cedar Creek.

"You have not gone to school, Vere?" he exclaimed, as his son came up.

"I've come back, father."

"Why? Has anything happened at Cedar Creek?"

Beauclerc shook his head.

Now that he was face to face with his father the eager, anxious questions died on his lips, and he hesitated.

"Then why have you come back?"

"Father! I—I heard some news at the school," Beauclerc's voice faltered, and his eyes did not meet his father's. "I—I—Have you heard, father?"

Mr. Beauclerc smiled faintly.

"I have not been to the camp for two days," he said. "I hear no news here, my boy. What is it?"

"There are road-agents in the section!"

The remittance-man started.

"Two masked men—" stammered Beauclerc. "There have been two robberies near Thompson—a rancher and a miner—and—and they were committed by two men masked with flour-bags. You—you did not know?"

Mr. Beauclerc's worn face paled a little.

"I did not know, Vere," he answered quietly.

"I—I was sure of it!" panted the boy.

"You were so sure of it that you came back from school at once when you heard

the news?" said the remittance-man with a touch of sarcasm.

Beauclerc crimsoned.

"I—I—," he stammered.

"You have a right to doubt me," said Mr. Beauclerc moodily. "You knew that I rode out with Poker Pete to rob the post-wagon—"

"Father!" muttered Beauclerc wretchedly. "I was mad to do it—mad!"

"Heaven knows how thankful I was that it was prevented. Vere, I told you so. I gave you my word that I would never allow such a thought to enter my mind again. When Poker Pete came here I drove him away. I have not seen him since. I have kept my word to you."

"Father! I—I was a brute, a fool to—to think—" muttered the schoolboy. "But—but when Todgers said there were two of them, I—it was like a knife in my heart! Oh, father!"

"I knew nothing of it," said Mr. Beauclerc quietly. "I am not angry with you, my poor boy. You have the right to doubt me."

"I don't doubt you—not for a moment, father. I—I was startled. I was terrified. I knew that villain would draw you into his wickedness again if he could, and I—I—Beauclerc's voice broke into a sob.

The remittance-man knitted his brows.

"Two robberies, you said, Vere?"

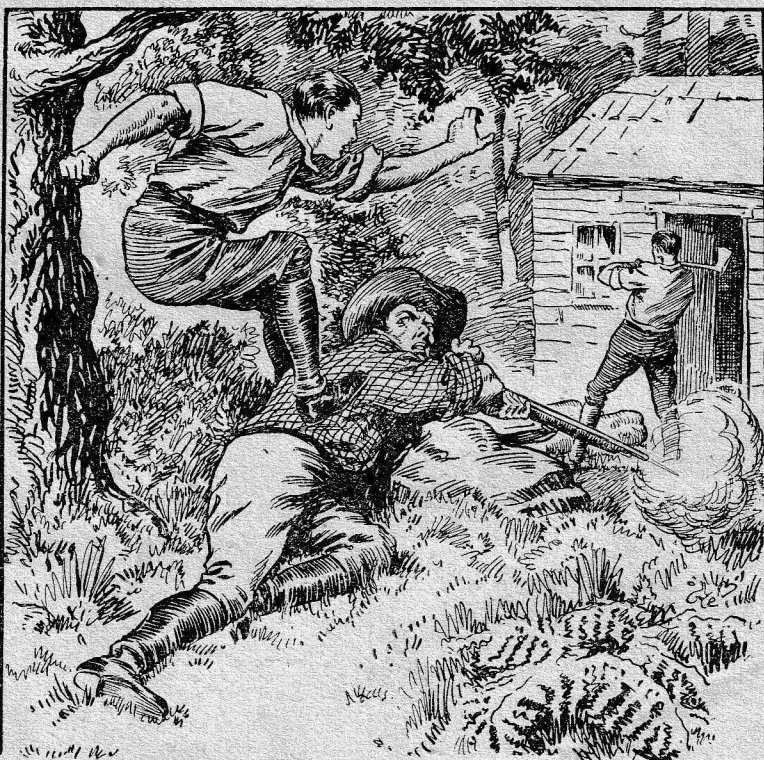
"Yes; a rancher on the prairie, and a miner coming back from the range. They were held up and robbed," muttered Beauclerc. "But it does not matter to us now."

"I think I can guess the name of one of them," said the remittance-man. "I was well aware that Poker Pete would find someone else to help him. He has had bad luck with the cards, and he is desperate. There is no doubt in my mind that one of them was Poker Pete. The other, probably, one of the Red Dog crowd."

Beauclerc nodded.

"It is not our business, father. We need not think about it."

"There is no proof in any case," said Mr. Beauclerc. "It is the sheriff's business, not ours. But"—he knitted his brows—"I shall



TO SAVE HIS FATHER! As Poker Pete was taking careful aim, Vere Beauclerc, with the spring of a tiger, leaped fairly upon him, his boots crashing into the rifleman's back. Crash! The rifle exploded in the air. (See Chapter 4.)

ride over to Thompson and see Poker Pete." He smiled grimly as the colour changed in his son's face. "You shall come with me, my boy, as you are staying away from school this morning."

"Oh, father!" murmured Beaulere, ashamed of the miserable pang that had pierced him as his father announced his intention.

The remittance-man moved towards the little shack. He came out in a few minutes with his coat and hat on, and led his horse from the shed.

Father and son mounted, in silence and rode towards the town.

Neither was in a mood for speech.

The remittance-man's face was darkly clouded.

Nearly—very nearly—he had been drawn into the desperate enterprise of the sport of Thompson, and, though he had shaken himself free, he had a knowledge of the guilty man that weighed upon his mind.

To betray Poker Pete was impossible, without betraying himself and bringing black shame upon his son.

But to keep silent as to what he knew while the Flour-Bag Gang pursued their lawless rascality was very near to sharing in their guilt.

One of them, at least, he knew; for he had not the slightest doubt that Poker Pete had resumed his rascally enterprise, with new companions.

The hoofs of the horses rattled at last upon the cobble-stones in the main street at Thompson.

While Frank Richards and Bob Lawless were sitting in class at Cedar Creek they little dreamed that their chum was dismounting at the door of the Red Dog Saloon in Thompson—and upon what mission!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Remittance-Man's Warning.

BOSS-EYE, the landlord of the Red Dog, stared at the remittance-man and his son as they entered.

Lascalles Beaulere was not unknown in that delectable resort, but the saloon-keeper was surprised to see his son there.

Two or three of the Red Dog habitués were lounging about the bar—Injun Dick, and Four Kings, and another; and they stared, too, at the handsome schoolboy who came in with the remittance-man.

"Morning, Colonel?" said Boss-Eye.

"Is Poker Pete about?" asked Mr. Beaulere.

Boss-Eye jerked a dirty thumb towards the saloon parlour.

"You'll find him to home!" he answered.

"Thank you!"

Mr. Beaulere went directly into the back room, followed by his son.

Poker Pete, the sport, was alone there.

There were the remains of a breakfast on the table, and Poker Pete, the slim, swarthy-complexioned sport, was smoking a black cheroot.

He was busy, with a rather curious occupation.

The sport was shuffling, cutting, and dealing a pack of cards, as if playing patience; but his patience game was of a peculiar variety.

He was practising bringing the cut pack together as it was before being cut—a valuable trick to a rascal who was not above assisting Fortune by "ways that are dark."

He raised his eyebrows at the sight of his visitors.

Mr. Beaulere closed the door leading into the bar, and turned to the gambler.

"I guess this is rather an unexpected pleasure, pard," drawled Poker Pete. "You've called to see me?"

"Yes."

"The last time I called to see you, you showed me the door!" remarked the sport, with a glitter in his black eyes.

"You can show me the door as soon as you please when I have said what I have come to say," answered Mr. Beaulere.

"Oh, you can run on," said Poker Pete, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I guess I don't bear malice. Are you looking for a poker game?"

"No."

"Chance to initiate the youngster—teach the young idea how to shoot, you know," said Poker Pete, with a grin.

"You need not speak of my son," said Lascalles Beaulere sternly. "I have brought

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him here as a witness, for reasons of my own. I know your game, Poker Pete. I have just heard of the road-agents who have started in the Valley?"

"Road-agents!"

"Yes; two masked men, who have robbed a miner and a rancher."

"I reckon I heard them chewing the rag about it in Gunten's store last night, now I think of it," drawled Poker Pete. "Has that brought you to Thompson this morning?"

"Yes."

"You've been robbed, too?" asked the sport, with a grin.

"I know the name of at least one of the rascals—or I think I do," answered the remittance-man.

"Honest?"

"I think so."

"Then I reckon you've come to the wrong address, pard. You want to call on the sheriff. The house with the piazza down the street, you know," said Poker Pete. "Mr. Henderson will be glad to see you, sure."

"Do you want me to call on the sheriff?"

"I guess it cuts no ice with me whether you do or not."

The remittance-man raised his hand. "You are one of the Flour-Bag Gang, Poker Pete—the leader, too. It was you who robbed the rancher—"

"You think so?" smiled the sport.

"I am sure of it."

"What's put the idea into your head, Beaulere? I'm quite interested, I guess," said the sport coolly. "Any reason to think so, or is it simply the good opinion you have of me?"

"I know it, and that is enough," said Mr. Beaulere. "I know it, because I know who stopped the post-wagon out of Cedar Camp a few weeks back."

"Yourself!" grinned Poker Pete.

"And you?"

"That's for you to prove, if you mosey along to the sheriff's. And you think I'm one of the Flour-Bag Gang, because of the Cedar Camp affair?"

"Yes."

"I may say the same to you."

"But it would not be true," said the remittance-man quietly. "What I say is the truth, and you know it. And it's got to stop, Poker Pete."

"Even admitting it, how are you going to stop it?" asked Poker Pete quietly, though his black eyes were glittering. "You can prove nothing against me to the sheriff; you can give yourself away, if you like. That's the most you can do."

"I've come here to warn you that you shall not play that game in the Thompson Valley," said Mr. Beaulere. "I am a man of my word, Poker Pete, and you know it. If there is another report of a robbery in this section, I shall take a hand in the game."

"And let all the section know that that lad's father attempted to rob the post-wagon!"

Vere Beaulere crimsoned.

"I shall take measures to stop you, and, if necessary, to bring you to justice," said Mr. Beaulere. "You can prove no more against me than I against you, if you come to that. I shall stop you by other means than by calling on the sheriff. If I allow you to keep on I shall be as guilty as you. And, I repeat, if there is another robbery in this section, I shall deal with you."

"And how?"

"That you will discover when the time comes; but you know I am a man of my word," said Mr. Beaulere. "For that matter, it would be easy enough for me to catch you in the act, as I know you are one of the gang."

The sport set his lips.

"You mean you'll watch me, and catch me napping, with a mask on my face and a six-shooter in my hand, and proof enough to string me on a tree?" he said.

"Perhaps! I've warned you!"

The sport's slim hand slid under his velvet jacket.

Mr. Beaulere's lip curled.

"You need not draw your revolver, Poker Pete," he said coldly. "You are not in the Black Hills now, or the Sierra Nevada. This is Canada, and there is a rope ready for you if you try that game."

Poker Pete's eyes glittered wickedly.

But he did not draw the weapon.

"You mean war?" he asked, after a pause.

"Unless you give up the road-agent game, certainly."

"I guess that means trouble for you, Beaulere. It's dangerous to have too long a tongue in the Wild West," said Poker Pete. "I reckon you had better look out for squalls, pard."

"I've said what I came to say," said the remittance-man. "I mean it, every word. That's enough."

He strode out of the saloon parlour, and Beaulere, who had not spoken a word during the curious interview, followed him.

Poker Pete glanced after him with a black brow.

Outside the Red Dog, the father and son mounted their horses, and rode out of Thompson.

"You do not doubt me now, Vere?" asked the remittance-man, with a slight smile, as they left the town behind.

"Never, father! But—but—" Beaulere's look was troubled. "That man means mischief, father."

"Let him!" said the remittance-man carelessly.

"He may—he may attempt—"

"I can take care of myself, my boy. Now you had better ride on to school—and keep your own counsel."

Father and son parted on the trail, and Beaulere trotted on towards Cedar Creek.

His mind was troubled.

The wicked glitter in Poker Pete's eyes haunted him, and he was oppressed by the thought that danger might be hanging over his father.

Morning lessons had just ended when he reached the school, and Frank Richards and Bob Lawless ran to meet him as he came in. "Here you are again!" exclaimed Frank.

"All right at home?"

"Yes," said Beaulere, with a smile.

"I guess Miss Meadows is rather mad with you," said Bob. "You'd better mosey in and make some first-class excuses, Cherub."

Beaulere nodded, and went into the lumber school.

He listened meekly to the lecture Miss Meadows gave him; fortunately his punishment stopped at that.

His chums rejoined him as he came out of the schoolhouse with a wrinkle on his brow. "Had it bad?" asked Bob sympathetically.

"Eh? No. Miss Meadows is a brick!" said Beaulere, with a faint smile.

"Then what are you looking so thundery about?"

"Was I?" muttered Beaulere.

"You were—and are! Is anything the matter?" asked Bob. "You can tell your pals if there's anything wrong, can't you?"

"There—there's nothing. Only—"

Beaulere paused, colouring.

"You're not anxious about your father?" asked Frank, in wonder. "Cherub, old chap, there's dozens of places as lonely as the shack, and there's no reason why road-agents should go that way—none at all!"

Beaulere thought of Poker Pete, and the threatening glitter in the sport's wicked eyes.

It haunted him, and he could not drive it from his mind. He knew that the reckless rascal was capable of almost any crime; and the remittance-man's threat barred him from the new course of rascality he had marked out for himself. What was he likely to do?

Beaulere thought of his father working on the lonely clearing, with the sombre woods round him; and it almost seemed to him that he could hear the ring of a rifle from the shadowy timber.

The thought made him shiver.

"Beau, old chap!" exclaimed Frank. "What the dickens! For goodness' sake tell us what the trouble is! You know we'll stand by you!"

"You think your father's in danger from the road-agents?" asked Bob Lawless, in wonder.

"Yes," breathed Beaulere. "But why? Why your father more than anybody else? Is there any reason?"

"Yes," Beaulere's voice was almost a whisper. "There's a reason."

"That alters the case, of course," said Bob soberly. "You are sure?"

"Yes."

"But how?"

"I'll tell you this much," said Beaulere. "My father knows—never mind how—but he knows that a man in Thompson is mixed up with the road-agents—that he's one of the Flour-Bag Gang. Mind, this is a secret!"

"I understand," said Frank. "We shan't

(Continued on page 16.)



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Week Ending July 28th, 1923.



By BOB CHERRY.

The Famous Five will proceed to Wharton Lodge for the summer vacation. There will be cricket and fishing, and boating, and bathing—in fact, every sort of pleasure under the sun. Colonel Wharton is an ideal host, and we shall come back to Greyfriars looking as brown as berries, and feeling in the pink of condition. Heigh-ho for the holidays!

We have it on good authority that Lord Mauleverer is going to a Home of Rest. The strenuous life at Greyfriars has worn his lordship out. He says he feels like a piece of masticated string. (A nobleman never says "chewed.") During the summer vac Mauly hopes to sleep twenty hours out of every twenty-four. The odd four hours will be spent in eating. What an ideal existence for a born-tired slacker!

Billy Bunter will betake his podgy person to Bunter Court. Sammy and Bessie are going there as well. Five hundred tons of foodstuffs have been laid in, in readiness for the arrival of this trio of gorgers! In spite of this precaution, I reckon they will eat their parents out of house and home.

Coker of the Fifth proposes to dash around the country on his motor-bike. If the intrepid Horace comes back to Greyfriars with all his limbs intact, it will be a miracle! While Billy Bunter is exceeding the feed-limit at Bunter Court, Coker will be exceeding the speed-limit elsewhere!

Vernon-Smith is going up to London, and he hopes to put in a good deal of time at Lord's, watching County cricket. A very pleasant and enjoyable recreation; and I hope Smithy will see some thrilling games, and tell us all about them when he gets back.

Loder of the Sixth is going to stay with one of his maiden aunts. I hope the good lady will point out to him the error of his ways, and send him back to Greyfriars a reformed character. But can the thingummybob change his skin, or the what's-a-name his spots?

Tubby of the Third proposes to make mud-pies at Margate. I did hear a rumour that Tubb was going to Bath. Well, he may be going to bath, but he hasn't done so yet, judging by his grimy appearance!

Tom Redwing is going on a long sea voyage, right round the coast. He will start and finish at Dover. It's a pleasure steamer that he's going on, and we all hope he will enjoy the trip, and meet with lots of merry adventures.

Mark Linley, loyal to Lancashire, will run up to that famous county to see his people, and to renew his acquaintance with some of the factory lads he was friendly with in the past. Marky's won't be a very exciting holiday, but I guarantee he will enjoy it up to the hilt.

CAN YOU WORK THIS OUT!

A spy was caught writing a cipher message. When approached he hastily put away his watch. The cipher he was writing necessitated a key. Nothing was found in the watch, yet it contained the key of the cipher. What could it have been?

The "Detective Magazine" is offering £250 in prizes for the solution of this little problem and eleven others equally fascinating. See the announcement in the number now on sale, price 7d.

IN YOUR EDITOR'S DEN!

By Billy Bunter.

My Dear Readers.—Let us bring out snowshoes, and our skates, and our set of furs. The Summer Vack is hear!

This English summer of ours is trooly the limit. Last summer, I beleeve, there was an average of six inches snowfall. Ponds and lakes were frozen over, and the weather kondition resembled those at the North Pole. And it's just the same this summer. The Clerk of the Weather has got a lot to answer for!

When you play cricket nowadays, it is impossibul to wear a thin silk cricket-shirt as in days of yore. You've got to wear a cupple of shirts, and a thick sweater, if you want to be warm, and keep your temperament up to normal.

However, most of us mannidge to skweeze plenty of enjoyment out of the Summer Vack, whatever the weather is like. If it's too cold for cricket, we organise a snow-fight, or a skating carnival.

You will all be very keen to here how me and my four fat subs spent the hollerday. And for our part, we are simply bersting to tell you of our eggspereinces.

If the old proverb, "Larf and grow fat," has any trooth in it, you all ought to be as fat as me by the time you've finished reading this number! My WEEKLY has long been famed for its cleverness and wit, and the smart way in which it is edited. I never make a blunder—or a "foe pa," as the French people say. You are at liberty to go right through this issew, and if you find one spelling mistake I shall be mightily serprized! Bob Cherry, who has been permitted to glanse through the proofs, says there are duzzens. But he's a jellus beest. He's only mad bekwase he can't throw up his connection with Wharton's paper, and get a job on my staff.

I will now leave you, dear readers, to split your sides with helpless larfter. You are bound to dubble up with merriement when you read your plump pal's latest masterpiece.

Yours sinseerly, YOUR EDITOR.
THE POPULAR.—No. 236.

Supplement I.]

A Special Number of Lines and Lickings Next Week!

IS THE VACATION TOO LONG?

This Question brought in shoals of replies from the St. Jim's fellows. A selection is printed below:

MONTY LOWTHER:

Too long, forsooth? Nay! The vacation is not nearly long enough. If I were the Head I should arrange for the summer vac. to start on April 1st, and to finish on September 30th. That would give us six whole months, and would be a vast improvement on six weeks! If the Head reads these remarks I hope he will take the hint.

FATTY WYNN:

The vacation is not too long; it's a jolly sight too short! Supposing a fellow wanted to run over to Australia, or Japan, for the vac? He wouldn't be able to do it. By the time he got out there the school would have assembled again. Six weeks is a ridiculously short holiday. Just when you're beginning to enjoy yourself you've got to pack your traps and toddle back to school. The summer vac. should last exactly as long as the cricket season; then everything in the garden would be lovely!

MR. RATCLIFF:

The summer holidays are much too long, and long holidays encourage loafing and laziness. If I had my own way there would be no holidays at all, except for the four Bank Holidays—Easter Monday, Whit Monday, August Bank Holiday, and Boxing Day. These should be ample. I have no patience with long holidays, and I mean to do my very utmost to get them shortened.

BAGGY TRIMBLE:

I find this queschn very hard to answer. Sometimes the hollerdays seem too long; sometimes they seem too short. If you are staying at a nice country mansion like Trimble Hall, living on the choicest fair, and day by day in every way getting fatter and fatter and fatter, the hollerdays seem pannelly short. If, on the other hand, you are staying with your maiden aunt, on a starvation diet, you long for the hollerdays to finish, so that you can get back to the school tuckshop. So the queschn in queschn has two sides to it, as you will reddily agree.

REGINALD TALBOT:

The summer vac. is neither too long nor too short. It is just right. If it were longer, we should become bored and discontented. As old Shakespeare says: "If all of life were playing holidays, to sport would be as tedious as to work." And if the vac. were shorter we should not be able to have our full fling. I consider that six weeks is just a nice spell, and it neither wants lengthening nor shortening.

BOYS! READ THIS!

If you like a yarn which is packed with real thrills, read "The Wire Devils," which commences in the "UNION JACK" (on sale Thursday, July 26th).

It is a story of American crookdom, and this is the theme: A band of up-to-date American criminals tap the railway telegraph wires in order to receive instructions in code from their chief, who sits like a spider in a web of wires, planning big things.

How the organisation is beaten all along the line by an independent operator, who steals their information and gets the prizes they have schemed for, makes a story after your own heart—the sort of yarn that will hold you spellbound from first word to last.

UNION JACK
LIBRARY Every Thursday 2d

OFF TO BUNTER-COURT!

By Dick Penfold.

Bunter wrote a letter to his pater, don't you know, Saying, "Sammy and myself to Bunter Court will go. We shall spend the summer vac. within the ancient halls, Enjoying many a pleasant snack, and chasing cricket-balls!"

It's a long way to Bunter Court, boys, It's a long way to go; We shall have such ripping sport, boys At the sweetest place I know. Good-bye, Greek and Latin! Farewell, toil and care! It's a long, long way to Bunter Court, boys, But my heart's right there!

Bunter bade good-bye to us in quite a pompous way; "Say, you chaps, I've packed my traps, and I am off to-day! Wish we could invite you, but our dad would surely hate us For inviting fellows of a lower social status!"

It's a long way to Bunter Court, boys, It's a long way to go; And the time is getting short, boys, We must hop it, don't you know. Good-bye, French and German! They make you tear your hair. It's a long, long way to Bunter Court, boys, But my heart's right there!

Bunter and his minor, on the good old station hack, Set off on their travels to enjoy the summer vac. See them wave their handkerchiefs, the plump and portly pair, And bawl their last good-byes to us upon the summer air.

It's a long way to Bunter Court, boys, It's a long way to go; Of good grub we shan't go short, boys, For the pater has heaps of "dough." Good-bye, Bull and Wharton! You're jealous, I declare! It's a long, long way to Bunter Court, boys, But my heart's right there!



The Staff On Holiday.

A Merry Sketch in Rhyme.
By TOM BROWN.

SCENE: The Masters' Room at Greyfriars. TIME: Breaking-up Day. All the masters are present.

MR. PROUT: I'm feeling very bright and gay,
And I could jump with jubilation!
The holidays commence to-day,
And Greyfriars starts its long Vacation.

MR. QUELCH: Where are you going, worthy Prout?
MR. PROUT: To Westward Ho, without a doubt.

MR. HACKER: What will you do at Westward Ho?
MR. PROUT: Play golf for weeks on end, you know!
MR. HACKER: I don't believe in golf a bit
Although it keeps one fine and fit.
I'll take my ease upon the sands,
And listen to the seaside bands.

MR. QUELCH: How will you spend the time, dear Twigg?
MR. TWIGG: On my allotment I shall dig!
Each morning, I shall dig potatoes,
Each evening, read such works as Plato's.
I always love such recreation,
It helps to brighten the Vacation.

THE HEAD:

MR. LASCELLES:
I have an Air Force friend named Harris,
He'll fly me right across to Paris.
That's better far than digging earth,
For Paris is a place of mirth.
I'm certain, on my summer holiday,
That every day will prove a jolly day!

MR. BUNTER:
You're lucky people, every one:
For me, there won't be any fun.
I've got to go to Bunter Court,
A place where there is little sport.
The antics of my Cousin Billy
Are pretty sure to send me silly.
And Sammy, too, will be a source
Of grave anxiety, of course.
I've got to keep the pair in order,
And be a sort of prison warder.
I envy all my colleagues here:
You'll have a time of mirth and cheer.
The Vac, for you, will be just splendid,
But I'll be thankful when it's ended!
Gentlemen! We must now depart.
The time is ripe for us to start.
Six taxi-cabs are waiting for us,
And I can hear the hearty chorus
Of schoolboys, full of jubilation,
Who are proceeding to the station.
The summer break will now commence;
We'll reassemble six weeks' hence!

CURTAIN.

[Supplement II.]



Holiday Cricket!

BY TUBBY MUFFIN.

When I went home for the Summer Vack this year, there happened to be a cricket week in progress at our ancestral manshun.

My pater was the skipper of our team, and our opponents were the Rolling Stones, a team of gentry that was tooring the country.

"Reginald," said my pater, "I have inklooded you in the team, and I hope you will bring luster upon the good name of our noble fambly."

"Trussed me, pater!" I said cheerfully. "Can I go in first?"

"Yes. You will open our innings with Shrubsole, the under gardener."

I waddled out to the wickets, looking very pompuss and important. Shrubsole walked respectfully at my side. He was a big, berly fellow, and the wrinkles of his brawny arms—or should it be mussels?—stood out like iron bands.

"Will you bat first?" I said to him.

"Very good, Master Reginald," he

replied, tuching his fourlock with grate respect.

Shrubsole was a jolly good batsman. He hit up sixteen runs in the first over. And now it was my turn to astonish the natives.

A long, leen scarecrow of a fellow was bowling, and he grinned a dyabollicle grin as he started his run.

I nervusly fingered the handle of my bat, and waited for the ball to come down. When it did come, it shot along the ground with the velosity of a masheen-gun bullet.

My bat swept through the air, and I eggpected to see the ball go sailing on to the ancestral roof. But it did nothing of the sort. It nocked my middle stump clean out of the ground, and the wicket-keeper gave a yell as the stump hit him on the nose.

I was out—bowled by the first ball!

How I crawled back to the pavillion I don't know. Everybuddy was larfing at me, and I blushed to the roots of my hare.

I hoped that a report of the match wouldn't find its way into the local paper. But my hopes were dashed. There was a full report of the game in the next edition, and my dux-egg looked very conspicuous, bekwawse of the big scores that the other batsmen made.

"MR. MUFFIN'S, XI.

Shrubsole, not out	104
R. Muffin, b Shooter	0
Perkins, not out	100
Extras	6

Total (for 1 wkt.) 210
Innings declared closed."

There was another match shortly after this one, but my pater didn't ask me to turn out, and I shouldn't have done so if he had. I'm fed-up with country house cricket. I can nock up sentaries galore at Rookwood, but when I play among strangers I always make an ass of myself.

"R. Muffin, b Shooter

0"
Those words haunt me in my dreams, and in my waking hours. I'm sure I shall never here the end of it at Rookwood. The fellows chip me to death about it. It's no use my pointing out to them that the very best batsmen come out for a duck sometimes. Joe Beckett, Steve Bloomer, and other famus cricketers have often got dux-eggs. But it's no use eggspaining this to Jimmy Silver & Co.

TRUBBLE IN THE FAMBLY!

BY SAMMY BUNTER.

I had been staying at Bunter Court, and with my customary jennerosity I desided to tip the members of the domestik staff. They had waited on me hand and foot, and derved a little recognition.

First of all I rang the bell for Billington, the butler. He came gliding into the drawing-room in his stelhly, catlike manner.

"Billington," I said, handing him the princely sum of tuppence, "that's for services rendered."

He looked at the tuppence, and he looked at me; and he tried to speak, but he couldn't. Unable to find words to express his gratitude, I thought. He gave a queer sort of gulp, and staggered out of the room.

"Tell the cook that Master Samuel wishes to speak to her!" I called after him.

The cook appeared a few minnits later.

"Martha," I said, "I want to thank you for the lovely dishes you have prepared during the vack. Will you axcept this hansom tip?"

And I handed her the sum of three-halfpence. Like Billington, she was too flabbergasted to speak. She clutched the three halfpennies and tottered away.

After that I sent for all the maids, and tipped them a halfpenny each. Not one of them thanked me. I imagined they were too overwhelmed with joy at reseeing a tip.

About an hour later my pater came rushing into the room.

"Samuel!" he shouted. "What have you done?"

"Eh?"

"It appears that you have insulted the members of my household by giving them mizzerable gratuities. They are most indignant about it—in fact, they have all given notiss!"

"Grate Scott!"

"You will give Billington at leest half-a-crown, and the others a shilling each!" said my pater. "I have made you an ample allowance, so you cannot plead poverty."

You could have nocked me down with a fether. But I had to pay up, though it was jolly hard to look plezzant.

THE EDITOR OF THE "WEEKLY" ENTERTAINS!



At the breaking-up concert organised by the Chums of the Remove Billy Bunter made a great hit with his ventriloquist performance. Later Peter Todd made another GREAT HIT at Bunter for "Poking fun at him through the medium of his doll."

Supplement III.]

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Tell All Your Pals That Next Week's Supplement is the **GOODS!**



"Saved by His Son!"

(Continued from page 12.)



talk, old fellow, and we sha'n't ask any questions. Only your father's found out one of the rotters."

"That's it!"

"He should go straight to the sheriff," said Bob.

"He can't! There's reasons—he's got no proof, for one thing. He knows it, but there's no evidence."

"How can he know it if there's no evidence?"

"He does know it. The man admitted it, if you come to that," said Beaulere. "I was there, with my father, and heard him. And—Poker Pete!"

"Oh, it's that rotter!"

"Yes. Poker Pete dare not go on the trails again, because my father knows—and because my father will not let him keep on—without interfering, and—"

His voice died away.

The chums' faces were very serious now. "You don't think Poker Pete could—could plan harm to your father, to—to keep him quiet?" muttered Frank, in a scared voice.

"Oh!"

"That's why I want to be at home," muttered Beaulere. "There may be nothing in it—the rascal mayn't dare. But, think how easy it would be—a rifle-shot from the woods!" He shuddered. "It's haunted me. There would be no proof, and the Red Dog would swear, if necessary, that Poker Pete was not there when it happened. It would be safe for him—"

"I believe he's villain enough," said Bob. "There's queer tales told about Poker Pete, and why he left California. Cherub, old man, you're going right home, and we're coming with you. Miss Meadows will let us off to see you safe home, and if she doesn't, we'll take French leave."

"But, Bob—"

"Leave it to me, old chap!"

Bob ran back to the lumber schoolhouse.

He returned in a few minutes with a cherry smile on his face.

"All O K!" he said. "Miss Meadows has given us leave. Let's get off, and ride like thunder for the shack. And—and I advise you to get your father to let you stay at home a few days—till—"

"I was thinking of that," said Beaulere.

"But it's to-day, or to-night, that I'm anxious about. Now that Poker Pete knows my father's intention, he won't let the grass grow under his feet, if he means mischief. Even already—"

"Don't think of that. Let's get off!"

In a few minutes the chums were riding up the trail through the woods.

They dashed along at a good speed in the pale winter sunshine.

As they turned into the branch trail that led to the lonely shack, Vere Beaulere spoke.

"We can't go on to the shack! I—I can't tell my father we've come to—guard him. He would send me back to school."

"I was thinking about that," said Bob.

"But there's no need to go to the shack; we can keep watch from the timber till dark. Then we'll come in with you to supper."

Beaulere nodded.

The schoolboys rode on, and halted at last a good distance from the shack.

The horses were tethered in a thicket, and they proceeded on foot.

The shack came in sight at last. A thin column of smoke rose from the chimney, showing that the remittance-man was at home. The door was open, and the gleam of the ruddy fire could be seen within.

As they looked from the cover of the timber they saw the figure of the remittance-man in the shack, for a moment, crossing before the fire.

Vere Beaulere drew a deep breath.

His father was safe so far at least; and all about the shack was so calm and peaceful that he was a little ashamed of his fears.

"All serene, Cherub," murmured Bob.

"I—I may have been alarmed for nothing," muttered Beaulere. "But—but I—"

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"But it's better to be on the safe side in dealing with a pesky coyote like Poker Pete," said Bob shrewdly. "If your poppa knew we were here, he'd most likely think us three young jays, and tell us to go back to school. But I guess we're going to watch a bit."

Bob Lawless scanned the timber, and then swung himself into the branches of a huge tree on the edge of the clearing. His chums followed him. From the thick branches it was easy to keep watch upon all approaches to the clearing, and to give the alarm if danger came.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Baffled!

THE sun was sinking towards the distant Pacific, and shadows were lengthening over the clearing. In the timber the dusk was deepening into darkness.

From the shack there came the steady sound of the woodman's axe.

The remittance-man was at work.

Little dreaming that his son was so near, Lascelles Beaulere worked on steadily as the shadows began to lengthen.

For two hours the chums had been watching in the thick branches of the tree, and nothing had stirred in the wood save the squirrels.

But suddenly Bob Lawless, who was squeezed comfortably in a fork of the tree, made a movement, and held up his hand.

His chums had heard a slight noise in the thickets below, but, thinking of the squirrels, they had hardly heeded it.

But Bob's ears were keener.

Beaulere's eyes met his questioningly.

"Silence!" whispered Bob. "And watch!" There was a faint rustle below in the dark spruce, and the chums waited and watched with beating hearts.

They knew now that somebody was approaching the clearing, and that he came not by the open trail, but creeping cautiously through the timber.

That was enough to tell them that the unseen man came as an enemy.

Their vigil had not been in vain, after all. The rustle was repeated.

Below in the dusk of the thickets they caught sight of a Stetson hat that moved slowly.

From the shack the ringing of the axe on the logs still came clearly.

The remittance-man, steadily at work, offered an easy and unsuspecting target; and Beaulere felt a chill at his heart as he thought of the unsuspected peril that was drawing near his father.

For there was no doubt now.

The creeping figure in the thickets stopped on the edge of the clearing, peering towards the shack from behind the trunk of the tree in the branches of which the three schoolboys watched.

As he peered he unsling the rifle that was hanging over his shoulder.

His head was bent as he examined it.

The schoolboys' hearts were thumping now. The man below pushed back the broad hat from his brow, and for an instant they saw the swarthy features of Poker Pete.

The sport of Thompson dropped on his knees, and, holding the rifle before him, crawled forward closer to the clearing, till only a thin screen of osiers covered him.

There, stretched on the ground, he placed the butt of his rifle to his shoulder, his black eyes gleaming along the barrel.

Vere Beaulere's eyes were glittering.

He slid silently down the trunk, and reached the ground directly behind the man, who was lying with the rifle at his shoulder.

Poker Pete was only a few yards from the big tree, as oblivious of the presence of the schoolboys as Mr. Beaulere was of him.

He was taking a slow and deadly aim when Vere Beaulere, with the spring of a tiger, was upon him.

The schoolboy leaped fairly upon the back of the outstretched rifleman, and his boots crashed down upon Poker Pete's back, crushing him to the ground.

There was a sudden, fearful yell from the sport.

Crack!

The rifle exploded as he ceased to grasp it, the bullet burying itself in the ground.

He twisted round like a cat upon his assailant, and as he turned up his startled and furious face both Beaulere's fists were dashed savagely into it with all his strength in the blows.

Poker Pete gasped, and rolled in the herbage.

A second more, and Frank Richards and Bob Lawless were upon him—they had been close behind their chum.

Poker Pete's struggle was brief.

The three schoolboys pinned him down with savage force.

"What is this?" exclaimed Mr. Beaulere as he rushed up.

But the sight of Poker Pete and the smoking rifle lying in the herbage was sufficient answer.

A bitter smile came over his face.

"Father," panted Beaulere, "he came to—to—"

"I understand! Let him get up!"

The sport struggled to his feet.

His swarthy face was bruised, and he was panting for breath.

Mr. Beaulere picked up the rifle.

"You meant this for me, Poker Pete!" he said. "You know what you deserve!"

Poker Pete turned deadly pale.

"Father!" murmured Beaulere.

The remittance-man smiled grimly.

"I do not mean to shoot the rascal, Vere," he said. "The sheriff can deal with him. Or stay—" The remittance-man paused. "You know what this means for you, Poker Pete—five years at least."

"Do your worst!" muttered the sport.

"I'm not asking anything at your hands!"

"I'll give you a chance," said the remittance-man quietly. "Go back where you came from, and leave Canada for ever, and you can go free. To-morrow morning I lay this matter before the sheriff, and if you are then in the Thompson Valley you will be taken. You know the result. Make the most of the few hours I give you."

The ruffian drew a quick breath.

"You mean that?" he muttered.

"I mean it. Go!"

Without another word the baffled rascal turned, and disappeared into the timber. The schoolboys were silent, though Bob Lawless' face showed his disapproval. But it was not only mercy that moved Mr. Beaulere, as Vere knew. It was better for Poker Pete to go.

"And how did you come here?" asked Mr. Beaulere, when the ruffian's footsteps had died away.

"The Cherub was anxious about you on that jay's account, and we came along to keep an eye open," said Bob, with a grin.

"You have saved my life," said the remittance-man. "I don't know that it was worth it; but you have done it. I thank you, my boys." He swung Poker Pete's rifle in the air, and it disappeared with a splash into the creek. "Come! Your friends must stay to supper, Vere."

The chums followed him into the shack. It was a cheery party that gathered there in the ruddy glow of the fire. Far in the timber, with malice and fear in his heart, Poker Pete was tramping away in the darkness.

THE END.

(Further adventures of *The Chums of Cedar Creek School* in next week's extra-bumper issue.)

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More Adventures of the Chums of the Lumber School Next Week!

THE SHADOW OF THE PAST!

Just as Vernon-Smith has settled down to his new life, a shadow from the past appears to mar his career. The Bounder has suffered many times for those misdeeds of terms ago, he has learned that the way of the transgressor is hard, but now he has friends to give him the helping hand; before it was a lone-hand fight!

THE BOUNDER AGAIN!



An Extra-Special, Long,
Complete Tale of Harry
Wharton & Co., of
Greyfriars.

By
FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Jerry Hawke's Tip!

"HERE he is!"
"Here's Smithy!"
Vernon-Smith of the Remove—the Bounder of Greyfriars, as he called—looked round him quickly. He had just come in from the cricket-field, and was still in his flannels, with his bat under his arm. His face was ruddy, and wore a cheery smile as he came into the School House. The smile died away as he looked round at the crowd of Remove fellows there, who were evidently waiting for him.

"Yes, here I am," he said quietly. "What's the matter?"

Some of the juniors laughed. All of them were looking at the Bounder very curiously. It was clear that something unusual was "on," but no one seemed to be in a hurry to explain.

"Oh, I say, Smithy," said Billy Bunter, with his irritating chuckle, "it's really too thick, you know!"

"Too risky, at any rate," said Bolsover major. "You must be an awful ass, Smithy."

"Suppose Quelch saw it?" said Skinner. "Or the Head!" remarked Snoop.

And then there was a sort of chorus: "Oh, crumbs! What would the Head say?"

Vernon-Smith looked from one to another, the amazement in his face giving place to angry annoyance.

"I haven't the faintest idea what you're diving at!" he exclaimed sharply. "What are you talking about?"

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter.

"You ass, Smithy!"

"You dufer!"

Vernon-Smith turned to Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove, who was talking to Eob Cherry in the doorway.

"Do you know what these silly asses are babbling about, Wharton?" he asked.

Wharton jerked his thumb towards the letter-rack in the passage.

"There's a postcard for you there," he said. "Bunter has been reading it. If what he says is true, the sooner you get it out of sight, the better."

Vernon-Smith looked puzzled.

"I don't see—" he began.

"You'll see when you see the card!" chuckled Bunter. "You must be an awful ass, Smithy. Anybody might see it."

Vernon-Smith turned on him angrily. "So you've been spying into my correspondence!" he exclaimed, making a threatening movement towards the fat junior.

Billy Bunter backed away promptly.

"Ahem! I—I saw it by accident," he explained. "I was looking for a letter—you see, I was expecting a postal-order, and and—"

"And he thought he'd find it in your postcard, Smithy," said Johnny Bull, with a grin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Vernon-Smith frowned, and moved towards the letter-rack. Some of the juniors followed him, and all of them looked after him curiously. There were three or four letters and a card in the rack. The letter was addressed to "Mister Vernon-Smith, Eskwire," in a large and sprawling hand. Vernon-Smith started as he saw the writing. Evidently he was acquainted with it. He took down the postcard hastily.

"Get it out of sight," advised Skinner, "and you'd better warn your giddy correspondent to put it inside an envelope next time."

"It would be safer!" grinned Snoop. "Vernon-Smith did not heed them. He was reading the postcard. His brow grew as black as thunder as he read it. It was a sufficiently startling message to be written openly on a postcard addressed to a junior schoolboy at Greyfriars. For it ran:

"Try Son of Mine for the Lantham Plate. Five to one against—JERRY HAWKE."

All eyes were upon the Bounder. He stood for some moments as if rooted to the floor, his brow growing blacker and blacker. Then he crumpled the card savagely in his hand. There was a chuckle from the spectators.

Vernon-Smith strode back to where Harry Wharton was standing. The captain of the Remove met him with a cold look.

"You know what's on this postcard?" said Vernon-Smith, in a low voice that shook with suppressed rage.

"I know what I just heard Bunter say," replied Wharton coldly. "It's a tip from a bookmaker, according to Bunter."

"That's it!"

Wharton's face set grimly.

"You gave us your word that you'd done with that kind of thing," he said. "I must say that it's rotten of you, Smithy—as well as idiotic. You've been taking us in!"

"He didn't take me in!" chuckled Billy Bunter. "I knew all along that he was humbugging. I've said so, too— Yar-ooh!"

Vernon-Smith swung round his arm, and the back of his hand came across Billy Bunter's mouth, effectually interrupting his remarks. The Owl of the Remove staggered back and collapsed against the wall, yelling.

Vernon-Smith looked round him with a flashing eye.

"Does anybody want to repeat Bunter's remarks?" he demanded. "I'm willing to give him the same, if he does!"

There was no reply. The Bounder was not a pleasant fellow to deal with when his temper was up. And it was plainly up now. He looked savagely from face to face, as if in search of a victim; but as the juniors did not speak, he turned back to Harry Wharton again.

"You say I've taken you in, Wharton?"

"Well, it looks like it."

"It certainly looks it," said Bob Cherry.

"I suppose you won't say that message has been sent to you for a joke?"

"Ow! Ow! Ow!" came from Bunter.

Vernon-Smith looked savagely at the chums of the Remove. He crumpled the offending postcard harder in his hand. It was not so very long since the Bounder had been in the habit of receiving such communications from gentlemen of the sporting fraternity; but at that time he had at least been cautious about it. He had never taken the risk of his dealings with the book-makers coming to the knowledge of the school authorities. Many of the juniors knew, or suspected, the Bounder's peculiar little ways, but he had been very careful to cover up his tracks. And then had come the time when the Bounder seemed to see the error of his ways; when he had said a final farewell to his reckless way of life. More than one of his old companions in rascality had been exasperated by his reformation; but Harry Wharton and Co. had received him with open arms, as it were. They had taken him on trust. Vernon-Smith was now on the best of terms with the Co. He was a member of the Form eleven, and Harry Wharton firmly believed that he was as straight as a die. That made the shock to him more painful now.

It was not pleasant to him to think that the Bounder had been tricking him.

"I suppose it's no good my saying anything, then?" said the Bounder between his teeth.

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't see that there's anything for you to say," he replied. "If the rascal who wrote that postcard is sending you tips for races now, it looks to me as if you've been fooling us all along. It's no business of mine; you can go your own way until you get sacked from the school—that's what it will come to."

"That's enough!" said the Bounder harshly. "I could explain this quite easily; but if that's the amount of faith you have in my word, it's no use my saying anything."

"If you can explain it—" began Wharton.

"I don't choose to now."

"Yow—ow!" came from Bunter. "You—you beastly gambling rotter, I've a jolly good mind to tell Quelch! Hands off, you rotter! Yah! Oh!"

The Bounder's suppressed rage broke out into flame. He seized the fat junior by the collar, swung him round, and kicked him furiously. His boot came upon Billy Bunter's fat person with what a novelist would describe as a sickening thud.

"Ow! Ow! Help!" roared Bunter.

"Thud! Thud! Thud!"

"You spying cad!" said Vernon-Smith between his teeth. "That'll teach you to let my correspondence alone!" Kick! Kick! "Take that! And that! And that!" Kick! Kick! Kick!

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" bellowed Bunter. "Help! Yaroo! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cave!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Chuck it, Smithy! Here comes Quelch!"

But it was too late. Bunter's roaring had brought Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, to the spot. The Form-master came striding along the passage, with an angry frown upon his brow.

Vernon-Smith released the Owl of the Remove, who staggered against the wall, yelling.

"Ow! Ow! Ow! Yow!"

"Vernon-Smith, what are you treating Bunter in this brutal manner for?" rapped out Mr. Quelch.

"He's been reading my letters!" said Vernon-Smith sullenly. "He's always spying into fellows' letters!"

"Tain't a letter!" roared Bunter. "Tain't a letter! It's a postcard; and I saw it by accident! It's a postcard from a rotten bookmaker! Wow-ow! Don't stamp on my foot like that, Bob Cherry, you beast!"

"Cherry! Leave Bunter alone at once."

"Ahem! Ye-es, sir."

Mr. Quelch fixed his eyes upon Bunter.

"Now, Bunter, what did you say? That Vernon-Smith has received a postcard from a bookmaker?"

"Yow-ow! I—I—I—" stammered Bunter. The juniors were all giving him deadly looks, and Bunter realised that if he "sneaked" about the Bounder there would be severe punishment for him afterwards. "I—I—I—you see, sir—I meant—ahem—"

"Is that the postcard in your hand, Vernon-Smith?" said Mr. Quelch, turning away from the stammering Owl of the Remove.

"Yes," said the Bounder.

"Show it to me."

The Bounder hesitated. There was a breathless hush among the juniors. They could imagine the effect the sight of that communication would have upon their Form-master. A red rag to a bull would be nothing to it.

"Do you hear me, Smith?"

The Bounder reluctantly held out the crumpled card. Mr. Quelch took it, smoothed it out, and looked at it. His brow grew like thunder. The juniors waited with beating hearts for the storm to break.

But it did not burst. Mr. Quelch looked at Vernon-Smith with steady eyes.

"Follow me to my study," he said quietly.

"Very well, sir."

And the door of the Form-master's study closed behind Mr. Quelch and the Bounder.

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THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Benefit of the Doubt.

THE Bounder followed his Form-master quietly into the study, and the door was shut. Mr. Quelch stood with one hand on his table, in the other the postcard. His stern eyes were fixed upon the junior before him.

"You understand that this is a very serious matter, Vernon-Smith?" he said icily.

"Yes, sir."

"The name signed on this postcard is that of a very disreputable character."

"A thorough rascal, sir," said the Bounder quietly. "He has been in prison, and has lately been released."

"And with such a man you, a Greyfriars boy, are in communication?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Quelch held up the postcard.

"Then what does this mean?"

"It does not mean what you suppose, sir. I can explain."

Mr. Quelch sat down. The cool steadiness of the Bounder's voice and look seemed to make an impression upon him.

"I am willing to hear what you have to say, Vernon-Smith. Unless you can explain in the most satisfactory manner, I need not tell you that it is my duty to place the matter before the Head. Your expulsion from the school will immediately follow. On a previous occasion, this kind of conduct was brought home to you, and the Head pardoned you upon your solemn promise to reform. That promise, I believed, had been kept. If it has been broken, you know what to expect."

Vernon-Smith winced.

"Now explain this—if you can!" added the Form-master. "What communication have you had with this man Hawke to receive this reply?"

"None, sir."

"Do you mean to say that the man has written to you without any communication from you to cause him to do so?"

"I do, sir."

There was a pause.

"That is a very extraordinary statement to make, Smith," said Mr. Quelch at last.

"I know it, sir. But consider—if I had taken up that kind of thing again, do you think I should be fool enough to let the man send me postcards here like that? Going might read any postcard when he takes it in from the postman. Any fellow might see it in the rack—any master or prefect. If I wanted Jerry Hawke to send me a tip, there are a dozen safe ways of doing it—a letter, or I could meet him if I liked. That postcard coming here openly is proof enough that I didn't want it to come."

"Certainly it was most incautious. But why should the man send you this communication against your will?"

"I will tell you, sir. He has been in prison, as I said. He has come out penniless. He has been warned off the course, and cannot practise as a bookmaker now, excepting by hanging about in public-house and that kind of thing. He is hard up, and he thought he could get money out of me."

"You mean that you had dealings with him in the past?"

"I confessed that to the Head, sir."

"Before your promise to the Head?"

The Bounder winced again.

"Yes, sir."

"And now—" said Mr. Quelch.

"Now he has written to me twice, asking me for money. I have taken no notice of his letters. I put them in the fire as soon as I received them. He threatened to make trouble for me if I did not meet him again—to give him money of course. This is his way of making trouble. He has sent this postcard on purpose, not because I have any dealings with him, but because I refuse to have any."

Mr. Quelch scanned the junior's face while he was speaking. The face was very earnest, and there was a ring of truth in the Bounder's tones. The Remove-master's brow cleared.

"You know, sir, all correspondence is subject to inspection by the Head. That is the rule here, though Dr. Locke doesn't often enforce it. The rotter wanted this to be seen, that's why he put it on a postcard. As it happens, it wouldn't have been noticed if Bunter had not been spying."

"I believe you, Vernon-Smith," said the Form-master, after quite a long pause.

"You say you have destroyed the man's letters?"

"Immediately I had them, sir."

"That is unfortunate. What he is attempting is blackmail, and with the letters it would have been possible to place the matter in the hands of the police. If you should receive another letter from him, Smith, bring it to me at once, and a charge shall be laid against him without loss of time."

"Very well, sir!"

"I will keep this postcard," said Mr. Quelch, placing it in his desk. "I have said that I believe you, Vernon-Smith. But in view of your previous conduct you cannot be too careful. If you have not erred since you made your promise to the Head, you have nothing to fear. Anything the man may say against you previous to that date will not have the slightest effect. If he makes another attempt to blackmail you, he shall be dealt with as severely as the law allows. You may go!"

"Thank you, sir!"

The Bounder left the study. As he passed through the doorway he hesitated and paused. The Form-master looked at him sharply.

"Have you anything more to say, Smith?"

"No, sir," said the Bounder hastily.

He quitted the study, and closed the door. But his face did not clear as he went down the passage. There was deep trouble in his look as he strode out into the close.

"I suppose it's all up with you?" asked Bob Cherry.

The Bounder's lip curled.

"It may surprise you to learn that it isn't," he replied.

"Not sacked!" exclaimed Frank Nugent.

"No!"

"Good luck! Congrats!" said Skinner. "But how on earth did you dodge it? You must have been awfully deep to pull the wool over Quelch's eyes, after what he'd seen."

"The deepfulness must have been terrific!" murmured Hurrey Jamset Ram Singh.

The Bounder sneered.

"Sorry to disappoint you," he said. "But I'm not sacked—I'm not even in disgrace."

"But—but why not?" asked Harry Wharton.

"I've explained to Mr. Quelch."

And the Bounder turned on his heel and walked away, leaving the Removites staring after him in astonishment.

"Well," ejaculated Bulstrode, "this beats the band! How on earth could he explain to Quelch? There wasn't anything to explain; that postcard spoke for itself."

"It's his luck," said Tom Brown.

"Smithy always falls on his feet."

"Blessed if I can understand it!" said Nugent.

Nobody could quite understand it. But the fact was clear enough. Vernon-Smith had not been sacked; and he was not even in disgrace. And the juniors remained in a state of perplexity, for the Bounder's obstinate pride would not permit him to vouchsafe any explanation to them.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Shadow of the Past.

HARRY WHARTON and Frank Nugent were at tea in Study No. 1 in the Remove passage.

The handsome face of the captain of the Remove was not so cheery as usual. He seemed to be deep in thought, and the two juniors had been silent for some time. Nugent, with a slightly amused glance at his chum, broke the silence at last.

"Penny for 'em!"

"Eh? What?"

"Penny for 'em! Though I don't think they're worth it, as I can guess what you're thinking about," said Nugent, laughing.

"It's the Bounder," said Harry, and he did not smile.

"I thought so. It was rather a shock to me," said Nugent. "I really thought he meant business this time. It certainly looked like it. Never saw a chap who seemed so much in earnest as he did when he was handling Hazel, and trying to persuade him to chuck up that silly game. And now—"

"He was always jolly deep," said Harry. "I feel an ass for letting him take me in. We knew that he went on in the old way after the time he was up before the Head—he broke his promise to the Head. But

that was long ago. Since he gave us his word that it was all over, we've made a chum of him, and had faith in him. Now it seems that he's been pulling our leg all along. There seems to be no end to his humbug. All this term he's been thoroughly decent, so far as I knew. And now it comes out—

Tap!

"Come in!" called out Nugent.

The study door opened, and Vernon-Smith came in. The chums of the Remove met him with grim looks, and the Bounder smiled in a sneering way as he saw it. Vernon-Smith seemed to be quite the old Bounder again now.

"Well?" said Harry shortly.

"You were talking about me, I suppose?" said Vernon-Smith.

"Yes."

"Condemning me in my absence, without giving me a chance to speak for myself?" said the Bounder, with a sneer.

"You've had plenty of chances to speak for yourself, if you want to," said Wharton, his cheeks flushing. "But if you've been taking us in, the less said the better. You gave us your word—"

"Or you wouldn't have admitted me to the honour and glory of your esteemed friendship?" said Vernon-Smith, in the same tone.

"I don't set up as a model," said Harry, biting his lip. "But that kind of thing's blackguardly, and you know it, and I don't want to have anything to do with a fellow who goes in for it. And it must come out sooner or later, and you'll be expelled, and that's a disgrace for the Remove, and for the whole school for that matter."

"I suppose it's natural you should take it like that," said Vernon-Smith, after a pause; "but you happen to be wrong this time. I haven't broken the word I gave you. Jerry Hawke wrote this postcard to me, to do exactly what it has done—to get me into trouble."

"And why?"

"Because I won't have anything to do with him."

"Oh!" said Wharton and Nugent together. That view of the case had not occurred to them before. They sat looking at the Bounder in uncomfortable silence, and he went on:

"If you think I'm a humbug, you might give me credit for a little common sense. When I used to have tips from bookies, I didn't have them sent here on postcards that anyone might read."

"Well, I thought it was awfully reckless," said Wharton.

"Do you believe what I say?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so. I never thought of that," said Harry slowly. "I know Loder of the Sixth was down on you when you chucked up the old game. I dare say this rotter must feel the same way. I suppose he's been trying to get money out of you?"

"Exactly."

Wharton looked at him steadily.

"He can be sent to prison for that," he said. "If it's all above-board, Smithy, you needn't be afraid of being down on him."

"It's all above-board, as far as you fellows are concerned," said the Bounder quietly; "but not so far as the Head is concerned. Jerry Hawke has a hold over me, and since he came out of prison he's been using it. You remember the time when I was bowled out, and the Head pardoned me, partly owing to my father's influence? I promised him that nothing of the kind should occur again. I did that simply to get out of a hole; I had no intention whatever of keeping to it. And I didn't keep to it. If I had, this fellow would most likely have rounded on me then. I went on in the same old way for a long time, till—well, till the time came when I saw that I was playing the giddy goat, and I chucked it for good. That was the end of last term. I gave you fellows my word that it was all over—and it was."

"And you've kept to that?"

"I have kept to it. But that was some time after my promise to the Head. And Jerry Hawke was in prison then, for some swindle or other, but now he's come out. He's written to me for money."

"And it's in his power to tell the Head that you had dealings with him after the date of your promise to Dr. Locke?" said Wharton slowly. "Is that it?"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.



TRICKED BY A RASCAL! Harry Wharton handed him the letter, and Vernon-Smith opened it, and read it over eagerly. Then a bitter exclamation broke from his lips. "Fooled!" he cried. "This is not the letter. It is a copy!" (See Chapter 6)

"I wouldn't care what he might say," he replied; "but he's got proof—proof in my writing."

"My hat!"

"You were ass enough to let him have anything of yours in writing?" exclaimed Nugent.

"No. It's a letter of mine to Cobb, at the Cross Keys, that he's got hold of," said the Bounder moodily. "At least, he says he has. Cobb is straight enough in his way; he wouldn't go back on a fellow. But this rotter has managed to get hold of the paper somehow—so he says. If the Head saw it, he would know that I broke my promise to him. The date would be enough for that."

"And the man's going to give you away?"

"So he says. I've had two letters from him, asking for money. Only—only he mentioned my letter to Cobb in them, you see, so I couldn't use them against him without giving myself away, so I burnt them. Now he's sent me this postcard, to get me into a row. I've explained it away—I've told Quelchly the truth about that. But if he saw that old letter, all the fat would be in the fire again. He believes what I've told him about that tip on the postcard; but if he had proof that I went back on my promise to the Head, of course he wouldn't believe it any longer. And he'll have proof, unless I can get the letter away from Hawke."

"By Jove! You are in a hole!" he said.

"If I could make the Head believe that I'd been going straight all this term, it would be all right; but I couldn't. That postcard would knock it on the head, taken along with the letter to Cobb, which Hawke can produce whenever he wants to—at least, he says so. Hawke wants me to meet him outside the school, and he will show me the letter to prove what he says. If he's really got it—and I'm pretty sure he has—the game's up with me, unless I can make terms with him. You fellows told me you would stand by me if I gave up that game. I've done it, and stuck to it. Can you help me now?"

"What date is the letter?"

"I forget exactly—but it was last term."

"After your promise to the Head?"

"Long after."

The chums of the Remove were silent. It was useless to tell the Bounder that he ought to have kept his promise; he was only too well aware of that. And they believed him now, fully. It was not the first time he had found himself in trouble since he had reformed. It was the shadow of the past falling upon the new and more honourable path the black sheep of the Remove was trying to follow.

"Well, I call that sheer, rotten, rough luck, Smithy!" said Wharton at last. "Blessed if I know what to advise!"

"There's one thing I can do," said the Bounder grimly. "I can chuck up being decent, and get into the old gang again. Jerry Hawke would welcome me with open arms."

"You won't do that!"

"It looks as if I shall be sacked if I don't."

Wharton made an uneasy movement. Certainly it did not seem easy for a fellow who had once gone in the wrong path to get into the right one again.

"You won't do that, anyway," said Harry. "You must get that letter away from the scoundrel somehow. He wants money for it."

The Bounder shook his head.

"He won't sell it—that's not his game. His idea is to keep it, and keep on bleeding me as long as I'm at Greyfriars."

"The rotter!"

"Calling him names won't do much good. Can you advise me what to do?"

"You might go to the Head, and make a clean breast of it," suggested Nugent. The Bounder laughed bitterly.

"Go to him, and tell him I've broken my promise once!" he said. "Tell him I'm owing up because I know I'm just going to be found out! What would that do for me?"

"You must get that letter," said Harry. "Then you advise me to go out and meet Hawke? Ever since his first letter to me,

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Harry Wharton Again Goes to the Rescue of Vernon-Smith!

he's been waiting for me at night outside the school."

"You can't break bounds at night."

"He won't meet me any other time. That's his little game, of course—to get me into it deeper and deeper. If I don't meet him, he's going to give me away; and if I do—well, I shall have broken bounds at night, and that will be another point against me when it all comes out!"

"The scoundrel!" said Harry, compressing his lips. "But—but you must make terms with him somehow. It's not much good going to the Head and telling him you've broken your promise. He'd never trust you again, that's a cert!"

"Well, he couldn't be expected to," said Nugent.

"I know that," said the Bounder moodily. "But it comes pretty hard, to be knocked out like this when I'm trying to do the decent thing. Suppose I'm found out when I get out of the dormitory to-night. There's always danger. Loder has had his eye on me ever since I broke with him, and he'd be glad to do me an ill turn!"

"You can't go out," said Harry decidedly. "It's too risky. It would be the finish for you if you were bowled out."

"Then what's to be done?"

"Somebody will have to meet the rotter, and try to make terms with him for you," said Harry uneasily. "I—I will try, if you like."

"You!"

"I said I'd stand by you if you went straight, and I meant it," said Wharton. "I'll see the man, and see what terms he'll agree to. If he'll hand over the letter for a sum of money, it seems to me you'd better pay it, and get clear!"

"I'll do that willingly enough; but he won't!"

"I'll do what I can with him," said Harry. "I dare say ten pounds in a lump would make him change his mind. If you'd stand that—"

"It isn't a question of money—I've got plenty of that," said the Bounder with a touch of his old manner. Vernon-Smith seldom forgot that he was the son of a millionaire, with an almost unlimited allowance. "If you could fix it up with him, it would be all right. At any rate, if you'd meet him instead of me, he wouldn't have any fresh hold on me by getting me outside the school at night. Of course, it's possible that he's lying, and hasn't the letter at all, and it is only a trick to get me outside the school for some reason of his own!"

"Where will he be waiting for you?" asked Harry.

"In the spinney near the stile at eleven o'clock."

"All right; I'll go!"

"You're a good chap, Wharton," said the Bounder, with some touch of emotion in his hard face. "If you get me out of this hole, I shan't forget it!"

Wharton nodded, and the Bounder left the study. Frank Nugent looked curiously at his chum. Wharton's face was darkly clouded.

"You're in for it now," Nugent remarked.

"I couldn't do less," said Harry, in a worried tone. "I said I'd stand by him!"

"But if you should be bowled out—"

"I've got to risk that!"

But the risk was great, and Wharton knew it. If it should come out that he had left the school at night to meet such a character as Jerry Hawke, the one-time bookmaker and present gaolbird, the consequences would be very serious for him, and he knew it only too well.

But he did not hesitate about it. That evening a good many fellows noticed that Harry Wharton's face was clouded, but they did not guess the reason.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Wharton's Venture!

L ODER of the Sixth saw lights out for the Remove that night. The prefect looked very curiously at Vernon-Smith. The story of the postcard from Jerry Hawke had been talked over in the School House, and had evidently reached Loder's ears.

In the old days Vernon-Smith had been very "thick" with Loder and other black sheep in the Sixth, and he had earned Loder's bitter enmity by throwing them over.

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Loder detested the reformed Bounder even more than he did his old enemies, Harry Wharton & Co.

"I hear you are up to your old tricks again, Smith," Loder remarked.

The Bounder made no reply.

"For my part, you never took me in," said Loder, compressing his lips. "But take care, my boy! Let me catch you tripping, and you'll know it! I've had my eye on you for some time!"

The Bounder was still silent; and as he refused to be drawn, Loder growled, and put out the light, and left the dormitory.

Harry Wharton did not think of sleep.

He had to be in the spinney at eleven o'clock, if he was to keep his word to the Bounder, and he never thought of not keeping it. But Loder's words had made him feel more uneasy.

After the incident of the postcard, Loder's desire to catch the Bounder tripping might lead him to keep a sharper look-out than usual. Loder's wishes in that direction had been baffled hitherto by the fact that the Bounder was really keeping straight; but the bully of the Sixth was not likely to lose an opportunity if one occurred.

Only, if a discovery should be made this particular night, it would not be the Bounder who would be caught, but Harry Wharton.

Wharton lay silent while the other fellows were talking, answering only in monosyllables when he was addressed. By ten o'clock most of the fellows were asleep; but it was not till half-past ten had sounded from the clock tower that Wharton rose.

He was dressing quietly in the darkness, when a whisper came from the Bounder's bed:

"You up, Wharton?"

"Yes," said Harry, in the same tone.

The Bounder was sitting up in bed, peering towards the captain of the Remove in the darkness.

"I say, if—if you don't like the idea, don't go," he whispered. "I don't want you to run the risk for me. After all, why should you go?"

"That's all right."

"You heard what Loder said. He may be keeping a look-out. If he should spot you outside the dormitory—"

"Better me than you," said Harry quietly.

"Your reputation would stand it better than mine, you mean," said the Bounder, in his old ironical tone.

"Yes," said Harry, "that's what I mean, Smithy."

"Look here, you'd better let me go—"

"I'm going!"

Harry Wharton's tone was quite decided, and the Bounder said no more.

Wharton finished dressing, and tiptoed to the dormitory window. There were easier ways out; but it was possible that Loder might make a round of the School House, and Wharton did not want to risk meeting the prefect in the passages. The window was already open at the top. Wharton pushed up the lower sash.

"I'll close it after you," said the Bounder's voice at his side. "I shan't sleep till you come back, either!"

"Right ho!"

"Take care of the ivy!"

"That's all right!"

"It's risky!" the Bounder muttered uneasily.

Wharton smiled.

"That's nothing; I've done it before."

He slipped out of the window upon the sill, and grasped the stout tendrils of the ivy in his hands. It was a risky descent—very risky indeed for any fellow who could not depend upon his nerve. But Wharton's nerve was all right, and he had made the same descent before on more than one occasion.

But the Bounder watched him very anxiously from the open window, till a faint whistle below signalled that Wharton was safe upon the firm earth. Then Vernon-Smith closed the window quietly and returned to bed, but not to sleep.

Harry Wharton, as he released his hold upon the ivy, stood back against the wall in the deep shadow, and looked about him before he ventured into the Close. All was shadowy and silent about him, the darkness in the Close broken only by the light from curtained windows in the School House. The masters were still up, and many of the seniors, the Sixth Form having the privilege of going to bed at any time they pleased.

But the house was locked up, the Close deserted.

Wharton left the ivied wall, and cut across the Close, glad when he was in the deep shadow of the old elms.

There, before he climbed the school wall, he paused to look back. He could see the lighted windows gleaming against the great, dark mass of the School House.

His heart was beating quicker than usual. It was not only that he was breaking bounds; he had done that before. But breaking bounds to get in a supply of "tuck," or to play some boyish prank, was very different from his present purpose—that of going to meet a disreputable character in secret. It was for another's sake; but Wharton could not help feeling a sense of guilt.

As he looked and listened, there was a sound in the Close, and he crouched back into the shadow of the elm-trees.

Two figures came along in the gloom, following the path. Wharton could not distinguish them, but he had made out from their height that they were seniors. His heart beat faster. A voice came to his ears—the voice of Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars.

"It's all serene, Gwynne."

"Seems so," said Gwynne.

"May as well get in, I think," said Wingate, with a yawn. "Loder seemed to have been suspicious about nothing."

And the two prefects passed on.

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath. His uneasiness had been well-founded; Loder had warned the captain of Greyfriars, and Wingate had made a round of the school at that late hour. If they should go to the Remove dormitory—

Wharton drove that thought from his mind. He heard a distant door close, and then he climbed the school wall and dropped into the road.

In the dim starlight, he started at a run for his destination. He knew that it was close upon eleven now. And, indeed, as he came in sight of the dark spinney, where Mr. Jerry Hawke was waiting for the Bounder, eleven strokes pealed out from the distant village of Firiadale, sounding softly through the summer night.

The scent of a strong tobacco greeted Wharton's nostrils as he plunged into the spinney. The red glow from the bowl of a pipe caught his eye. A dark form detached itself from the shadows, and started towards him, at the sound of his hurried breathing.

"So that card fetched you, did it, Master Smithy? You've come?"

"I've come!" said Wharton quietly.

He heard a startled oath.

"Who are you?" A match scratched out, and a stubby, liquor-coarsened face peered into his under the dark trees. "What game's this?"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Straight From the Shoulder!

THE match went out, and Mr. Jerry Hawke became a black shadow once more.

He stretched out his hand, and grasped Wharton by the shoulder.

"Wot game's this? I know you—Harry Wharton! Wot—"

Wharton jerked his shoulder away from the rascal's touch.

"Don't touch me!" he rapped out angrily.

"Igh and mighty, ain't we?" said Mr. Hawke. "Mustn't be touched, wot? Well, I don't want words with you. Where's my old pal, Smithy?"

"I've come instead."

"And why can't Smithy come?" demanded Mr. Hawke, evidently angry and disappointed. "I don't want no truck with you!"

"He can't come; it's too risky!"

"No more risky for him than for you, fur as I see," replied Mr. Hawke. "Howsumever, as long as you talk business, I'm your man. I suppose Smithy's told you?"

"He's told me that you hold a letter of his, not written to you, but to Mr. Cobb, and that you are holding it over his head to squeeze money out of him," said Wharton sternly.

Mr. Hawke chuckled.

"Well, that's about the size of it," he agreed. "If Smithy chooses to go back on his old pals, he's got to pay the piper. I got 'old of that bit of paper, and I fancy

A Story of Thrills and Dramatic Situations—"Outwitting a Rascal!"—Next Week!

it's going to be worth a little income to me—won't?"

"You have been in prison, I understand?" said Harry.

"I've 'ad trouble!" snarled Mr. Hawke. "Wot's that to you? Anybody might 'ave a little trouble, owin' to a misunderstanding'—a matter of signin' a letter."

"You may find yourself back there, if you're not careful, that's all," said Harry. "But I've come to make terms with you."

"Now you're talking," said Mr. Hawke, in a tone of satisfaction. "My old pal Smithy knows my price—two quid down to begin with. 'Ave you brought the notes?"

"I've brought nothing!"

"Then wot's the good of your coming at all?" demanded Hawke. "By gum, I've a mind to go straight up to the school this very minute, and 'and my paper over to the 'Ead!"

"In the first place, you've got to prove that you have the paper," said Harry. "Vernon-Smith has told me what it should be like, and if you have it, I shall recognise it. You must show it to me. You won't be paid for nothing."

"And if I show it—"

"Then we can make terms."

"No snatchin', mind!"

"I shall not snatch it," said Wharton contemptuously.

Mr. Hawke fumbled in an inside pocket, and there was a sound of crackling paper. "I'll strike a match, so that you can see," he said.

Hawke struck a match, and Wharton glanced at the letter Hawke held in his hand. So far as Wharton could judge in that flickering light, and in that hasty glance, it was in the Bounder's hand. And he remembered the wording of it—as the Bounder had described it to the best of his recollection. It ran:

"Dear Cobb,—You can expect me at half-past eleven; I can't make it earlier, as Quelch is very wary lately, and I'm afraid he's smelt a rat. But he goes to bed at eleven, so after that the coast will be clear. I shall bring the cash with me to settle. Bye-bye!"

"V. G."

It was but seldom that the Bounder, even in his most reckless days, had been reckless enough to commit anything to writing. But the circumstances at that time had been unusual; he had lost money, and Mr. Cobb was pressing hard for a settlement, and hinting that if the debt were not speedily liquidated, trouble would follow. Vernon-Smith had obtained money from his father in time to avoid trouble. But the letter he had written had survived, to cause him worse trouble afterwards. Cobb, the landlord of the Cross Keys, blackguard as he was, played what he called a "square" game, and he would never have used the letter against Vernon-Smith—unless the Bounder had refused to settle his debts. But the debts had been paid, and the account with Cobb cleared off. By some trick, Hawke had obtained possession of the letter apparently; and as he did not, like Mr. Cobb, pride himself upon being a "sport," he was making use of it to blackmail the son of the millionaire.

The light flickered out, and Mr. Hawke replaced the letter in his pocket, with a hoarse chuckle.

"Satisfied, my pippin?" he asked.

"Yes. How much do you want for that letter?"

"Two quid."

"And you will hand it over—"

Jerry Hawke chuckled again.

"Don't you make any mistake," he said, with emphasis. "I ain't handing over this here letter. I'm keeping this. Mister Smithy will kindly 'and me a small sum hevery now and then when I want it. That's the programme."

"That is blackmail," said Harry.

"You can call it by any fancy name you like," said Hawke insolently. "I call it business. If my old pal turns his back on me, he can take the consequences. See?"

"Will you take ten pounds for the letter?"

"No; I won't!"

"What will you take?"

"Two quid down, and more when I choose to ask for it," said Hawke coolly.

"I've got 'im under my thumb, and I'm goin' to keep him there. That's my game."

Wharton drew a deep breath.

It was as Vernon-Smith had said: the scoundrel did not intend to part with the source of his power. Vernon-Smith's reckless folly had placed him under that dirty thumb. Unless the letter could be recovered, there seemed no way out of the difficulty.

Wharton clenched his hands.

In the light of the match, he had looked the scoundrel over—he was a little man, in a far from fit condition. He was bigger, of course, than the Greyfriars junior, and much stronger, naturally; but he was in a flabby condition from excessive drinking. Harry Wharton would not have feared to try conclusions with him. And now a bold idea flashed into his mind. They were alone in the spinney—and the letter which meant ruin to the reformed Bounder was in the rascal's pocket. There was no one to interfere! Wharton's hands clenched harder, and his eyes gleamed. If the man would not give up the letter—

"Listen to me," said Harry, as calmly as he could; "you have no right at all to ask Vernon-Smith for money—you know that."

A husky chuckle was the only reply. "But he is willing to pay you ten pounds for that letter. Will you accept the offer?"

"No!"

"Very well, then. I shall take it from you."

"Wot!"

"You hand me that letter," said Harry determinedly, "or I shall take it!"

"Why, you cheeky whipper-snapper—"

"That's enough! Will you hand over that letter?"

"I won't 'and over the letter!" said Mr. Hawke. "But I'll give you the 'idng of your life, if you tork to me!"

"I won't talk to you any more!" said Wharton, between his teeth. "I'll do something more than talk. For the last time—"

An oath was the only reply. Jerry Hawke's arm went up, and for the first time Wharton realised that the man was armed. He sprang back just in time as a thick stick swept downwards through the air.

The blow missed him by a foot or more, thanks to his speed. The next instant, he leaped forward, and his right came out, straight from the shoulder.

Crash!

Wharton's clenched fist crashed right into the brutal, drink-soddened face. Jerry Hawke gave a low gasp, and reeled back, and bumped on the ground.

Wharton was upon him in an instant. He grasped the cudgel from the rascal's relaxing fingers, and tossed it away among the trees. Then his knee was planted upon the fallen man's chest.

The back of the rascal's head had struck the ground with a heavy thud, and he lay half dazed under the gripping knee.

He wriggled, but made no resistance as the junior dragged open his foul coat and tore the letter from his pocket.

Wharton sprang to his feet. Hawke still lay, mumbling, on the ground. The junior struck a match and took a hasty glance at the letter. One glance was enough. He thrust it into his pocket.

Jerry Hawke was scrambling to his feet, cursing savagely. He made a lurch towards the junior, and Wharton darted away in the shadowy trees. He was not afraid of Jerry Hawke, but now that he had obtained possession of the letter there was no further purpose to be served by handling him. He ran quickly through the spinney, the ruffian cursing and stumbling clumsily after him, and leaped into the lane. Then he hurried away in the direction of Greyfriars, and the voice of Jerry Hawke, mumbling threats and oaths, died away behind him.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Bitter Blow!

VERNON-SMITH was the first out of bed in the Remove dormitory.

He had not slept till after midnight, and so he lay in sound slumber till the clang of the rising-bell awakened him. But the moment he was awake he thought of the letter. Had Harry Wharton's expedition been a success. He controlled his impatience. Only the Bounder and the Famous Five knew that the Remove captain had been out of bounds the previous night. The existence of the letter was a secret from everybody else, and Vernon-Smith did not run the

risk of exciting curiosity by examining the letter in the dormitory.

He bathed and dressed as usual, and did not even speak to Wharton, although the Remove captain gave him a nod to signify that he had succeeded. But they were the first out of the dormitory. Wharton understood what was in his mind, and immediately the Bounder went down he followed him.

It was not till they were in the Close—which they had to themselves at that early hour—that the Bounder held out his hand for the letter.

Wharton handed it to him. Vernon-Smith opened it and read it over eagerly. Then a bitter exclamation broke from his lips.

"Fooled!"

Wharton regarded him anxiously.

"Fooled? What do you mean, Smithy?"

"That's not the letter!"

Wharton started.

"Not the letter?"

"No!" said the Bounder, grinding his teeth. "He's spoofed you!"

"But—but it's the letter he showed me. It's in your hand. It's the wording you described to me!" stammered Wharton, utterly taken aback by that unexpected development.

Vernon-Smith gave a bitter laugh.

"It's only a copy, all the same. It's not in my hand; it's an imitation. That's what Jerry Hawke was sent to gaul for—imitating another man's hand. He's an old hand at that kind of thing. I suppose he was afraid of something of that sort—something like what you did. He knows I'm a tough customer. So he had this copy all ready to show—it was near enough to pass by the light of a match. I dare say I should have been taken in if I'd met him instead of you. The reason why he was determined to meet me by night perhaps; in the daylight it wouldn't have passed. But it's only a copy. You can see now it's not written on my paper. It's a good imitation. The scoundrel left the original safely locked up somewhere, in case of accidents—"

"I—I couldn't guess that," faltered Wharton. "I thought it was the right letter, Smithy. I never thought—"

"Don't think I'm reproaching you," said the Bounder. "You couldn't know. I think I should have been deceived myself, seeing it by the light of a match, as I've said. I might have taken it by force, just as you did. And, of course, he suspected that something of the kind might happen; that's why he had this ready. But there it is! This isn't the letter, and he's still got it. And now—My hat, he will be wild at what you did to him, and— Did you hurt him much?"

"Well, I gave him one good drive," admitted Wharton. "It floored him."

"He will be rattly about it. He's a spiteful brute!" The Bounder's face was clouded with anxiety now. "He may give up the idea of making money now, and have his revenge instead. It would be like him."

Wharton's brows contracted. He had done his best, as he believed at the time. But it looked as if he had made matters worse instead of better. In his rage at the way he had been handled, it was quite likely that Jerry Hawke would throw his hopes of profit to the winds, and revenge himself instead. And if that was his decision he might arrive at the school with the fatal letter at any moment; or it might be sent to the Head by post.

"You see, he's made nothing out of the letter so far, and he knows now that we'll stop at nothing to get it away from him," said Vernon-Smith, compressing his lips. "And once he feels sure there's nothing to be made, he'll do his very worst. He may come straight here—"

"We must stop him somehow!" said Harry desperately.

"How can we?" said the Bounder moodily. "Oh, what awful luck! He may send it by post to the Head or Quelch. We can't stop it then. We can't even see their letters, to see whether one's addressed in his hand. My word, I shall have a pleasant time this morning, waiting for the chopper to come down!"

"I'm sorry, Smithy!"

"That's all right! You did your best," said the Bounder wearily. "I should most likely have done the same in your place. By gad, it's enough to make a fellow chuck up—"

Hawke would be all right if I would be pally with him again."

And a hard look came over the Bounder's face.

(Now turn to page 26.)

THE POPULAR.—No. 236.

Hard Times for the Reformed Junior to Come! Will His Chums Stand By Him?

THE MYSTERY OF THE NEW SKIPPER!

The strange behaviour of Valentine Mornington, the new captain of the Fourth-Form, causes a great sensation in the school. The general opinion is that Morny is treading the downward path in a reckless manner—but, has the junior some dark secret? You simply must not miss the yarn below!

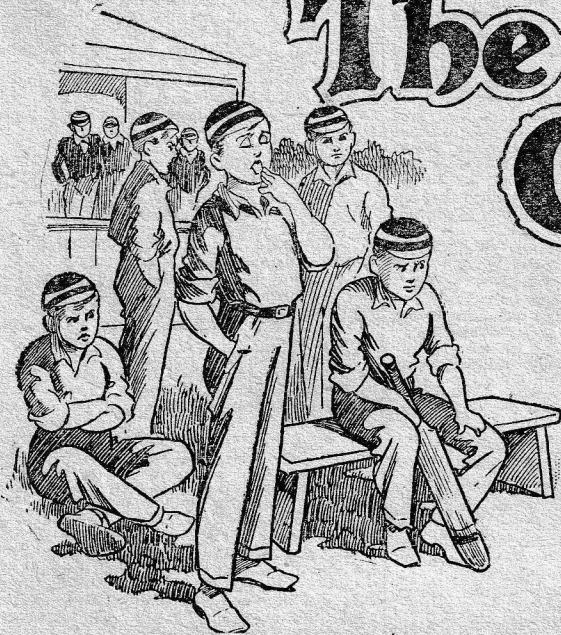
TROUBLE FOR MORNINGTON!

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The Missing Captain!

A Fine Long, Complete Story of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood.

BY OWEN CONQUEST.



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Morny's Way.

"MORNRY!" Mornington of the Fourth was sitting in the window-seat in Study No. 4, looking out into the quadrangle.

The sun was setting, and the old beeches were casting long shadows in the quad. Morny's handsome face was dark and thoughtful as he gazed from the window, and he did not turn as his chum spoke.

There had been silence in the study for some time.

Kit Erroll was working at the table, but at intervals he raised his head, to glance towards his chum. Several times a shade of anxiety had crossed Erroll's face as he looked at Morny's thoughtful profile. At last he spoke.

Mornington continued to stare into the quadrangle as if deeply absorbed in watching the lengthening shadows of the beech-trees.

"Morny, old chap!"

Morny heard then, and he looked round, with a slightly irritable expression.

"Hallo!"

"Hadden't you better begin your prep., Morny?"

"Oh, bother prep.!"

"Better get on with it," said Erroll mildly. "You don't want any trouble with Mr. Bootles to-morrow."

"Blow Bootles!"

"It's the Bagshot match to-morrow, Morny, you know. If you should get detained—"

Morny yawned, and rose from the window-seat.

"I suppose I'd better begin grindin'," he said discontentedly. "Bootles is a worry; he's always findin' fault. Just like him to detain me for the afternoon when there's a match on!"

"You've been a bit of a worry to Bootles, you know."

"Bless Bootles! Still, I suppose I'd better toe the line, or there will be trouble. But if anythin' happened, Jimmy Silver could captain the side against Bagshot all right."

"You're captain now, Morny!"

"I'm blessed if I know what I was so keen about it for!" yawned Mornington. "It takes up a lot of a fellow's time, and there's always somethin' to worry about."

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a listless and dissatisfied air.

In a few minutes, however, he threw his books aside, and rose to his feet restlessly. "Blessed if I can put my mind into that stuff!" he grunted. "I'm fed up, Erroll!"

"What with?"

"Everything!" said Mornington comprehensively.

"You needn't worry about the match, if that's what you're thinking of. We're in great form for to-morrow, and I think we shall beat Bagshot. Jimmy Silver is at the top of his form; his bowling to-day was simply ripping."

"And what was my battin' like?" grinned Mornington.

"Not so good as usual; but you'll be all right to-morrow."

"Perhaps!"

"Look here, Morny—" said Erroll abruptly.

"Well?"

"What have you got on your mind?"

Mornington did not answer immediately. He had turned to the window again, and stood staring out into the deepening dusk in the quad. When he spoke, it was over his shoulder, without looking at his chum.

"What makes you think I've got somethin' on my mind?" he asked.

"Your ways for some time past," answered Erroll quietly. "You seem to have lost interest in things. You're not so keen on cricket, for instance—"

"Cricket's a bore, like everythin' else!"

"You were no end pleased at becoming junior captain of Rookwood, and now you don't seem to care anything about it."

"True. I don't!"

"Well, you must admit that you've changed in the last week or so. Now, tell me what you've got on your mind."

Mornington laughed.

"What should I have on my mind?" he answered. "It's my character that's at fault, old scout. I get fed up. I was as keen as a razor to get in as junior captain, and I was pleased when I bagged Jimmy Silver's job. But I'm not much like Silver. I'm tired of the stunt already. Everything I take up is only a stunt, and I get sick of it when the novelty's worn off. When I used to go the pace with Lattrey and his set, I got fed up with that, and turned away from it. Now I've got sick of swotting, and tootin' the line, and playin' cricket, and—everything!"

"I was afraid it was something like

that. Morny," said Erroll sadly. "But that's a frame of mind you ought to fight against. It's not good for you."

Morny shrugged his shoulders.

"You see, we're different," he said. "You're a steady old codger and whatever your hand findeth to do you do it with all your might. I'm like Reuben—'unstable as water, thou shalt not excel,' you know. That's me all over."

"But—"

"I'm made like that!" said Mornington restlessly. "Besides—besides—" He hesitated.

"Go on!" said Erroll quietly.

"I'm poor!" said Mornington, with a flush. "I was rich once—the richest fellow at Rookwood. Then my cousin turned up—you remember it all—and I was left. Well, I haven't made a howl about it, but I've felt it, all the same. I've missed it all. I want to be the best-dressed fellow in the Fourth, I want expensive motor-cars, and bank-notes in my pocket, I want money to burn, and I haven't got it. See?"

"That's not very serious, Morny."

"Not to a chap like you, but awfully serious to a chap like me. You don't care what clothes you wear as long as you're decent; I care no end. I hate wearin' a collar twice, and a necktie three times. I hate havin' my boots soled and heeled. I hate lookin' at a quid twice before I spend it. In fact," said Mornington, with a bitter grin—"in fact, I've got all the tastes of a gentleman's gentleman, and that's what I ought to be, I suppose. I belong to the vulgar rich, and I can't get out of it. And you don't understand it a little bit."

"I could understand it in a cad like Lattrey, or Peele," said Erroll; "but it's rather hard to understand in a fellow like you."

"You see, I'm a good deal of a cad myself," explained Mornington, with cynical candour. "That's where the trouble is."

"What rot!"

"It's so, old scout. And—and like a fool, I've landed myself in a position I'm not fit for. Why couldn't I leave the captaincy alone?" Mornington gave a restless shrug of the shoulders. "I can't resign it now—the fellows would think I found the job too big for me; and I'm too conceited and swankin' to let them think so. But—but I'm stickin' to the job, but I'm not fit for it. A captain has duties—and there never was a less dutiful fellow in existence than I. I suppose. It's made me ill to hear the chaps talking about the Bagshot match to-morrow. I suppose it would shock you to hear that I don't care two pins about the match."

"But why?"

"Because I haven't got any bets laid on it."

"Morny!"

"I knew I should shock you!" grinned Mornington. "You'll be droppin' my friendship some day, old top, like a hot potato, when you understand at last what I'm really like."

Are Mornington's Days as Junior Captain Numbered? See Next Week!

"That will never happen, anyhow."
"I'm not goin' to be poor," said Mornington, in a dogged tone. "Why should I, when a chance comes my way? And—like a fool, I land myself into a job where I know I ought to keep as straight as a die, and set an example to the other chaps. But—"

Erroll stared blankly at his friend.
"You're talking in riddles, Morny. You speak as if you had a chance of getting rich."

"Suppose I have?"
"Not much use supposing that as it's impossible," Erroll rose to his feet. "Look here, Morny, you alarm me. What is it you have got in your head now?"

Morny did not answer for a moment. But he smiled as he met Erroll's anxious and alarmed gaze.

"It's all right," he said carelessly. "Only blowin' off steam, you know. I'm a discontented ass—that's what's the matter. I've got all I want; and I'm mooning over the things I don't really want. Only gasin', old chap; don't take any notice of my nonsense."
"But—"

"I think I'll take a turn in the quad," said Morny abruptly. "A little fresh air will do me good—after the way I've been evotin'!" He laughed. "You stick to merry old Virgil—I'm goin' for a walk."

Mornington left the study before his chum could reply.

The door closed sharply on him; and Erroll sat down at the table again, with a distressed cloud upon his face. The strange mood of his chum troubled him deeply. Morny's nature was not superficial by any means—but it was volatile, and his changeableness had often troubled his chum. That there was something wrong with Morny now, Erroll knew well, though he could not guess what it was.

He did not resume his work. He sat in deep and painful thought for some time, and then rose and crossed to the window. Outside, the dusk was deepening into darkness. Under the old beeches Erroll caught sight of a moving shadow—and he knew that it was Mornington, pacing to and fro in the gloom a prey to restless discontent. And Erroll, with a heavy heart, watched him till the deepening darkness hid him from sight.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. A Very Mysterious Document.

JIMMY!" Jimmy Silver & Co. were at prep. in the end study when Tubby Muffin rolled in.

Jimmy Silver had just finished; but Lovell, Raby, and Newcome were still hard at work, and Lovell waved an impatient hand at the fat Classical.

"Shut up!" he said politely.

"I say, you know—"

"Try up!"

"Tea's over and done with, Tubby," said Jimmy Silver, with a laugh. "You're too late!"

"Oh, I knew you had only sardines for tea, and not much of them," answered Tubby. "Blow your tea, Jimmy Silver! Taint that."

"Well, if it's supper, there isn't going to be any."

"Taint supper!" roared Tubby Muffin.

"What the thump is it then?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "If you're going to offer your services for the Bagshot match to-morrow, Morny's the man to go to. He will jump at the offer—I don't think!"

"I'll bet I could play cricket as well as Morny was playing it to-day, and chance it!" said Muffin disdainfully. "Never saw a chap in such rotten form. But it isn't that. I've found something."

"Is that fat idiot going to shut up, or am I to take the poker to him?" inquired Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Look here, Lovell—"

"If you've found something, take it to Mr. Bootles, if it's any value, Tubby," said Jimmy Silver.

"It isn't!"

"Then chuck it away!"

"But it's jolly queer, Jimmy."

Tubby Muffin had a sheet of paper in his fat hand, and he held it up. Evidently there was something interesting on that sheet of paper, from Tubby Muffin's point of view.

"Well, what is it?" asked Jimmy.

"It's jolly queer!" repeated Tubby Muffin. "I've never seen anything like it. I picked it up on the landing. Some chap must have dropped it, mustn't he? I was coming upstairs, when that beast Mornington came down in a hurry and ran into me. Knocked me over, you know," said Tubby Muffin indignantly. "Luckily, I caught hold of his collar and pulled him over, too. And he actually bumped me on the landing."

"Mustn't pull junior captains over by their collars," grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Well, he's a beast!" said Tubby. "I wish you were captain again, Jimmy—you were never quite such a beast as Morny. But I say, I found this paper on the landing, and it's jolly queer. I can't make it out."

"Some deep arithmetical problem, such as twice one are two?" asked Lovell. "That would be a bit above your brain powers, I suppose?"

"It's a lot of numbers," said Tubby. "and some letters, and it don't seem to mean anything. It's really extraordinary, so I brought it here to show you fellows."

"Well, let's see it!" yawned Jimmy Silver.

Tubby had succeeded in interesting the Fistical Four at last; and all of them looked at the paper as the fat Classical laid it on the table.

They looked at it, and stared. It certainly was an extraordinary paper, and the Fistical Four, though considerably brighter, intellectually, than Tubby, could make no more of it than he did. It ran:

R.	N.
7	
	29
30	
	28
	4
	17
	20
23	
5	
	10
27	
7	
19	
	24
1	
36	

That was all; but it was enough to make the Fistical Four of the Fourth rub their eyes. There was nothing in mathematics that they knew of that bore any resemblance to this. What the letters meant, and what the numbers meant, was a deep mystery to the end study.

Tubby Muffin blinked at them, evidently pleased at the impression he had produced. There was no doubt that the Fistical Four were puzzled and perplexed.

"Well, what does that mean, Jimmy Silver?" asked Tubby Muffin.

Jimmy shook his head.

"Ask me another," he said. "I can't make head or tail of it. It doesn't seem to mean anything, so far as I can see."

"Some joke, I suppose," said Raby. "Did you make this up, to puzzle us, Tubby?"

"No!" howled Tubby. "I tell you I found it on the landing, after Morny had knocked me over."

"Some chap in the Fourth must have dropped it there, then," said Newcome. "You'd better inquire up and down the passage, if you want to find the owner."

"I don't specially want to find the owner, that I know of. I want to know what it means," said the inquisitive Tubby. "It must mean something, you know."

"Well, I suppose a chap wouldn't take the trouble to write it down for nothing," said Jimmy Silver, rubbing his nose thoughtfully. "But I can't make it out. Might be some sort of cryptogram. The list looks a bit like Morny's; he always makes small, neat figures in this style. Take it along to No. 4, and see if it's his."

"Oh, of course!" exclaimed Tubby. "He dropped it when I pulled him over, I expect. I'll ask Morny what it means."

And Tubby Muffin rolled out of the study, with the mysterious document in his fat fist. Lovell and Raby and Newcome resumed their work; but Jimmy Silver sat with a somewhat thoughtful expression on his face. He was thinking of the mysterious paper.

"Done!" yawned Lovell, rising from the

table at last. "Hallo! What are you looking like a boiled owl about, Jimmy?"

"I was thinking—"

"Penny for 'em, if they're worth it."

"It's jolly queer about that paper," said Jimmy. "It puzzled me at first; but, now I think of it, I've seen something like it before."

"Where?"

"In a book," said Jimmy. "Last vac. I was looking over a book at home about holidays on the Riviera, and there was a description of Monte Carlo."

"Monte Carlo!" repeated Lovell, with a stare. "That's the gambling place, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"What's that got to do with Tubby's paper?"

"Nothing, of course. But I remember, in the description of the place, they mentioned a spooling game that's played there; red and black numbers on a wheel. There was a specimen list of numbers, and it ran like that list Tubby showed us. If that paper means anything at all, it's a list of numbers kept by some person who's been playing roulette."

"Roulette!" ejaculated Lovell.

"That's the name of the game—some sort of spool for taking in strangers, I suppose," said Jimmy. "But—but it's illegal in England. It's not possible—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell, in great merriment. "Do you think that some chap in the Fourth has been tripping across to Monte Carlo on a Saturday afternoon?"

Raby and Newcome chorled.

"Fathead!" said Jimmy. "I say the game's illegal in England. But I've read in the newspapers that it's played at some places illegally. Silly fools go there to be swindled, and the police come down on them every now and then. But—"

"My dear man, you're dreaming!" grinned Lovell. "There isn't anything of that kind anywhere near Rookwood; and if there was, no Rookwood chap would know anything about it. My hat! I can imagine how the Head would look if he heard anything about it."

Jimmy shook his head.

"I suppose there's nothing in it, of course," he assented. "But it struck me—Never mind. Let's get down, if you're finished. We've got some boxing on with Tommy Dodd and Co. in the gym."

"Come on then!"

The Fistical Four left the end study; but Jimmy Silver was still in rather a thoughtful mood. He was pretty certain that the mysterious paper belonged to Valentine Mornington. And, though Morny was as straight as a die, and Jimmy had no doubt about it, he could not help remembering that in Morny's early days at Rookwood he had been the wildest fellow in the school, and had come very near to being expelled. And the bare possibility that Morny—now junior captain of the school—was returning to his old wild ways, was very discomfiting to Jimmy Silver.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Morny Loses His Temper.

MORNY here?" Kit Erroll was in the window-seat, plunged in thought, when Tubby Muffin came into No. 4.

His unfinished work was on the table. For once, Erroll was staking.

He looked up, with less than his usual kind patience, as the fat Classical rolled in.

"Morny's gone out."

"When will he come back, then?" asked Tubby. "I've got something here that belongs to him."

"Put it on the table, then."

"But I want to know what it means."

"What?"

"Look at it, old top!" said Tubby.

Erroll glanced at the paper as Tubby held it up. A startled look came over his face. He rose quickly to his feet, and caught the paper from Tubby's fat hand.

"Where did you get this?" he asked sharply.

"Picked it up on the landing," said Tubby. "I think Morny dropped it after bumping over me. I say, give it to me, you know."

Erroll did not answer. His eyes were glued on the paper, and he plainly did not intend to hand it back to the fat junior.

"You know what it means?" asked Tubby.

"Inquisitively. "It must mean something, you know. Jimmy thinks it's Morny's list. I say, is it something about backing horses?"

"What?"

"Morny used to back horses a lot, you know," said Tubby. "That was when he was thick with Lattrey and Peele and Gower, and that lot. I believe he's given it up since he lost his money. I remember he had some scheme of a system for backing horses, and it cost him a lot of money. He used to make bets through Joey Hook, at Coombe, you know."

"You fat duffer!"

"Oh, I say, Erroll, he did, you know! Everybody in the Fourth knows it, and knows about his breaking bounds at night."

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Erroll.

Kit Erroll knew more than Tubby did about his chum's former habits, but he did not like to hear the subject spoken of.

"Well, you know what it means," said Tubby. "I can see that in your face. Why can't you tell a chap?"

"You can cut along," said Erroll. "I'll give this to Morny when he comes in."

"But perhaps it isn't Morny's; and I want to know what it means."

"It's not your business, Muffin."

"Well, it isn't yours either, if it comes to that," retorted the fat junior. "You give me that paper, Erroll."

"Oh, buzz off!"

"Look here—"

There was a step in the passage, and Valentine Mornington came into the study. His face was a little pale, and as moody and dissatisfied as when he had left. He glanced at Erroll and Tubby Muffin.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" he asked. "I want to know what it means!" howled Tubby.

Inquisitiveness was almost a disease with Reginald Muffin, and his appetite for information was fairly whetted now.

"What what means, you fat idiot?"

"That paper with the numbers on it."

Mornington started, and his hand flew to his pocket. It did not need more than that action to reveal the ownership of the mysterious paper.

"You dropped it on the landing," grinned Tubby. "Now Erroll's got it, and he won't give it to me. I say, Morny—Yarooooooo!"

Tubby Muffin, much to his astonishment and indignation, found himself suddenly seized by his fat shoulders.

With a spin, Morny sent him whirling into the passage.

Tubby Muffin spun round like a very fat top, and was across the corridor before he knew what was happening to him.

He bumped on the opposite wall, and collapsed, with a roar.

"Bump!"

"Oh! Ah! Yah! Yooooo!" roared Tubby breathlessly.

Mornington's eyes glittered after him from the study doorway.

"Cut off, you fat fool!" he snapped.

"Yaroooh! Help! Yooooo!"

"Do you want me to kick you along the passage?" said Mornington, between his teeth.

Erroll's hand fell on his chum's arm from within the study. Morny gave him a fierce look for a moment, but he allowed himself to be drawn back into the room, and Erroll closed the door.

Tubby Muffin scrambled up, and rolled away down the passage, simply palpitating with indignant wrath. What was the cause of Morny's sudden outbreak of temper the fat Classical could not even guess.

In Study No. 4, Mornington and his chum looked at one another rather grimly. Then Mornington held out his hand for the paper.

"It's mine," he said.

"I know it's yours, Morny." Erroll passed the mysterious paper to the junior captain of Rookwood. "Will you tell me what it means?"

"Oh, it's nothin'!" said Mornington carelessly.

"Is that all?"

"What the thump does it matter?" exclaimed Mornington irritably. "You're jolly curious all of a sudden, Kit Erroll!"

"I'm not curious, Morny. You've never found me curious about your affairs, I think," said Erroll quietly. "But I should like to know what that means."

"I tell you it's nothin'!"

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Erroll drew a deep breath.

"You've nothing more to tell me than that, Morny?"

"Nothin'!"

"Very well!"

Erroll did not say another word. He sat down at the table and resumed the work so long interrupted. Mornington looked at him with a clouded brow, and shrugged his shoulders impatiently and quitted the study. There was no prep for Valentine Mornington that evening.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Mornington Missing.

JIMMY SILVER wore a pleasant smile as he came out of the School House after dinner the following day. There was bright sunshine in the quadrangle and the old red roofs of Rookwood glimmered in the sun. The cricket-field looked like emerald—a pleasant sight to the eyes of a cricketer. Jimmy Silver was feeling fit and cheerful, and quite well satisfied with himself and the universe generally.

Bagshot was coming over that afternoon, and Jimmy was looking forward to the match. True, he was no longer junior captain. He had captained Rookwood in the last match with Bagshot, but this time Valentine Mornington was in command. But Jimmy did not mind much. He was the champion bowler of the Lower School—indeed, there were Sixth Form wickets that were not quite safe from Jimmy Silver, and his services could not be dispensed with in any important match. Not that Morny showed any desire to dispense with them. The new captain and the former captain pulled together remarkably well, and Jimmy's name had gone down in the list as a matter of course.

Jimmy Silver was going to enjoy himself that afternoon in his own way, which was by taking Bagshot wickets. He only hoped that Morny would prove the good batsman he had always been, in spite of the fact that the new skipper had been rather off-colour lately.

He caught sight of Mornington heading for the gates at a rather rapid walk, and called to him.

"Going out, Morny?"

Mornington glanced round.

"Yes!" he answered shortly.

"Bagshot get here at two-thirty, you know," said Jimmy Silver, rather surprised that the skipper should be going out so soon before the match. "Not going far, I suppose?"

"Oh, bother Bagshot!"

"Wha-at?"

Mornington coloured under Jimmy's astonished look. Then he smiled. To Jimmy Silver, the Bagshot match loomed large that afternoon, and Jimmy would have been more surprised still if he had known how little Morny was thinking of it just then.

"I—I mean, it's all right," said Mornington hastily. "I shall be back in plenty of time for Bagshot, Jimmy. I'm only going a little way—not so far as Coombe, in fact!"

"Right you are!" said Jimmy.

Valentine Mornington went out at the gates, not seeming to see Kit Erroll, who was coming towards him across the quad. Erroll hastened his steps and then slackened again. It was pretty clear that his chum did not want his company just then.

Jimmy Silver glanced after Morny's disappearing form, and then at Erroll. It occurred to him that there was some rift in the lute in Study No. 4. That was not his business, however, and he sauntered away without a remark. Lovell and Raby and Newcome joined him in the quad.

"Morny gone out?" asked Newcome.

"Yes."

"Silly ass! He ought to be here. Blessed if I know what the fellows elected Morny skipper for," said Newcome. "You used to leave me out of the matches sometimes, Jimmy. Morny does it all the time!"

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"Cricket comes before friendship, unless you're chucking away matches," he remarked.

Arthur Newcome grunted. He was a cheery and contented youth, as a rule, but his three chums were in the Rookwood junior team, and he was feeling rather "left" that afternoon.

"Let's hope one of the Modern players will fall downstairs and break a leg or two,"

suggested Raby. "Then you'll go in, Newcome!"

Newcome laughed.

"I don't think I'll depend on that," he said. "I'll take a stroll this afternoon, I think, on the botany stunt. I'll be back before tea, and then you can tell me how Bagshot walked over you!"

"They won't walk over us in your lifetime, fathead!" said Lovell. "I think we're going to mop 'em up. I must say that Morny has looked a bit off colour lately, but everybody else is in great form. Conroy was batting yesterday like a Jesop, and Tommy Dodd is in remarkable form—for a Modern. We shall be all right!"

"Best of luck, old top!" said Newcome. And Newcome strolled away as his chums headed for the cricket-ground.

After two, the Rookwood juniors began to gather on the ground. There was a good team to represent Rookwood: Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby, Conroy, Erroll, Van Ryn, Grace, Mornington—Classicals; and Dodd, Cook, and Doyle—Moderns. Ten of the eleven gathered on the ground, in spotless white; but Valentine Mornington was not there.

Bulkeley of the Sixth, the captain of Rookwood, gave them a look-in on his way to Big Side for practice. The big Sixth-Former glanced over the junior cricketers with an approving eye. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked very fit and businesslike.

"Ready for business, what?" asked Bulkeley, with a smile.

"Quite!" said Jimmy. "We're expecting Bagshot every minute now!"

"Where's your skipper?"

"Oh, Morny's coming along!"

"He's gone out," said Smythe of the Shell, who was hanging about the pavilion. "Met him on the Coombe road, walkin', a quarter of an hour ago!"

Bulkeley looked surprised.

"He will be back for the match," said Jimmy Silver hastily.

"I should hope so," remarked the captain of Rookwood in rather a dry tone.

There was a squeak from Tubby Muffin.

"Here come Bagshot!"

The visiting team had arrived.

Jimmy Silver and the other cricketers exchanged glances. Pankley & Co. of Bagshot had arrived, but the Rookwood captain was not on the ground to greet them. Morny had not come in.

"This is rather curious of Mornington, isn't it?" said Bulkeley.

"I—I suppose he's delayed, somehow," said Jimmy Silver. "He will turn up all right!"

Bulkeley shook his head and walked on towards the senior ground. It was his duty, as captain of the school, to keep an eye on junior cricket, and he was by no means satisfied with Mornington's peculiar conduct on this occasion.

Jimmy Silver greeted the Bagshot fellows, and Lovell cut off to the gates to see if there was any sign of Mornington returning. But he looked for Morny in vain.

He came back and found Jimmy chatting with Pankley and Poole of Bagshot. He shook his head in response to Jimmy's inquiring glance.

Jimmy called to Erroll.

"Know where Morny's gone, Erroll?"

"No!"

"Or when he'll be back?"

"Sorry, no!"

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver, in dismay.

"Anything up?" asked Cecil Pankley. The Bagshot skipper could see that there was something amiss.

"Well, our skipper hasn't come in," said Jimmy Silver. "Morny's skipper now, you know. Mind waiting a bit?"

"Not at all!" said Pankley politely.

But the Bagshot fellows were smiling. They did not quite know what to make of a cricket captain who was absent, without explanation, when the match was due to begin.

Erroll ran down to the gates and looked out on the road. But there was no sign of Mornington there, and he returned to the cricket-ground with a knitted brow.

Mornington's inexplicable absence was generally known now, and it was the subject of animated discussion among the juniors gathering round the field.

Tommy Dodd was heard to inquire what fellows could expect when they elected a doddering Classical as captain. Tubby

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Muffin suggested that Morny had dropped into the Bird-in-Hand for a game of billiards, and forgotten all about the match—a suggestion which very nearly earned him a lunge from Erroll's bat.

How to account for Morny's peculiar proceedings was a mystery, and it was a mystery the Rookwood fellows had no time to solve. The minutes were passing, and, polite as the Bagshot Bounders were, they were showing signs of impatience. The Rookwood cricketers held a hurried consultation.

"We can't keep Bagshot hanging about much longer," said Jimmy Silver. "They're grinning at us already."

"We shall have to play without Morny!" growled Lovell. "What the thump does he want to take himself off just before a match for?"

"Goodness knows!"

"He—he may have had some—some accident!" said Erroll hesitatingly.

"Walked under a market cart, perhaps!" suggested Arthur Edward Lovell, with deep sarcasm.

"Well, as he hasn't come back——"

"More likely some of his cheek!" growled Lovell. "He's just gone out and let it slide."

"He wouldn't do that."

"Well, he's done it. The question is, are we going to play Bagshot, or ain't we?"

"You're vice, Jimmy!" remarked Raby.

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"As Morny isn't here, we're bound to play the match," he said. "If you fellows agree, we'll get on. I suppose I'd better take Morny's place."

"And if the fellows had any sense, they'd make you keep it!" growled Lovell.

"Never mind that. We shall want another man," said Jimmy Silver briskly. "Where's Newcome?"

"The silly ass has gone out botanising!"

"That's rotten! We can't wait any longer. Pons will fill the bill. Know where Pons is, Conroy?"

"Here he is, old top!" said the voice of the Canadian junior, behind Jimmy. "Ready if you want me."

"Get into your things, then, sharp!"

"You bet!"

Pons was ready very quickly. Jimmy Silver, taking his old place as junior captain for the nonce, tossed with Pankley for choice of innings. It fell to Rookwood to bat first, and Jimmy sent in Lovell and Erroll to open the innings.

"There's still a chance for Morny," he said. "You're last man in, Pons, and if Morny turns up, you understand——"

"I savvy!" said Pons cheerfully.

Probably Pons was not very anxious to see Mornington turn up before the end of the innings. As it turned out, Morny did not do so, and when last man was called, the Canadian junior went in. The Rookwood first innings closed for 60 runs, and when it was over Mornington had not appeared; and every fellow on Little Side was asking himself the question, "Where was Morny?" without being able to find an answer to it.

"Fool! Fool!"

Newcome grinned.

"Morny's being jolly polite to somebody!"

he murmured. Then he called out, "Hallo, Morny!"

There was a rustle in the underwood. Newcome pushed his way through, and came on Valentine Mornington.

The dandy of the Fourth was leaning against the trunk of an old oak, his hands driven deep into his pockets, and a black and moody expression on his face.

He gave Newcome a far from pleasant look.

"You!" he ejaculated. "What the dickens are you doin' here, Newcome?"

"Botanising!" answered Newcome cheerfully.

Morny gave a scoffing laugh.

"What rot?"

"Thanks!" said Newcome, unperturbed.

"You seem to be alone here," said Newcome, glancing round. "Whom were you calling a fool? I heard you!"

"Whom do you think?" sneered Mornington. "I was speakin' to myself, if you want to know!"

"Oh, I see! Well, if that's the case, you hit the right nail on the head, and got the right word."

"Oh, shut up!"

Arthur Newcome's eyes gleamed, and he took a step nearer to Valentine Mornington. He was a peaceable fellow, but Mornington's manner was very hard to bear peaceably.

Morny regarded him with a sneering look.

"Huntin' for trouble?" he asked. "If you are, I can give you all you want, Newcome. I'm just in a mood to smash somebody!"

"You can try your hand on me if you



SAVING THE MATCH! There was a groan from the Rookwooders as the leather flew hot from the bat. They had expected to see that ball save the game for them, but the wicket was still standing. Then there was a roar. "Erroll! Erroll! Well caught!" (See Chapter 6.)

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. A Surprise for Newcome.

FOO! Arthur Newcome jumped. Newcome was rambling through Coombe Wood, and, in his botanical zeal, he had gone a good distance from the beaten paths. It was a very pleasant ramble among the big trees, interlaced by creepers and thick ferns, with the sun glinting through thick, green foliage overhead.

Newcome was in a quite contented mood. He would rather have been playing cricket at Rookwood, but he was enjoying himself in his own way.

The junior had supposed himself to be alone in the depths of the thick wood, seldom trodden by anyone. The sudden sound of a voice close at hand startled him.

It was not only the voice suddenly breaking the deep stillness of the wood that had a startling effect. It was the fact that the voice was that of Valentine Mornington.

Newcome had supposed that Morny was on the cricket-ground at Rookwood, deep in the Bagshot match. He stared round him in amazement.

Mornington was not to be seen, but the underwood was so thick that Newcome could not see more than a yard or two. As he looked round him he heard Morny's voice again.

"But what the dickens are you doing here, if you come to that? I thought you were playing cricket."

"Cricket?"

"You haven't forgotten the match, I suppose?"

Morny's lip curled.

"Cricket! The match! What rot! I'm not thinkin' of cricket."

"It's a cricket captain's bizney to think of cricket, isn't it?" asked Newcome drily.

"Oh, rot!"

"Have you left the fellows in the lurch, then?" exclaimed Newcome warmly.

"Oh, they'll get on all right without me! I don't care a rap whether they do or not. Hang them! Don't talk rot!"

"You seem in a jolly nice temper this afternoon, Morny!" said Newcome, with increasing astonishment. "If that's the way you treat cricket fixtures, you won't be captain long!"

"Do you think I care?" snapped Mornington.

"I've somethin' else to think about."

"The fellows will want to know the——"

"Confound the fellows!"

like," said Newcome. "I'm feeling quite inclined to damage your nose, you cheeky cad!"

Mornington clenched his hands hard, with a glitter in his eyes. But he unclenched them again, and shrugged his shoulders.

"What's the good?" he muttered. "I've played the fool! Cricket! I suppose I'd have done better to play cricket. But it was a chance—a glorious chance—and——"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Oh, nothin'! You'd better clear off, Newcome; let me alone. Hold on, though!"

Morny came nearer to Newcome, with a gleam in his eyes. "Can you lend me any money?"

"Money!" repeated Newcome, in amazement. The sudden change in topic astonished him.

"Yes, money. I—I'm hard up. I—I want some tin!" said Mornington eagerly. "I'm not a chap to borrow, as a rule; you know that. But—but I'm in trouble for want of some money, and that's the fact."

Newcome's face softened. He knew all

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about Morny's fall from fortune, and he would not have been surprised to hear that the once wealthy and extravagant dandy of the Fourth had plunged into some expense he found it difficult to meet.

"Oh, if that's it—," he said.

"That's it! Can you lend me a few quids?"

"My hat! I'm not a giddy millionaire!" said Newcome, smiling. "I can lend you a quid if you like."

"That all?" asked Morny, his face falling.

"It's all I've got, you see."

"Shell out, then."

Newcome took a currency note from his pocket, and handed it to Mornington, whose fingers closed on it greedily. He hardly stayed to mutter a word of thanks, but darted off through the wood.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Newcome.

The sound of brushing foliage and hurried footsteps died away, and Arthur Newcome was alone. Morny was gone, but he had not gone in the direction of Rookwood. Newcome stood for several minutes, staring blankly in the direction Morny had taken, before he turned away from the spot. He shook his head seriously as he turned away. There was something wrong with Valentine Mornington—something very wrong indeed; and Newcome wondered what it was.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

Mornington's Return.

"G O it, Jimmy!"

Shadows were lengthening at Rookwood, and the cricket-match was very near its close. Morny had not put in an appearance, and in the keen interest of the game the Rookwooders had almost forgotten him.

The match had been well contested. Rookwood had taken 60 in their first innings and 50 in the second. Bagshot had 65 for the first innings, and they were 40 in the second for eight wickets. Five were wanted to tie, and 6 to win, and two wickets to fall.

Jimmy Silver's bowling was to be the deciding factor.

Pankley of Bagshot had the bowling, with Putter at the other end. Pankley had done very well for his side, and he was very confident. The over was beginning, and Jimmy Silver was going on to bowl, and all eyes were upon him.

"Go it, Jimmy Silver!"

"Good old Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver sent down the ball, and Pankley smiled as he played it. The leather went whizzing, and it looked like two to Pankley, and he ran, and Putter ran. But the ball came quickly in with a smart return from Kit Erroll, and it proved only a single.

Putter had to face the bowling, and it was Jimmy Silver's turn to smile. He knew that he could handle Putter.

Clack!

The sound of the falling wicket followed the ball, and there was a roar from the Rookwood crowd.

"Well bowled, Jimmy!"

"Bravo!"

"Good old Jimmy!"

"Last man in!"

The last Bagshot man came to the wickets, and he was very wary. He knocked the ball away for a single run, and gave the bowling to Cecil Pankley again. Three to tie, and four to win, and Pankley was in great form.

And the hopes of Rookwood fell almost to zero when Pankley scored two from the next ball.

"All over bar shoutin'!" yawned Adolphus Smythe of the Shell.

"One to tie, and two to win!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell. "Oh, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver was not in a hurry to deliver the next ball. The result of the Bagshot match probably depended on it, and Jimmy Silver put all he knew into it. The ball came down, and Pankley played.

There was something like a groan from Lovell as the leather flew bat from the bat.

And the Rookwooders gasped. They had hoped, and more than half-expected, to see the wicket go down; and the wicket was still standing, and the batsmen were running.

And then there was a roar.

"Erroll, Erroll! Well caught!"

"Oh, well caught, sir!"

Kit Erroll, with a flush in his face, held up the ball. And all Rookwood roared.

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"How's that?"

"Hurrah!"

"Well caught, Erroll!"

Jimmy Silver rushed up to the fieldsman, and gave him a tremendous clap on the shoulder.

"Good man!" he gasped. "Oh, good man!"

"Our win!" chortled Lovell. "Rookwood wins! Hurrah!"

Pankley grinned at Jimmy Silver as he came off.

"Jolly near thing!" he remarked. "That was a good catch—or was it a giddy fluke!"

"No fear!" said Jimmy laughing. "It was a fluke your getting so near to a win, old top."

"Bow-wow!" was the Bagshot skipper's reply to that.

There was keen satisfaction among the Rookwooders. The end had been very close, but the win was all the more satisfactory on that account. Only Kit Erroll's face was clouded as the cricketers came off the field. He was thinking of his absent chum.

Newcome came in as Jimmy Silver & Co. were heading for the School House.

"How did it go?" he inquired.

"Won by a run."

"Good!"

"My hat! Morny never turned up, after all!" exclaimed Lovell, remembering the existence of Valentine Mornington. "What do you think of that for a skipper?"

Newcome nodded.

"I knew," he said. "I met him in the wood this afternoon."

"Then he's had no accident?" exclaimed Raby.

"He didn't look like it. He seemed a bit worried, that was all."

"He'll get some plain English when he comes back to Rookwood," said Jimmy Silver quietly.

After the Bagshot fellows were gone, Jimmy Silver repaired to Study No. 4. He knew that Kit Erroll was anxious about his chum. He found Erroll moving restlessly about the study. Erroll looked up quickly as Jimmy appeared in the doorway.

"Has he come in?" he asked eagerly.

"Not yet."

"I—I think there must have been some accident," faltered Erroll. "It's unaccountable, otherwise."

"That's what I came to tell you," said Jimmy Silver. "There's not been any accident."

"How do you know?"

"Because Newcome met Morny in the wood, when he was out on his botany stunt. Morny simply let the match slide."

"He—he couldn't!" muttered Erroll.

"Well, he did."

"But—but why should he?"

Jimmy's face set grimly.

"That's what he will have to explain when he comes in. The cricket club can't be treated in this way."

"I think he must have a good reason, Jimmy. Give him a chance, you know."

"If he had a good reason, he can tell us what it was," said Jimmy Silver; and he left the study.

Erroll, with a troubled brow, went downstairs. He could not account for Morny's conduct, but there were dark forebodings in his mind. He had not forgotten the list of numbers discovered by Tubby Muffin, of which he knew the meaning far better than Jimmy Silver did. And there was a deep fear in his heart that evil had befallen his chum.

A good many fellows gathered in the big doorway to wait for Mornington to come in. It was close on looking-up now, and his return could not be long delayed. Tubby Muffin's fat squeak was heard at last from the dusky quad.

"Here he comes!"

A figure loomed up in the dusk.

Valentine Mornington came striding towards the School House, and he came up the steps with a set face and a black brow. His look was not pleasant; and one or two fellows who had intended to "jaw" him decided not to do so. But Morny's black look had no terrors for Jimmy Silver, and he spoke at once as Mornington entered the House.

"You've missed the match, Mornington."

"Eh? Oh, yes!"

"You're supposed to be junior captain!" exclaimed Lovell. "What the thump do you mean by it?"

"Find out!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Morny!" muttered Erroll, in distress. Mornington did not even glance at his chum.

"Don't you even want to know how it went, Morny?" exclaimed Raby, in angry disgust.

"Not in the least!"

Mornington strode on towards the staircase, leaving the juniors gazing.

"Mornington!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Go and eat coke!"

And Mornington tramped up the stairs without another word.

Jimmy Silver made a step after Mornington, but he stopped. There was nothing more to be said just then. But it was pretty clear to all that Mornington's days as junior captain of Rookwood were numbered.

THE END.

(Tell your pals that next week's story of Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood is full of thrills.)

SMITHY'S

ROUGH LUCK!

(Continued from page 21.)

face. The struggle to do the right was difficult; the shadow of the past lay too darkly upon his path. By force of circumstances, it seemed that by persisting in the straight path, he would bring ruin upon himself; and that he could only save himself by going back to the old bad ways. It was a grim temptation to one whose conceptions of right and wrong were by no means firmly fixed.

Wharton understood his feelings, and he laid his hand on the Bounder's shoulder.

"Don't think of that, Smithy," he said quietly. "Play the game. We'll find some way yet of settling that scoundrel. But don't go back on your word, and on yourself. Play the game!"

"And get the sack!" said the Bounder sardonically.

"It's a rotten position, I know. But there must be some way out."

"Blessed if I see it, then! The fellow may get tipsy, and come here. That's the greatest danger. He must have been tipsy, and blabbed something out before Loder some time. That's what put Loder on the track last night. He doesn't care what he says or does when he's been drinking. He thinks I've given him the go-by, and he's ratty about it. It's natural in a way. If he comes here—," The Bounder set his teeth.

"I'm not going to be sacked from the school for the sake of playing the game as you call it! If there's no other way, I shall pal on to him again, and stave it off that way."

"Smithy!"

"I'm not going to be ruined!" said the Bounder savagely. "Haven't I done my best? There isn't a fellow in the school has been straighter than I've been this term. I've had Loder and Carne down on me because of it—and you know how much a prefect can make a junior squirm. I've chucked it all up—betting, smoking, breaking bounds—everything—and if you want to know, I've found it precious dull at times, too. But I've stuck to it. I've even gone out of my way to help others do the same. Haven't I looked after that fool Hazeldene like a Dutch uncle, and kept it dark that he took my money to gamble with? I've done more than most fellows would do. Now I've got to be shown up and ruined, because I'm trying to do the decent thing. Well, I'm fed up with it!"

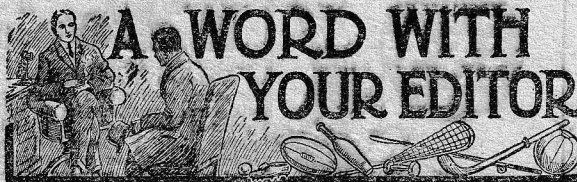
"I know. But it all comes of your breaking your promise to the Head," said Harry quietly. "That's the cause of it, and you've got to pay for it, Smithy. You ought to stick to your guns, and play the game—whatever comes of it!"

"That's easy enough for you to say; you're not in the soup. I tell you a chap's whole career is ruined by being sacked from a school like this—and for such reasons! I can't be expected to stand it! I've got to save myself, and I'll save myself any way I can!"

THE END.

(You must not miss next week's stirring story of Greyfriars, entitled: "OUTWITTING A RASCAL.")

"The Mystery of the Bungalow on the Heath!"—Next Week!



A WORD WITH YOUR EDITOR

THE GREAT COMPETITION.

IT is just as I expected. There has been a record rush in connection with the Grand Cricket Competition, with its £300 prize list. But there is plenty of time yet. Make ready! Send in your coupons! Those of my readers who have not as yet got busy over their forecasts would be well advised to make up for lost time. Lost time may mean lost prizes, and these prizes are worth striving for. This is the opportunity of the season, and the splendid offer has made a sensation.

"OUTWITTING A RASCAL!"

Next week we have a strong and thoroughly appealing yarn dealing with the varied career of Vernon-Smith. The Bounder of Greyfriars has good chums these days. Long ago he and Wharton were at daggers drawn. Things have changed vastly. The Remove captain is his most loyal chum, but even the comradeship of Wharton and the resourceful Co. cannot save the Bounder from the consequences of past folly. In the new story we see Vernon-Smith being victimised shamefully by an unscrupulous rogue who is in possession of a tall-tale letter which ought to have been destroyed long before. The rascal is intent on squeezing money out of his prey. You will be thrilled by the action of Wharton. He is not the fellow to leave a chum in the lurch. He realises there is something he can do, and he gets busy in grand style.

"DICKY BIRD'S CAPTURE."

It would be absurd to institute comparisons, but there is no doubt that the dramatic Cedar Creek series in the "Pop" is simply unrivalled. There is nothing so fine in this special line to be found anywhere. Don't miss next week's gripping story of adventure with rustlers and road agents. It is a narrative full of excitement, and the way the Cedar Creek fellows rally to the call of duty to round up some of the pests of the Thompson Valley Section makes brilliant reading. We all like Cedar Creek, and the topping little school will stand even higher after next Tuesday.

"HEADING FOR DISASTER!"

Val Mornington is a puzzle to his friends. He is one of the fellows who come unstuck at a critical juncture. In next week's tale of Rookwood it is pretty evident he is passing through an out-and-out bad phase. Will his tenure of the coveted captaincy be shortened by reason of his amazing tactics? That remains to be seen. Anyway, he is going downhill, and when you find a wrong start is made in that direction, you feel that nothing short of a miracle will be any good. Tuesday's yarn is a master stroke—surprise after surprise makes you well-nigh giddy with anticipation of what is coming next. You will feel all the time that Mornington ought to pull himself together. He is worthy of better things.

"SKIMPOL'S REFORMATION SCHEME."

St. Jim's is admirably represented in the next issue of the "Popular" by no less a personage than Skimpole. "Skimmay," as Gussy always calls him, has a great idea. Unkind critics would say the brainy, quaint-minded fellow had a bee in his bonnet, but one need not take such caustic scepticisms into account, any more than does the benevolent Skimpole. Very few people really understand Skimpole. He often fails to understand himself. You sometimes get the impression that he is lost in admiration of his own perfections. Then he suddenly pulls out the modest stop, as it were, and you see the real character of the fellow. In the new yarn he captures your attention by his wheeze to turn all the lads of the neighbouring village into superlative gentlemen. Of course, you cannot make silk purses out of the ears of sows, and, for that matter, one never heard of any misguided enthusiasts who contemplated setting up a factory for the purpose. But sows' ears do not come in. And yet Skimpole has got the wrong pig by the ear. He thinks it would be a great thing to turn a lout into a gentleman, and so it might, but you have got to prove that the alleged lout is really a lout. The story goes in one long, hearty laugh, and what more could be wished?

AN IMPOT NUMBER.

That most popular institution known as an impot is treated of in the most thorough style next week. As we know, most fellows welcome an impot. They know its intrinsic worth. It is so chastening and inspiring. What more enjoyable than "lines"? You will smile some over "Billy Bunter's Weekly" on Tuesday. The porpoise is the proprietor of some very curious and entertaining knowledge concerning impots, and he lets the world benefit thereby.

"THE LEAGUE OF SEVEN."

We are on the eve of the Great Rebellion in the coming instalment. The Duke of Monmouth has landed at Lyme; the mysterious League is busy; there is a rush to the standard of the handsome and debonair Stuart Prince whom so many think would make a better king than the ignoble James. The reader will be thrilled by the amazing developments ensuing on the clarion call to arms.

Your Editor.

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8. Baldness.

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2. A packet of "Cremex" shampoo. This is an antiseptic purifier which thoroughly cleanses the hair and scalp of all scurf, etc., and prepares the hair for the "Hair-Drill" treatment. You should avoid greasy, hair-matting coconut oils.
3. A bottle of "Uzon" Brilliantine, which gives a final touch of beauty to the hair, and is especially beneficial to those whose scalp is inclined to be "dry."
4. A copy of the new edition of the secret "Hair-Drill" Manual of instruction.

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Everyone, especially ladies, should beware of attempting to grow hair by means of internal medicines. Even if it were possible, it would be dangerous, as it would cause new hair growth all over the body or not at all. Thus, internal remedies are likely to cause complete disfigurement and unsightliness by causing superfluous hairs to grow on Cheeks, Lips, Chin, and Arms.

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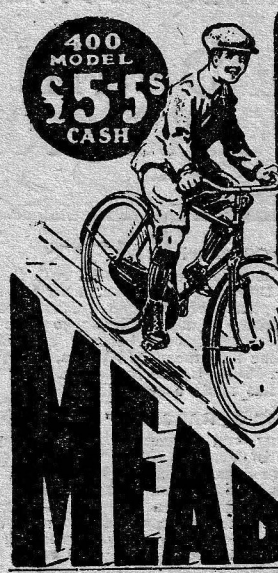
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