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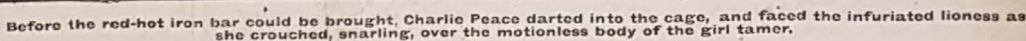
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Vol. 1.  
No. 21

A SPLENDID TALE  
OF THE  
BOYHOOD OF  
CHARLES PEACOCK



*Continued on the next page.*



## The Scapegrace of the Regiment.

(Continued.)

lip as to which to "plump" for and which to avoid.

For even in the smartest battalion there are some companies good and some rank bad.

Jack could imagine, for instance, that any "crush" Lieut. the Hon. Gaggleton Glynn had anything to do with would be bound to be rotten, and no place for them.

Then, again, they had no desire to fall into Sergeant Riggs' clutches permanently if they could avoid it.

But whether either of these belonged to E—the company they were told off to—they had not the ghost of an idea, and they were too proud to inquire.

They found their future colour-sergeant seated in his "bunk" in

awaiting them. This gloomy cupboard outside the door of one of the barracks-rooms, seemed to Jack rather less comfortable than the prison-cell in which he had just spent the night.

However, it was private, and after a few years in a crowded barracks-room, most soldiers would be glad enough to sling their cots in a coal-cellar if they were allowed.

Unfortunately, Colour-sergeant Bush, of E, seemed as gloomy as his surroundings. Jack sized him up as a weak man, and since a weak Colour can only mean an indifferent commander at best, he realised that once again their luck was sadly out.

As was only to be expected, he read them a lecture on the bad start they had made in their new career; but so little heart did he put into it that Jack found himself actually yawning.

"Well, there's your order for your

kits," concluded the colour-mourner fully. "You'll take those over to the quartermaster's store at two sharp, and get measured. And just see nobody pinches any of your stuff when you get it back to your room, because they're a pretty rum lot. It's the one just below here," he explained, turning again to his little table littered with pay-sheets and papers. "Ask for Private Baggs and Sims, and tell 'em I sent you. They'll look after you and show you the ropes."

The gloomy colour leaved a last heavy sigh, and taking this as a signal of dismissal, Jack winked at Percival and led the way out.

"That man's just wasted as a soldier. He ought to have been an undertaker. He gives one the face-ache simply to look at him," laughed Jack, as they descended the draughty staircase and waited at a door marked "25 N.C.O.'s and Men."

Pushing this open, they found themselves in a big, bare room, scrupulously clean, with bed-cots ranged round the four walls, two long tables with forms running down the centre, and in the middle a huge stove, and an equally enormous coal-bin.

Above each bed was a shelf on which was stowed the soldier's extra uniform and belongings, all packed and arranged according to pattern, so that each shelf was as like the rest as peas in a pod.

Beneath was a row of pegs for belts and equipment, and beside the bed a rack for the rifle.

As it was close on time for the dinner bugle to sound, the room was full. A few men lounged on the ends of the fold-up bed-cots, reading papers, but the greater number were grouped about one of the tables, where, to judge by the rattle of a dice-box and the invitations of a

gentleman with a strong Cockney accent to "Plank your money on the old mud'ook this time, mates!" a gambling game was in full swing. "Excuse me, can anyone tell me which is Private Sims?" asked Jack in a loud, clear voice.

Instantly the group bending over the table straightened up to take a look at him, while out of its midst bobbed the vicious, ferret face of Private "Pasty" Green.

"Oh, there 'e is!" he cried exultantly. "Wot did I tell yer chums. 'Ere's our gentleman, off wot used to be a blessed biffer one, don't cher know—haw, haw!"

"Give 'im a cheer, boys!" cheered the cocker "ero" wot sets about our poor fellers when they're tight and can't look out for themselves. Go on, boys! Ip-ip-ip-lurrrrr!"

(Another long instalment of this absorbing tale in next week's EMPIRE Library. Order in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)

[Our Readers are informed that the characters in the following story are purely imaginary, and no reference or allusion is made to any living person. Actual names may be unintentionally mentioned, but the Editor wishes it to be distinctly understood that no adverse personal reflection is intended.]

## The Most Popular School Story.

# THE RIVALS OF ST. WODE'S.

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

### THIS HAS TAKEN PLACE.

Dick Penwyn, a sturdy Cornish lad who has been to a Council school, obtains a scholarship at St. Wode's. On his arrival there he is received with open arms by Blagden & Co., who mistake him for another new fellow—Lord Lovell. On discovering their mistake, Blagden & Co. become bitter enemies of both the new juniors, who chum together. To the disgust of his Form-fellows, "Bunny" Lovell is taken up by Crawcour & Co., of the Fifth, whose companionship, Pen sees plainly, is doing the easy-going young viscount no good. Bunny, however, will not listen to his friend's remonstrances, and Pen is wandering about disconsolately during one of his chum's visits to the "Blades," as Crawcour & Co. call themselves, when Newcome, of the Fourth, accosts him curiously.

"Are you glad to be at St. Wode's, Penwyn?" he asks.

"Yes, in a way," replies Pen.

(Read on from here.)

### Assistance for Newcome.

"ONLY in a way?" said Newcome, grinning.

"Yes, I know it's a rise in life for me, and may mean something for me in the future, and for my people. But the fellows here don't seem so hearty and unaffected as the fellows I'm used to."

Newcome chuckled. He wondered what Blagden and Co. would say if they knew that the scholarship chap compared the St. Wode's fellows unfavourably with the Council-school chaps he was used to.

"Does that amuse you?" asked Pen.

"Yes, rather. But it's all right," said Newcome, good-humouredly. "You'll get used to us, you know. We're not all bad; there are black sheep here, but if you're decent all the time, you'll get on with most of the fellows."

"I hope I shall be decent."

"Don't be touchy," said Newcome quietly. "I'm not getting at you. I'm not a snob, and I know you're all right. At the same time, you can't expect all the fellows to see it—all at once."

"I suppose not."

"You've only got to stick to your guns and play the game to pull through. A chap can never be really done in, except by himself. That's my opinion!"

"I dare say you're right."

"Oh, I'm right!" said Newcome cheerfully. "You depend on your uncle! Look here, you must have been through this stuff in the scholarship exam. I know they make it jolly stiff. I know there are Fifth-formers here who couldn't pass it, though it's only to admit you to the Fourth!"

"Very likely!"

"Well, go through this with me, there's a good fellow," said Newcome. "Your friend doesn't want you now, does he—I mean Lovell? I believe you've chummed up with him!"

"Yes," said Pen.

"He doesn't want you for a minute, I suppose?"

"No," said Pen, flushing. "He doesn't want me."

"Oh!" murmured Newcome, noting the flush in the junior's cheek. "Falling out already? Well, it's none of my bizney."

"Did you speak?"

"Yes; help me with this beast Horace," said Newcome. "What I can't make out is, why they should be lords of the earth and exalted to the gods as well—those chaps in the chariots, you know."

Pen laughed, and cheerfully went through the old familiar ode with Newcome. The St. Wode's fellow passed no remark on the matter, but he could not help being struck by the clearness and precision of the scholarship lad's knowledge.

After ten minutes Newcome had learned more from Pen than he was likely to learn from Mr. Bush in a week.

"Thanks, old man," he said gratefully, when Pen had finished. "You make it clearer than old Bush does."

He chuckled. "Won't I surprise him in the morning, too! As a matter of fact, Penwyn, it's an open secret that old Bushy-whiskers is weak in the classics—jolly weak, and Horace is his bugbear. He has to mug it up in his study, you know, before he takes us, and one or two of the fellows have caught him tripping—yes, rather! My hat! He comes down heavy on them, too! He's a University man, too, old Bushy—I know that—but all sorts of chaps get into the University now," said Newcome cheerfully. "I shouldn't wonder if he's one of those scholarship outsiders—my hat! Excuse me, old man—I broke off remorsefully, 'I—I didn't notice what I was saying! I'm awfully sorry—I really am.'"

Pen had reddened.

"Oh, don't mind me!" he said.

"I'm learning not to be touchy. If Mr. Bush was a scholarship chap, though, I should think it's to his credit, not against him."

"So should I, really," said Newcome hesitatingly. "I suppose it's more to a chap's credit to do things himself than to have his pater pay for them. But—but that's not the way it's generally looked at, you know. I dare say a chap can become snobbish without thinking, you see. I could have bitten my tongue out for saying what I just said; but I didn't really mean anything."

"It's all right."

"After you'd just helped me, too, like the jolly brick you are," said Newcome. "I'm so jolly sorry, Penwyn."

Pen smiled.

"Don't say anything more about it," he said. "It's nothing! As for Mr. Bush, if he is a scholarship chap himself—"

"Penwyn! Penwyn! Boy! How dare you!"

Pen jumped up.

Mr. Bush had entered the common-room, unseen by the two juniors as they sat facing the fire, and he had evidently heard what the Cornish lad said.

He stood facing the two alarmed boys—his hands trembling, his features convulsed with rage.

### Driven to Revolt.

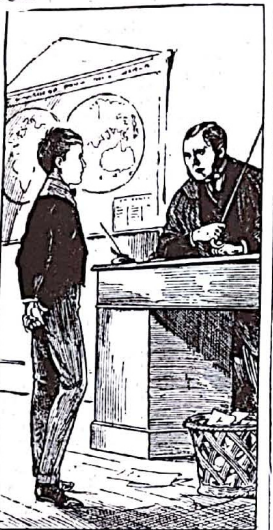
"PENWYN!" Mr. Bush was stammering in his rage, his words coming out thickly. "Penwyn! How dare you, boy?"

Pen looked at him in surprise. Mr. Bush had heard his remark, but he did not see why it should offend the master of the Fourth.

Pen had been about to say nothing that had any harm in it—ill as Mr. Bush had treated him, he was not the fellow to carp and growl about a master behind his back.

But Mr. Bush had evidently taken very great exception to the words which Pen regarded as perfectly harmless.

His face was quite white with passion, and his eyes were scintillating with an unpleasant greenish light.



"I am waiting for you, Penwyn," said Mr. Bush ominously. "Hold out your hand." But Pen put his hands behind him.

"Penwyn, you—you gutter-brat!" said Mr. Bush thickly. "How dare you talk about me! I say, how dare you slander me, sir?"

Pen crimsoned.

"I was not slandering you, sir," he said quietly. "I was saying—"

"You—you wretched beggar from the streets!" said Mr. Bush. "A disgrace to the Council-school where you were taught, you have come here to be a greater disgrace to St. Wode's!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Blagden. Pen bit his lip.

"You'll not find it pay to slander your masters," said Mr. Bush. "There is severe punishment provided at St. Wode's for that kind of villainy, Penwyn. You cannot bring the habits of the—the criminal classes here with impunity."

"I did not slander you. I will tell you what I was about to say."

"Boy! I distinctly heard you!"

"I was saying, sir, that if you had been a scholarship boy yourself, you would probably show more consideration for me as a scholarship boy," said Pen. "That is what I was saying when you interrupted me."

Mr. Bush glared at him.

And how dare you assume that a master at St. Wode's has had the same disgraceful upbringing as yourself, you gutter outcast!" he thundered.

"I have not had a disgraceful upbringing, sir," said Pen, his lip trembling. "I was brought up by my father."

"Ah, some low, ill-mannered wretch like yourself, only too eager to thrust his son into a place he was not fit for!"

Pen's eyes burned.

"If you speak of my father in that way again, sir, I shall complain to the Head!" he said, in low, determined tones.

"Go it!" murmured Newcome, not loud enough for Mr. Bush to hear.

Mr. Bush had simply staggered back in astonishment. He was more astonished than enraged at the words of the scholarship boy.

"What—what!" he stammered.

Pen set his lips firmly. So long as the form-master, in his mean, spiteful way, sneered at and abused him, Pen could stand it, and meant to stand it. But that his father—the honest, kind, brave father—who had worked for him and made endless sacrifices for his sake—sacrifices Pen might never be able to repay—that John Penwyn should be spoken of insultingly by so mean a creature as Mr. Bush—that was not to be endured. Pen would not have stayed at St. Wode's to endure it. He would sooner have given up all his prospects there, and shaken the dust of the place from his feet for ever.

He faced the Form-master calmly. There was a dangerous gleam in his eyes now. The glance of everyone in the room was upon the singular scene. The fellows were almost breathless, wondering how the Form-master would take the cheek of the scholarship chap.

Mr. Bush's fingers were clenching and unclenching with rage.

But he knew that he had gone too far.

He read determination in Pen's face, and he knew that if his words were reported to the head-master of St. Wode's in a complaint from the scholarship boy, he would have a very painful scene to go through with Dr. Wimperis. The Head was very strong on the subject of the masters keeping their dignity before the boys.

In fact, Mr. Bush saw a possibility of his having to leave St. Wode's if the Cornish junior carried out his threat.

He choked back the furious words that leaped to his lips.

Pen did not speak. He had no desire to triumph over the Form-master in any way. He was only determined that his father should not be spoken of disrespectfully by Mr. Bush or by anybody else. He would not have stood it from the Head himself.

"Penwyn!" said Mr. Bush, at last. "I—I hardly know how to deal with you. You—you are such a ruffian, such an untamed hooligan!"

"He ought to be expelled, sir," said Blagden.

"Hear, hear!" murmured Skeat. "Quite right," said Mr. Bush. "Quite right, Blagden. This boy certainly should be expelled; it is not fit that he should mix with the sons of gentlemen. I trust, however, that you do not allow his presence to contaminate you more than you can help."

"Trust us for that, sir," said Blagden.

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Cads!" murmured Newcome. "Fancy sucking up to old Bushy like that! Pah!"

"I—I hardly know what to say to you, Penwyn," said Mr. Bush. "I suppose it is useless to complain of your manners—disgusting and disgraceful as they are."

Pen did not reply.

Mr. Bush went on victoriously. The mean-hearted man realised that so

long as he only insulted Pen, and not Pen's father, he was in no danger of that dreaded complaint to the Head. And although he owed that to Pen's forbearance, he was none the less keen to take advantage of it.

"I am glad to see," said Mr. Bush, "that the boys of my Form feel as keenly as myself the disgrace you have brought upon them. I am only sorry that there is no means of relieving St. Wode's of your presence."

"Still Pen was silent. Only his eyes burned. He had hardened himself to this, and he could stand it.

"But there is one resource in your case, Penwyn—you can be caned," said Mr. Bush, swishing in the air the cane he had in his hand. He had come to the junior room to cane somebody else, but he forgot that

Penwyn. "Hold out your hand, Penwyn."

A hunted look came into Pen's eyes.

How long was this to last? His hands were yet aching from the last caning Mr. Bush had found an excuse for giving him.

Was he called upon to submit to constant ill-usage—to be savagely, cruelly caned whenever it suited the cruel temper of the mean-spirited man who was in authority over him?

Was life worth living on such terms—were the advantages his St. Wode's scholarship had brought him worth the price?

Pen was not a soft lad—he could stand punishment. But constant, undeserved punishment, that was a different matter.

"I am waiting for you, Penwyn," said Mr. Bush ominously.

Pen's hands were still down at his sides.

The Fourth Form were simply breathless.

Was the scholarship chap—the Council-school bouncer—going to defy the master of his Form?

It seemed impossible.

There was no fellow in the St. Wode's Fourth who would have dared to do it! Did the Cornish junior, the scholarship boy, dare more than the rest of the Form, then?

Surely not! But—

But he did not hold out his hand. The silence was tense—the excitement thrilling to the juniors who were looking on. For once there was something like sympathy for Pen in many of the faces round him.

Plucky, at least, the fellows knew it was to "back up" against old Bushy. They might dislike Pen, but they enjoyed seeing the domineering, evil-tempered Form-master taken down.

"Penwyn!"

"Yes, sir," said Pen quietly.

His low, calm voice cut the silence like a knife. There was no defiance in it, but there was no fear. There was only steady calmness.

"Penwyn! You heard me?"

"Yes, sir."

"I told you to hold out your hand."

"Yes, sir."

"Why are you to be caned, sir?"

"Do you dare to question me, boy?" thundered Mr. Bush. "Hold out your hand at once, sir, or—"

will thrash you, sir, where you stand. Hold out your hand instantly, Penwyn."

Mr. Bush's bluster was a sign that he was unsure of his position now. Pen did not know that. But he did not surrender.

He put his hands behind him.

"You—you refuse to obey me," shouted Mr. Bush, hardly believing his eyes.

(Another splendid instalment of this absorbing tale next week.)