

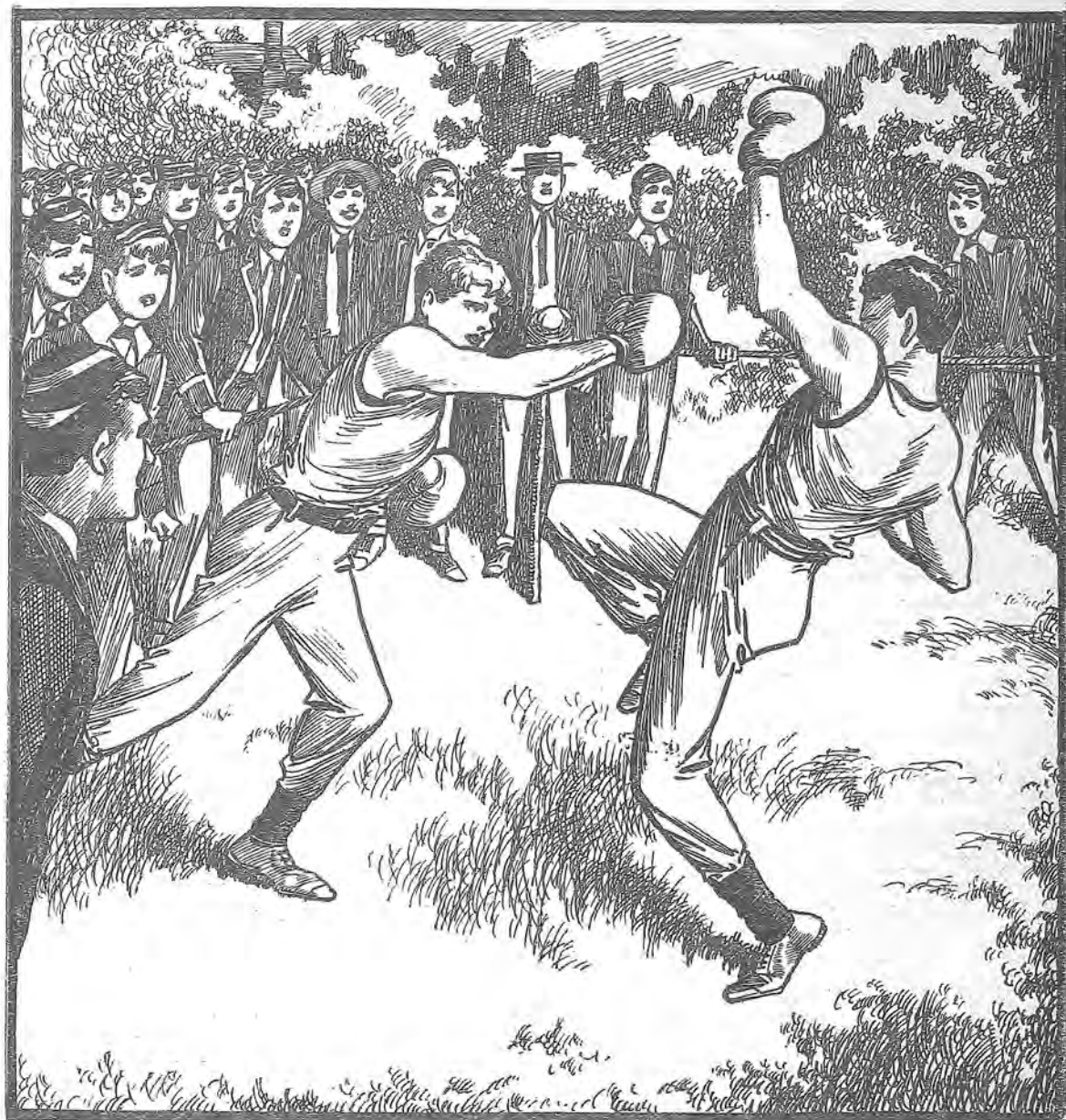
28
GRAND BANK HOLIDAY NUMBER!

The Penny **1½^d**
Popular

Week Ending
August 2nd, 1919.

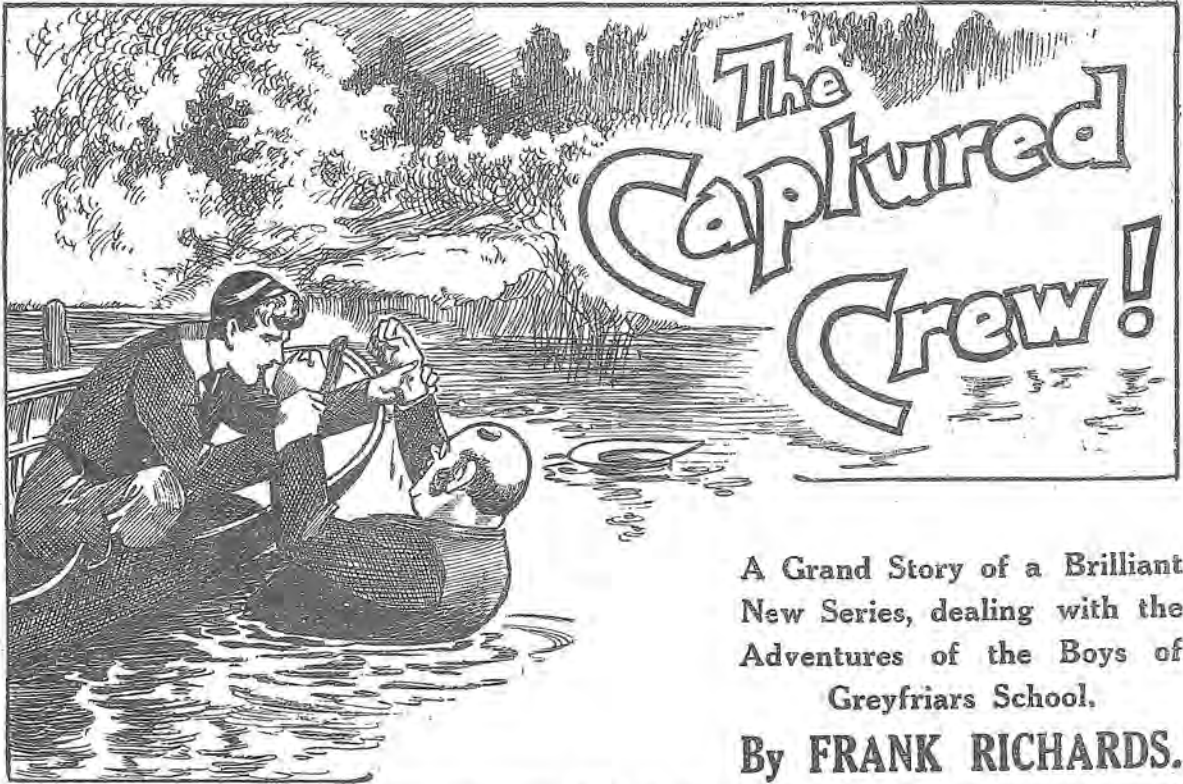
No. 28.
New Series.

Three Complete Stories of—
HARRY WHARTON & CO.—JIMMY SILVER & CO.—TOM MERRY & CO.



BOB CHERRY'S GREAT CONTEST!

(An Exciting Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale of Greyfriars in this issue.)



A Grand Story of a Brilliant
New Series, dealing with the
Adventures of the Boys of
Greyfriars School.
By **FRANK RICHARDS.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
A Modest Hero.

"PULL, you beggars—pull!" Round a bend in the River Sark, close to Greyfriars, appeared a sturdy, athletic boat's crew. The timely plashing of their oars made merry music.

Harry Wharton & Co., of the Remove, were putting in some hard practice on the river. They were visiting Chester next day, to hold a sports' tournament with the boys of Cheshire, and a boat-race had been included in the list of events.

Dicky Nugent, who was acting as cox, yelled cheerfully at the Remove oarsmen.

"That's the style! Strong and steady does it! Buck up, No. 4!"

No. 4 was Dicky Nugent's major, who was taking things a trifle more easily than he should have done.

"Don't get excited, Dicky," said Frank. "I'm saving up my powers till we get to Chester. That's when we shall need to go all out. By all accounts, the Cheshire fellows have got a first-rate crew."

Harry Wharton, at stroke, set a hot pace for the last quarter of a mile, and the juniors were panting and puffing when they drew level with the boat-house.

"Well rowed!" said a quiet, approving voice.

"Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "It's Miss Phyllis!"

Phyllis Howell, of Cliff House, was on the towing-path.

She smiled brightly at the juniors as they stepped out of their boat.

Harry Wharton & Co. chatted with their girl-chum for a few moments, and then disappeared into the boat-house, with the exception of Bob Cherry, who lingered behind.

"Buck up, Bob!" said Harry Wharton.

"Ahem! I—I think I'll stroll with Miss Phyllis as far as Cliff House," murmured Bob.

"Good idea!" murmured Frank Nugent. "I'll come along, too."

"Same here!" said Wharton.

"I, too, will helpfully assist to escortfully take the charming Miss Phyllis to Cliff House!" murmured Hurree Singh.

Bob Cherry flushed.

"Don't be a set of asses!" he said. "Keep off the grass! Two's company, you know."

"I believe," said Nugent solemnly, "that our Bob's fallen head-over-ears in love!"

"You champion ass—"

"I see all the symptoms," said Squiff.

"Bob's very badly bitten. Note his nice

clean rowing-jersey. Note also the fact that he's washed his neck."

"Ifa, ha, ha!"

"I believe he's cultivating a growth on his upper-lip, too!" said Tom Brown.

"Of all the prize idiots!" growled Bob Cherry.

And, slamming the door of the boat-house in the faces of his humorous chums, he joined Phyllis Howell on the towing-path.

"What's the joke, Bob?" asked Phyllis.

"Oh, nothing!" said Bob. "I'm going to see you as far as Cliff House, if I may."

"Of course you may! And you can stay to tea, if you like! Our study isn't in funds, but I believe that Flap Derwent mentioned that there was a stale sardine in the cupboard, and a kipper of advanced age."

"Then it will be a high tea," said Bob, laughing.

Phyllis laughed, too.

"By the way," she said, "why were you rowing at such a pace just now?"

"We're having a boat-race with the Cheshire fellows in a day or two on the River Dee."

"Splendid!"

"I think we shall pull it off," said Bob.

"Wharton's been keeping us up to the mark."

Phyllis nodded.

"One of these days," she said, "you must have a boat-race with Cliff House."

"Eh?"

"We'll challenge you to a race on the river!"

"You're joking, of course!" grinned Bob.

"Why, we should simply knock spots off you!"

"You think girls can't row!" exclaimed Phyllis, with a flash of indignation.

"Well—er—not exactly," faltered Bob.

"But you wouldn't be quite up to our weight."

"How long is the course you covered just now?"

"Half a mile."

"Well, provided you give us two hundred yards start, I'll guarantee to raise a crew of girls that will beat you! Is that a bargain?"

"Oh, quite!" said Bob.

He smiled at the prospect of a boat-race with the Cliff House girls. He recalled sundry contests between the girls and boys at cricket, football, and hockey—contests in which the girls had been hopelessly out-classed.

Cliff House had never met Greyfriars on the river; but, even with the two hundred

yards to help them, there was not much doubt that the girls would be whacked to the wide.

"That's a go, then!" said Phyllis. "Directly you come back from Chester we'll hold the race. Of course, if you feel like backing out—"

"Not a bit of it!" said Bob.

When Cliff House was reached the scheme was propounded to Flap Derwent, who cheerfully remarked that Greyfriars would be beaten to a frazzle.

Marjorie Hazeldene and Clara Trevelyan, who came into the study during the conversation, emphatically declared that Cliff House could hold its own on the river against all comers.

"Of course," said Bob Cherry, "you might beat us if Billy Bunter was stroke. But you'll find Wharton a very different proposition."

To which Miss Clara retorted in her emphatic, boyish way:

"Rats!"

Bob Cherry partook of his "high" tea—which wasn't so bad, after all—and set off for Greyfriars by way of the towing-path.

He chuckled to himself as he went.

"Phyllis has put her foot in it this time with a vengeance!" he murmured. "If we don't lick Cliff House to a frazzle I'm a Dutchman!"

Bob Cherry was still amusing himself with his reflections, when he sighted a plump and portly gentleman on the opposite side of the river.

The gentleman was evidently in a great hurry, for, although he carried a considerable amount of overweight, he was coming along at a canter.

A plank had been placed across the river at that part, as a temporary means of crossing.

No doubt a young and agile person could have crossed the plank in safety, but it was a risky undertaking for a stout gentleman in a hurry.

Bob Cherry saw the portly person heading for the plank, and he gave a shout of warning.

"I shouldn't try the plank if I were you, sir! It's safer to cross by the foot-bridge lower down."

The stout gentleman took no heed.

He puffed his way towards the plank, and plunged across it.

Bob Cherry looked on breathlessly.

"The mad idiot!" he muttered, as the plank

rocked and swayed ominously. "He'll get a ducking, if he's not jolly careful!"

When he was half-way across the plank the plump gentleman suddenly stopped short.

He began to realise that there was justification for Bob Cherry's warning.

For one giddy second he paused, uncertain whether to go back or to go on.

"This way!" shouted Bob.

But the plank-walker was in a state of nervous apprehension by this time.

He looked this way and that way, and then lost his footing.

Splash!

With a cry of alarm the stout gentleman struck the water. He spluttered about on the surface like a fat frog.

Bob Cherry was almost convulsed with merriment, but he realised that there was danger.

"Don't struggle!" he exclaimed. "I'll have you out in a jiffy!"

Fortunately, there was a rowing-boat moored to the bank.

Bob Cherry jumped into it, and a few swift strokes brought him to the scene of the calamity.

The victim was behaving very badly. He clutched frantically at the boat, bawling for help at the top of his voice.

"Steady on!" said Bob. "You'll capsize the boat if you're not careful!"

"Oh dear! Help! I—I'm drowning! Get me out of this—quick!"

And then Bob Cherry performed a feat which a champion weight-lifter might have envied.

He leaned over the side of the boat, gripped the stout person by the wrists, and proceeded to haul him up.

It was a herculean task. The perspiration stood in beads on Bob's brow.

After a gruelling struggle, however, he succeeded in heaving the man into the boat, where he lay gasping like a floundering fish.

Panting with his exertions, Bob Cherry pulled to the bank.

"My brave lad," said the plump gentleman, as he emerged on to the bank, "you have rendered me a great service! You have saved my life!"

"Rot!" said Bob Cherry.

"I repeat, you have saved my life! And in so doing, you have benefited not only myself, but the community at large. I am the Mayor of Courtfield!"

"My hat!"

"Unfortunately," said the mayor, shaking his drenched garments, "I have missed the three-fifty train at Friardale, which I was hurrying to catch. But better to lose the train than lose my life, which, as I have already hinted, is valuable."

"It's a risky job crossing that plank," said Bob Cherry.

"So I have discovered! Now, I wonder where I can get my clothes dried?"

"The Cross Keys is the nearest place," said Bob. "The back entrance is a little further down."

"Thank you, my boy, thank you!"

The mayor plunged his hand into his pocket, and drew therefrom a little bundle of Treasury notes.

"I should like to reward you—" he began.

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"I'd much rather you didn't, sir," he said. "This is nothing to go into heroics about. You were in fairly shallow water, so I doubt if you were in any real danger. And apart from that, anybody would have fished you out."

"Won't you accept—"

"I'll accept nothing," said Bob, politely but firmly.

"Bless my soul! You are a most remarkable lad. I perceive you are a Greyfriars boy. Might I ask your name?"

A mischievous impulse came to Bob Cherry at that moment.

He realised that if he gave his correct name there would be a great fuss made. People would be lauding him to the skies as a hero and a life-saver, and all that sort of thing. And Bob had no great love of the limelight.

"My name?" he said, carelessly. "Oh, Skinner—Harold Skinner, of the Remove."

"I shall remember that."

"I hope you're not going to send a present, or something, up to the school," said Bob, realising that if a five-pound note arrived for Harold Skinner, the cad of the Remove would promptly collar it.

"Do you seriously mean that?" said the mayor.

Bob Cherry nodded.

He wished to make no capital out of the affair himself. Neither did he wish Skinner to profit by another fellow's action. In fact, he half repented already of having given Skinner's name.

"Well, well," said the mayor. "I can only thank you once again, on behalf of my townspeople, for your great gallantry. Good-bye, my boy!"

And the mayor extended a dripping hand, which Bob Cherry shook cordially.

A moment later the mayor was squelching his way along the towing-path, while Bob Cherry walked thoughtfully back to Greyfriars.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Skinner's Chance!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

Billy Bunter came into Study No. 1 next morning like a whirlwind.

There was an excited gleam in Bunter's little, round eyes, and a newspaper, damp from the printing-machines, was clutched in his fat hand.

The Famous Five were packing their cricket gear, ready for the tour. Bunter's presence was, to say the least of it, unwelcome.

"Scat!" growled Johnny Bull, brandishing a cricket-stump.

"Melt away!" said Nugent.

"Go and chewfully devour coke!" murmured Hurree Singh.

"Oh, really, you know!" protested Bunter. "I've got news—marvellous news!"

"Have the Huns sunk another Fleet?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"Rats! Look here!"

And Billy Bunter spread the newspaper—a local one—on the table.

"What the merry dickens—" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

A headline had caught his eye—a headline which made him gasp.

"Bravo, Skinner! Greyfriars Junior's Gallant Rescue!"

The other members of the Famous Five, attracted by the amazed expression on Wharton's face, crowded round to read the paragraph. And this is what they saw:

"At the time of going to press we have been given details of a very gallant rescue on the part of a Greyfriars boy named Harold Skinner."

"It appears that the Mayor of Courtfield—one of the most highly-respected gentlemen in the district—was crossing the River Sark by a foot-plank, when he had the misfortune to fall into the water."

"But for the prompt action of Harold Skinner this paragraph might have taken the form of an obituary notice."

"With admirable presence of mind, Skinner manned a rowing-boat, and went to the assistance of the mayor, who has always regretted his inability to swim."

"After a terrible struggle, the plucky junior succeeded in hauling the mayor into the boat, and rowing him to the bank."

"We need not elaborate on this deed of bravery. Greyfriars boys have often made themselves conspicuous in the past by similar acts of courage."

"The residents of Courtfield and the surrounding villages will ever have cause to remember Harold Skinner's daring rescue."

The Famous Five perused that paragraph in profound astonishment—with the exception of Bob Cherry, who knew the true facts of the case.

Frank Nugent rubbed his eyes, as if to make sure he was not dreaming.

"Skinner!" he gasped. "Skinner—the giddy hero!"

"Some japing journalist must have been at work," said Harry Wharton.

"The japefulness is terrific!" said Hurree Singh. "The ludicrous Skinner would not have performed this esteemed caper."

"I say, you fellows!" chimed in Billy Bunter. "I always knew Skinner had the right stuff in him!"

"Rats!"

"He did exactly what I should have done, if I'd been there," said Bunter.

"You!" said Johnny Bull, in contempt. "You'd have told the mayor to buck up and drown!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What does Skinner say about this?" asked Bob Cherry, with interest.

"He's very modest about it," said Bunter. "He says he nearly lost his own life in saving the mayor's, but he'd willingly do it again!"

"What!" gasped Bob.

"Skinner's ordered a dozen copies of the local paper, to send out to his relatives and

friends," Bunter went on. "He hopes to raise quite a lot of tips on the strength of it."

"My hat!"

"Of course, it's all tommy-rot," said Nugent. "Skinner would be the last fellow in the world to fish anybody out of the river. He doesn't know how to handle a pair of oars, to begin with."

"Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, going to the window. "There seems to be a lot of excitement in the Close."

The juniors followed Bob's gaze.

Skinner of the Remove was strutting about like a peacock, with an alone-I-did-it expression on his face.

Fellows were flocking round him with their congratulations.

Snoop and Stott, in particular, clung to him like limpets. Whether they believed the newspaper report or not, they were making a great fuss of their leader. If a reward was forthcoming for Skinner's alleged bravery, Snoop and Stott meant to have a look in.

The Famous Five went down into the Close, while Billy Bunter dashed off to Study No. 7 with the news.

"Look here, Skinner!" said Johnny Bull, in his blunt way. "Have you been going in for a form of self-advertisement?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Skinner.

"Did you arrange for that paragraph to be put in the paper?"

"Of course not!"

"You're not going to tell me that you fished the Mayor of Courtfield out of the river?"

"Oh, yes, I did! You needn't thump me on the back," said Skinner. "I'm getting a bit tired of congratulations."

"My only aunt!"

"Did you get very wet, Skinny?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I should jolly well say so! The mayor was a pretty hefty fish to land, I can tell you! He capsize the boat, and I had to swim with him at the finish. Of course, the paper didn't say anything about that."

We need not elaborate on this deed of bravery," it said, and I'm glad. If they went into details, they'd have filled whole columns!"

"Great pip!"

"Modesty, thy name is Skinner!" said Squiff.

At that moment Mr. Quelch rustled to the spot.

The news had filtered through to the Form-master's ears, and he was surprised and pleased to think that there was some good in one of his most refractory pupils.

"I understand you saved the life of the Mayor of Courtfield yesterday, Skinner?" said Mr. Quelch.

"That's so, sir."

"Your courage is most commendable, Skinner! From my knowledge of you, I should not have supposed you capable of performing an heroic deed."

"Oh, really, sir—"

"It seems that I have misjudged you in the past," Mr. Quelch went on. "There is good in everyone, and the good that is in you has only just made itself apparent."

There was a chuckle from the juniors.

"My boys," said Mr. Quelch, frowning. "I trust you do not regard this affair in the light of a joke. You all have cause to be proud of your schoolfellow."

"Oh, help!" murmured Nugent.

Mr. Quelch nodded kindly to Skinner, and swept away, with rustling gown.

For a moment or two Harold Skinner stood thinking furiously. Then, as if coming to a sudden decision, he ran after Mr. Quelch.

"If you please, sir—"

"Well, Skinner?" said the Remove-master, stopping short.

"I was wondering—ahem!—whether it would be possible for me to go to Chester with Harry Wharton's party, sir."

"I am afraid Wharton's team is already complete," said Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, I know, sir. I don't want to go as a playing member—merely as a looker-on, sir. After that terrible ordeal I went through yesterday, I feel that I need a holiday."

"Very well, Skinner. In view of your recent brave conduct, I see no reason why you should not be allowed to go. I will mention the matter to Dr. Locke, and will let you know definitely in half an hour."

"Thank awfully, sir!"

And Skinner rejoined his schoolfellows with a gloating smile.

"What's the little game?" asked Stott.

"I've asked Quelchly if I can go to Chester."

"My hat!"

"You cadging worm!" said Johnny Bull. "We're not taking any rank outsiders with us!"

"No; rather not!" said Nugent.

"I'm afraid you won't be able to help yourselves!" sneered Skinner. "Quelchly's gone to ask the Head if I can come."

"There's no room for you in the team," said Wharton.

"I wouldn't play if there was! I'm merely going to be a looker-on in Vienna."

"Quelchly must be off his rocker!" said Squiff.

"That paragraph in the paper has turned his head!" said Nugent. "He thinks Skinner is a paragon of all the virtues!"

The tourists were annoyed to think that they were going to be saddled with Skinner's society.

Bob Cherry was not only annoyed, but distressed.

Ought he to expose Skinner, and to state the true facts of the case?

Bob finally decided that, for Skinner's sake, he would remain silent. If the Head got to know that Skinner had obtained a week's holiday under false pretences, there would be short shrift for the cad of the Remove.

Bob Cherry had little love for Skinner; but his code of honour prevented him from "splitting" on the impostor.

Half an hour later Mr. Quelchly accosted Skinner in the Close.

"I have arranged for you to go to Chester, Skinner."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

A few minutes later the tourists, with Wingate in charge, trooped out of gates. And Harold Skinner, smiling broadly, accompanied them.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Snake in the Grass!

SKINNER of the Remove had a twofold object in going on the tour. In the first place, he wanted to have a good time; and, secondly, it was his intention, if possible, to unsettle the tour.

Skinner had been carefully excluded from all previous tours. Wharton didn't want him, and he had told him so. Vernon-Smith didn't want him, and the Bouncer had not minced his words.

Whilst the tourists had been enjoying themselves, Skinner had writhed and chafed in the Form-room, under the gimlet eyes of Mr. Quelch.

As a result, Skinner's feelings towards Wharton and Vernon-Smith were not exactly bristling with brotherly affection.

Nothing would have suited Skinner more than to spoil the sports at Chester.

He had not mapped out a plan of campaign as yet, but he meant to leave no stone unturned to wreck the Remove's chances of success.

Skinner was ignored in the railway carriage, but he did not seem to mind. His brain was very active as the train sped on its way.

It was late in the afternoon when the tourists reached Chester. Instead of plunging at once into the sports, they explored the ancient and historic town.

Jim Challoner, a local schoolboy, and the skipper of the Cheshire team, showed the Greyfriars juniors round, and pointed out to them all the places of interest.

"What sort of a cricket team have you got?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Nothing to shout from the housetops about," said Challoner; "but I think we shall give you a good run for your money!"

Bob Cherry regarded the Cheshire captain curiously.

"I believe I've heard of you before," he said. "You're known as Jim the Slogger, aren't you?"

Challoner flushed.

"It's an idiotic nickname," he said, "and I don't live up to it. My last six scores in cricket have been 1, 2, 0, 0, 0, 1. Sounds cheerful, doesn't it?"

"You'll blossom out again to-morrow!" said Mark Linley with a smile.

And Challoner did!

Early next morning, on a pitch which was ideal for run-getting, the match started.

The Cheshire boys batted first, and Challoner was in fine form.

As a rule, Hurree Singh's bowling was treated with great respect by all. But for Jim Challoner it had no terrors.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 28.

Time and time again the Cheshire captain sent the ball over the railings, to the accompaniment of loud applause from the spectators.

"That fellow must have been pulling our legs yesterday," remarked Bob Cherry. "I've never seen Inky's bowling punished so much."

Hurree Singh mixed his deliveries, now sending down a scorching ball, and now a slow one.

Wickets fell, but not Challoner's. Jim the Slogger carried his bat right through the innings, and out of a total of 140 he had made 90, not out.

Skinner sneered as the Greyfriars fieldmen came back to the pavilion.

"You've bitten off more than you can chew this journey!" he said.

Bob Cherry wagged an admonishing forefinger at the cad of the Remove.

"If you don't behave yourself, Skinney," he said, "we shall be compelled to strew the cricket-pitch with your bones, at the risk of making an unholy mess!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner subsided, with a growl. He realised that there was an undercurrent or seriousness in Bob Cherry's remark.

"Come along, Bob!" said Harry Wharton. "We want runs—and plenty of 'em!"

Wharton and Bob Cherry gave the Friars a splendid start. Squiff and Mark Linley carried on the good work, and Bolsover major put up a great show at the finish. The result was that Harry Wharton & Co. got to within two runs of their opponents' total.

"A good game!" remarked Jim Challoner, as he sat down to lunch.

"Everything hinges on the second innings."

"I believe you've got a magic bat, or something!" growled Johnny Bull. "You didn't make a single mistake in the first innings."

"There's something in that," said Bob Cherry. "A good bat makes all the difference in the world. I should feel quite lost without my 'Willow King.'"

Skinner, who was seated opposite, pricked up his ears.

So Bob Cherry had a favourite bat! On his own showing, he would be all at sea without it.

"All right, my son!" muttered Skinner. "I'll jolly soon settle your hash!"

And whilst the second innings of the Cheshire boys was in progress Skinner crept stealthily into the pavilion.

The place was empty.

After a hurried glance round, Skinner unearthed Bob Cherry's bat.

"Now, the question is, where can I hide it?" he murmured.

To take it outside the pavilion would attract attention.

Skinner glanced around, and sighted some steps leading to a loft. He hastily mounted them, and buried the bat beneath some old sacking which he found in the corner.

"That ought to do the trick!" he murmured.

And the cad of the Remove dismounted from the loft, and strolled out of the pavilion with an air of unconcern.

The Cheshire wickets were falling fast.

Jim the Slogger was repeating his early performance; but he could get no one to stay with him. The rest of the batsmen fared very badly against the cunning deliveries of Hurree Singh.

When the last wicket fell Bob Cherry turned to his chums with a beaming smile.

"We want eighty to win," he said. "Not exactly a colossal task, is it?"

"You ought to get them off your own bat, Bob," said Frank Nugent, as the juniors entered the pavilion.

"Yes—but where is my blessed bat? I left it here, in the corner, and it's disappeared!"

"What?"

The Removes became alarmed at once. They well knew that Bob Cherry, if he had to use a common or garden bat in place of his own, would come a cropper. Apart from that, Bob could not afford to lose a bat which was a present from his father, Major Cherry.

"Are you sure it was in that corner?" asked Wharton.

"Positive!"

"Then it must have taken unto itself wings!"

Bob Cherry began to search for the missing bat with a worried frown. His chums helped him. It did not occur to any of them to climb into the loft.

"Somebody lost a banknote?" inquired Challoner, looking in at the doorway.

"Something more important than that," said Bob Cherry. "My bat's missing!"

"Great Scott!"

Challoner readily joined in the search. The pavilion was ransacked from end to end, but there was no sign of the bat.

"I'm awfully sorry this should have happened," said Challoner, at length. "I ought to have put somebody in charge of the pavilion; but it didn't occur to me that the things weren't safe."

"Of course not!" said Wharton. "It can't be helped. We shall have to resume the search later on. It's time for our innings now."

"You'd better borrow my bludgeon, Bob," said Johnny Bull. "It's not a patch on yours, but you may be able to slog a few boundaries with it."

Bob Cherry nodded.

He went in first with Harry Wharton, but he could not concentrate upon the game. He was worried about the lost bat. His father, he knew, would be very indignant about its loss. He would probably tax Bob with gross carelessness.

Bob Cherry was clean bowled before he had scored a single run.

It was not the fault of Johnny Bull's bat. It was due to Bob's wandering thoughts. It is impossible to play cricket and to think of other things at the same time.

Bob Cherry's usual sunny smile had followed the example of the bat. It was missing. He frowned as he came up the pavilion steps.

"Rough luck, old man!" said Nugent.

And Skinner, who sat a short distance away, chuckled gleefully. His little scheme had been crowned with success.

Bob Cherry's failure had a damping effect on the play of the others.

Harry Wharton played a very simple ball into the hands of point; and Squiff was run out before he had time to settle down.

Johnny Bull and Frank Nugent fared little better.

Five wickets down for five runs!

It was an appalling prospect for the Greyfriars Remove. Unless a miracle happened at the eleventh hour, they would be hopelessly beaten.

Skinner rubbed his hands with keen satisfaction.

This was exactly what he wanted. Nothing would give him greater pleasure than to send a telegram to his pals at Greyfriars, stating that the Remove had been licked.

Unfortunately for Skinner, however, there were two fellows who refused to accept defeat.

Mark Linley and Monty Newland came together, and for a merry half-hour they made the fur fly. So much so, that when their partnership was dissolved, the Friars were within a dozen runs of victory.

Hurree Singh and Bolsover major put the finishing touches, and Greyfriars won an exciting game by two wickets.

"Well played, you fellows!" said Harry Wharton, as Hurree Singh and Bolsover came up the pavilion steps. "Now for tea!"

"I'm not touching a morsel of grub," said Bob Cherry, "until my bat's found!"

As Bob spoke, there was a sudden shout from the loft above.

"Got it!" exclaimed Squiff's voice.

The Australian junior had been searching in the loft; and, in treading on the sacking, he had discovered the presence of the bat underneath.

A moment later Squiff rejoined his school-fellows with the bat.

"How on earth did it get up there?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Give it up," said Squiff. "You haven't been walking in your sleep, by any chance, Bob?"

"Of course not, fathead! Somebody must have stowed the bat away in the loft for a jape."

"That being the case," said Nugent, "it will go hard with the precious japer, if we find him!"

"We won the match, anyway," said Monty Newland. "And now for some grub!"

The Removes sat down to tea in a cheerful mood.

Skinner sat remote from all, with a melancholy frown on his face.

But he was not beaten yet. His hopes of spoiling the cricket-match had been dashed. But there was the boat-race to follow, and the cad of the Remove was already devising ways and means whereby he might bring about the downfall of the Greyfriars tourists,



The portly gentleman paused in the middle of the swaying plank uncertain whether to turn back or go on. Somehow he lost his footing, and with a cry of alarm he struck the water. (See page 3.)

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Captured!

YOU won't be ever wantin' a dog, now?"

Skinner gave a start, as the words were addressed to him. He was taking a solitary stroll through the streets of Chester, in the cool of the evening.

"A very cute an' intelligent animal!" continued the voice.

Skinner turned, and was confronted by one of the most repulsive-looking men he had ever seen. He was holding a pugnacious-looking dog, duly muzzled, on a lead.

"The fact is," said the man confidently, "I'm 'ard up, an' the only way I can raise the wind is to part with my best pal. I don't want to lose 'im, but I feel he ought to go. Are you game to make me a bid for 'im, young gent?"

"I don't want a dog," said Skinner shortly. "But this 'ere is a sooper-dog—a most intelligent critter!"

"Nothing doing!" said Skinner.

He was about to move on, when it occurred to him that he might make good use of this repulsive-looking man.

"You say you're hard up?" said Skinner. "Which I ain't touched a mouthful of food for days!"

The statement was perfectly correct, so far as solid food was concerned. The "Puncher," as he was known in Chester, was in the habit of taking his food in liquid form.

"Look here," said Skinner. "I'll tell you an easy way of earning a fiver!"

The Puncher's eyes glittered. "I'm your man, every time!" he said. "You want a little job done?"

Skinner nodded. "I want eight fellows to be put out of the way for a day or two," he said.

"You want 'em kidnapped—what?" said the Puncher, all attention.

"That's rather an ugly word. I don't want any violence used, if that's what you mean. I just want them safely shut up under lock and key."

"A fiver ain't much for a risky job of that sort!" said the Puncher.

"I'll cap it with another fiver when the job's finished," said Skinner.

"That's better! An' 'ow am I to get 'old of these kids—I take it they're kids?"

"They're just about my own size and weight."

"Then they won't give much trouble!" said the Puncher, with a contemptuous glance at Skinner's weedy frame.

"You'll have to get a couple of fellows to help you," said Skinner.

"That's soon done!"

"Good! The eight kids will be going for a bathe in the river at six o'clock in the morning. The coast ought to be quite clear then. Where do you propose to take them?"

The Puncher reflected a moment. "There's an empty 'ouse a couple of miles beyond the town," he said. "I'll see that the kids are stowed away safe in the cellar."

"That's the idea!" said Skinner.

He rummaged in his pocket, and produced a five-pound note—the sum total of his resources.

It went very much against the grain to have to part with the fiver, but Skinner reflected that the kidnapping of an entire crew was bound to cost money.

"I leave the details to you," he said, as he handed over the note. "Mind you make a good job of it."

"Trust me!" said the Puncher cheerfully. Skinner walked back to the hotel with his heart beating fast.

He had played a good many low-down parts in his time, but none so base as this.

Supposing the Puncher made a hash of it? Skinner scarcely dared to think of the consequences.

Harry Wharton & Co. were in bed when the cad of the Remove reached the hotel.

The eight members of the boat's crew—the Famous Five, Squiff, Mark Linley, and Monty Newland—had arranged to retire early, and to turn out at six in the morning for a swim.

There was no sleep for Skinner that night. He had a room to himself, the rest of the juniors having no use for his company; and he tossed restlessly in his bed all night.

Blissfully unconscious of the fact that they would be walking into a trap, the eight members of the crew awoke early, and set out with their towels and costumes.

"What a topping morning!" said Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"It's ideal for a dip," he said.

"Don't seem to be many people about," remarked Nugent.

The juniors struck off down a deserted side-street.

The next moment a big car came crawling towards them.

There were three men in the car, which slowed up as it approached the Greyfriars fellows.

What followed happened so swiftly and suddenly that the juniors had no time to put up a fight.

The three men leapt out on to the pavement, and Harry Wharton & Co. were bundled into the car.

"What the thump—" began Bob Cherry. And then he found himself, lying gagged and bound and helpless, on the seat.

The rest of the juniors shared the same fate. And then the car bounded forward.

It did not crawl this time. It fairly

flashed through the quiet streets, and did not slow up until it reached a quaint, historic-looking house, situated in an isolated position at the end of an avenue.

"Quick, boys!" said the Punter.

And the juniors were carried, one at a time, into the building, and taken down to the cellar.

When they had all been deposited on the damp stone floor the Punter removed their bonds.

Harry Wharton was the first to find his voice.

"What's the little game?" he blurted out indignantly.

The Punter grinned.

"I hope as 'ow you'll be 'appy an' comfortable, young gentles!" he said. "You won't be 'ere long—a couple of days at the outside. An' I'll see that you're well looked after."

"You scoundrel!" exclaimed Nugent.

The Punter stood on the steps of the cellar and waved a grimy hand.

"Ta-ta!" he said. "Sorry I can't stay, but I've got an appointment. I'll come back later on with some grub."

The kidnapper disappeared up the steps, and the juniors heard a sound as of a heavy stone weight being replaced.

"My only aunt!" muttered Johnny Bull.

"Kidnapped, and in broad daylight!" said Squiff.

"Did you ever?" asked Bob Cherry.

"No, never!" said Nugent. "What on earth's the idea of collaring eight fellows and shutting 'em up in a cellar?"

"I could understand it if Smithy were here," said Wharton. "Smithy's the son of a millionaire, and he'd be a useful sort of fellow to hold to ransom. But there aren't any millionaires' sons here."

"The boat-race is due to be rowed at nine o'clock," said Mark Linley. "Strikes me it will have to be cancelled."

"Unless we can find a way out of this hole!" said Johnny Bull.

The juniors began to look round for a means of escape.

Harry Wharton suggested that they ascended the cellar steps and threw their united weight upon the stone.

This was done, but the stone refused to budge.

Again and again the juniors hurled themselves upon it. They might just as well have tried to remove a mountain.

"No go," said Monty Newland.

But the prisoners did not abandon hope.

In the semi-darkness of the cellar they searched for a possible exit.

"It's a very old house," said Wharton, "and it's just possible that there's a sliding panel in the wall somewhere. We won't give up yet, anyway."

For upwards of half an hour the juniors tapped the walls of the cellar.

And then Squiff gave a sudden shout.

"Here we are!"

The rest of the Removites rushed to the spot.

Squiff had certainly made a remarkable discovery.

A panel slid back in the wall, revealing an uninviting aperture.

"Goo!" It doesn't look very tempting," said Bob Cherry. "But if there's a passage on the other side we'll explore it."

"Yes, rather!"

One by one the juniors wriggled their way through the opening.

They found themselves in a narrow, winding passage. Whether it would afford them an outlet of escape or not remained to be seen.

After following the passage for fifty yards or so Bob Cherry, who was in front, came to a sudden halt.

"Go ahead, Bob!" called Wharton from the rear.

"I can't, fathead! We've come to the end of the passage!"

"Oh!"

"It's a beastly blind alley!" growled Johnny Bull. "We shall have to turn back."

"No, we shan't!" said Nugent excitedly.

A match flickered in the gloom, and the juniors saw Nugent pointing to an iron ladder.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Up we go, kids!"

And Bob led the way, scrambling up the ladder with the agility of a monkey.

The rest of the juniors followed.

When they reached the top of the ladder they found themselves in what was apparently a disused wing of the house.

"So far, so good," said Wharton. "The rest is easy."

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 28.

"Provided that hooligan fellow isn't still knocking about," said Mark Linley.

But there was no sign of the Punter. That worthily had considered it unnecessary to set a guard over the prisoners.

Hurree Singh and Johnny Bull wrenched open one of the windows, and the Removites clambered through, and emerged into the bright sunshine.

"What luck!" said Squiff. "We're free, and we shall be in time for the merry old boat-race, after all!"

"Yes, rather!"

The next moment eight dusty and dishevelled juniors were striding rapidly away in the direction of the river.

Skinner's little scheme had fallen flat, after all!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Boat-Race.

"W HERE on earth have the silly asses got to?"

Wingate of the Sixth stood on the steps of the hotel after breakfast, and asked the question in great annoyance.

Bolsover major glanced up at the sky, as if he expected Harry Wharton & Co. to come fluttering down.

"Ask me another, Wingate!" he said. "They went out for a dip at six o'clock—"

"But it's past eight now!" grunted Wingate.

"I expect they've gone off on an excursion up the river, and forgotten all about the boat-race!" said Skinner.

"Nonsense!" Wharton wouldn't do that sort of thing.

"It's certainly a poser," said Piet Delarey, who, although a member of the touring-party, was not taking part in the boat-race.

"Shall we go and hunt for them, Wingate?" The captain of Greyfriars nodded.

"One of you had better stay behind, in case they turn up at the hotel," he said.

"I'll stay!" said Skinner.

The others went along to the river. The scoured the banks for a distance of over a mile, and then retraced their steps to the boathouse.

"They've disappeared, right enough!" said Bolsover. "There's not a sign or a shadow of them."

Shortly before nine o'clock Jim Challoner and his followers arrived on the scene.

"Have you mislaid your men?" inquired Challoner.

Wingate grunted.

"I can't think where they've got to," he said.

"Don't worry," said the Cheshire skipper. "They'll turn up in a few minutes."

The neighbouring clocks were striking nine when eight dusty and breathless juniors came up at a canter.

"Just in time!" said Wingate. "I thought we should have to postpone the race. Where have you silly young asses been?"

"It's a long story," said Harry Wharton. "And I doubt if you'd believe it, anyway. It would sound too much like a fairy-tale."

"Let's hear it," said Wingate.

Harry Wharton described how, on their way to the river in the early morning, the juniors had fallen into captivity. He recounted their strange experiences in full.

Wingate fairly gasped.

"Is this a romance, Wharton?"

"I knew you'd find it hard to swallow," said the captain of the Remove. "But it's a fact. If we hadn't discovered the sliding panel in the cellar we should have been stuck there for goodness knows how long!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Bolsover major.

"It's extraordinary, to say the least of it," said Wingate. "Why on earth should anyone want to kidnap you?"

"That's just what we've been trying to puzzle out for ourselves, old sport!" said Bob Cherry.

"Have you had your breakfast?"

"We've only just come out of prison," said Squiff. "I don't mean Dartmoor," he added quickly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then you'd better go along to the hotel and get some grub," said Wingate.

"Rats!" said Nugent. "Business before pleasure. We'll tackle the boat-race first."

"Just as you like."

The juniors went into the boathouse and changed into their shorts and rowing-jerseys.

After a brief delay the two boats pulled out into midstream.

"Are you ready?" shouted Wingate.

There was a general nodding of heads as the rival crews bent over their oars.

Bang!

The pistol cracked, and the two boats leapt off the mark as one.

The Greyfriars juniors were badly handicapped.

In the first place, they had eaten no breakfast; and, secondly, they had expended a great deal of energy since six o'clock that morning.

But they warmed to their work.

Harry Wharton set a powerful stroke, and the men behind him worked like niggers.

But the Cheshire boys were trained to perfection. Jim Challoner had seen to that.

And at the end of the first half-mile his boat enjoyed a slight advantage.

Dicky Nugent had been unable to take part in the tour, and the Friars had secured the services of a boy named Walters as cox.

Walters was not a native of Cheshire, but he was spending his holidays there. He threw himself heart and soul into his task of spurring the Greyfriars crew on to victory.

"You're slacking, No. 4! Put a jerk on!"

Frank Nugent roused himself with an effort. He was feeling fagged already, but he realised that one weak link in the armour would spoil everything. It was up to him to keep on keeping on, for the honour of the Remove.

"That's tons better!" shouted Walters encouragingly, as the Greyfriars boat began to creep up in little jerks. "Put your beef into it, you fellows! You're gaining!"

The shouts of the spectators came clearly to the ears of the straining, heaving boat-crews.

"Now, you men—now!" urged Walters, leaning forward in his seat. "Let 'em have it hot! Brace up, No. 2!"

For Monty Newland's head was already beginning to sink on his chest.

Greyfriars spurred with the strength of despair.

The winning-post, although near, seemed half a mile away, and the crew was far spent.

Harry Wharton still set a very fast stroke, but his energy was ebbing away. And behind him, several of his chums were showing signs of distress.

But by sheer will-power the Greyfriars juniors kept on.

Their boat began to pick up—slowly at first, but none the less surely. And within a few yards from home the two boats were level!

"Now or never, you fellows!"

Walters' shrill voice rose above the plashing of the oars.

A few strong, sweeping strokes, a craning forward on the part of the spectators, and the race was over.

How had it gone?

The Greyfriars juniors seemed neither to know nor care.

With one exception they collapsed on their oars.

The exception was Bob Cherry.

A moment's breathless pause, and the verdict was announced:

"Greyfriars wins!"

And from the lips of the spectators burst a cheer—a mighty and prolonged cheer—in praise of the fellows who won!

Harold Skinner heard that cheer as he wended his way towards the river.

What had happened?

Had the boat-race been rowed, after all?

Skinner's eyes nearly bulged out of his head when he caught sight of the Greyfriars crew.

The Punter must have let me down!" he muttered at length. "Hang him!"

The cad of the Remove had expended five pounds in order to get the Greyfriars crew out of the way. Yet here they were; and, what was more, they had won!

Skinner's expression was like unto that of the monarch in the poem, who never smiled again.

When Harry Wharton & Co. had shaken off the effects of that grim struggle, they proceeded to their hotel for a belated breakfast.

Skinner looked daggers at them as they passed.

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Johnny Bull thoughtfully, "if Skinner was at the bottom of that kidnapping bizney."

"Neither should I," said Nugent. "But it's no use taxing the cad with it. He'd only deny it."

"We'll keep an eye on him, after this," said Wharton. "And if we bowl him out in a shady trick we'll make him wish he'd never been born!"

"Hear, hear!"

Bob Cherry began to wish more than ever that he had not been the cause of Skinner's presence with the touring-party. Bob had

already begun to suspect that it was Skinner who had hidden his bat.

Fortunately for the cad of the Remove, Bob Cherry did not put his suspicion into words.

All the same, Harold Skinner was not destined to go scot-free!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Rascal's Reward!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. took no further part in sport that day.

The strain of the boathrace had temporarily crippled their energies.

Next morning, however, the swimming contests took place.

Out of seven events the boys of Cheshire won four and Greyfriars three.

Shortly afterwards Bob Cherry came face to face with Jim Challoner in the boxing-ring.

The Cheshire skipper had earned the title of "Jim the Slogger" on the cricket-field; but the nickname applied with equal truth to his performances in the ring.

Although a clean fighter, he was not a scientific one. He believed in hitting hard and hitting often; and had Bob Cherry not stopped one of his sledge-hammer punches, the sledge-hammer punch in question would have stopped Bob Cherry!

But Bob's defence was perfect, and he gave his opponent no chance to break through.

At the end of the third round Challoner was caught napping.

He lowered his guard for an instant, and Bob Cherry sailed in with a blow which would have knocked the stuffing out of a better man than Challoner.

The Cheshire boy went down for the count; and a storm of applause greeted the victorious Greyfriars boxer.

"Here endeth the tour!" said Squiff. "Methinks we've done extremely well!"

"Did I hear you say that the tour was ended, Squiff?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"Of course!"

"Well, it isn't!"

The juniors stared at Bob Cherry.

"There are no other events, that I can see," said Harry Wharton. "We cut out the running races, and had the boathrace instead."

"And now we're going to have another!" said Bob Cherry. "Just before we came away I arranged, on behalf of the Remove, a boathrace with the Cliff House girls."

"My hat!"

"We're giving the fair damsels two hundred yards start in a course of half a mile," said Bob. "And if we don't lick them, we shall never hear the end of it!"

"Oh, we'll lick them all right!" grinned Nugent. "When's the race coming off?"

"To-morrow afternoon. I expect all the nobility and gentry will turn out to see it."

Bob Cherry was right.

After dinner next day, when the juniors were back on their native heath, the banks of the River Sark were crowded with spectators.

Greyfriars had turned out to a man to witness the extraordinary event; and a good many local people were present.

The Removites seemed to regard the affair as a huge joke.

Not so the Cliff House girls.

Before the race started, Phyllis Howell put her crew over half the course, and the onlookers, many of whom had come to scoff, began furiously to think.

The girls were in fine trim.

Wingate had good-naturedly volunteered to start the race; and at his direction the two crews took up their positions, with the girls two hundred yards in front.

"That two hundred yards," said Squiff, casting his eye along the river, "will take some picking up. I'm not at all sure that you weren't a champion ass, Bob, to arrange this fixture!"

Bob Cherry was beginning to doubt the wisdom of his action, too. He had left out of his calculations the fact that, while the Greyfriars tourists had been in Cheshire, the Cliff House girls had been putting in some strenuous practice on the river.

"We simply must win!" said Harry Wharton. "If we lost, I should never be able to look the girls in the face again."

"They'd chip us for ever and ever!" said Nugent.

The Greyfriars crew, after seeing their opponents perform, no longer looked upon the affair as a farce. They were anxious and uneasy.

The Cliff House girls, on the other hand, were calm and confident.

"We simply must win!" said Phyllis Howell, unconsciously quoting Wharton's own words.

"They think that we girls can't row, and we're going to teach them not to jump to hasty conclusions!"

"Hear, hear!" said Clara Trevlyn. "Cliff House isn't going to be licked by mere boys!"

"No, rather not!" said Flap Derwent.

"Now we're off!" said Clara. "Let her rip, girls!"

"Oh, Clara!" murmured Marjorie Hazeldene. But Marjorie's voice was lost in the uproar which followed.

The pistol cracked, and the race started, to the accompaniment of a deafening roar from the crowd on the bank.

"Go it, Greyfriars!"

"Come on, Cliff House!"

Harry Wharton meant to leave nothing to chance. He set just as fast a stroke as he had set on the River Dee, against the boys of Cheshire.

And he had need to, for the girls were going strong.

Phyllis Howell rowed vigorously, and the other girls kept time with her with perfect precision.

For a time, the distance between the two boats did not seem to lessen.

But the boys naturally had more stamina, and the pace which Phyllis Howell had set at the start was not maintained for long.

Harry Wharton, on the other hand, did not

slacken his stroke, and the Greyfriars boat drew nearer and nearer, the blades of the oarsmen cleaving the water in union.

"Good old Friars!"

"Drive her through, Wharton!"

The Cliff House girls had slackened considerably, but Phyllis Howell rallied them again when the winning-post came in sight.

Harry Wharton darted a quick glance over his shoulder.

And then the Friars made their final spurt. The boat leapt through the sparkling water like a live thing.

Six more strokes, and the Greyfriars boat was level. Eight more, and the race was over and won.

Harry Wharton & Co. had achieved a thrilling victory on the post.

Phyllis Howell stepped up to Bob Cherry, and extended her hand with a frank smile.

"We give you best," she said.

"You put up a great show!" said Bob Cherry chivalrously. "I take back all I said about girls not being able to row. You made us go all out!"

At that moment, Mr. Quelch came on the scene, with a portly gentleman in tow.

"Well done, my boys!" he said, with a smile.

The portly gentleman was about to add his congratulations to those of the Form-master, when his eyes lighted upon Bob Cherry.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "There is the boy who saved my life!"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bob. "That's fairly put the golden helmet on it!"

For the portly person was none other than the Mayor of Courtfield!

Mr. Quelch started just as violently as Bob Cherry had done.

He turned to the mayor.

"I fear you are labouring under a delusion, sir," he said. "The boy who saved your life is not present."

"Nonsense! My eyesight is not failing me, Mr. Quelch. That is the boy!"

"But it was Skinner who rescued you—"

"Is not that boy's name Skinner?"

"Certainly not! That is Robert Cherry!"

The mayor blinked at the bewildered Bob.

"But you told me—"

"That my name was Skinner? Yes, sir. I—goodness knows what made me say it! I suppose it was because I didn't want a lot of fuss made about the affair."

"Cherry!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Do you mean to say it was you who saved this gentleman's life?"

"That's so, sir."

"Then Skinner has been taking credit for the action of another! He made no attempt to contradict the report in the Press. I shall have to deal most severely with Skinner!"

"I didn't mean to cause trouble, sir," faltered Bob Cherry.

"It was very wrong of you to withhold your correct name, Cherry!" said Mr. Quelch sternly. "However, as you were prompted by feelings of modesty, I shall say no more about it."

Just then Mr. Quelch caught sight of Skinner, and swooped down upon him like a wolf on the fold, as Squiff expressed it.

"Skinner!" Mr. Quelch's voice resembled the rumble of thunder. "Come with me at once!"

The cad of the Remove backed away in alarm.

"Come!" repeated Mr. Quelch. "I trust you do not wish me to use force, Skinner?"

"Nunno, sir!"

"Very well, then. You will accompany me immediately to my study!"

And Skinner reluctantly obeyed.

Mr. Quelch did not spare the rod. The wretched Skinner was grovelling on the Form-master's carpet when the castigation was over.

And Skinner went, giving the impression that he was trying to fold himself up like a penknife.

But he had got no more than he deserved. Indeed, if the full chapter of his offences had come to light, he would not have seen another sunrise at Greyfriars. On the whole, he had got off very lightly.

There was a great celebration in Study No. 1 that evening, and Bob Cherry occupied the place of honour at the head of the table.

The startling news that Bob, and not Skinner, had been instrumental in saving the mayor's life, spread through the Remove like wild-fire.

Bob Cherry was the hero of the hour. And as for Skinner, he was sent to Coventry for a week to brood over the complete failure of his plot in connection with the Captured Crew!

THE END.

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Chums of Rookwood.

BY OWEN CONQUEST.



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Tommy's in Trouble.

"WHEN said Tommy Doyle was a fat-head?"

Tommy Doyle stopped suddenly as he heard his name mentioned. He was walking under the trees bordering the Rookwood playing-fields, and for once he was alone.

He waited for the answer to the question.

"Why, Tommy Dodd?"

Tommy Doyle peeped through the bushes, and looked towards the speaker. It was Peele, the cad of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood, and he was talking to Gower and Lattrey, his chums.

"Tommy Dodd said Doyle was a fathead!" exclaimed Gower. "That's enough, my son. Why, they are pals!"

Peele sneered.

"Even pals have things said about them," he said. "You can be sure Tommy Dodd made certain Doyle was not knocking about when he said it."

Tommy Doyle flushed, and clenched his fists hard. But he did not speak.

"What was biting Tommy Dodd, then?" asked Lattrey.

"Something to do with a remittance Doyle had received from Ireland," explained Peele. "Of course, I don't know all the facts. I just happened to hear Tommy Dodd speak of Doyle as a fathead."

"Perhaps he didn't share the remittance with them—Dodd and Cook," suggested Gower. "I always did say that the greatest of pals are not always open-hearted to each other."

Tommy Doyle bit his lip hard.

His hot Irish blood urged him to use his fists as an effective means of staying the words that Peele was uttering. But surely, where was the need for Peele to lie to his friends when he could not know that Tommy Doyle was listening?

Tommy Doyle hesitated, and a feeling of bitter resentment swept over him. He certainly had had a large remittance from home, and he had not told Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook, who were his staunchest friends in the Modern House at Rookwood, that he was in funds.

It was Tommy Doyle's plan to invite his chums to a picnic on the river on the coming Saturday afternoon. Funds were low with the Modern House Co., and Tommy Doyle was looking forward with keen pleasure to the surprise and gratification of his chums.

But Peele's words cast a damper over those pleasant thoughts.

He did not move as Peele & Co. jumped to their feet and walked away towards the Classical House. He felt very much like punching their heads.

"Sure, it's rot!" he muttered, and sat down to think the matter over.

Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook had always been his closest friends, and many pleasures and many dangers had they passed through together.

But now—

Why should Peele, without knowing that he—Tommy Doyle—was listening, openly say that Tommy Dodd had been running him down behind his back?

That was the question which literally burned in Tommy Doyle's brain as he sat under the trees by the playing-fields of Rookwood, and for an answer to which he would cheerfully have given the whole of the remittance recently received.

But Peele & Co. could have enlightened him on the subject.

Up in their study in the Classical House, the

three cads were sitting down, chuckling and gurgling with laughter.

"I'll bet he bit that little lot, Peele!" chuckled Gower. "It's a good job I saw him coming. Now perhaps the cheeky snobs will be quarrelling amongst themselves."

Lattrey snorted.

"That doesn't do us much good," he said warmly. "If I had not mentioned that Tommy Doyle was in funds, and suggested borrowing something from him, you'd never have thought of pitching that yarn!"

Peele laughed.

"My dear ass," he exclaimed, "that's where the jolly part comes in! You sowed the seed, so to speak, and my imagination did the rest! I'll bet there's a to-do over at the Modern to-night!"

"Mischievous-making, that's all it is," snapped Lattrey. "However, it's none of my business, and I don't care what comes of it!"

"But we do!" chuckled Gower. "I'd give something to see Jimmy Silver & Co. fall out, and then Tommy Dodd & Co.—a jolly old bust-up all the way round!"

Peele, Gower, and Lattrey had not forgotten the humiliation and punishment they had received from the two famous Co.'s on account of their caddish ways.

Gower had stuck the "treatment" longer than the others, but had been made to eat humble pie, after all. And Gower was of a vindictive nature.

If Tommy Doyle could have heard the conversation in that study, everything would have been all right. But unfortunately he did not.

He could find no answer to that burning question, and made up his mind to tackle Tommy Dodd himself. But even as he was on his way to the Modern House he changed his mind.

If Tommy Dodd had passed that remark, then surely it was not up to him to ask for apologies! That was how Tommy Doyle, hot with anger, looked at the matter.

As far as that went, however, it was hardly right for Tommy Doyle to listen to the cads of the Classical House without giving his own tried chums a hearing.

But Tommy Doyle's hot Irish blood would not admit that Peele & Co. could have been speaking otherwise than quite innocently.

He reached the study, and promptly took up a book and started to read.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Dodd were there, but to them he paid not the slightest heed.

Tommy Dodd looked up in surprise.

"What's biting you, honey?" he asked.

Tommy Doyle did not reply.

"Been ragged by the Classics?"

"No!"

"Been gated?"

"No!"

"Bulkeley been cutting up rough?"

"No!"

Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook stared. Doyle had always been of a communicative nature, and kept nothing back from his chums.

But he was evidently keeping something back now. He was, moreover, unusually sulky.

"Let him alone, Tommy," whispered Tommy Cook. "He'll be all right in a few minutes."

Tommy Doyle turned over the pages of the book listlessly, but although he must have heard Tommy Cook's whisper, he made no sign of the fact.

"Sulky little ass!" snapped Tommy Dodd. "He's got something on his mind, and won't tell us!"

"Shush!" murmured Tommy Cook.

Tommy Doyle bit his lip hard. His face flushed and his eyes gleamed angrily as he heard Tommy Dodd's remark.

Sulky! That was the first time any suggestion of that sort had been laid at his door, and Tommy Doyle felt bitterly angry and deeply resentful.

"Sure, there's nothin' the matter with me, entirely," he said suddenly. "I'm all right, and I'm not sulky!"

"Then what on earth's the matter with you?" demanded Tommy Dodd. "You look as though you'd lost sixpence and found a bob, or the other way about."

"Can't help my looks, can I?" asked Doyle warmly.

"But you don't usually go about with a face as long as a fiddle," put in Tommy Cook quietly.

"Nor walk in the study and sit down without a word," added Tommy Dodd.

"Suppose I can do as I like?" snapped Tommy Doyle. "If you—"

He was interrupted. The door suddenly opened, and Jimmy Silver, Arthur Edward Lovell, Raby, and Newcome, the chums of the Classical House, who were known as the Fistical Four, came in.

There was a cheerful grin on Jimmy Silver's face.

"Hallo, my chip-chips!" he said gaily. "Did I hear voices raised in anger?"

"It's bad for little boys to quarrel," added Newcome solemnly.

Tommy Dodd glowered.

"Rats!" he said warmly. "If you chaps don't want to go out on your necks, you'd better not make fatheaded remarks!"

"We're not quarrelling, either," snorted Tommy Cook. "Over here we are at peace—not for ever kicking up a shindy like you chaps do in the Classics."

Jimmy Silver chuckled as he looked from one to another of the Modern House Co. His glance rested on Tommy Doyle, who had proceeded with his reading as soon as he was interrupted.

"It looks as if one member of the Co. that never quarrels has got the pip," he said lightly. "I'd like to warn you, my good young fellow—"

"Rats!" snapped Tommy Doyle.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared, and Tommy Dodd and Cook flushed uncomfortably.

It was not what Tommy Doyle said that made the Classical Co. stare. It was the tone in which he spoke.

"My hat!" said Jimmy Silver. "What's the matter, Tommy?"

"Nothin'!" answered Tommy Doyle shortly. "And if you're going to stand there gassing rot, sure, then I'm off!"

And, taking his book, Tommy Doyle rose from his chair and left the study. He closed the door behind him with a slam that reverberated throughout the House.

Jimmy Silver & Co. simply gasped.

"My hat! I've never seen our Tommy like that!" said Tommy Cook, in surprise. "Blessed if I know what's the matter with him!"

"Nor I!" said Tommy Dodd.

Jimmy Silver shook his forefinger reprovingly at the leader of the Modern juniors.

"Tommy Dodd, I'm surprised at you!" he said solemnly.

"And so are we!" murmured Raby.

"Look here—" began Tommy Dodd heatedly.

"Naughty boys to quarrel!" interrupted Jimmy Silver. "As one chap—"

"We haven't quarrelled!" howled Tommy Dodd excitedly. "We've never had a word! I tell you—"

"Better leave it to them to make it up!" said Newcome slowly. "Come on, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. turned and left the study, shaking their heads sorrowfully.

Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook stared at one another in dismay.

"What on earth's the trouble, Duddy?" asked Tommy Cook. "I don't like this at all. It's the first time old Doyle has acted like this!"

"Yes—and let's hope it's the last!" said Tommy Dodd. "But—but I should like to know why Doyle is so rottenly sulky!"

Peele & Co. of the Classical House could have told them. But they did not, and there was more trouble to come for the Tommies as a result of the cad keeping silent.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Jimmy Silver's Part.

"W" E shall have to settle it!" Thus Jimmy Silver, leader of the Classical juniors at Rookwood.

There was a very determined expression on his face as he made that remark to his chums and study-mates, Newcome, Lovell, and Raby.

"Settle what?" demanded Raby.

"Why, Tommy Dodd & Co., of course!" retorted Jimmy Silver.

His chums stared.

"Settle Tommy Dodd & Co.!" exclaimed Lovell. "What on earth have they done?"

It was Jimmy Silver's turn to stare.

"Done?" Nothing—

"Then why should we settle them?"

"Oh, you fathead! Can't you wait a minute and give me a chance to finish what I was going to say?"

Lovell snorted.

"You take a blessed long time to make yourself understood!"

"Br-r-r! You chaps know that our gallant comrades—"

"Eh?"

"Gallant comrades," repeated Jimmy Silver firmly. "They've unfortunately fallen out—otherwise, quarrelled. Now, I consider that we shall have to settle it, and let the merry dove-bird of peace flitter in their giddy study once more."

"Why should we interfere?" Raby wanted to know.

"Because they're a thick-headed lot—obstinate. And if Tommy Doyle doesn't say what's the matter with him, they won't ask him!"

"Well—"

"We must, therefore, come to the giddy rescue, and settle it for them. I don't like the idea of the Three Tommies falling out."

"Nor do we, come to that. But how—"

"That, my dear chappie, is what we must discuss. Four brains are better than one, as somebody who ought to know once said."

Raby, Lovell, and Newcome nodded their approval. Jimmy Silver was undoubtedly right.

It was not pleasant to know that the Three Tommies, their chums of the Modern House, had fallen out, and harmony no longer existed in the study.

But if Tommy Dodd & Co. thought that their Classical rivals were trying to settle matters, there was more than one way in which they could look at it.

Interference would be one way, and that, although far from the thoughts of Jimmy Silver & Co., would probably predominate.

"As long as they don't think we are biffing into their biz," said Lovell doubtfully. "It's a rotten business!"

"If we only knew exactly what was the matter—"

"began Raby slowly. "Yes, and it's a mighty big 'if,' old son!" chipped in Jimmy Silver. "If we knew that there would be no need to do any settling. Everything would come right of its own accord, for I'm certain there can't be anything radically wrong."

"Just a tiff, I expect," said Newcome. "But how are we going to find out, Jimmy?" Jimmy Silver hesitated.

"We might tackle Tommy Doyle," he murmured.

"Of course, as he won't tell his own chums, he is certain to tell us!" said Lovell sarcastically.

"Well—"

"Bump it out of him!" said Lovell emphatically. "Sometimes one has to be cruel to be kind, you know."

Jimmy Silver looked doubtful.

"Rather a rotten way of doing things, isn't it?" he said.

Lovell shrugged his shoulders.

"It's jolly certain nobody in this House could tell us about the trouble!" he said.

"So we must do battle with the Moderns. Tommy Doyle is the man to tackle."

Jimmy Silver hesitated, but he gave in at last, and the Fistical Four left their study to seek Tommy Doyle.

They did not expect to have much trouble in finding him alone.

They were passing out of the Classical House into the quadrangle when they ran into Peele & Co. The cads were chuckling, and their faces were wreathed in smiles.

Jimmy Silver stopped.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he said. "Who's fallen down and broken his leg?"

Peele & Co. stared.

"Eh! What are you talking about?" demanded Peele. "Has somebody got hurt? Who?"

"Well, I suppose you're pleased at something like that?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Not at all," said Gower quickly. "Only Tommy Dodd and Tommy Doyle are going it hammer and tongs by the tool-shed, that's all!"

"Daddy fighting Doyle!" exclaimed Lovell.

"Here, come on, Jimmy, this is where the settling starts!"

And the Fistical Four dashed off in the direction of the tool-shed.

They arrived, panting, one minute after Gower had imparted the information.

Tommy Dodd and Tommy Doyle were undoubtedly going it hammer and tongs.

Tommy Dodd's eyes were gleaming with anger, and Tommy Doyle was white and tense.

They hammered one another with all the strength at their command.

"Stop it, you dummies!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Go for them!" booted Raby wrathfully.

Newcome and Lovell seized Tommy Doyle, and bore him, still fighting, to the ground.

Jimmy Silver and Raby collared Tommy Dodd and held him fast.

"What are you dummies going to do next?" demanded Jimmy Silver wrathfully.

"Lemme get at him!" panted Tommy Dodd.

"I'll jolly well show you!"

"Arrah, ye spalpeens!" gasped Tommy Doyle. "Bejabbers, O'll hit yez both!"

"Hold him down, Newcome!" said Jimmy Silver shortly.

Tommy Dodd and Doyle gave up struggling at last. With two to each of them they had not much chance.

Tommy Doyle was jerked to his feet.

"Ye—ye—" he began, staring angrily at his leader.

"Now, now, steady, you chaps!" said Jimmy Silver steadily. "What the dickens are you doing?"

"Fighting!" said Tommy Dodd laconically.

"The rotter—"

"Shut up!" howled Jimmy Silver.

"Well, he shouldn't—"

"Lug him up to his study, Newcome! Help him, Raby, old chap!"

Newcome and Raby took the Modern House leader by the arms, and he was walked away from the scene of battle, leaving Tommy Doyle with Jimmy Silver and Lovell.

Jimmy Silver waited until they had disappeared before he turned to Tommy Doyle.

"Tommy Doyle, you're the silliest dummy I've ever met!" he said coolly. "What do you mean by fighting with your best pal?"

Tommy Doyle hit his lip.

"I didn't want to fight," he said quickly.

"But—but, Tommy Dodd wouldn't force a fight on you!"

"He did!"

"What!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. simply gasped.

"What for?" demanded Raby.

"Because I wouldn't speak to him!"

"Quite right, too!"

"Borra—"

Tommy Doyle's eyes blazed wrathfully.

"Why don't you tell them what's the matter with you?" asked Jimmy Silver quietly. "Do you call it fair to treat them like that?"

"They shouldn't have said it!"

"Said what?"

"That I was sticking to my remittance, that I was a fathead, and all that!"

"My hat! Are you sticking to your remittance?"

"Well, I was, but only until Saturday, when I was going to surprise them, and take them out and blue it."

"Have you told them that?"

"No; not after what Tommy Dodd said!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at each other in dismay. This was certainly not what they expected.

If Tommy Dodd had said what Tommy Doyle assured them, then Tommy Dodd was most certainly in the wrong. But it was unlike Tommy Dodd to say anything offensive like that without very good cause.

The question that now arose was, did Tommy Dodd consider it rotten of Tommy

Doyle not to offer his remittance when he knew that funds were low with the study?

"My hat! This is a poser!" confessed Raby.

"What are you going to do now, Jimmy?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Jimmy Silver, with a thoughtful frown. "Either Tommy Doyle's dreaming—"

"I'm not!"

"Then Tommy Dodd's gone off his rocker!"

Tommy Doyle suddenly started to struggle again, and it needed all Jimmy Silver's strength to hold him in, even with Lovell's help.

"I'm tellin' ye nothin' more," said Tommy Doyle, quietening down suddenly. "If ye want to know, ye'd better go and see Tommy Dodd!"

And, wriggling himself free, Tommy Doyle bolted towards the playing-fields. Jimmy Silver and Lovell were staring after him when Raby and Newcome returned.

The two juniors were informed of what had happened, but could offer no solution to the question of what was to be done.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Settling Up.

"C" OME in!" Jimmy Silver uttered that exclamation as there came a knock at the study door while he and his chums were doing their prep.

The door opened, and Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook walked in.

They looked downhearted, and not a little distressed. The rupture with Tommy Doyle affected them deeply.

"Hallo, Tommy!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Whither—"

"Don't rot, there's a good chap!" interrupted Tommy Dodd, flinging himself down in a chair.

"Sorry!" said Jimmy Silver hastily. "Haven't you chaps settled things up yet?"

Tommy Doyle and Tommy Cook shook their heads.

"Unfortunately, no," said Tommy Dodd. "I wish to goodness I could find out what the silly ass has got the pip for!"

Jimmy Silver knew what Tommy Doyle's trouble was. But was it quite fair to speak about it?

He decided to risk it.

"I can tell you," he said quietly.

Tommy Dodd looked up quickly. His eyes suddenly gleamed with hope.

"Jimmy! Tell us, there's a good chap!" he said earnestly. "You've no idea how—"

"how—"

"Yes, I have," interrupted Jimmy Silver. "We are as sorry as you are, Duddy. Anyhow, the matter that's troubling Tommy Doyle is briefly this. He heard you call him a fathead—"

"Eh?" interrupted Tommy Dodd quickly.

"Shut up, and let me have my say first! Tommy heard you call him a fathead—"

"I didn't!"

"Well, he says you did. He had a remittance, and apparently you didn't like it because he hasn't shared it out. He thinks you called him names behind his back, and is naturally raty about it."

Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook simply stared at one another.

"Well, I'm dashed!" ejaculated Tommy Dodd. "The silly ass! I certainly have never called him names behind his back, and I certainly haven't thought about his blessed remittance. He's off his rocker!"

"He's pretty pippy over it, anyhow," put in Lovell quietly. "And if you did say these things, Tommy, I must say—"

"I didn't say anything about it at all!" said Tommy Dodd firmly. "I don't care what Tommy Doyle says. I didn't!"

"I'll back you up there, Duddy," said Cook.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at each other in dismay. Here was a tangle!

"But—but—he says—" began Jimmy Silver.

"I have already said I don't care what he says!" interposed Tommy Dodd. "And I'm certainly not going to tell him that he's talking out of his hat! If he thinks so badly of me—well, hang it all, is it up to me to make the first approaches for a reconciliation?"

"N-n-no," murmured Jimmy Silver, and added suddenly: "Look here, supposing you leave it to us?"

"I don't see—"

"There's too many don'ts about you to-day, Tommy Dodd," said Newcome. "Are you going to let this potty affair go on for good, or are you going to leave it to me?"

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"I don't care!" said Tommy Dodd sharply. "I'm fed-up!"

"So are we!" said Jimmy Silver. "We don't like to hear of our friends having a bust-up, and we think that as it's a difficult matter for you to settle it's better left to us."

"Oh, well, go ahead!" said Tommy Dodd resignedly; and, rising to his feet, he made for the door. He turned round as he opened it, and added shamefacedly: "And—and you're thundering good chaps, you know!"

And he bolted down the passage.

Jimmy Silver chuckled as his footsteps died away.

"And he doesn't care!" he said. "Old Tommy Dodd is feeling this bizz pretty rough; there's no doubt about that."

"I hope we can fix things up," said Newcome. "They're jolly good chaps, if they are Modern House asses. I suppose we'll tackle Tommy Doyle again now?"

Jimmy Silver hesitated.

"If we send for him he won't come," he said slowly. "If we go over to the Modern House we'll probably get chucked out on our necks. No; we shall have to entice him somewhere and somehow."

"But how and where?" interrupted Raby.

"That's more to the point."

"I know it is, fathead!" growled Jimmy Silver. "And if you were to offer sensible suggestions instead of spouting rot—"

"I can see another Co. falling out in a minute," said Raby darkly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cackle, you dummies! Go on, laugh!" gibed Jimmy Silver.

The chums stopped laughing and cackling, and put their heads together to settle the all-important question of reuniting Tommy Doyle to his chums.

It was Arthur Edward Lovell who hit upon the idea at last, and it received the general approval of his chums.

The first part of the idea was shown when Lovell despatched a Second-Form fag to Tommy Doyle, to say that his trunk was being knocked about in the box-room.

The message was duly delivered, and its effect was instantaneous. Tommy Doyle departed in great wrath for the box-room.

As he approached the old study which was being used for a box-room he heard the sounds of bumping and crashing. He burst open the door and rushed inside the room.

He stopped suddenly, and made a dash for the door. But he was too late.

Jimmy Silver was there before him, had turned the key and put it in his pocket almost before the Modern House junior realised that he was trapped.

"A kid told me you were knocking about my trunk!" he shouted angrily.

"Quite right, ducky!" said Jimmy Silver coolly. "But only gently; no harm done. Had to do it, you know, otherwise the message wouldn't have been quite truthful."

"But—but—the banging and crashing I heard—"

"Just an old box lifted from the floor and dumped down again," explained Jimmy Silver. "The fact is, Tommy Doyle, you're here until you answer our questions—"

"Then I'm here for good!" interrupted Tommy Doyle shortly, and sat down on one of the boxes.

"But you're not," said Jimmy Silver, whilst his chums nodded their heads emphatically. "Now, you might just as well listen patiently, Tommy—"

Tommy Doyle set his lips obstinately. "I've nothin' to say," he said firmly.

"But when I tell you that Tommy Dodd

denies absolutely that he ever mentioned the fact that you are a fathead—I beg to submit to the gentlemen present that you are a fathead, Tommy Doyle—"

"Look here—"

"Daddy says he never thought about your remittance—and certainly didn't call you a fathead behind your back!"

"I might tell you that old Daddy is frightfully cut up over this biz," put in Lovell evenly.

Tommy Doyle's face was a study in painful surprise. He looked from one to another of the Classical juniors in acute dismay.

"But—but—"

"Supposing you tell us when you heard him say it, and where—"

"I didn't say I heard him call me a fathead!" interrupted Tommy Doyle quickly. "I said—"

"You didn't hear him!" echoed Jimmy Silver.

"Then what the dickens do you mean by kicking up all this fuss?" demanded Newcome wrathfully.

Tommy Doyle shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"I'll tell you the yarn, if you promise not to inform Daddy," he said.

"Depends whether we think we ought to," said Jimmy Silver.

"Well, when I was strolling down by the trees round the playing-fields I heard two or three of your chaps talking about myself and Daddy."

"Our chaps?"

"Yes—Peele, Gower, and Lattrey. They were—"

"My hat! Those worms!"

"Yes; and Peele was saying that he heard Tommy Dodd call me a fathead; he said it had something to do with a remittance. I've had a remittance, as I've told you, but I didn't say anything—wanting to make a surprise of it, you see."

"Yes!" said Jimmy Silver encouragingly.

"The rotters were sitting under the bushes, and couldn't have seen me. But I heard them. I was eavesdropping, maybe."

Jimmy Silver's eyes glinted.

"Peele & Co. couldn't have seen you from where they sat," he said slowly. "But they might have seen you coming their way!"

"My hat! You don't think—"

"My dear ass, they're as rotten as rotten can be! They'll make mischief when and where they can—especially if it's up against your Co. or ours!"

"Bejabers, I'll—"

Tommy Doyle rose excitedly to his feet, but Jimmy Silver pushed him back again.

"No, you won't!" he said calmly. "This is our business for the present. You must remember I'm only assuming things. Now, supposing Peele—you said Peele?—good! Well, supposing he happened to know you had a remittance—"

"He did. He was at the post when I got it!" interrupted Tommy Doyle hastily.

"There you are!" said Jimmy Silver triumphantly. "That's the first supposition done away with. Taking advantage of your being alone, they spun that yarn, and caused all the mischief they thought they would!"

"The worms!"

"The rotten cads!"

"Bejabers, I'm goin' to have a chat with them," said Tommy Doyle, pushing back his cuffs in a warlike manner.

"Not until you've apologised to Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook," said Newcome firmly. "I think that's up to you, old son, because you ought to have known your chums

better than to think they'd behave like—like Peele & Co. would!"

Tommy Doyle nodded.

"Open the blessed door!" he said, almost dancing with impatience.

Jimmy Silver opened the door, and Tommy Doyle rushed out.

"That's the end of their bust-up!" said Jimmy Silver.

"If your 'thinks' are right," said Newcome. Five minutes later Tommy Dodd & Co. emerged from the Modern House, arm-in-arm, and chatting gaily.

Matters were settled as far as they were concerned, but they evidently had business in the Classical House.

What that business was came to light when the three Modernites made inquiries for Peele & Co. They found them in the Common-room, and put such searching questions to the cads of Rookwood that they howled themselves over before very many minutes.

After which Tommy Dodd & Co., each selecting an opponent, proceeded to bowl Peele & Co. over by means of their fists!

The mischief-makers' scheme had worked for but a short time, and the punishment that was inflicted by the irate Modernites took still shorter time to administer.

It was a very happy Co. that knocked at Jimmy Silver's study door whilst Peele & Co. were picking themselves up from the floor of the Common-room.

"Come in!" sang out Raby cheerily.

Tommy Dodd & Co. went in.

"Jimmy Silver," said Tommy Doyle. "I'm obliged to yez for proving me a fathead!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm now goin' to ask yez if you'll join the party on Saturday afternoon—"

"Hurrah! What-ho!" chuckled Jimmy Silver.

And, grinning, Tommy Dodd & Co. left the study and went to the Modern House, having settled, not only their differences, but the mischief-makers as well!

When they had gone, Jimmy Silver turned to his chums. The Classical leader was frowning.

"That was just about the limit in caddishness!" he said warily. "I'm blessed if I know how Peele & Co. can stoop so low as to play such dirty tricks!"

Newcome, Raby, and Lovell nodded.

"I consider that it reflects discredit on the House," said Raby.

"Which ought to be settled at once!" added Newcome.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"No; they've had enough for one day," he said quietly. "But I think we'll make an appointment in the gymnasium for tomorrow after morning lessons."

The Fistic! Four found Peele & Co. in a very unenviable state, for Tommy Dodd & Co. had done their work well. But they hardened their hearts, and the appointment was duly made.

And by the time it had been kept, Peele & Co. deeply regretted the part they had taken in trying to separate the chums of the Modern House.

Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Lovell insisted on their putting the gloves on, and Peele & Co. did not stand up very long. They acted up to their cowardly natures, and grovelled on the floor at the first opportunity.

"You've been out and out rotters!" said Jimmy Silver shortly. "My advice to you is, leave Tommy Dodd & Co. alone, and don't let the House down any more!"

And with that Jimmy Silver & Co. left them.

THE END.

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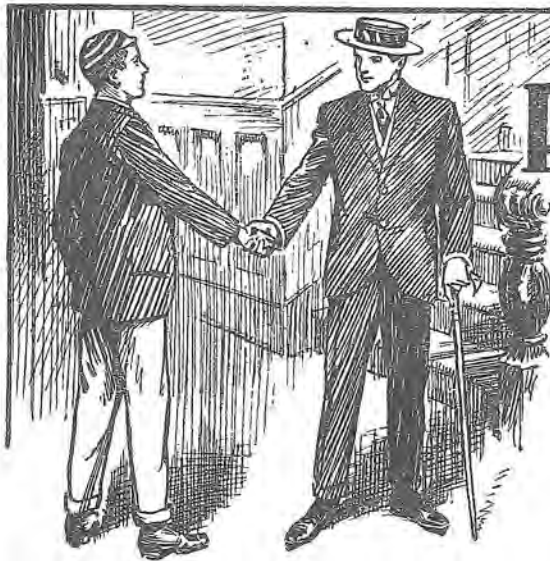
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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Three Minors Are Asked to Tea.
"PARDON me, but you are a St. Jim's boy, aren't you?"

Frank Levison, of the Third Form, turned at that question, addressed to him in a sweet and pleasant voice.

It was a lady who had put the question—a young lady, and a very pretty one. He knew her at once, though he had never spoken to her before.

He raised his straw hat, and answered politely:

"Yes, Miss Graeme."
"Why, you know my name—or, at least, my stage name!" said the pretty young lady, smiling down upon him.

"Oh, yes. I—you see, we've seen your photo outside the Empire, and—and—but I thought you had gone!"

Frank's confusion was evident. He and his chums had talked a good deal about Miss Nora Graeme during the last week or so. There had been trouble at St. Jim's, and she was mixed up in it. Just how she came to be mixed up in it they did not understand, and it was by accident they had come to know about it. But they were sure it was not in any way her fault.

This confidence in her was based on the fact that she looked not only very pretty, but also very nice. It was not, perhaps, an absolutely conclusive argument; but it was good enough for Wally & Co. They were ready to rank Nora Graeme with Wally's cousin Ethel and Doris Levison, Frank's sister, which was giving her very high rank indeed.

But Frank felt confused now. He thought Miss Graeme must guess that she had been talked about at St. Jim's, and he suspected that she might not like it.

She did guess that, and it is possible that it did not exactly please her. But Frank Levison's face pleased her. It was such an honest face, and Frank's smile so winning.

"We are not playing anywhere this week," the girl answered, "and I am staying on at Wayland for two or three days, with my friend Miss Mandeville, who has just gone into a shop. I saw you standing there, and I felt sure you would not mind my speaking to you."

Frank would have said he liked it, but he was too shy. So he said:

"I'm waiting for someone who's gone into a shop, too—at least, two fellows—D'Arcy minor and Manners minor. I stayed to watch the bikes, you know; there have been quite a lot stolen lately."

"D'Arcy minor—why, that must be one of Lord Eastwood's sons, surely! Which is it—Wally or Arthur?"

"It's Wally—Arthur is Gussy, and Gussy's D'Arcy major, of course. But it's queer you should know Wally—he doesn't know you."

"He wouldn't—not by the name I bear now," replied the girl. "And I don't suppose he would remember me. I was a schoolgirl when I met him, and he was a dear little kiddy in frocks."

"Oh, I say, though, don't you remind Wally of that!" said Frank, aghast. "He'd hate it frightfully, you know. Fancy Wally in frocks!"

"I will be discreet, I promise you," said the pretty young lady, smiling very charmingly. "But I really must speak to Wally. By the way, you haven't told me your name."

"I'm Levison minor, Miss Graeme."

"And I'm really Miss Dalgleish, not Miss Graeme at all. That is only my stage name. Oh, here's my friend Miss Mandeville!"

A stout lady, quite nice-looking, Frank thought, but very much older and stouter than Nora Graeme, came bustling out of a draper's shop.

"I've matched it, dear!" she said gaily.

"Oh, you've found a friend, I see!"

"Yes, a new friend; but one of his chums is quite an old one, I find, and I'm waiting to see him. This is Levison minor. I don't know his Christian name."

"Frank," murmured the Third Former, colouring.

"That is Frank Levison. That's ever so much better than Levison minor, isn't it? And this lady, Frank, is my very best chum, Miss Mandeville."

"Mabel Mandeville," said the leading lady, with a wink that Frank did not fail to see.

"But you need not call her Mabel until you know her better," said Miss Graeme, with a silvery little laugh.

"Oh, I shouldn't think of it!" murmured Frank.

He rather wished Wally would appear. He was quite equal to talking to Miss Graeme; but he felt that Wally was needed to cope with the other lady.

And at this moment Wally and Reggie Manners appeared.

"Hallo, kid!" began Wally. "Why didn't you—"

Then he stopped short, seeing the two ladies, and both he and Reggie doffed their hats.

"Why, it's Miss Graeme!" Frank distinctly heard Reggie whisper.

"You wouldn't know me, Wally, but I knew you when you were quite a small kid."

"Don't say 'in frocks!' He'll be awfully wild if you do!" whispered Frank.

"And perhaps you may remember my name—Nina Dalgleish," went on the pretty young lady, just as if Frank had said nothing.

"Why—but you—you're Miss Graeme!" said Wally, in amazement.

"That's my stage name, as I've already explained to your chum, here."

"Well, this is a corker!" cried Wally. "I seemed to know your face all along—"

"You never said so," put in Reggie Manners. "It was me that remembered her. I saw her in the piece last Christmas hols, you know."

"Shut up until you're introduced, you silly ass!" muttered Wally wrathfully.

"We must have introductions all round, I think," Miss Graeme said.

The introductions were duly made. Then Wally said:

"Why, I remember now! You're Kildare's cousin! That—that explains a lot, doesn't it, you fellows?"

"Quite a lot," observed Miss Mandeville, in rather a dry way.

And Frank was sure that he saw her wink again.

"Will you all come and have tea with us?" asked the younger lady.

Wally and Frank and Reggie looked at one another. All three wanted to accept the invitation, but each wanted to see first what the others thought about it.

The hesitation was only momentary. Wally saw that Frank and Reggie were willing to go, and that there was no likelihood of his being chipped later, and he replied:

"Oh, rather! Thanks awfully, Miss Dalgleish! I say, though, what ought I to call you? It's a bit difficult when anyone has two names, you know."

"Perhaps I had better be Miss Graeme for the present, Wally."

"Or Nora," put in Miss Mandeville slyly.

"Oh, that, if you like! I don't mind a bit, I'm sure!" replied the girl gaily.

They all thought her no end of a good sort, and only Frank suspected that there was a special motive behind the invitation to tea.

"Where shall we go?" she asked.

"Let's go to our digs," said Miss Mandeville. "But we'll get in plenty of good things first, as we've three squires to carry them."

Miss Mandeville knew that her friend had an object in inviting them. Frank was sure of that, too. Of course, it would be easier to talk at the ladies' lodgings than at a teashop.

Wally and Reggie both seemed pleased with the notion of going to tea with the two actresses. It made them feel manly, and just a bit doggish, perhaps. Frank liked it, too, but his feeling about it was rather different from theirs.

A visit to one or two confectioners' provided quite a load for each of the three. It seemed that Miss Graeme meant to do the thing in style, and that she had plenty of money.

The digs were very pleasant, and the landlady gave the trio a smiling welcome. Not until tea was fairly under way did Miss Graeme begin to ask any questions. And then she asked them in a manner that seemed quite natural, even to Frank, who was waiting for her to begin.

"So you remembered that I am Eric Kildare's cousin, Wally?" she said.

"Oh, rather!" replied Wally. "Pass those sausage-rolls, Reggie, you slacker! Miss Mandeville hasn't anything on her plate."

"Of course, you know my cousin very well!" went on the girl.

"What do you think? I fag for him, you know!"

"Do you? How nice! And it's an honour to be fag to the captain of St. Jim's, isn't it?"

"Yes; if you look at it that way. Old

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Kildare's one of the very best—captain or not! He isn't captain now, you know."

Reggie gave Wally a kick under the table. It seemed to Reggie that this was one of the things that might better have been left unsaid.

"Oh, I didn't know! How is that?" returned Miss Graeme.

Reggie gave Wally another gentle hint with his foot; but it had not the effect desired.

Wally considered it very like the cheek of Manners minor to suppose that he—D'Arcy minor, autocrat of the Third—did not know better than anyone else what should be said and what left unsaid.

"There's been a row, and the Head kicked him out. But don't you worry, Miss Graeme. It—"

"Kicked him out? But you surely don't mean, expelled him?" broke in the girl breathlessly.

"Oh, no, he's not sacked—at least, not yet!" replied Wally. "I don't think he will be, either. Darrel saved him from that, I fancy."

Frank nudged Wally. Frank thought, as Reggie did, that Wally was telling too much.

Now, Wally would sometimes take a hint from Frank. That was a very different matter from allowing himself to be dictated to by Manners minor.

And Wally suddenly began to doubt whether Kildare would quite like his telling all this. He flushed, and looked uneasy.

But he found out that he had gone too far to draw back.

"Didn't I tell you so, dear?" cried Miss Mandeville.

"Oh, you know all about it, then?" asked Wally, in something very like a growl.

"Not all," said Miss Graeme; "but we know enough to want to know more. Will you please tell us, Wally? I'm Eric Kildare's cousin, you know, and he and I have always been chums. If he has got into a scrape, it's—its partly my fault. And—and you mustn't think that I have no sympathy with people who get into scrapes. I have—lots!"

The three youngsters were all looking at her intently by this time. Her eyes shone, and a scarlet flush mantled her pretty face. It was plain to them that she cared very much indeed about what happened to Kildare, and, somehow, that made them care more.

"I—I haven't been as good a girl as I might have been myself, you know," Miss Graeme went on, her flush deepening. "I ran away from home to go on the stage, and for over two years I haven't seen one of my own folks. Then I saw Eric, and—and now it seems that he has got into trouble through me, and—and—oh, Wally, you really must tell me all about it, so that I can think of some way of putting it right!"

Reggie Manners nodded to Wally, meaning to imply that Wally had his approval, if he elected to tell the story.

Wally carefully avoided looking at Reggie. He wanted it to be quite clear that that youth's approval did not matter to him. But he glanced at Frank.

"I think you ought to tell Miss Graeme, Wally," Frank said, flushing nearly as redly as the girl herself.

"Right—ho! I will, then. Now, don't you get chipping in, young Manners! It's me that's going to tell this yarn, not you!"

Reggie managed, with considerable difficulty, to choke down an angry retort. Seeing that he had not spoken for fully ten minutes, it really did seem that Wally might have omitted that warning.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

To Put Things Right.

"TELL me it all, Wally, please! We know some of it, but there are so many things that we don't understand, aren't there, Mabel?" said Miss Graeme.

"I shan't be satisfied with anything less than the whole story, though, of course, it's really no affair of mine," replied Miss Mandeville, tossing her golden head.

She put a large slice of cake on the plate of Reggie, who was sitting by her, as she spoke; and Reggie, though he had fancied that he had finished, was too polite not to get on with it. That gave Wally a better chance to tell his story uninterrupted—as, possibly, Miss Mandeville had guessed it would.

"Well, there's a lot of it, and some of it I only know by hearsay, and some of it you

mayn't quite like, you know, Miss Graeme," said Wally doubtfully.

"That doesn't really matter. Don't you see that if there's anything I don't like, it's probably due to the fact that no one knew Eric Kildare and I are cousins? I can guess what he has got into a scrape for. They think he has been running after some designing mix of an actress. Isn't that so?"

"Ye-es, that's something like it, I suppose," admitted Wally, with evident reluctance; "but," he added, "they didn't know you, Miss Graeme, or they wouldn't have thought that."

"Rather not!" chimed in Frank. And Reggie muttered something about their being silly asses for thinking anything at all. But, as Reggie's utterance was obscured by cake, no one knew just what he said.

Miss Graeme smiled at their eager championship, and Miss Mandeville laughed outright, and threw her plump arm around Frank's shoulders.

"Old Selby," said Wally—"that's our Form-master, you know—had a down on Kildare because he butted in when Gus was butting in—I mean, Selby was going for me, and Gus, like a silly ass, must come meddling, and Selby slashed him across the face with his cane, and Kildare came along and told the old Hun what he thought of him."

"And very proper, too!" said Miss Mandeville. "Nora, my dear, I told you old Gruff-and-Grim was a rank outsider!"

"He was quite nice to me," said Miss Graeme.

"First person he has ever been nice to, then, I reckon!" said Wally.

"But no one could help being nice to Miss Graeme—not even old Selby!" Frank put in. Miss Mandeville fairly hugged him for that.

"So Selby had a down on Kildare," went on Wally, "and when he has a down on anyone he just waits his chance, you know."

"Pleasant person!" murmured Miss Mandeville.

"And, somehow, he got his chance when he and Ratty—that's the New House master, and he's nearly as bad as our beast!—found your cousin and Darrel at the Empire; though I can't make out, now, why those two old jossers were there."

"To see the play, of course!" said Reggie.

"Rats! I mean—oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Graeme, and yours, too, Miss Mandeville! But I mean rats! They haven't sense enough to want to see it. I suppose they were spying. Anyway, they found those two there, and then old Selby saw Kildare with you, Miss Graeme, and he reckoned that gave him a chance to get even with Kildare—see?"

"I see, Wally. You seem to know quite a lot about what happened. I thought it was only the ladies who gossiped!"

"Oh, there's lots of that goes on at any school, you know! And, of course, we were all interested about Kildare—we like him no end. We came into it too; but Cardew came into it first. What are you smiling at, Miss Graeme? You don't know Cardew, do you?"

"I don't know him, but I think I should like to. Wasn't he the bad boy who tricked Mr. Selby?"

"Yes; but how did you know that? I say, Cardew would be ever so keen if he heard you say that you'd like to know him! That would suit him, you bet!"

"You can tell him, Franky!" said Reggie, grinning.

"Is Cardew a special chum of yours, Frank?" asked Miss Graeme.

"Yes, he is, in a way. He's one of my major's two chums, and he's been no end decent to me. Cardew's a fine chap, Miss Graeme, though he does do silly things sometimes!" said loyal Frank.

"Well, no one's saying anything against him, chump!" Wally retorted. "It isn't anything against him to say that he'd catch at the chance of knowing Miss Graeme. Anybody would. Why, old Selby did! I say, though, was it old Selby who told you about Cardew spoofing him?"

"Never mind that, Wally. Get on with the story, please!"

"Right—ho! I don't know that Cardew's spoof matters much to that, except that it made old Selby madder."

Wally did not know quite everything. As it chanced, Cardew's spoof had had more to do with developments in the very tangled skein of the Selby-Kildare feud than he imagined.

"Then there was the bizney in the bunshop. A lot of us were there. These two kids—"

"Who are you calling a kid?" demanded Reggie.

"You, fathead! These two kids and some more of our Form were there—seven of us altogether—and Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther of the Shell; and Frank's major and Cardew and Clive, and my major and three chums of his—and there was some larking about over the ices we'd ordered. And old Selby came in and told us all to clear. Then Kildare popped in, and he took our side, and there was another row. I think it was after that the old Hun reported Kildare and Darrel—yes, I'm pretty sure it was, though there's been such a lot happening that I may have got it mixed a bit."

Wally had to stop for breath here; and Reggie tried to take up the tale.

"So Selby had Kildare up before the Head, and—"

"Will you dry up, young Manners? I'm telling this yarn!"

"I don't see why you should have all the say!" retorted Reggie angrily.

"Oh, we might as well let Wally finish, as he has begun!" said Miss Graeme.

"That's all right if you say so; but I'm not jolly well going to be ordered about by him!" Reggie replied.

"So Selby reported those two, and the Head said Kildare couldn't be captain any longer, and they say he wouldn't have Darrel instead, not if there was an election. But there hasn't been one since, and Monteith's carrying on for Kildare, and that's why I think Kildare will be skipper again if there isn't another row. But I don't know that there isn't to be. We've heard a yarn that Cardew has got everybody off—except us, and Selby caned us—but I don't half believe it."

"But what was the fresh row about, dear boy?" asked Miss Mandeville.

"That fellow Williton, you know. We saw Kildare go for him here, and put him off the steps."

It was plain that Wally, and his chums as well, understood why Kildare had handed Williton—that Williton had been annoying Miss Graeme. But Wally, outspoken as he was, did not say so; and the girl liked him all the better for keeping that back.

"So you saw that, did you?" said Miss Mandeville, in surprise.

"Yes. We cleared out as soon as we'd seen. We didn't want Kildare to think we were spying on him. Of course, we weren't; but it might have looked like it. Well, we knew what it would be after that, unless the other fellow was a funk—it was simply bound to be a fight. And it was, too. But Darrel wangled it somehow so that he fought the sweep instead of Kildare. We know why that was."

"And why was it?" asked Miss Mandeville slyly.

Miss Graeme had ceased to say anything, but she sat, with parted lips, listening eagerly to every word spoken.

"So that Kildare shouldn't get the sack," answered Wally. "He'd been gated, you know; and it would have been the giddy kick-out for him—for a dead cert if he'd come into Wayland to fight."

"But he did come into Wayland, with a riding-whip!" said Miss Mandeville.

"Did he? That must have been on Saturday, then. There was some tale about, but no one seemed to know the rights of it. He didn't come on Friday; we know that, for we saw the fight, and cheered like mad when Darrel knocked that rotter out."

Then Miss Graeme spoke.

"I should like Darrel," she said; and there was a thrill in her voice. "He must be the sort of friend anyone would be proud to have."

"Rather!" said Frank Levison.

"He's one of the best!" said Reggie.

"Of course he is! Everybody knows that!" Wally chimed in.

"But how came you boys to be at the fight? Mr. Darrel didn't take you, did he? I don't think that would have been quite the thing, though I am ready to believe that what Mr. Darrel did would be right," Miss Mandeville said.

"Oh, he only took Tom Merry and Lowther and Manners—that's Manners major, this kid's brother."

Reggie glared at Wally again.

"We saw Cardew and Clive and my brother, and followed them," explained Frank.

"So there were quite a lot of you there to cheer Darrel on," Miss Graeme said. "I'm glad of that."

"Old Selby was glad, too, when he popped in and caught us," Wally said, with a grin.

"My hat, wasn't it a haul for him! He's ever so down on our crowd, and he can't bear any of the other fellows who were there. But



Miss Nina Dalglish and Wally D'Arcy & Co. marched into the local confectioners, and proceeded to purchase large quantities of eatables of every variety. (See page 11.)

he hasn't reported them yet, or us either. We've been caned; but he said he was going to report us as well when the Head came back. And the Head came back on Saturday evening. But he hasn't done a thing yet, and I don't see how he can if he lets it slide much longer."

"I believe Cardew's wangled it somehow," Frank said thoughtfully.

"Oh, you think Cardew can do anything!" retorted Wally. "This kid believes no end in Cardew, you know, Miss Graeme. I admit that the chap is jolly crafty, but I don't see how he could get round old Selby, especially after he'd done him down like that—pretending to be you—er—I mean, to be a girl."

"Did Mr. Selby ever report that?" asked Miss Mandeville.

"I don't know. No, I suppose he couldn't have done," Wally replied.

"Cardew would have been sacked if he had," said Reggie.

"I know he didn't," Frank said. "I asked Cardew. I was afraid he would get sacked. And he said that dear old Selby had been merciful to him. You fellows know the mocking way he says things."

"Crums!" cried Wally, looking at his watch. "We shall have to scoot, and ride like one o'clock, or we shall be late for prep! You won't think us rude to bolt like this, will you, Miss Graeme, and Miss Mandeville, too?"

"Not in the very least!" answered Nora Graeme.

"You mustn't give your tyrant a chance by being late for—what-is-it?" added Miss Mandeville.

The three shook hands and darted out to their bikes, which had been left just under the window.

They were mounted and away within forty seconds of Wally's glance at his watch. Even so, they knew that they must do the ride across Wayland Moor in something like record time in order to be back for prep.

"The dears!" said Miss Mandeville. "I should have kissed them all if they had only given me time. And I fairly love the quiet youngster!"

She meant Frank Levison.

"They are dear little chaps," said Nora. "Mabel, I'm beginning to see through things a bit, and I'm afraid that that exceedingly perverse boy Cardew is really at the bottom of Eric's trouble."

"Old Gruff-and-Grim's at the bottom of it, and it's old Gruff-and-Grim you're beginning to see through!" replied Miss Mandeville.

She had taken a very strong dislike to Mr. Selby.

"Yes, I'm very much afraid he hasn't played fairly, Mabel."

"I can see through the business with the erratic Master Cardew, anyway. Of course, he didn't report the boy! He dared not! It would have made him look such a figure of fun, you see. And if it is true that the boy has prevailed upon him not to report the fight he has done it through that—working upon Gruff-and-Grim's fears, you know."

It was a shrewd guess. Miss Mandeville had seen a good deal of the world, and, though her acquaintance with men of Mr. Selby's type was small, she had sized him up better than Nina Dalglish had.

But now Miss Dalglish had also taken Mr. Selby's measure pretty accurately.

"I think you're right, Mabel," she said.

"I know I'm right, ducks! I always am!"

"There's more fun in it than that, though."

Mr. Selby blurted out to me the story of young Cardew's trick. He was very angry about it; and I was silly enough to laugh. Before that we had been on quite friendly terms. I had told him about my relationship to Eric, and had asked him, if he reported the dear boy, to tell the whole story, so that it might look less black against him. I don't see how any reasonable person could blame Eric much if they knew everything, do you, dear?"

"Schoolmasters are not reasonable persons!" snapped Miss Mandeville.

"Oh, but I think Dr. Holmes is, and Mr. Railton, too! Well, I believe that Mr. Selby played me false. I know he was bitterly incensed with me for being amused by Cardew's trick, and I think that he made up his mind to be revenged upon me as well

as upon Eric. So he reported Eric without saying anything about what I had told him. I'm sure of it!"

"So am I! I'd believe anything black about old Gruff-and-Grim! And, of course, that would make a bad case against Master Eric. To break bounds— Isn't that what they call it?—to run after a flighty actress person—why, it might have been me just as well as you! But what are you going to do about it, dear? I know you mean to do something by that very resolute mouth of yours."

"I'm going to St. Jim's to see Dr. Holmes and tell him the whole truth!" flashed Nina. "Then, perhaps, it will be that horrible Mr. Selby who will be sacked, and not Eric!"

And with that she threw herself upon the couch and burst into tears.

"There, there, dear!" said Miss Mandeville, stroking her hair. "Don't take on! You shall go to-morrow, and I'll go with you!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Stopped on the Road.

"I SAY, Kildare!"

"What do you want, kid? You ought to be in bed, you know!" returned the Sixth-Former.

He had been sitting moodily by the window of his study, looking out upon the quad, when Wally D'Arcy had stuck his head in at the door.

"That's all right," answered Wally. "It wants five minutes to time yet. I should have come along to you before, only we had to ride like blue blazes to get back from Wayland in time for prep. We just managed it, though."

"But I didn't send for you. I don't want you," Kildare said, rather puzzled.

"Oh, I know that! It's because I've news for you that I've come."

"News! What news?"

"About your cousin!" replied Wally, with a half-suppressed chuckle.

He was prepared for the start Kildare gave at that.

"What cousin?" asked the senior sharply.

"Miss Dalgleish. Oh, I know all about it! And I met her years ago, when I was quite a kid. She remembered me when she saw me."

"But where did she see you? How could she have seen you?"

"In Wayland, this afternoon. Why, I do believe you didn't know she was still there, Kildare!"

Kildare had not known. He had received no word from Nina. That was not surprising. When they met on the Saturday, before Kildare's visit to the White Hart to thrash Williton, he had promised to go to her diggings later.

And he had not gone. The happenings at the White Hart, where Williton had shot at him and wounded Darrel, had driven the appointment out of his head until after his return to St. Jim's. And he had felt then that it was risking too much to go into the town again—risking too much for Darrel, that is. He would have taken the risk cheerfully for himself.

Feeling that he could tell his cousin nothing but what would add to her trouble, he had not written. But Nina had waited for a letter from him, and had been hurt at not receiving one. On Sunday he had thought it too late to write, thinking that the two ladies would have moved on to the next town at which "Lights Down!" was to be played, with the rest of the company.

"Look here, I don't understand this, D'Arcy minor!" he said now. "Tell me the whole story, and look sharp about it, for it's your bedtime—though that's no affair of mine now."

"Yes it is! We all reckon you're skipper, whatever anyone may say!" cried Wally eagerly. "And I'll jolly well see that the Third do anything you tell them, Kildare; don't you worry about that!"

"Rot! I'm not skipper; I'm not even a prefect; and if it needed you to make the Third obey me, it would be a pretty complete admission of the fact, wouldn't it? Never mind that, though, young 'un; I know you mean well. And I know I can trust you, so I may as well say first as last that you're not to talk about Miss Graeme's being my cousin."

"Oh, we're not going to talk!" replied Wally. "We know enough for that. Why, we haven't even told the rest of our crowd."

"Who are we?" demanded Kildare.

"Only Levison minor and Manners minor, besides me," said Wally.

"H'm! Might be worse. Levison minor is a sensible kid. But Manners minor will need muzzling."

"Reggie's all serene," Wally answered. "I'll see that he keeps his silly young mouth shut. We were in Wayland, Kildare, and Frank was waiting outside a shop with the bikes while we went in. And when we came out we found him talking to your cousin and another lady—ever so much older and a bit too fat, but a real good sort. She took to young Frank no end. Perhaps she's got a kid like him at home; I know 'Miss' doesn't always mean much when it's an actress."

Kildare smiled at the lag's ingenious description of the bouncing Miss Mandeville.

"Go on!" he said.

"So they asked us to tea, and made us say what we'd like to have, and we carried it to their digs. It wasn't half ripping, I can tell you! I don't care much about womenfolk myself; but your cousin's a clipper, and Miss Mandeville isn't half dusty. We had tea with them, and they wanted to know all about what had happened here."

"Oh, confound it! And you told them, of course? About my being in a dashed row and turned out of the captaincy and all that—?"

"Well, yes, I did. Oughtn't I have told, Kildare? She's your cousin, you know, and she was ever so worried about you," answered Wally, in some distress.

"You've your brother's notorious tact and judgment, I see! Oh, I don't say you were to blame; if those two set to work to pump you three innocents they were bound to get all they wanted to know out of you. It's awkward, though."

"I'm ever so sorry, Kildare!" said Wally contritely.

"Never mind! I forgive you. Cut off now. I want to think this out."

Wally went, very downcast. But it was safe to assume that that mood would not endure long with D'Arcy minor.

"Nina still at Wayland, and waiting to hear from me, of course!" murmured Kildare. "And no end worried about Saturday—she smelt a rat then, I know. I must go and see her at once—it's the only decent thing to do. More trouble if I'm seen, I know. But that's

no great odds—I'm booked for the sack, in spite of young Cardew's wangling. That may get dear old Darrel off; it won't get me. Well, I needn't drag George into this; that's one consolation."

He did not hesitate. Catching up his straw, he ran downstairs and strode across the quad to the gates.

They were locked; but he still had his key of the smaller gate, though, as he was no longer a prefect, he knew he had no right to use it, apart from the fact that he was gated.

Was he gated still, though? He was not quite sure of that. He fancied the Head had intended that only to last for such time as the "Lights Down!" company were at Wayland.

It mattered little, for he was breaking bounds in any case. Only the prefects had the right to be out as late as this.

There was a train from Rylcombe that he would be able to catch by walking fast. He would have to tramp back, for he did not care to ask for the key of the bicycle-shed, which Taggles, the porter, would have at this hour.

Taggles did not see him pass out, and he had gone more than half a mile upon the road before he met anyone.

And then it was just about the last person he would have chosen—Mr. Raiton!

The senior would almost have preferred to meet the Head himself. The Housemaster and he had always been such good friends that Kildare had felt very keenly Mr. Raiton's altered manner towards him during the last few days.

"Kildare!" ejaculated the master, in surprise.

"I can't explain, sir, and I can't wait. I must catch a train at Rylcombe!"

Mr. Raiton turned.

"I will walk that way with you, Kildare," he said, very gravely.

Eric Kildare appreciated the kindness and tact of that. He longed to explain everything to this good friend. But his promise to Nina sealed his lips. No one was to be told—that was the agreement between them. And Kildare did not guess that she had made up her mind to tell.

Suddenly it flashed upon him now that there was something more she must know. He had not told her on the Saturday of the illness of her mother. It seemed to him then that, at any cost, he must get to Wayland—must see her that night!

There was silence between the two for three or four minutes.

Then Mr. Raiton spoke.

"Kildare, surely you were not—I won't say running away, but leaving St. Jim's like this without telling us of your departure?"

"Oh, no, sir! I give you my word I am coming back to-night!"

"I don't want to pry into your affairs, Kildare. You are not a child, and you have not been treated as one. Dr. Holmes stretched matters as far as he possibly could for you. I do not want to question you, I say; but as your friend I must warn you that you are doing a most foolhardy thing—a thing that can hardly fail to have serious consequences for you."

"The Head's been more than good, sir; I know that! I am grateful to him and to you. I quite understand your meaning. This puts the lid on it! But I was going to have the sack, anyway, I suppose; and whether that's so or not I simply must go!"

"I shall not seek to stop you, Kildare," replied the master gravely. "But I must ask you one question. Are you going to Wayland to see—to see that lady?"

"Yes!" muttered Kildare desperately.

"Then you are doing a foolish thing—a fatal thing! I know well how difficult it is to reason with a young man in the pride of his youth, when the blood runs hot, and authority seems to him something to be defied. I have been young myself, and I know, I say."

"I don't want to defy authority, sir! Upon my honour, I hate the idea of flying in the face of the Head like this, and I hate even more to be obliged to seem ungrateful and disrespectful to you!"

"Let us put aside all question of gratitude and respect, Kildare! Let me speak to you as one friend to another. We have been good friends, and it will pain me deeply if we cease to be so. My boy, your expulsion would not have broken that tie! But this will, if you persist in going on in the face of what I have said, I can only believe that you have no value for my regard!"

Kildare wavered. He would have given in at once but for the thought of that news from home he had failed to give Nina.

Mr. Raiton waited for him to speak.

Side by side they walked on together, away from St. Jim's, towards the station. In a few minutes they must reach it. The train was nearly due, and both recognised the fact that if Kildare got on that train he thereby practically closed his career at St. Jim's.

If the master had spoken again then, the boy might have persisted in his obduracy.

But Mr. Raiton remained silent. He had made his final plea.

And that patient silence touched Kildare as it might not have touched most fellows, for most would not have understood it as he did.

After all, was there any real use in going to Nina that night?

What he could tell her about himself was no more than she had already learned from the three minors. He might add a few details, it is true; but they would hardly be of any real importance to the story.

And his news would keep. His cousin would only be made anxious by it—perhaps unnecessarily—and she could not leave Wayland that evening in time to make any difference in the journey to Ireland.

Kildare stopped suddenly. The rumbling of the train was audible, and the signal-light had changed colour.

"I will go back, sir," he said.

There was not a trace of sulkiness in his speech, nor was there either resentment or condescension in the master's answer.

"I am glad of that, Kildare!"

Not another word passed between them until they parted in the hall of the School House.

Then the Sixth-Former said simply:

"Thank you, sir! You have been very good to me."

Mr. Raiton held out his hand and gripped Kildare's. That grip spoke more than many words.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Williton's Foul Stroke.

IT was not long after nine o'clock next morning when Toby, the School House page, appeared at the door of the Sixth Form-room.

"If you please, sir, the Head wants to see Mr. Kildare and Mr. Darrel at once," he said to Mr. Raiton.

The master nodded to the two seniors, and they went at once. Mr. Raiton's face was anxious as he looked after them. He wondered whether there was new trouble, or whether this was merely to be a settlement of the old one.

Several there were even more anxious than he was. Baker, Rushden, and Monteith were all worried. They had heard something of what had happened in Wayland during the previous week.

So had Knox; but he was not worried. His face wore a sneering grin, and Baker, who noted it, felt that he would have enjoyed kicking him.

"Now to face the music!" said Kildare to his chum, as they passed together to Dr. Holmes' study.

He tried to speak lightly; but the attempt was hardly a success.

Darrel did not answer. Even now he did not regret what he had done. His arm was still in a sling, and he could still feel the pain of the bullet-wound; but he would have borne far more than that for Kildare's sake.

The first glance showed them that the Head was in his sternest mood.

But they had guessed before that that they had fresh trouble to face.

If it had been merely a settlement of the old score Darrel would not have been sent for.

They stood before the Head, and he eyed them for a minute that seemed like an hour, without a word.

Then he asked abruptly:

"Why do you carry your arm in a sling, Darrel?"

It was a crucial question, and both seniors recognised the fact.

Darrel would not lie. The Head knew that. But would he tell the whole truth?

He hesitated. The Head's keen eyes looked at him from under their heavy, grizzled eyebrows. He met them unflinchingly, but still he did not speak.

"You had better tell the whole truth!" said the Head.

"It seems to me that you must know it already, sir," murmured Darrel, in confusion.

Then Kildare spoke out, and there was nothing confused about his speech.

"What Darrel did he did for my sake, sir!"

"I have already an inkling of that, Kildare. But I do not know what he did, or what you have done. I have here a letter, unsigned, which tells me surprising things. I wish to

know whether those things are true," returned the Head.

He looked at them, as if expecting them to tell their story, that he might compare it with that which he had been told.

And they would have spoken out, but for the fact that they were concerned with a secret not their own.

The stern, steady gaze of the Head made them feel very uncomfortable. He saw that, and it may be that some thought of the clean record these two had maintained at St. Jim's, some personal liking for them both, prompted his next action.

For he held out a letter.

"You may read this," he said.

Kildare and Darrel read together.

"I feel it my duty to inform you that two of your senior boys have lately been behaving in a manner that I am certain would not meet with your approval. In consequence of an infatuation for an actress of the company playing last week at the Empire Music Hall at Wayland, one of them had a violent quarrel with a visitor to the town who is believed to be an aspirant to the hand of the lady in question. It would appear that he was for some reason prevented from keeping the appointment he had made to meet that gentleman in a fight—it may be that his courage failed him, but on that score I have no certain information. The other kept the appointment in his stead, and the fight took place, without gloves, on the bowling-green of the White Hart Inn, on Friday last. A number of your juniors attended it, doubtless by invitation. The finish of it was witnessed also by a master from your school, for which reason I must assume that the story of the fight has reached your ears. It should certainly have done so, or you have been very ill-served by your intelligence department. But you can hardly be aware, I think, that on the following day there was a shooting fracas at the White Hart, in which both these youths were concerned."

"A WELL-WISHER TO ST. JAMES."

Both the seniors saw the hand of Buck Williton in that anonymous epistle. It was typewritten, so as to hide the identity of the writer. But only Williton, or someone prompted by him, could have written it.

It was a foul stroke—a stab in the back. Williton had nothing to be grateful for, it was true. If the police had not been called in after he had shot at Kildare and wounded Darrel, it was only—as he was well aware—to keep the story from becoming public, not out of any mercy towards him.

But no man with a spark of decency in him would have sent that letter after he had been let off thus, whatever the cause of his being let off had been.

"Do you know who wrote that letter, Kildare?" asked Dr. Holmes.

"I believe that I do, sir. In fact, I am sure of it. Only one man could have been at the bottom of it, whether he actually wrote it himself, or caused it to be written."

"Who is this man?"

"A scoundrel named Williton, sir!"

"You had better restrain your epithets, Kildare! For the writer of an anonymous letter I find it impossible to feel any respect, or indeed to make any excuse; and there is very obvious malice in this communication. But I cannot refuse to take cognisance of the information given me. Answer me this—are the charges made in this letter substantially true?"

It was a difficult question for Kildare to answer. For the charges were founded on fact, yet they were so made as to throw a false colour over everything.

But Kildare could not explain. If he could have told the Head that Miss Dalgleish was his cousin, that statement would have altered the whole aspect of the case at once. The relationship gave him a right to resent Williton's objectionable attentions to the girl; it went far to excuse his breaking of bounds to see her. But he was bound by honour, and he could only reply:

"Yes, sir."

The Head's face grew sterner.

"The writer of the letter is the man referred to in it?" he said.

"Yes, sir, unless I am wrong as to the writer's identity. But I don't think I can be."

"You, Darrel, fought with this man?"

"Yes, sir," answered Darrel.

"What was the result of the fight?"

"I thrashed him, sir."

Was that a gleam of satisfaction in the Head's eyes?

Clergyman and schoolmaster though he was, Dr. Holmes was very human. It may well

have been that he was glad to hear Darrel had beaten this fellow, though, of course, he would not own it.

"This fight took place on licensed premises at Wayland?"

"I suppose so, sir. The bowling-green is part of the inn premises, no doubt; but it is entered by a gate of its own, and I was not inside the White Hart on Friday. But I was on Saturday," replied Darrel candidly.

"It was on the Saturday that the shooting affray took place?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you were hit in the arm?"

"Yes, sir."

"The shot was fired at me, sir!" said Kildare eagerly. "Darrel threw himself in front of me, and took it."

The stern face of the Head relaxed a little.

"Who fired the shot?" he asked.

"Williton," replied Kildare. "I went there to horsewhip him."

"Indeed!" said the Head frigidly.

"He deserved it, sir. The man is an utter scoundrel!"

This time the Head did not rebuke the use of that epithet. Doubtless he had formed his own opinion of Mr. Buck Williton.

"Who were the juniors present at the fight, Darrel?"

There was nothing for it but to answer that, although Darrel was. Cardew's curious conscience was not to get them all off, after all!

If Darrel did not answer, Dr. Holmes would find out by other means.

"Merry, Manners, Lowther, Levison major, Cardew, Clive, D'Arcy minor, Manners minor, Levison minor, Hobbs, Frayne, Gibson and Jameson, sir."

"Were they there by your invitation? Surely, Darrel, you had sense and decency enough, in the midst of all your folly, not to invite members of the Third Form to such a disgraceful affair?"

"I asked Merry to second me, sir. I did not care to ask anyone in the Sixth or Fifth. Lowther and Manners major may be said to have come by my invitation, as I told Merry that he need not keep the matter a secret from them. I had nothing whatever to do with the presence of the rest, and I am sure Merry and the other two did not tell them. I beg most earnestly, sir, that the juniors concerned—the rest, as well as the three I led into it—may not suffer for what was entirely my blame!"

"I shall not forget that request, Darrel. One more question I must ask you. This matter should have been reported to me. It was not so reported. Who was the master who arrived upon the scene?"

"That question is one I can't answer, sir," Darrel said resolutely.

He was not sure that he was right in his refusal, and certainly no liking for Mr. Selby influenced it.

But the man had kept silence, whatever his motive might have been, and Darrel felt that he could not give him away.

"Very well. I will not press that, Kildare, where is this man Williton now?"

"I don't know, sir. I understood that he was leaving Wayland at once. We agreed not to call in the police on condition that he should go."

"But not solely to bring that about, I take it," rejoined the Head drily. "However, I cannot say that I am sorry the police were not called in. The result would have been a scandal that would have taken the school a very long time to live down."

He rang the bell, and Toby appeared.

"Will you ask Mr. Railton to be so kind as to come here?" Dr. Holmes said to the page.

Toby went, and there was silence in the room.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Sentenced to the Sack!

R. RAILTON came quickly.

The Head gave him the anonymous letter to read, and when he had read it talked to him in low tones for a few minutes. The Housemaster's face, at first merely anxious, grew sterner as he talked.

Then they sat side by side, and it was evident that both had made up their minds. But that they felt keenly the decision to which they had come could be read in their faces.

"Kildare—and you, Darrel, in a lesser

measure—you have been guilty of very grave offences against the rules—I may say against what matters more, the honour—of this school."

The Head paused, as if for some reply.

But neither senior spoke.

They could not deny his charge. The story as the Head knew it was discreditable to Kildare, and only less so to Darrel because it was plain that he had acted throughout from loyal friendship.

"To a man who did not know you so well, Kildare, it would seem clear that an absurd infatuation for an actress had been at the base of all your offences—that jealousy led you to quarrel with this man Williton. But you spoke of some motive for your actions that you were not at liberty to reveal; and I still have so much faith in your essential probity that I am not satisfied to accept the obvious explanation. Are you now prepared to offer any explanation that may even extenuate your wrongdoing? If so, we are willing to hear it."

Kildare could not answer at once. There was a big lump in his throat. He thought of Mr. Railton's kindness the night before; he saw plainly what kindness Dr. Holmes was treating him now, and he could not find words to express himself.

But he could not tell Nina's secret! His honour was pledged.

"I do not want to hurry you, Kildare. Take time to think."

"It's no good, sir! I can't tell you," answered Kildare hoarsely.

"Then you must go! I know that you will acquiesce in the justice of that sentence. It pains me to speak it; it pains Mr. Railton to be forced to concur in it. But you must see—"

"I see, sir. I know you couldn't do anything else. It's no use saying I'm sorry; but I think you'll understand some day how sorry I am!"

"Darrel, we almost feel that we are punishing you for your virtues rather than your faults. It is clear to us that all you did was done out of loyal affection for Kildare. But that feeling has led you so far astray that we must inflict the same punishment upon you. It may lighten the burden of it for you to know that I feel it possible to accede to your request that the juniors mixed up in this deplorable affair should be let off."

"Thank you, sir," answered Darrel, white to the lips.

But Kildare's grip on his arm made him feel that it was better to go than to stay. St. Jim's without Kildare! It was almost unthinkable to Darrel!

"There will be no public expulsion," went on the Head. "From you I do not disguise the fact that this is expulsion. But as far as may be I shall disguise it from the world at large. You will both be ready to go within three hours. I will say good-bye to you now, for I cannot bear to see you again. Nothing I have ever had to do since I became headmaster of this school has hurt me quite so much as this!"

The Head's eyes were stern no longer; there was a mist before them as he shook hands with the two.

Mr. Railton did not say good-bye, and they knew that they would see him again later.

They passed out together, and the only comfort either had was that they were together still.

Even that was poor consolation for Eric Kildare, who could not help but feel keenly the harm he had wrought for his loyal chum.

"It had to be, sir," said Mr. Railton unsteadily, as the door closed behind them.

"Yes, Railton, it had to be. But I could hardly feel it more if those two were my own boys."

There came a rap at the door.

Toby put in his head in response to Dr. Holmes' call. Toby looked nervous. He knew that there was something pretty badly wrong.

"Two ladies to see you, sir," he said.

"They say it's an urgent and important business. Here's their cards, sir."

He handed the cards to the Head on a salver.

"Miss Mandeville" was on the first he read. He had never heard of Miss Mandeville before. But the name on the second was vaguely familiar to him. "Miss Nora Graeme"—surely that was the young lady who had caused all this trouble!

Underneath the name was written in pencil another—"Miss Nina Dalgleish." But that conveyed no further information to the Head.

He passed the second card to Mr. Railton. "Now, I wonder—" he said. "I must see them, Railton; that is the one thing certain in all this. It seems impossible that—and yet—Show the ladies in, Marsh! Please stay, Railton!"

A minute later a very pretty and graceful girl of not more than twenty-one was ushered into the room. There followed her a stout, fair, good-tempered-looking lady of nearly double her age, who looked the actress all over.

It was the elder lady who spoke first. The younger seemed unable to find her voice.

"You're Dr. Holmes, I'm sure," said Miss Mandeville briskly. "I'm nobody at all in this act; I may as well make that clear from the start. But this is Miss Graeme, whose name I think you must have heard—or, rather, it isn't Miss Graeme, for that's her stage name, and doesn't matter a scrap at the moment. It's Nina Dalgleish—Eric Kildare's cousin!"

The Head and Mr. Railton looked into one another's faces, and fairly gasped.

This explained so much! Not everything. There were incidents in the tangled affair that nothing could explain away, but it really did make an enormous amount of difference that the girl concerned should be the cousin of Kildare.

Miss Mandeville saw the impression she had made, and she favoured both gentlemen with a beaming smile.

"Ah, that tells you something, doesn't it?" she said. "I'm quite sure that, both of you want fair play; your faces are enough to tell me that. The boy's in trouble—heavy trouble—isn't that correct?—and most of it is on account of this silly girl and her secret. Yes, you are silly, dare—it's not a bit of good denying that!"

"I'm not denying it, Mabel," replied Nina. "I have been very silly, I know. But it isn't altogether my fault if Eric is in trouble because of my making him keep my secret, for I thought until yesterday that Dr. Holmes knew it, and I felt so sure that he couldn't be hard on Eric if he did know."

"My dear young lady, you bewilder me, positively!" said the Head, passing his right hand across his brow. "Please sit down—and you, too, Miss Mandeville. I assure you that I appreciate the motives which have brought you here, little as I understand them. Pray sit down!"

The two ladies took seats.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Unpleasant for Selby!

"AND now may I ask how it was you came to think that I knew your secret, Miss Dalgleish?" said the Head. "I do not ask you what that secret is, but—"

"Oh, I will tell you—I want to tell you! When you know it, you will understand so much more than you possibly can without knowing. You see, I ran away from home to go on the stage, and none of my people knew where I was. Then I came to Wayland with our company, and Eric spotted me, and, of course, he came to the Empire to see me act. That was very natural, wasn't it, even though he ought not to have gone?"

"Very natural indeed, my dear young lady!" replied the Head, with a smile. "If he had been guilty of nothing worse than that the trouble would have been but slight."

"But he hasn't—not really worse—because everything else arose from that, you see, Dr. Holmes. I made him promise that he wouldn't tell anyone about me. Of course, I was thinking about our people, but I did mean you and other folks here as well. He had told Mr. Darrel, I know; that was different, and I didn't mind that."

The Head and Mr. Railton knew now what was the secret which had tied Kildare's tongue.

But they were to learn more. Miss Mandeville spoke up at this stage.

"I know I've no right to butt in at all," she said, "but I'm very fond of this child; and I admire very highly two young gentlemen who are badly under the weather just now. I want to say to you that, as a woman of the world, I see no harm in what they have done—any of it. Of course, I know that you look at it with different eyes."

"Is it true that—that Eric and his friend are—are to be expelled, Dr. Holmes?" asked Nina timidly.

The Head looked at Mr. Railton before replying.

"If you had asked me that question five minutes ago, Miss Dalgleish, I should have been compelled to answer 'Yes,'" he said slowly. "At this moment they are under sentence of expulsion—I have no doubt that they are packing to go. But what you and Miss Mandeville have said compels me to reconsider my decision."

"Yes, it must make a bit of difference that young Kildare only came to see his own cousin, instead of being in the toils of a designing siren of the stage—like me, for instance!" said Miss Mandeville.

Mr. Railton laughed. The Head looked at the end of his nose, but there was a twinkle in his eyes.

Nina said indignantly:

"You are nothing of the sort, Mabel! You've looked after me—"

"Like a mother!" chimed in the breezy actress. "Don't spare me, my dear!"

Dr. Holmes handed to the speaker the anonymous letter.

"I should be glad to have your opinion of that, Miss Mandeville," he said, with grave courtesy. And both the ladies understood that he wanted Miss Mandeville to know that he respected her and valued her opinion.

The actress read the letter quickly, and her eyes flashed with anger as she read.

She threw it upon the table when she had finished, with a fine dramatic gesture.

"Poh!" she said. "I don't like touching it! I can tell you who wrote that, Dr. Holmes—and why he wrote it!"

"Who—and why?" asked the Head.

"Mr. Buck Williton—and for nothing else but for dirty, sneaking revenge! He's an aspirant for the hand of this dear child. Why, sir, a proposal of marriage from that man would be an insult to any decent girl! Old Gruff-and-Grim hasn't behaved well in this affair; but I do hold it to his credit that he saw the sort of man Buck Williton was, and stood between Nora and him."

"Old Gruff-and-Grim, Miss Mandeville? Pardon me; I do not understand to whom you refer," said the Head.

"Mr. Selby!" snapped Miss Mandeville.

"And in what manner, may I ask, has Mr. Selby behaved badly?"

"I'm afraid you are slow, Dr. Holmes. Haven't you got on to the fact that it was to old Gruff-and-Grim my dear here confided her secret, because she knew that he was going to report Eric Kildare, and she wanted you to know how things really stood? But he didn't tell you, I'll bet!"

Again Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton looked at one another. The Head was frowning now.

"I assure you that if only I had known this—" he began.

"But you know it now, Dr. Holmes, and it wasn't Eric's fault that you didn't know it before!" cried the girl, quick to see and to seize her advantage. "You won't expel them, will you? Oh, please don't!"

"I shall certainly not expel them, though I cannot admit that all they have done was right and proper," said the Head. "If I had known, as it seems I should have known, of the relationship between you and Kildare, my dear girl, the question of expulsion could not have arisen, for matters must surely have taken a different course."

"Oh, thank you—thank you!" cried Nina, hardly able to keep back her tears.

"You're a white man, sir!" exclaimed Miss Mandeville.

"And now, my dear girl, perhaps you will accept a word or two of advice from a man almost old enough to be your grandfather," said the Head. "Don't keep your people in ignorance another day of your whereabouts! Will you allow me to take you two ladies to my wife? She will be glad to know you. I will then send for Kildare and Darrel, and make them aware of the fact that I have been given reason to rescind the sentence passed upon them. After that, you will no doubt be glad to see your cousin, Miss Dalgleish."

"And Mr. Darrel, too!" murmured the girl. "He has stood by Eric so splendidly that—"

"Oh, certainly—Darrel, too!" said the Head, as he opened the door for them, and followed them out.

He was back within five minutes.

"Railton," he said, "I am delighted! I am so pleased that I must do what I know to be foolish—overlook altogether the

faults those two have been guilty of, and restore them to their places without any punishment at all!"

"I am not sure that it is foolish, sir," answered the Housemaster. "It seems to me the best course. Their offences were not schoolboy offences, and they can hardly be expiated by ordinary schoolboy punishments. I am sure that both have suffered a good deal, too."

Kildare and Darrel were sent for. The interview was not a long one, but it lifted the two seniors from the depths of depression to the seventh heaven of delight.

The slate was wiped clean! They could make a fresh start. And, best of all, neither the Head nor Mr. Railton seemed to regard them as real offenders.

When they had gone the Head turned to Mr. Railton.

"There is one very unpleasant feature of this affair, Railton," he said, his face growing stern again. "Selby comes out of it very badly indeed. I cannot avoid the conclusion that, out of ill-feeling towards Kildare, he deliberately kept back that pretty girl's story. I am going to send for Selby at once. Will you—"

"If you will excuse me, I would much rather not stay. It will only complicate matters if I do, for Selby persists in looking upon me as an enemy."

So Mr. Railton went, and Mr. Selby was sent for.

He came in in a blustering and defiant mood, for it dinned that he had seen the two ladies from the "Lights Down" company in the quad, and had guessed that there was trouble in store for him.

"Will you be good enough to let me speak first, Mr. Selby?" said the Head coldly, breaking in upon an incoherent torrent of words from the Third Form master. "I have to ask you several questions, which you may not at all like answering. In the first place, is it a fact that, when you reported Kildare to me for breaking bounds in consequence of his infatuation for an actress playing at the Empire at Wayland, you were aware that the lady in the case was his cousin?"

"I—I hardly knew whether to believe the young lady's story. I—er—thought she was merely shielding Kildare," faltered the miserable man.

To the Head that explanation seemed beneath contempt. He would not even answer it.

"And now, Mr. Selby, may I ask you how it was that you failed to report to me the fight on the bowling-green of the White Hart Inn?"

"I—I—really sir, you seemed so little pleased by the earlier report that—that, in short—"

"Enough! I am tempted to ask you for your resignation, Mr. Selby! I was minded to do that a few weeks ago, when you showed up very badly indeed in that matter of Levison minor. If you offer it, I shall accept it now!"

Silence! Mr. Selby was prepared to eat dirt before he offered his resignation. He felt rather as if he were eating dirt as the scornful eyes of the Head seemed to look right through him.

"I will not press that. You have been many years here, and it would be something like a cruelty to force you out, Selby. But I hope you will make it convenient to your arrangements to take a fortnight's leave from to-day. That is all. Good-morning!"

Never in his life had Henry Selby felt so cowed and humiliated as when he left the Head's study, practically suspended for a fortnight!

It was a bitter pill to swallow; but it was not so bitter as being cast out would have been, and he vowed as he went that he would make them all—the Head, Railton, Kildare, Darrel—sorry for this some day.

There was a tea-party in Kildare's study that evening. The principal guests were Miss Mandeville and Nina Dalgleish. But there were others—Darrel, of course, the Terrible Three, the three minors Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Cardew, because Miss Dalgleish wanted to meet him; Levison major, because he was Frank's brother; and Clive, because he was the chum of Cardew and Levison major. And all agreed what a good sort Nina Dalgleish was, and what a lucky fellow Kildare was to possess such a pretty cousin.

THE END.