

The Greyfriars
HOLIDAY
ANNUAL
for BOYS

1941

1941





Frontispiece

Colour Plate by Savile Lumley

THE SPECTRE OF THE MOAT HOUSE!

From Harvey's room came a cry of horror and dread. Len Lex clenched his hands and ran forward. Man ghost, he was going to know what it was! (See page 41.)



My Tour of Prouble

By
The Editor

How the misplaced zeal of Miggs, our office-boy, very nearly brought the "Holiday Annual" to disaster!

ONE morning last June I called my sub-editor and asked him a strange question.

"Jones," I said, "where is 'The Holiday Annual'?"

My sub looked as though he thought I had a few screws loose.

"It's not printed yet, sir," he explained soothingly. "It doesn't come out until September—if you have forgotten."

"Having already edited twenty-one volumes of the Annual, I'm not likely to forget it," I replied. "Jones, for the last three months we have been wading through a mountain of manuscripts. Our wastepaper-basket has been flooded out every day with things like Bunter's celebrated 'Ode to a Sossage':

'O sossage divine,
I wish you were mine,
You byutiful bagfool of bliss!'

Hundreds more have been returned to their authors. It was only yesterday that we finally made up the contents of this year's Annual—after three months' solid work."

"Quite so, sir."

"Very well, then! I left the pile of manuscripts on my desk when I went home last night. This morning they are missing. Hence my question—where is 'The Holiday Annual'?"

Jones said blankly that he didn't know. He thought perhaps Miggs might know. I therefore sent for Miggs.

Horatio Fortescue Miggs is our office-boy. He has ten thousand pimples, but no brains. He spends his entire time doing those things he ought not to do and leaving undone those things he ought to have done. Having glared at him in order to reduce him to such a condition of terror that he might possibly tell the



Gosling was sunning himself at the door of his lodge, with a pipe and the morning paper.

truth by accident, I asked if he had touched the manuscripts.

"Yessir! Cert'nly, sir!" gasped the child. "I thought you'd put 'em there to send back. So I sent 'em, sir—last night."

"Sent them? Where?"

"To their writers, sir. With the usual slipper-paper, sir. Editor regrets, and all that, sir. Yessir!"

I sat back with a slight moan. Apart from the fact that our entire "Holiday Annual" had gone west, I was trying to picture the faces of Mr. Frank Richards and Mr. Martin Clifford and the others when they found on their doormats the stories they had worked on for weeks at my express desire, accompanied by a slip of paper saying that the editor regretted he was unable to use their work as it was not quite up to the high standard demanded by "The

Holiday Annual"! They would think I'd gone crazy.

However, I did not hit Miggs. I told him my exact opinion of him in a few well-chosen words, and then I dived for the 'phone and called up Frank Richards. It was then my turn to listen to a few well-chosen words, and nobody can choose words better than Mr. Richards.

"And as for not being up to the high standard you demand," he said crisply, "all I can say is——"

"Yes, yes, yes, I know. You've said it once already. But I tell you it's Miggs' fault. Send back the story, like a good chap, and forget it, will you?"

Luckily our authors are all good sportsmen, and half an hour on the 'phone straightened the matter out as far as they were concerned. But there were still the contributions from the boys at Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood to be recovered. The respective and respected headmasters of these schools would also think of a few well-chosen words if I rang them up and asked to speak to a dozen different boys, one after the other. Besides, I could not clearly remember who had written what. Our official list of contents had not even been drawn up at that time.

There was only one thing to do—I must visit the schools at once. I looked upon this as a duty, though I am bound to admit that a tour through Kent, Sussex and Hampshire on a sunny June day appealed to me more than a dusty office. I decided to take Miggs with me and make him apologise in person, so I gave him another scarifying glare.

"Have you a hat?" I snarled.

He said he had, sir.

"Fetch it!"

He fetched it.

"Put it on!"

He put it on.

"Now come with me!"

He followed me limply as I went out to my car. I told him curtly to get in and he collapsed into the front seat. We then purred away over Blackfriars Bridge with our bonnet pointed towards the sunny orchards and hop-gardens of Kent.

It certainly was a glorious morning. In fact, Miggs became so uplifted with the scene that he started to whistle. I breathed hard

"Miggs!"

"Yessir!"

"Stop that din!"

He stopped it hurriedly. A grim silence prevailed until a distant blue line on the horizon told us we were approaching the sea. Miggs then observed that if he had known we was a-going to the seaside he would have brought his bathing costume.

We did not, however, get to the sea, as we turned off the Pegg Road at Friardale and drove to Greyfriars School. I had not been to Greyfriars for several months, and it was good to see the old place again, with the ivy still clinging to its medieval grey stones. Gosling was sunning himself at the door of his lodge, with a pipe and the morning paper. He looked surly, as usual.

"Wot I sez is this 'ere," he grunted, as we turned in at the gates. "This ain't the time for visitors. You want to come back after twelverclock."

"That will do, my man," replied Miggs, and the lad's dignity was so overpowering that Gosling was left quite dazed.

We parked the car under the elms in the deserted quad, with its fountain still playing merrily in the middle. (The quad, I mean, not the car.) Classes were still in progress, so I

left Miggs on a seat under the trees with instructions to move at his peril, while I strolled round outside the Form-room windows. From the Fifth Form room I heard the portly boom of Mr. Prout.

"Is it possible, Coker, that you cannot even spell a simple four-letter word?"

"A seven-letter word, sir," came the answering bray of the Fifth Form's prize fathead, Horace James Coker.

"What? What?"

"'Axis' is a seven-letter word, sir. A C K S I S S—Axis!"

I heard Prout gurgle and the other fellows laugh.

"Silence! Coker, I—you—such unnerving ignorance! What am I to do with you, Coker? Step out before the Form. If you will insist on behaving like a child in a kindergarten, you shall be treated like that, Coker. Hand me a sheet of foolscap."



The burly Horace Coker, with a face like unto a bolled beetroot, was standing before the Form with a dunce's cap on his head.

A loud roar of laughter came from inside the room. With my hands on the windowsill, I hoisted myself up and took a peep. The burly Horace Coker, with a face like unto a boiled beetroot, was standing before the Form with a paper dunce's cap bearing a large black D perched on his mop of hair. Prout was regarding him with grim satisfaction.

I moved on, chuckling. Passing the acid bark of Mr. Hacker from the Shell-room, I reached the windows of the Remove Form, in which a riot seemed to be in progress. A dozen fellows were shouting at once, and there came the dull thud of books being thrown at something in the room. Above the tumult, I heard an agitated squeak.

"Mon Dieu! Zat you sit down, you verree bad boys! Allons donc! Regard not le chat, mes enfants. Sit down viz yourselves at once——"



Bunter refused to let Miggs alone. His boot crashed home, and Miggs gave a squeak.

"We'll get him out, Mossoo," came the cheery voice of the Bounder—Herbert Vernon-Smith. "Head him off there, you men——"

Evilently the young rascals were ragging Monsieur Charpentier, the French master. I had often read of rags in the French class, but I was surprised at the extent of it. No wonder the Remove had the name of being the toughest Form at Greyfriars.

But there was one man who could deal with them. Suddenly I heard a loud squeak from Bunter.

"I say, you fellows—Quelch!"

"Oh, my hat! Cave, you men!"

And silence fell, except for Mossoo's muttering. Then came the grinding tones of the Remove's own master, Henry Samuel Quelch.

"What is the meaning of this uproar?"

"We—we were just helping Mossoo, sir," came Bob Cherry's voice ruefully.

"Gosling's cat was in Mossoo's desk, sir," explained Harold Skinner meekly. "We were driving her out."

He spoke as though it was the natural and normal thing for Gosling's cat to be in Mossoo's desk.

"I require to know the name of the boy who put the animal in that desk."

To this there was grim silence. The culprit seemed shy of coming into the limelight. Quelch waited a few moments and then went on:

"Very well, I shall make inquiries about it. But whoever introduced the cat into this room, the whole Form were concerned in the uproar which succeeded it. I shall therefore punish the whole Form with two hours' detention this afternoon, and if I hear another sound from this room——"

He left the threat unfinished, but

his tone suggested that boiling oil would come into it somewhere.

However, there was little time for any more noise from the Remove, for twelve o'clock struck from the great tower and classes were over for the day. The Remove trooped out rather glumly. When they saw me standing in the quad, some of the fellows gave me cheery greetings, some were polite and rather grim, and some, like Bunter, merely glowered and said "Yah!"

"Gentlemen, chaps and fellows," I answered genially, "I'm afraid some of you are disappointed with the return of the contributions you sent me. That's why I'm here. A mistake has occurred and I have brought the criminal here to apologise for it. Miggs—come here!"

The wretched Horatio sidled up defensively. On the word of command he explained his error to the crowd of grinning fellows, and set up a complicated defence of his action under three heads: (1) he didn't do it; (2) he didn't mean it, and (3) he wouldn't do it again. Harry Wharton & Co., the Famous Five of the Remove, burst into laughter.

"I'll collect the copy from the fellows and let you have it back," chuckled Wharton.

"Much obliged! Would you like to kick Miggs for giving you the trouble? You have my full permission."

"Yes, rather!" said Billy Bunter at once. "I say, you fellows, stand back and let me get at him."

"Why, you ferocious oyster!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Let the kid alone, you belligerent barrel!"

But the fat boy refused to let Miggs off. His boot crashed home. Miggs gave a squeak and looked at me uncertainly. Bunter was something of a



Bunter streaked away across the quad, with Miggs hot on his heels. "Yoop! I say, you fellows—Help!"

bully whenever he had the chance, and he was kicking Miggs with great enjoyment.

"Your own fault," I told the lad, "but you're not obliged to take it lying down, if you don't want to."

"Oh, yessir! Thank you, sir!" gasped Miggs, and he immediately hurled himself at Bunter. Then the position was reversed. Bunter streaked away across the quad, with Miggs hot on his heels.

"Yooooop! I say, you fellows—Help! Dragimoff!" His voice faded away in the distance.

"So you're detained this afternoon," I observed to the fellows, who were laughing heartily.

They stopped laughing and became grave. Johnny Bull grunted, Frank Nugent sighed, Bob Cherry nodded, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh said that "the detainfulness was terrific!"

"All the fault of that burbling dummy, Bolsover major," said Bob Cherry. "He put Gosling's cat into Mossoo's desk, blow him! And we had a Form match against the Shell this afternoon. What a life!"

"Cheer up!" I said. "I owe you a good turn to square myself, so I'll see if I can beg you off with Mr. Quelch."

At that they gave three cheers, though not, I must admit, very hopefully. Even I was not too sanguine about my chances, but I put on my



Quelch's face set like iron, and my heart sank. Surely I had not listened to a solid hour of him for nothing?

best smile and made my way to the Form-master's study. Mr. Quelch was busy on his typewriter, adding to his great work, "The History of Greyfriars," in 99 volumes. He greeted me very civilly.

"How do you do, Mr. Quelch?" I asked politely, and then, with a sudden inspiration: "I looked in for a few words with you about your book. I am greatly interested in it. The

history of Greyfriars is a fascinating subject, and I am sure it must have cost you an immense amount of research."

The shot told at once. Mr. Quelch thawed like snow in the summer sun, and at once began to read me long extracts from the work. I sat back and closed my eyes in an excess of enjoyment. When I woke up, an hour had passed and he was well into chapter five. There were only a hundred and fourteen more chapters to read, but I had to stop him with the plea of an urgent appointment elsewhere.

"I shall look forward eagerly to hearing the rest of the book," I told him untruthfully, "and I wish I could stay now, but time's getting on. I must just have a few words with the boys. They're rather melancholy at being detained this afternoon—they had a cricket match or something, I believe. I suppose it would not be possible to—er—"

Quelch's face set like iron, and my heart sank. Surely I had not listened to a solid hour of him for nothing? No—his brow cleared again, and he said, "Just for this once. But if it ever happened again," etc., etc. The boys were free!

They gave me three cheers in earnest when they heard the news. Wharton gave me the pile of manuscripts he had collected, and then they formed a bodyguard to see me to my car. By a quick manœuvre at the critical moment, I avoided cashing Bunter's celebrated postal-order, and then I was off, with the fair county of Sussex before me and the cheers of Greyfriars behind.

It was not until I reached Courtfield that I realised that Miggs was also behind. I had forgotten him. So back I went and collected that trouble-

some insect. We had lunch in a hotel at Hastings, and then we tooled along placidly through the lanes and valleys and villages of one of the fairest counties in Britain. Sussex seemed to grow sleepier and sleepier, and Rylcombe, with its old stone bridge and cool green river, was practically lifeless. Even Taggles, the St. Jim's porter, was asleep that sunny afternoon. We roused him with a spanner and asked for Tom Merry.

"Which he ain't in," snuffled the porter.

"Oh! In that case, can I see Jack Blake of the Fourth?"

"Which he ain't in."

"Oh! Then Figgins of the New House, perhaps?"

"Which he ain't in."

"Is anyone in?"

"No," said Taggles, and went to sleep.

It certainly seemed as though Taggles was right. St. Jim's lay dreaming in the sun; an occasional master walked across the quad from the library, a few fags were playing a desperate game of tip-and-run on the sports ground, and one or two loafers were chatting on the front steps, but apart from this the whole place seemed asleep. I inserted the spanner into Taggles again and asked if he knew where I could find Tom Merry & Co.

"No," said Taggles, and went to sleep.

I gave it up. We left St. Jim's to slumber and headed towards Rookwood, with the intention of calling at the Sussex school on our way home.

It was a long drive into Hampshire. The afternoon had waned into evening when we struck the small village of Coombe, buried among the pine-clad hills. A party of five boys, each



"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, fishing out his monocle. "How do you do, my deah sir? It's a pleasuah to meet you!"

carrying a bag, were walking along the lane, and I braked quickly when I spotted them.

"Hallo, hallo!" I cried cheerily. "What are you fellows doing in this part of the world?"

They were St. Jim's fellows—Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, with Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth.

"Great pip!" said Blake. "It's the Editor!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, fishing out his monocle. "How do you do, my deah sir? It's a pleasuah to meet you!"

"Hear, hear!" said Tom. "Glad to see you, sir!"

Now, although these remarks were made politely, I noted that the juniors were a little stiff and reserved, so I turned to Miggs.

"Do your stuff, Miggs!" I com-

manded, and again the wretched youth went through his tale of woe.

Smiles returned to their faces at once.

"Pway don't mention it, deah boy," said Gussy to Miggs, as though the latter had been the Duke of Somewhere or Other. "We accept your apology as fwom one gentleman to anothah."

"Oh crikey!" said Miggs.

"It's all right, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry, laughing. "I'll get back the stories and send them by post to-morrow."

I expressed my thanks.

"Have you fellows been playing Rookwood?" I asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How did you get on?"

"Lost," sighed Monty Lowther. "Beaten by the crushing margin of sixty-eight runs."

"Owing," said Blake fiercely, "to the antics of a burbling burbler who ran two fellows out and then dropped a catch."

"Weally, Blake, if you wefer to me as a burblin' burblah——"

"Didn't you run me out when I was well set?" howled Blake. "Didn't you run Fatty Wynn out?"

"I have already explained, deah boy, that the hot weathah made me wathah dwowsy. Hot weathah always makes me dwowsy."



I said I was too full to eat anything—which was not the case. But the sausage roll and the doughnuts were not wasted. Miggs ate them.

"You—you—you——"

"Peace, my infants!" I chuckled. "And where are the rest of the team?"

"They've gone on, by the five-twenty," explained Tom. "We stayed to have a feed with Jimmy Silver. There's another train at six-twelve."

"Yaas, wathah! I found that out in the time-table, deah boys."

"Well, I won't detain you," I

laughed. "Give my apologies to Figgins & Co. and the others. I hope I shall see you all again one day."

"Au wevwah, sir!" said Gussy, and we parted with a cheery handshake.

The old square tower of Rookwood rose out of the trees. I found Jimmy Silver & Co., the heroes of the Classical Fourth, at prep. They gave me a hearty welcome, and Mr. Dalton, their Form-master, kindly gave them leave from prep. to entertain me. When Miggs had once more been through his stuff, Jimmy Silver readily went out to collect the necessary manuscripts.

Arthur Edward Lovell put on the kettle to make a cup of tea, while Raby and Newcome consulted anxiously under cover of the cupboard door.

"But that ass Lovell trod on it," I heard Newcome whisper. "You can see the marks."

"Smooth it on your coat-sleeve," hissed Raby, and after a hurried operation behind the door, Newcome emerged bearing a sausage roll, with some partially smoothed-out bootmarks on it.

"Ahem!" coughed Newcome, red-faced. "We—we had the St. Jim's fellows to tea and most of the tommy has gone, but here's a—a sausage roll that's quite good——"

"Thank you!" I said gravely, eyeing the sausage roll sternly.

Newcome dived back into the cupboard and helped Raby to brush coal-dust off a couple of doughnuts which had accidentally fallen into the scuttle. However, I set their minds at rest by saying I was too full to eat anything—which was not the case—and would take only a cup of tea. The sausage roll and doughnuts were not wasted, though. Miggs ate them.

A crowd of other fellows came along to meet me—Putty Grace, Mornington, Kit Erroll, Gunner and Higgs, and others. Jimmy Silver gave me the works of art, and after a warm farewell I took my leave of Rookwood.

When I had driven a little way down the lane, I remembered that I had left Miggs behind, eating doughnuts, and went back for him with deep feelings.

The shades of evening were

falling fast as we drove through Coombe. A slight crowd was gathered round the station entrance, and I heard a well-known voice, raised on its top note.

"Yawwooh! You feahful wuffians! Yooop! I no longah wegard you as fwiends! I will give you a feahful thwashin' all wound, you wottahs! Yooohooooop!"

Amazed, I stopped the car. Tom Merry & Co., assisted by Blake, were bumping Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on the pavement. His precious jacket was rumpled, his tie was torn, and wrath gleamed in his eye. Wrath also gleamed in the eyes of his friends as they bumped him soundly.

"There!" gasped Tom Merry at length. "Now take that dummy away and lose it, Blake, before I lose control of myself."

"You uttah wottahs——"

"What's wrong, you fellows?" I asked.

"Wrong!" howled Blake. "He not only ran me out and ran Fatty out, and then dropped Conroy at cover-point, but he found out that we had time to stay and feed with Jimmy Silver because there was another train at six-twelve."

"And it runs on Saturdays only!" hooted Monty Lowther.

"And we shan't get to St. Jim's till



"Yawwooh! You feahful wuffians!" roared Arthur Augustus as he was bumped. "I no longah wegard you as fwiends!"

midnight!" raved Manners.

"And we're going to slaughter him and strew the hungry churchyard with his bones!" added Tom Merry.

"That's no excuse whatevah for wumplin' a fellow's jacket," gasped Gussy. "I considah you a set of howwid boundahs!"

I chuckled and opened the door of my car.

"Pile in, fellows! You can all cram in here, and we'll be at St. Jim's in no time."

"Bai Jove! That's vewy good of you, sir."

"Not at all. But I should recommend you to study a time-table more closely in future, and not try to catch a Saturdays only train on Wednesday."

"Hear, hear!"

And we rolled off together.

It was late when Miggs and I reached London. I was tired and glad to be back, but Miggs had enjoyed himself immensely. At least, he looked thoughtful and asked:

"'Scuse me, sir. If them stories was sent back again in error to the young gents, should we have to take another trip round the schools, sir?"

"No, we should not," I replied firmly. "The person who sent those stories back would get the Order of the Boot, so make a note of it!"

And the stories were not sent back. THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL was saved. It had nearly been done in, but I rescued it, and—here it is!

TALE OF A TOPPER



By
**Monty
Lowther**

WE saw it gleaming in the sun,
So handsome, neat and proper;
And gasps arose from everyone
At Gussy's newest topper.

There never was a hat so fair
As that superb creation;
So faultless and so debonair,
It claimed our admiration.

We saw it shining in the quad,
Where Gussy walked sedately;
With calm and graceful steps he trod,
The whole effect was stately!

Alas, it tears my heart to rags
To write this tragic story,
For near at hand, some thoughtless fags
Aspired to football glory!

They kicked a muddy ball about,
And thought it rather jolly,
Until at length there came a shout
From Gussy's brother, Wally.

"Look out there, Gus, you silly clown!
And mind your giddy bonnet!"
Too late! A muddy ball fell down
And landed squarely on it!

Oh, what a horrid squeelching sound!
We were deprived of action,
As Gussy sat upon the ground
In utter stupefaction.

"Bai Jove!" His voice was full of dread.
"Whatevah are you doin'?"
He took the topper from his head
And gazed upon a ruin!

Then noble rage possessed his soul,
He rushed towards his brother,
And round and around and round the goal
They each dodged one another.

Meanwhile, a boot had kicked the hat
(The boot, I think, was Merry's).
Blake trod on it and squashed it flat
And passed it on to Herries.

In vain poor Gussy after that
His grief and rage was venting;
The dustbin closed upon his hat
And he was left lamenting

BILLY BUNTER'S BURGLAR!



By
FRANK RICHARDS

Billy Bunter's reluctance to have an aching tooth removed leads to not a little excitement—for Bunter and a Burglar!

THE FIRST CHAPTER

EXIT BUNTER!

"ALL over in a couple of minutes!"

"Ow!"

"Just one tug of the dentist's forceps——"

"Wow! Beast!"

"And it'll all be over," said Peter Todd soothingly. "No more pain then, old fat bean; so the best thing you can do now is to trot along to the sanny and get it over quick!"

Toddy's advice was well meant; but it was not well received. Billy Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove looked the reverse of grateful for it, as he glared up at his study-mate through his big spectacles from the armchair in which he was tenderly nursing a fat and swollen face.

"Beast!" he hooted. "Chortling over a chap because a chap's got toothache! Yah!"

"Try not to be a fathead, my dear old bean," said Peter patiently. "It may hurt——"

"Yow!"

"Just a little of course, for a few ticks. But then it'll be all over; and think of the joy of being without that rotten toothache again," said Peter consolingly. "Better hurry, old fat man. The dentist's waiting."

There was a tap on the study door. Trotter the page poked his head through the doorway. There was a somewhat ghoulish grin on his face.

"Which Mr. Quelch says Master Bunter's wanted in the sanatorium," he announced genially.

"Yooop! Tell him I'm not coming! Tell him the pain's gone! Tell him——"

"Which 'e says you're to come at once, sir. 'Tell Master Bunter, 'e says, 'as Doctor Pillbury an' the

dentist is both 'ere an' 'e's to come right away,' 'e says."

"Better put a jerk in it," advised Peter Todd. "No need to add to your troubles by getting Quelch's rag out. Buck up, old fat man."

"Beast! Look here, I'm not going to have my jaw pulled to bits by the dashed dentist!" roared Bunter.

"My toothache's gone now——"

"Always happens when you get near the dentist's chair," remarked Toddy philosophically. "Have it yanked out all the same, old bean!"

"Shan't! You're an unfeeling rotter, and I despise you! Yah!"

Peter Todd rose from his chair with a frown.

"Look here, you fat, funky frog, this has gone far enough! There's nothing to be scared about, anyway—having a tooth out is no more painful than having your hair cut nowadays—but even if there were, you've got to go through with it. Roll along to the dentist like a good porpoise and make it snappy!"

"I'm not going, I tell you! Look here, Trotter, you grinning beast, tell Quelchy I've been taken ill. Tell him I've gone out——"

"Tell him Bunter's coming along right now, you mean!" grunted Peter Todd, taking a step forward. "If you won't go of your own accord, Bunter, I'll roll you along myself! This way!"

"Ow! Beast! Leggo! I'm not going!"

But there Bunter was mistaken. He got going at quite a spanking pace, propelled from the rear by Peter Todd's lean but sinewy arm.

Peter marched him out of Study No. 7 and down the Remove passage, to an accompaniment of yells of protest from Billy Bunter. Trotter ambled amiably beside them and quite a number of Removites, attracted

by the din, came out of their studies to join them. They grinned heartlessly when they learned the cause of the commotion.

"Chuck it, Bunt, old man!" counselled Bob Cherry. "I had a tooth out myself once. There's nothing in it."

"Absolutely nothing!" chortled Skinner, who was particularly insensitive to the aches and pains of anybody but Harold Skinner. "The first ten minutes he's tugging will be the worst; after that, you'll get used to it!"

"Beast!"

"Besides, it's good for your health to have a lot of pain," added Skinner. "Makes you tough! I believe in pain myself—yaroooh! My foot! What idiot jumped on it?"

"Only little me!" said Bob Cherry demurely. "Quite a pleasure to do anything that's good for your health, old bean! Don't thank me!"

The Removites chuckled and Skinner hopped aside, hugging his injured extremity and looking as if he was not at all likely to render thanks for the cheery Bob's contribution to his bodily health.

Leaving the injured Skinner behind, the interested crowd marched cheerfully down the stairs behind the Porpoise and his stern captor.

At the foot of the stairs, Bunter made quite a pathetic appeal to be released. Bunter was not of the stuff that heroes are made of; and, absurd as it seemed, he was scared out of his fat wits at the prospect of facing the dentist.

"Look here, Peter, old chap, lemme go, you beast! I've never done you any harm, you rotter—I mean, dear old fellow—and my toothache's gone now, anyway. You lemme go—and I'll go to the sanny myself!"

"I'm going to see you go, old sport!" said Peter grimly. "This way—yaroooh!"

Peter Todd's remarks finished up in a fiendish howl. In sheer desperation, Bunter had kicked backwards—and that kick landed fairly and squarely on the tenderest part of Toddy's shin! Toddy jumped back with a howl, releasing his fat captive in the process. An instant later, Billy Bunter made a dash for the wide, open spaces, to the tune of an encouraging cheer from the crowd. Any member of the crowd could have overtaken the fat porpoise had he been so minded; but it was none of their business, and they were quite content to let Bunter get away with it if he could.

Bunter could—and he did! While Peter Todd sat down, yelling, Bunter was going all out. His fat legs working like clockwork, he dashed to the front door. He took the School House steps three at a time, paused for a mere instant at the bottom to regain his balance, then resumed his headlong flight.

"Trust Bunter!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "He's heading for the tuckshop!"

"Must be instinct!" grinned Tom Brown. "Hallo, hallo! 'Ware Quelchy, you fellows!"

Mr. Quelch came striding up to the School House steps from the direction of the school sanatorium. There was a portentous frown on his brow.

"Boys! I am looking for Bunter—ah, Trotter, so you are here, too! Where is Bunter?"

"Which 'e's gorn, sir!" answered Trotter. "Master Bunter says as 'e ain't 'avin' no tooth pulled out by no dentist, sir, so 'e's gorn!"

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Quelch's brow became positively thunderous.

"Gone? Gone where?"

"Please, sir, 'e went off in the direction of the shop!"

Mr. Quelch's lips set grimly.

"Indeed. In that case, Trotter, you may return to your duties. I will find Bunter myself."

"Yessir. Thank'ee, sir!"

Trotter retreated. The Remove master stalked off towards the tuckshop, with an expression on his face that boded ill for Bunter.

Later, however, Mr. Quelch had to return empty-handed. Bunter was not, it seemed, in the tuckshop. Nor was he to be found anywhere near the tuckshop. Nor indeed, reported fellows who afterwards scouted round for him, was he to be found anywhere at all.

For all the evidence there was to the contrary, Bunter's podgy person might have evaporated; and eventually, Dr. Pillbury and the dentist were compelled to depart without removing the fat Owl's offending molar!

THE SECOND CHAPTER

BUNTER MEETS A PROFESSOR

"BEASTS!"

Billy Bunter said that word.

Or, more accurately, he gasped it. The fat Owl of the Remove had bellows to mend.

He had run all the way from the School House to the elm walk in the far corner of the school grounds, and he was almost at bursting point by the time he reached the shelter of the long grass and the trees. He shook a fat fist indiscriminately at the distant school buildings as he sat down below one of the tall elms. A moment later he unclenched the same fist and started caressing his swollen face again. A twinge in the gums was giving him a stern reminder that the toothache which he had forgotten in

the excitement was still very much a reality.

"Beasts!" repeated Billy Bunter sulphurously.

Really, it was a little illogical for Bunter to be annoyed with the Removites. But logic was never Bunter's long suit, and he mumbled "Beasts!" with every twinge just as though the fellows were entirely responsible for his aching tooth.

A rustling sound in the long grass nearby brought his dolorous groaning to a stop. Bunter ducked—hurriedly. If Peter Todd or one of the other beasts was still on his track, bent on hauling him back to the dentist, Bunter intended to make himself as inconspicuous as possible. Bunter rolled over on to his fat hands and knees and began crawling cautiously towards the shelter of a neighbouring bush, like a fat young Redskin on the warpath.

He reached the bush without trouble and crawled round it to get to the far side from the walk. Then he had a shock.

Crawling round the bush towards him, also on hands and knees, was a man!

He was a total stranger to Bunter, and he seemed almost as startled to see Bunter as Bunter was to see him. The pair of them stared at each other blankly. Then the horrid thought came to Bunter that it was the dentist and he emitted a yelp.

"Leggo! Don't touch me! I ain't going to have that tooth out—the pain's gone now!"

The stranger—a neatly dressed, youngish man—looked surprised for a moment. Surprise, however, quickly gave way to relief; he grinned.

"Don't worry, young 'un. You've made a mistake. I'm not the dentist."

Bunter blinked suspiciously at him.

"Look here, no larks, now. If you really are the beastly dentist——"

"I really am not, I assure you. I—well, as a matter of fact, I am an archaeologist."

"A whatter?"

"An archaeologist—a student of antiquities, you know. Have you never heard of Professor Cheetham?"

"Can't say I have—ow!" concluded Bunter, as he experienced yet another spasm of pain from his aching tooth.

"Your education has been sadly neglected, young man. Better not tell your masters that I said so, though, or they'll be taking steps to withdraw my permit. I have a permit, you see, to explore the grounds at any time I like. You have some most interesting relics at this school."

"You're welcome to 'em," sniffed Bunter. "If I couldn't find something better to do with my time than crawl round the school grounds looking for relics I'd eat my hat! Yow!"

"Naturally, I should hardly expect a schoolboy to share the enthusiasm that animates a professor," remarked Professor Cheetham, regarding Bunter with a somewhat peculiar expression in his keen face. "You, I suppose, walk about these venerable old buildings with scarcely a thought to their hundreds of years of history."

"Blow history!" snorted the Owl of the Remove disrespectfully. "Catch me rooting about the blessed School House thinking about history! I've got more important things to think about, I hope. You can do it—but not me!"

"Unfortunately, I am not able to do it with the same freedom as you, since my permit does not extend to the school buildings themselves during term time," sighed the professor, standing up and gazing quite sadly at

the grey old pile that could be glimpsed through the trees. "I must really approach your headmaster for permission, one of these days. By the way, can one see the windows of his study from this point?"

"Ow! Yes; they're over there, near the main door," grunted Bunter, still ruefully nursing his face with one hand while he pointed through the trees with the other.

Professor Cheetham nodded.

"It is there, of course, that he transacts all business relating to the school—the donations, for instance, to the building restoration fund, to which I want myself to contribute?"

"S'pose so," growled Bunter, who had not the faintest interest in the building restoration fund, nor indeed at the moment in anything save that ache in his jaw. "They say he's been

holding up visitors to ransom there lately for the blessed fund—and that's where he keeps his safe, of course."

"Of course," nodded the professor. "But I must go. Please do not let it be known that I have been talking to you or my permit might be withdrawn."

"Think I'm likely to waste my time talking aboutarchie—thin-gummy?" said Bunter, contemptuously. "Not likely! But, look here, while I remember it, I happen to be expecting a postal-order——"

Bunter blinked up hopefully at Professor Cheetham. But the subject of Bunter's celebrated postal-order, which had been expected at Greyfriars so long that it was reputed to have grown whiskers in transit, did not seem to interest the Professor. He stalked off among the elms with a



As Billy Bunter crawled towards the bush he had a shock. Crawling round the bush towards him, also on hands and knees, was a man!

mere wave to the Owl of the Remove. And Bunter was left to nurse his jaw disconsolately and vent his feelings in one final and expressive :

"Beast !"

THE THIRD CHAPTER

AFTER LIGHTS OUT !

BOOM !

The last stroke of midnight boomed out from the old clock tower at Greyfriars and died away into silence.

Billy Bunter shivered.

In the usual way, he would have been in the Remove dormitory at this hour. His loud snore would have been forming an unmusical accompaniment to the deep chiming of the school clock. On this occasion, for the first time he could remember, Bunter found himself listening to the reverberating strokes of twelve o'clock midnight from the flagstones of the Close.

There was a bright moon shining overhead and the air of the summer night was soft and pleasant enough. From the point of view of the weather, it was an ideal night for any man to be out on the tiles. But Bunter shivered all the same, and thought longingly of his empty bed in the dorm. He had no wish whatever to remain out on the tiles while that vacant bed in the dorm. called him.

It was, of course, Bunter's own fault. At any time of the day after his flight from the School House he could have reported to Mr. Quelch had he felt like doing so. But there were drawbacks about that course, chiefly in the shape of a cane that usually reposed in a corner of Mr. Quelch's study ; and Bunter had allowed the hours to slip by without being able to bring himself to do it.

Now it was midnight ; and ob-

viously, unless the hapless fat Owl chose to sleep on the flagstones or somewhere else equally inconvenient, something had to be done.

Bunter groaned aloud as he rolled miserably across the Close. He was tired and his tooth was still aching. Worse than either of these, perhaps, he was hungry.

It was true that during the evening he had managed to sneak into the school kitchen unobserved and secure food. But he had not been able to take more than would have satisfied half a dozen normal fellows ; so naturally he was still hungry.

It would have given him some small comfort had he thought the school authorities were so worried over his absence as to be likely to overlook his behaviour. But he was under no illusions on that point. Late in the evening, from a sheltered nook in the elm walk, he had overheard Quelch discussing the matter with Prout. He had heard that his tuck-pilfering exploit in the kitchen was known to the Head, who proposed to stop searching and merely to wait for Bunter to ring the door-bell. So he knew for certain that there was going to be no killing the fatted calf for W. G. B.

Bunter rolled round the Close in a state of great despondency—looking for an open window. In Bunter's fatuous estimation, it was better to get into the House secretly than to ring the bell. What would happen in the morning, he did not know ; but he did know that he had no wish to fetch Mr. Quelch out of bed to let him in.

At first, he could see no opening. Eventually, however, on rolling round to the front of the House, he found what he sought in a most surprising place.

A window in the Head's study on the ground floor was wide open.

Bunter blinked at that open window in great surprise. The Head's study was the last place where he would have expected to find an open window. It occurred to him either that Dr. Locke must be getting very careless in his old age or else that the domestic staff were at fault. Still, an open window was an open window to Bunter in his present plight—Head's study or not. After a moment's hesitation at the thought of entering the House by that holy of holies, Bunter conquered his fears and hauled himself up on to the sill.

Grunting and puffing from his efforts, he insinuated his podgy person into the moonlit room and dropped on to the floor.

An instant later, he gave a startled jump.

He had caught sight of the Head's safe, which stood against the wall near the window, in a spot where the moonlight was shining. The door of the safe was wide open and books and papers, obviously taken from it, were scattered in disorder over the floor.

For a moment, as he gazed through his big spectacles at that startling sight, Billy Bunter felt his heart stop beating. His fat knees knocked together.

"Oh, lor'!" he gasped.

It was a burglary! Even Bunter's obtuse brain could not fail to understand that!

He stared round him in dismay and alarm. Unless he had already departed with the loot, there must be a burglar somewhere near him—possibly in the Head's study itself, watching Bunter from one of the dark corners! At that unpleasant thought, Bunter gave a squeak of alarm and turned towards the door.

At the same moment, there was a movement behind him.

Bunter opened his lips to yell. But the intended yell did not materialise. Instead, a big hand was suddenly clapped over his mouth and a grip of iron fastened round his neck.

"Quiet, you!" hissed a threatening voice in the terrified fat Owl's ear. "Otherwise, I'll soon quieten you!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

OPERATION ENTIRELY SUCCESSFUL!

IN the darkness, gripped by an unseen hand, Billy Bunter almost collapsed from sheer funk.

Fear, however, was not the only emotion he felt. At the sound of the burglar's voice, he also experienced a spasm of surprise. For the voice, easily recognised, was that of Professor Cheetham, his chance acquaintance in the elm walk!

Bunter was not quick on the uptake; but the sound of the professor's voice explained everything in a flash. "Professor Cheetham" was no more a professor than was Bunter himself. He was just a common or garden cracksman who had assumed his title to pull the wool over Bunter's eyes and extract from him all the useful information he could!

It was an aggravating thought, and one that caused Bunter to feel distinctly peeved with himself. But he had little time to give to this aspect of the matter. He was much more concerned with the cracksman's intentions regarding himself.

It was an immense relief to Bunter when that big hand was lifted from his mouth and the iron grip relaxed.

"Quiet, remember!" hissed the burglar.

"Sus-sus-certainly! I—I won't say a word——"

" Quiet, I said ! "

" Ow ! All right ! " gasped Bunter.

" Just stand where you are without moving or talking till I tell you you can ! See ? "

" I sus-sus-see ! "

" You'd better ! "

" Professor Cheetham " released his fat captive. Bunter heard him turn away—doubtless to resume the task which Bunter's arrival had interrupted.

The fat Removite stood facing the door in palpitating expectancy, while the " professor " busied himself at the safe.

What made Bunter do what he did next, he never knew.

Possibly in the inmost recesses of his fat mind he was anxious to undo the harm he had done and raise the alarm, in the hope of nipping the " professor's " burglarious aims in the bud. More probably, he felt so scared in his present position that he was emboldened to make a bid for liberty rather than put up with it any longer.

Whatever the reason, the fat Owl made a sudden leap for the door. At the same moment, he let out a ringing call for help.

" Help ! Rescue ! Burglars ! Police ! " yelled Bunter, as he raced out of the Head's study.

He heard a startled gasp behind him, then pattering footsteps. He spurted desperately down the passage outside the Head's study, with the " professor " close at his heels.

Unfortunately, Bunter was no sprinter. Before he had reached the end of the passage, the " professor " had drawn level with him. He felt that clutching hands were being extended for him.

Sheer desperation drove Bunter to it. Nothing else could have done it.

With a suddenness that took his

pursuer completely by surprise, Bunter turned and put out his foot !

That surprise move of Bunter's proved to be sheer disaster for " Professor Cheetham." It was also disastrous in a minor degree for Bunter himself. The " professor " crashed. Bunter received a big, whirling fist in his face as he did so. Both rolled on to the floor of the passage, yelling.

" Whooooop ! "

" Yaroooooh ! Help ! Murder ! "

Two thunderous crashes and a whole series of yells rang out through the nocturnal silence of the School House. The effect was instantaneous. Doors began to open upstairs and startled voices could be heard calling. A light gleamed in the distance.

" Professor Cheetham," with a muttered oath, scrambled to his feet and beat a hasty retreat. But he was too late. Before he had run half way down the passage, the light was switched on and two burly seniors appeared. Bunter sat up and pointed wildly after the retiring crook.

" There he is, Wingate ! Nab him, North ! It's the burglar ! "

Wingate and North fairly flew after their quarry, and cornered him just before he reached the Head's study. He turned and hit out desperately ; but Wingate and North, tough customers both, closed with him unhesitatingly, and in a matter of a few seconds, he was their prisoner.

There was a surprise for the Remove fellows when they arrived on the scene a few seconds later. Wharton, the first arrival, stared at Bunter in blank amazement.

" Bunter ! " he ejaculated. " What the merry dickens are you doing here ? "

" Oh, really, Wharton ! I've been catching a burglar ! "

" Wha-a-at ! "



A big hand was suddenly clapped over Bunter's mouth and a grip of iron fastened round his neck.
 "Quiet, you!" hissed a threatening voice in the terrified Owl's ear.

"Blessed if I see anything to stare about!" sniffed Bunter, whose courage was rapidly returning now that the "professor" was in safe hands. "I'm not scared, I hope, like some of you chaps. I tackled him single-handed—regardless of danger, you know. He had a cudgel in one hand and a pistol in the other and a dagger in the other——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I didn't care two hoots. Brave as a lion, I flung myself into the fray—— Oh! G-g-good evening, sir!" finished Bunter, changing his tune considerably as Mr. Quelch, a terrifying spectacle to Bunter even in pyjamas and dressing-gown, stalked forward.

"Bunter! What is the meaning of this?" Then Mr. Quelch stopped and blinked incredulously, as he spotted the two Sixth-Formers with their captive. "Wingate! North! Who is this person?"

"Apparently a burglar, sir," answered Wingate. "When I came downstairs, he was fighting with Bunter."

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Quelch looked completely taken aback by that surprising statement. "Bunter! Is this true? Kindly explain the matter at once."

Bunter was only too willing to do that. He plunged into a vivid and exciting story in which the hero, William George Bunter, performed

feats of courage and endurance which would have put any film hero to shame. Mr. Quelch listened in grim silence, apparently sorting out the modicum of truth from the abundance of exaggeration as the tale progressed. When Bunter finished at last, he nodded.

"Very well, Bunter. That will be sufficient. You should learn to be more truthful."

"Oh, really, sir——"

"You have, however, done well in all the circumstances," acknowledged the Remove master. "You are entitled to the credit for that, Bunter. Now you may leave me to summon the police and complete the matter. You will go up to your dormitory to bed; and in regard to your extraordinary behaviour in going into hiding earlier in the day, you will report to me immediately after prayers to-morrow morning."

Bunter's fat jaw dropped. In the excitement, he had forgotten all his other worries. Now they came back with a rush, with the prospect of a licking in addition.

"I—I say, sir, you—you ain't going to whop me, after all I've done—saving the Head thousands of pounds——"

The crowd chuckled. Mr. Quelch frowned.

"Ahem! Your behaviour in calling attention to the burglar, Bunter, is perhaps an extenuating fact. Having regard to that, I shall on this occasion let you off——"

"Oh, good—— I mean, thank you, sir!"

"But it must be clearly understood," concluded Mr. Quelch, "that

you are to have your tooth extracted to-morrow!"

"Oh, crikey!"

Billy Bunter groaned. Instinctively his fat paw went up reminiscently to that troublesome molar.

Then he jumped. An expression of amazement dawned on his fat countenance. He opened his mouth and dabbed a handkerchief on the gum. He withdrew it and the crowd saw reposing on it a tooth!

"M-m-my hat!" Billy Bunter stared at his hanky. Finally, he grinned. "I—I say, sir, there won't be any need for the dentist, after all!"

"What!"

"It was the burglar, sir!" chortled Bunter. "He biffed me on the mouth! It must have loosened the tooth, and now it's come out altogether! He, he, he!"

"Goodness gracious!" Mr. Quelch stared at Bunter's molar as though mesmerised. "You are sure, Bunter, that it is the right tooth?"

"Positive, sir!"

"Very well, then. Very well indeed." The master of the Remove permitted the ghost of a smile to flit across his stern visage. "I congratulate you, Bunter, on your good fortune."

Mr. Quelch then turned his attention to the captive professor; and Bunter was escorted up to the Remove dormitory like a conquering hero.

And in less than five minutes an unmusical snore, ringing out across the dorm., told the Remove quite plainly that a fat and fatuous Owl was enjoying peaceful and untroubled repose!



SOMEBODY'S AUNT!

By
Monty
Lowther



*When the
humorist of St.
Jim's wished
the floor would
open and swal-
low him up!*

How I hate people who ask me which was my worst moment. It's the sort of moment a fellow usually spends his entire life trying to forget, and to have it raked up is very trying. At least, it tries me immensely, and it always finds me guilty, because it was my own fault.

A sense of humour is a great drawback at times. It leads a fellow into awkward situations. Last Speech Day, for instance, I had fed myself well at the high tea in Hall, and was leaning back on a bench, staring in a goofy manner at a statue of Sir Pompous Gasbag (who founded the new library wing), when a lady sat herself beside me and remarked:

"Well, little boy, did you enjoy your tea?"

I gave her a swift glance and said to

myself, "This is somebody's aunt!" The school is crowded out with aunts on Speech Day. You can't move without tripping over an aunt. All sorts of weird relations turn up to watch their pet darlings take a prize, and you have to keep a weather eye open or they'll beam on you and ask if you're a friend of little Tommy's.

But there's a limit, and this female had passed it. "Little boy!"—to a Shell fellow! Did she think I was a fag in the Second? It may not have been polite to pull her venerable leg, but who could blame me for it?

"Yes, madam," I replied courteously. "Very much indeed! I was sick twice, and made a complete beast of myself."

She seemed to give a sort of start.

"Dear me! I'm sorry to hear that. Little boys shouldn't be greedy, you

know. I hope you are a good little boy in school?"

"I fear not, madam," I replied mournfully. "I am a very naughty child indeed. I frequently have to be smacked."

"Oh, but I am sure it's nothing serious!" she exclaimed, goggling at me. "You have a very frank and open face, and I feel sure your better self will prevail in the end."

I tried to keep a straight face.

"I sincerely trust so, ma'am!" I gurgled.

"And how do you like St. James', little boy?"

I shook my head.

"Horrid!" I replied.

"Indeed? Why, I thought it was such a nice place!"

"You little know!" I replied darkly. "It's a shocking show! Hasn't your nephew told you about it?"

"No, he seems to like it; at least, I think he does." At which I chuckled silently. My guess had been correct. She was somebody's aunt.

"I expect he wants to spare your feelings," I went on ruthlessly. "It's awful! No wonder the little boys stuff themselves at tea on Speech Day. It's the only good meal we ever get. All the rest of the term we have bread and water, with a little dripping on Sundays."

"Goodness gracious! I never heard that before!"

"No, they keep it pretty dark. There would be a public outcry if the facts were known, and the masters don't want that. They're a set of brutes, all of them."

"Not all of them, surely?"

"Every single one! You see those two over there? That's Railton, our Housemaster, and Linton, our Form-beak. You'd never guess, to look at

them, that they're a couple of the biggest tyrants going, would you?"

"My dear little man, you surely must be wrong. I can hardly believe it."

"Ah, you should see my back—covered with livid stripes. If a fellow gets a single word wrong in his exercise, they haul him out by the scruff of the neck and pitch into him with horsewhips. It's terrible!"

"I can hardly credit it."

"A fact," I said sadly. It was wrong of me, I know. I should never have told all those ridiculous and barefaced lies, and I should not have distressed the old lady by inventing such tales. I can only plead that my sense of humour got the better of me. I believe, too, that I meant all along to apologise for talking nonsense before she left me, but I didn't get the chance.

"It's monstrous!" she said firmly.

"It's a crying scandal! I'm glad you have told me this, little man, because I believe I can get it put right."

"Oh, I shouldn't bother!" I put in hurriedly.

"I certainly shall, now I know the truth. Richard!" she called out sternly.

I looked round to see which Richard she meant. And I nearly jumped out of my skin as Railton came hurrying along.

"Yes, my dear aunt?" said he.

I didn't wait for the rest. I legged it. It was an hour later that Mr. Railton called me into his study and asked me to show him my livid stripes. As I hadn't any, he kindly provided them with his cane. And he made me apologise in his presence to Miss Somebody's Aunt—which I did very willingly.

I shall always think of that as my worst moment.

NOTES FOR NEW BOYS

By PETER TODD.



Profit by the bitter experiences of Peter Todd—who hands out some helpful hints for new boys.

you introduce them to your school. If they have any peculiar looks, manners or modes of dress, do your best to leave them at home, if you can do so without hurting their feelings. Boys are rather thoughtless, and they love a joke.

Mistake number two was still more fatal. Although an innocent strippling, I decided to put on the air of a knowing card. I wanted to show these fellows that I could take care of myself. I wore an expression of careless ease. They couldn't impress me. On the contrary, I seemed to impress the Remove. They were all quite respectful.

Skinner, introducing himself most humbly, told me he could see at once that I was a man of the world. Highly flattered, I nodded. He offered me a cigarette, as one man to another. I had never smoked before, and had regarded it as a dingy practice, but because my innocence was so profound I had to accept it as part of the Greyfriars customs. Skinner was sorry that he hadn't a match, but said that the gentleman over there would oblige me if I asked him.

The gentleman was Mr. Quelch!

He did not oblige me with a match. He obliged me with a long lecture and six on the bags. Even that didn't cure me, for I allowed Vernon-Smith to persuade me to go to Wingate's study and scoff his tea; and later on, when I went up to see the Head, I remembered Bulstrode's tip and asked after

WHEN I was a new kid at Greyfriars I had no guide, philosopher and friend to prevent me making an ass of myself. New boys arrive, as a rule, like sheep to the slaughter, and if there is one possible method of putting their foot into it they make for it without fail. There are many errors a new boy can make. I made plenty myself. And I hope these few tips, the result of bitter experience, will earn me the gratitude of all who read these words.

Gratitude (I may mention) is best shown by standing a fellow a feed.

Now my first mistake on entering Greyfriars was to allow my Uncle Benjamin to come with me. Uncle Ben is a clever and learned man, but there is no doubt that he affects a remarkable pattern in whiskers, and he wants getting used to. One or two juniors appeared to swoon on seeing him get out of the cab. For my first six months at school I heard nothing but affectionate inquiries after my "grandfather's whiskers." They called him Noah, and said I was evidently something out of the Ark.

A fellow's relations are usually good and kindly folk, but be careful how

the health of his Aunt Jemima. It then began to dawn on me that I wasn't so clever as I thought, and I retired into private life to hide my diminished head.

Never be ashamed of being innocent. Everyone is at the start. Be modest, don't push yourself forward, and you'll get on quite well. Don't expect to make a sensation when you arrive. You won't. For some weeks you'll be hardly noticed. The new boy is left to find his own level in the school. He doesn't drop into his right place at once; he finds it gradually. If you remember that, you won't worry because nobody at the school seems to be interested in you. Your turn will come.

Another useful tip—tell your fond uncles and aunts *not* to write you postcards. The message on a postcard is public property. It is stuck up in the letter-rack and the whole school reads it. So if there is any talk about wearing flannel next to your skin, etc., you will never hear the end of it.

Above all, don't flash your money about in the hope of creating an impression—it will be the wrong sort of impression. You may be as rich as Croesus, but conceal the fact. If once

you are labelled "a purse-proud cad," you are done for. It's the sort of reputation you never quite lose. Trevor of the Remove made that mistake when he first came. His pater's a rich Lancashire mill-owner, and Trevor soon let us know it—with the result that he has always been under a slight cloud ever since.

A discreet tip to Gosling, the porter, and Trotter, the page, is never wasted—they can help you in lots of ways. But don't try to tip the matron. The matron at college holds a dignified position, and you might as well attempt to tip the Head. Mrs. Kebble will give you a very frosty look if you dare to offer her a bob.

One last hint—if there's anything you want to know, ask politely. Undoubtedly some practical jokers will pull your leg, but take it with good humour, and you'll soon be popular. Most fellows are good-natured enough to help a new boy, provided he doesn't give himself airs. They were once new boys themselves!

And—by way of a postscript—if you meet a fat junior in spectacles who tells you a long story about a postal-order, just slew him round and give him your boot. You'll then be happy ever after.

WHO'S WHO AT GREYFRIARS

A Puzzle Poem

Each line of this poem contains the buried name of the character to whom it alludes. Thus, in the first line, the words "fLOCK Each day" conceal the name of Dr. Locke, the Headmaster. Can you find the others?

WHO wisely rules his college flock each day?
Who's good at showing a team the way to play?
Who often takes a risk in nervous fear?
Who, as a sequel, checks his gay career?
Who takes the giddy bun, term after term?
Who is a selfish swindler and a worm?
Who thinks it odd that he is called a freak?
Who has no open ways to show his beak?

Who once was bred upon the soil of France?
Whose dress, in every item, pleads a glance?
Who says, "You dratted imps, go sling yer 'ook"?
Who loathes the bathtub, but is brought to book?
Whose conduct strangely contradicts his name?
Who's rather a keen fellow for a game?
Whose mad caprice selects ill-favoured haunts?
Who backs him to the hilt on all his jaunts?
Who would not chop his pigtail off in pride?
Whose hefty whack errs not on mercy's side?
And whose enthusiasm it has been
To gain the limelight, where he can be seen?

SOLUTION TO ABOVE: Locke, Wingate, Skinner, Quelch, Bunter, Fish, Todd, Snoop, Dupont, Temple, Gosling, Tubb, Angel, Rake, Price, Hilton, Hop Hi, Hacker, and Smith.

THE MOAT HOUSE MYSTERY!

By
CHARLES
HAMILTON

Len Lex, schoolboy detective, on the track of a mystery is like a terrier after a rat—he never lets up until his quarry is in the bag!

THE FIRST CHAPTER

CLANKING CHAINS!

"I SUPPOSE I know whether my own uncle's house is haunted or not!" said Harvey warmly. "I tell you, Jerningham Moat House has been haunted since the umpteenth century—sportsman in white, clanking chains, horrid groans, and all that!"

"Seen it?" asked Banks, winking at Len Lex.

"I haven't exactly seen it, and I haven't exactly heard it!"

"I thought not," agreed Banks.

"Tell us about it, old bean," said Len Lex, gently restraining Harvey as he grasped a cushion to hurl at

the unbelieving Banks. "A haunted house, at Christmas, is simply jolly."

"Well, I don't want to put you off the place, as you're coming with me for the hols," said Harvey.

"My dear chap, a ghost is an extra attraction! I wouldn't miss it for worlds!"

"Same here!" murmured Banks. "Somebody get up and turn on the light, if Harvey's going to make our flesh creep! And shut the door—there's a draught."



Nobody got up. The three Fifth Formers, in Study No. 8 at Oakshott, were taking it easy after tea, and nobody felt disposed to move.

It was dim and dusky in the study. The December darkness had fallen on the school. The winter wind, whistling from the Sussex downs, pattered snowflakes on the window-panes. The study fire burned with a ruddy glow, gleaming on the faces of the three fellows sitting round the fire, casting strange lights and shadows.

Oakshott School was breaking up for Christmas the next day. After tea in Study No. 8, Pie Porringe had gone down to look for letters, and Len Lex, Harvey, and Banks sat round the fire talking of the holidays. As the dusk deepened, only the fire illumined the study, and shadows lurked in the corners and danced on the walls.

"Carry on, old man," said Len.

"I'm not guaranteeing that the story's true," confessed Harvey. "But I can tell you that lots of people round the Moat House believe it. It happened centuries ago. There was a Sir Lucian Jerningham then, same as there is now. He had a nephew, who was heir to the title and estate. This chap bagged him one dark winter's night, and parked him in the dungeon below the level of the moat—a dark, damp, dismal dungeon, where he——"

"Caught a cold," suggested Banks.

"Shut up, ass! Where he perished."

"Must have been perishing cold there!" said Banks. "That nephew must have been a bit of a perisher, too!"

"Will you dry up, idiot? The new man held high revel in the old oak hall," went on Harvey, "while the rightful lord of the mansion was perishing in chains in the deep, dark

dungeon. On Christmas night, when the new man was holding his revels with his boon companions, there came a sudden strange sound from the dungeon stair!" Harvey paused impressively.

"It was the sound of a rattling chain," he continued. "Clink, clink, clink! Clank, clank, clank! The new lord of the manor started to his feet. Slowly the sound approached the great oaken doors of the hall—and all within stood stricken silent, their eyes fixed on the doors, which slowly opened of their own accord!" Harvey paused again.

"From the darkness," he went on, "came a haggard figure, with hair white as the driven snow, and chains on its limbs that rattled and clinked as it moved, uttering deep groans at every step! Slowly, with rattling chains, it drew nearer and nearer to the new lord, who stood transfixed, gazing at it in frozen horror! An icy finger touched him!"

"Grooogh!" said Banks.

"And he fell upon his face amid the wine-cups! Then suddenly all was dark!"

The fire in Study No. 8 blazed up for a moment, and died down, leaving the study almost in darkness. Harvey's voice went on, in the shadows:

"Through the darkness came the sound of a groan, and then the rattle of chains—clink, clink!"

Clink!

Harvey broke off suddenly, Len Lex started, and Banks gave a startled yell as through the darkness and silence of the study came that sudden strange, startling clink of metal.

"Oh!" gasped Harvey.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Banks.

"What——" began Len.

Clink, clink! Groan!

For a startled second the three sat

there as if petrified, staring into the circling shadows. The ghost story had suddenly changed into reality. Then they bounded to their feet, and Len Lex leaped to switch on the light.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

NOT SO FUNNY!

PORRIDGE of the Fifth grinned. He had gone down to look for letters. Coming back with an unopened letter in his hand, he found the study in darkness, save for a glow from the fire, and heard the voice of Harvey telling the ghost story. Pie paused at the door—grinning!

He felt in his pocket for a bunch of keys. It seemed no end of a joke to Pie to weigh in with a clink and a groan at the psychological moment. He clinked the keys and groaned—a deep, hair-raising groan. It seemed fearfully funny to the goat of the Fifth. It seemed to him still more fearfully funny as he heard the startled exclamations of the fellows in the study.

He clinked the keys again, suppressing a chuckle, and stepping softly in, let out another hair-raising groan.

"What the thump——" yelled Banks as that fearful groan came directly behind him.

Crash! Len Lex, leaping for the switch, crashed into an unseen figure in the dark. It went over backwards, with a yell.

"Ow! Yaroooooh!"

"Pie!" yelled Harvey.

"That goat!" gasped Banks.

Len switched on the light. Pie, a bunch of keys in one hand, a letter in the other, scrambled to his feet.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he chortled.

"You priceless goat!" yelled Harvey. "Making a fellow jump nearly out of his skin!"

"Ha, ha!" chortled Pie.

"You benighted chump!" roared Banks.

"Ha, ha!"

"Bump him!" yelled Harvey and Banks together.

"Here, I say—hold on!" yelled Pie as his exasperated friends collared him. "I say, can't you take a—whoop—joke? Ow! Don't bang my head on the fender, you blithering idiots—yaroooooh!"

Pie struggled madly. The bunch of keys flew from one hand, clanging in the fender. The letter flew from the other, landing in the fire. Pie, heedless of either, struggled and roared.

"Here, look out!" exclaimed Len.

He made a jump at the fire to save the letter. It was rather unfortunate that, at the same moment, Pie got one hand free and hit out fiercely. Whether he was hitting at Harvey or at Banks was not clear; what was painfully clear was that Len Lex got it. Pie's lashing fist jolted on his chin, and he staggered back, stumbled over a chair, and went full length on the carpet.

"Oh!" gasped Len.

"Will you leggo?" yelled Pie, as his friends secured him again, and gave him another bump on the hearth-rug—what time Len Lex sprawled, and the letter blazed up in the fire and was consumed to ashes.

"There!" gasped Banks. "You goat——"

"There!" panted Harvey. "You fathead——"

"Oh! Ow!" Pie gurgled, and scrambled up. "You dummies! Can't you take a jig—jig—jug—joke? Ow! I've a jolly good mind—— Oh crumbs! Where's that letter?"

Pie picked the bunch of keys out of the fender and stared round for

the letter. A wisp of white ashes in the fire was all that remained of it.

"You goat!" gasped Len. "It went into the fire!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" snorted Harvey. "You've jolly well chucked your letter into the fire, you potty ass!"

"It—it's gone!" stuttered Pie, staring into the fire.

"Hadn't you read it?" asked Len.

"Eh? No, of course not! I was bringing it up to the study——"

"Well, it's your own silly fault!" said Harvey. "You couldn't drop a letter without letting it fall into the fire! You all over!"

"Well, I don't mind if you don't!" said Pie.

"Well, I don't!" hooted Harvey. "Not a rap!"

"That's all right, then!" said Pie. "I should hate to lose a letter, just before Christmas, but if you don't mind——"

Harvey jumped.

"Wharrer you mean, you ass? Wasn't it your letter?"

"No; yours. I brought it up to the study for you."

Harvey gazed at him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Len and Banks. They could not help it. The expression on Harvey's face was too much for them.

"Mum—mum—my letter!" stuttered Harvey. "Mum—mum—mine! Why, you—you goat! You ass! You unspeakable idiot! I—I—I'll——"

"You said you didn't mind——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I'll show you whether I mind or not!" shrieked Harvey. He grabbed up a hassock and hurled himself at Porringe. "Now, you, ass——"

Bang, bang, bang!

"Here, I say—yaroooooh! Drag-gimoff! Stoppit! Oh, crumbs!" spluttered Pie, as he backed and dodged. "I say—— Oh, my hat! I say—— Whooop!"

Pie dodged out of the study and ran for it! Harvey pursued him to the doorway, still swiping with the hassock. He hurled it after him, and a wild yell floated back as Porringe vanished.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

PIE, AS PER USUAL!

LEN LEX breathed deep in the frosty air, and his face was as bright as the gleam of the winter sun that came from a steely sky. It was a cold and frosty morning. The snow had ceased to fall, but it lay like a white mantle in the Oakshott quadrangle, and ridged walls and roofs with gleaming white.

Fags of the Fourth were hurling snowballs at one another. One from Root missed its aim and knocked off the hat of Oliphant of the Sixth, captain of Oakshott—and Root stood petrified with horror at what he had done. But Oliphant only smiled as he picked up his hat. The spirit of Christmas was in the air—which was lucky for Root.

Len smiled as he walked on, tramping in snow. Nephew of Detective-Inspector Nixon of Scotland Yard, he had come to Oakshott School more as a detective than a schoolboy. But the case of the Sussex Man had been wound up successfully by the school-boy detective, and Len remained simply as Lex of the Fifth. He liked Oakshott—he was enjoying life there; he liked Harvey and Banks; he liked even that goat Porringe. Study No. 8 was a happy family, from which Bill Nixon's nephew would have been sorry to break away.

There was going to be no parting with his friends this Christmas, at all events, as Harvey had asked his three study-mates home for the holidays at his uncle's house in Hampshire. It was a very welcome invitation to Len, not only because he liked old Harvey and the other fellows, but because he had no near relations but Bill—and Bill was a busy man.

So the Christmas holiday was going to be at the Moat House, which, from Harvey's description, was a most romantic and attractive old spot. His uncle, Sir Lucian Jerningham, had a liking, it seemed, for boyish company at Yuletide, which Study No. 8 agreed showed that he was a jolly old sportsman. He was, Harvey confessed, a bit ancient, but full of beans, wealthy and generous—and fond of his nephew Cedric. The only fly in the ointment, according to Harvey, was that the old baronet's other nephew, Captain Jerningham, would be there, and Harvey did not like the captain, who, he said, put on side.

In every other respect the Moat House was absolutely jolly. There was an ancient moat, a deep, dark, dank dungeon, where, according to the legend, a former Sir Lucian had been chained up and done to death by his wicked nephew; and the ghost of that ancient lord of the manor, who dragged his chains and groaned in the stilly night. There was a

jolly old butler, named Whishaw; there was the old bean's secretary, Mr. Chard, who, said Harvey, was chubby and jolly, though he was rather bald, and stacked with knowledge.

Altogether, it looked good to Len, and he was looking forward to the Moat House and Christmas there. And if there really was a spectre—which Len doubted—it would be rather fun to track him down, and an easier task than tracking down the Sussex Man. Len, thinking it over as he walked in the quad that cold, frosty morning, looked merry and bright as he came on Harvey and Banks in serious consultation.



Pie spotted Harvey at the open window; his arm went up and the snowball flew. "Oooogh!" stuttered Mr. Chowne as the snowball caught him on the right ear.

" 'Phone ! " Banks was saying.

" What's up ? " asked Len.

" Well, I'm a bit worried," said Harvey. " You know that goat Porringe landed my letter in the fire yesterday. Well, I find that the fathead noticed that the postmark was Olkham, and that's where the Moat House is, see ? Looks to me as if it was a letter from my uncle. Everything's fixed up, of course—it's all right. Still, nunky must have had something to say, if he wrote."

" Quite ! " agreed Len. " Well, there's a 'phone in Common-room, and you can ask leave to ring up the Moat House."

" I think I'd better," said Harvey. " I rather wonder that nunky didn't ring me, if he had something to say at the last minute like this. I've a jolly good mind to kick that goat ! "

" 'Phone nunky instead," said Len, smiling.

Harvey nodded, and the three Fifth Formers walked back to the House. A whizzing snowball dropped a couple of yards ahead of them, and they glared round at the cheery Pie. Pie, clearly, was in great spirits, and expressing it in his usual goat-like way. He missed, of course ; Pie could not have hit the side of a house with a snowball or anything else.

" Hold on a minute ! " said Harvey. " Give that goat a few ! "

They held on a minute, and gathered snow.

Whiz, whiz, whiz ! Crash ! Smash ! Bash ! Porringe rolled in snow, and roared, as three snowballs, in swift succession, crashed and smashed and bashed on him. Grinning, the three walked on, leaving Pie to roar.

Porrige scrambled up, red and wrathful, gathered a snowball, and rushed in pursuit. By that time, however, the trio were in the House.

Chowne, master of the Shell, was standing at the tall open window of the Common-room, looking out into the quad. There was a slight frown on Chowne's face. He had spotted Porringe with a snowball grasped in his hand, and Mr. Chowne did not approve of horse-play in the quad.

" There's Chowne," said Banks, at the doorway. " Ask him, and get going."

Harvey, leaving his friends at the door, went into Common-room. He approached the master of the Shell.

" If you please, sir," said Harvey, in his most respectful tone, " may I use the telephone——"

Harvey was interrupted. Pie, at that moment, spotted him at the open window. Pie, with a snowball in his hand, was not likely to lose such a chance. His right arm went up, and his snowball flew.

Which would not have mattered very much had Pie's aim been good. But the snowball missed Harvey by a foot or more, and caught the master of the Shell on the right ear as he stood half-turned towards Harvey.

" Ooooooogh ! " stuttered Mr. Chowne, very much surprised. He staggered, lost his footing and fell. From the quadrangle came a gasp and a pattering of feet. Pie saw what he had done. Horrified, he flew.

" What—what—what—— " stuttered Mr. Chowne dizzily. " A—a—a snowball ! Harvey ! How dare you ! You — you — you young rascal ! " Chowne sat up. " Upon my word, you—you—have dared——"

" I—I—I—— " gasped Harvey, while Len and Banks, in silent horror, gazed from the doorway.

Mr. Chowne staggered to his feet. Evidently he supposed that that snowball had been intended for him, as he had got it. Still worse, he

clearly suspected that Harvey had deliberately drawn his attention so that the snowballer could take him off his guard and get him. Chowne almost foamed.

"I shall report this to your headmaster, Harvey—you and Porringe and Lex and Banks—all of you. Upon my word——Groooogh!" Mr. Chowne gouged snow from his ear.

"Oh, sir!" gasped Harvey. "I—I never——"

"Go! I shall report——"

"I—I—I—really, sir—I—I came to ask if I might use the telephone, sir——"

"You may not!" thundered Mr. Chowne. "Go! Leave this room! I shall report——"

Harvey joined his friends at the door and they faded away.

"That goat!" said Banks. "I say, what are you going to do now, Harvey, old man?"

"I'm going to look for Porringe!" he hissed. "Come and help me!"

They went and helped him. Oakshott School was breaking up that day, and from the fearful yells that proceeded from Porringe of the Fifth, when his friends found him, it might have been supposed that Pie was breaking up, too!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

SOMETHING WRONG!

THROUGH the winter dusk a few light flakes whirled on the sharp wind. Four fellows, coat-collars up about their ears, caps pulled down, bags in their hands, stood in the dim street outside the little village station at Olkham, and stared about them in the gloom.

They had been waiting about, and staring into the thickening gloom, for a quarter of an hour or more, since a slow train, after many changes,

had landed them at that remote Hampshire village. It had been a cold and rather tiresome journey, and Harvey & Co. were looking forward to stepping into Sir Lucian Jerningham's car and whirling away to the Moat House and bright firelight, warmth, and hospitality. But they waited in vain. There was no car at the station and no sign of one coming.

"It's weird!" said Harvey. "Blessed if I can make it out! Nunky knew my train, of course, and arranged to send the car to pick us up."

"I suppose the snow wouldn't stop it?" said Banks.

"Not enough for that. Besides, if it did, he would send somebody or something! Only—he hasn't."

"What about walking it?" suggested Len. "We've got legs."

"A mile and a half—through this!" Harvey looked glum. This was not the sort of thing he had planned for his friends. It was disconcerting and very perplexing.

"Any sort of lift to be got in this show?" asked Porringe, with a glance round at snow-roofed cottages, from which not a light glimmered.

"Not to save your life!" answered Harvey. "Wheelbarrow, perhaps!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Can't make it out! Nunky's not the man to forget. And even if he did, Captain Jerningham's there, and he would remember—and Wishaw, too. Wishaw would see to it, or old Chardy. The car must have started and had an accident—that's all there is to it!" said Harvey. "Rough luck on you men—looks as if we've got to hoof it."

"Rot!" said Len cheerfully. "We can hoof it all right!"

"Right as rain!" said Porringe. "Keep your peckers up! Look here,

let's trot, and do some snowballing as we go along——"

"Kill him!" said Banks.

"Look here, Banker——"

"Oh, come on!" said Harvey.

"The car's hung up on the road—that's it. We may pass it and get picked up. Better start, I think."

All four were tired of hanging about in the cold wind. They started to walk. In Olkham it was dim; outside Olkham, on the country road, it was almost as black as a hat. Through the darkness the powdery snow on the road glimmered and flakes whirled on the wind. Muffled up in their coats, swinging their bags, the four Oakshott fellows tramped.

Harvey was rather glum—personally, he did not mind very much, but he felt that it was rough luck on his guests. Banks and Len were cheery enough, and Pie kept up a merry whistle—out of tune, of course, and melodious only to Pie's own ears. After a half-mile of tramping through cold wind and whirling flakes, and dense darkness, however, Pie's whistle died away—rather to the relief of his friends.

No car was passed on the road. From the road they turned into a lane, which was muddy as well as snowy and windy. Leafless trees arched overhead and groaned in the bitter wind. Still there was no sign of a car, either as a going concern or hung up in a conked-out state.

It undoubtedly looked as if no car had left the Moat House to pick up Sir Lucian Jerningham's visitors. Which was perplexing to Harvey's friends, after what he had told them about the kind-heartedness and unbounded hospitality of that jolly old bean, his Uncle Lucian; and more and more disconcerting to Harvey himself, who could not help feeling a

little sore at what looked like careless neglect.

Harvey came to a halt at a gate, ridged with snow, under dark trees.

"Look here, you men, goodness knows how and why, but the car never started," he said. "We shan't get picked up. This is a short cut through the park, and will save half the distance. May as well take it, as we've got to leg it."

"Good egg!" said Len.

"Hear, hear!" said Banks. "I shan't be sorry to see a fire!"

The gate groaned on rusty hinges and they passed through. Beyond lay a footpath under leafless, frosty, old oaks and beeches. Snow and fallen leaves crumpled under their feet. If the lane had been dark, the footpath was darker, and there was a grunt from Porridge as he bumped into a tree.

"Wow!"

"Clumsy ass!" said Banks.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Len, startled. "What——" A sudden beam of light shot through the blackness. Someone was on the dark path ahead of the Oakshott men, and evidently he had heard them. The electric torch shone in their faces, almost blinding them with its sudden light. They blinked at the shadowy, burly figure behind it.

"Who are you?" rapped a sharp, authoritative voice. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Pie. "Is that a footpad?"

"You burbling blitherer!" hissed Banks. "It's a bobby!"

It was a figure in uniform that loomed behind the sudden light. Two keen eyes scanned their startled faces.

"Who are you?" repeated the sharp voice.

"We're going to the Moat House," answered Harvey. "I'm Sir Lucian



"Blessed if I can make it out!" said Harvey, as the Oakshott fellows stood outside the deserted station in the winter gloom. "Nunky arranged to send the car to pick us up."

Jerningham's nephew, if you want to know."

"What do you mean? Sir Lucian's nephew is a man of thirty—you look like a schoolboy——"

"You're a credit to the Force!" chuckled Harvey. "You've guessed it in one! I'm my uncle's nephew, all the same—on the other side of the family. Name's Harvey, if you're interested."

The constable made no reply to that. For a long moment he scanned the faces of the Oakshott quartet; then the light was suddenly shut off.

"You can go on, sir," he said civilly. And the Oakshott fellows tramped on, the burly figure of the constable vanishing in darkness.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

THE PHANTOM OF THE DARK!

LEN LEX had a thoughtful wrinkle in his brow as he tramped on with his friends. That sudden challenge from the darkness had

startled the whole party. Len could not help wondering why a constable was patrolling a footpath in Sir Lucian Jerningham's park, keenly on the watch. He had seen that the party were schoolboys, and allowed them to pass on. But for whom, or what, could he have been watching?

The other fellows were wondering also, and Porringe propounded a suggestion that was worthy of his brilliant intellect.

"Poachers!" said Pie.

"What?" yelled Banks.

"That bobby was watching for somebody!" said Pie. "Must have been poachers—what?"

"Goat!" said Harvey.

"But what the dickens was he at, though?" said Banks. "Can't be

walking about there because he enjoys the weather. And this is private land, isn't it?"

"Yes. Hallo! Look! Is that another?" exclaimed Harvey.

At a distance from the footpath a subdued light gleamed, moving among the trees. The Oakshott fellows came to a halt, staring at it, as it shifted and glimmered and finally vanished. They could not make out, in the distance and the darkness, who carried the light. When it was gone, they moved on again, in subdued silence, wondering.

Harvey broke the silence at last.

"I don't get this!" he said. "Something must be up—looks as if the police are searching the park! What the dickens for?"

"Poachers," said Pie.

"Fathead!" said his three friends together.

"Well," said Pie, "I jolly well think——"

"Listen!" muttered Len.

His keen ear caught a sound, close at hand. The four Oakshott men came to a halt, their hearts beating faster. The darkness—the silence of the desolate park—were having rather a creepy effect on them. The sound came again—a faint rustle in frosty thickets.

"Another bobby!" muttered Banks. But he spoke without conviction. It was not a constable who was moving so stealthily in the dark. A constable, too, would surely have turned on a light. It was somebody who had evidently heard the school-boys' voices and footsteps, but did not choose to make himself known. The rustle died into dead silence; and they peered into the darkness, seeing nothing, yet knowing that someone was close at hand.

"Who's there?" called out

Harvey. And there was a slight shake in his voice. They listened for a reply, but none came.

"Not a bobby this time!" muttered Banks.

"A poacher!"

"Idiot!"

"Hark!" breathed Harvey.

From the blackness, moaning on the wind, came a strange, eerie sound—a long groan. It caused the Oakshott fellows to jump almost clear of the ground. Pie clutched the arm nearest him—Len's.

"Look!" he breathed.

It was a glimmer of white from the black—the height of a man's face from the ground. But no features could be distinguished; only a patch of flat whiteness, ghostly and eerie. And from that patch of glimmering white came the sound of a groan, prolonged, rising and falling on the wind. Then the white glimmer vanished, and all was black again and silent, save for the moaning of the December wind in the bare branches.

"What—what—was it?" muttered Banks through his chattering teeth.

Harvey shivered.

"Let's get on!" he muttered. "It's nearly half a mile yet. Let's get on and get out of this!"

They hurried on. Harvey and Banks and Pie, if they were not scared, certainly felt their hearts beat very unpleasantly. In a lighted room by a ruddy fireside a ghost story was one thing; in a black and lonely wood at night it was quite another. And the thought of the phantom of the Moat House was in their minds. They did not run, but they walked very fast, without speaking. And as they went there came at intervals a faint sound—the cracking of a twig, or the brushing of a branch—behind them in the blackness of

the path, which hinted that that strange and mysterious presence was haunting their footsteps. Then, low and faint, came that shuddering groan, echoing eerily on the wailing wind.

"I—I say, it—it's jolly c-c-cold!" stammered Pie. "What about sprinting? It'll warm us up!"

They broke into a trot—the three of them. In the dense gloom, none of the three noticed that Len Lex dropped behind.

Len was not insensible to the eerie influence of that strange, unearthly sound in the lonely and desolate wood. But he pulled himself together. Superstition had no part in the make-up of Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew. Someone—or something—was haunting the footsteps of the Oakshott party as they hurried through the dark wood—and he was going to know who, or what, it was!

That it was trickery was clear to the schoolboy detective's cool and practical mind, though he had to admit that it was inexplicable. For no one, either at the Moat House or elsewhere, could have known that they were coming by that lonely path through Jerningham Park—no one could have planned to waylay them there to play upon their terrors with ghostly trickery. Some stranger, who could not even have seen them, but could only have heard their voices, was playing this ghastly trick! Why? Who could it be, roaming in the gloom at the risk of being spotted by the police who were searching through the park?

Whoever it was—whatever it was—Len was going to know. At that moment, Bill Nixon's nephew ceased to be a schoolboy and became a detective again. Quietly, he dropped behind his hurrying friends, backed under a

frosty beech by the footpath, and waited. The heavy tramping of three pairs of boots receded up the path, and Len calculated that the ghostly pursuer would hardly detect that it was not the sound of four. He waited—watchful in the darkness.

Len could have kicked himself for not having a flashlamp in his pocket. There was no time to unpack one from his bag. In black darkness he waited and watched, every sense on the alert.

A shadow loomed. Len heard deep, fast breathing. He smiled—grimly. It was not a phantom that was breathing so fast and hard as it trod on the track of the schoolboys.

He listened intently. Evidently the ghostly pursuer, knowing that he had the party on the run, did not know that one had dropped behind to wait for him. He had them scared, and was keeping them scared, no doubt intending to keep up that eerie trickery till they escaped from the wood. That he had no suspicion that one had stayed behind was quite clear—for the black shadow, and the deep breathing, passed Len as he stood backing against the beech, invisible. And as it passed, the schoolboy detective swung round the suitcase in his right hand, and it crashed on the back of a head.

The black shadow toppled forward. There was a grunt, and the sound of a fall. The scarcely seen figure was on its hands and knees in the snow, knocked spinning by that sudden crash. Len dropped the suitcase and leaped on the sprawling form.

His grasp closed on it—on a thick overcoat! It was human—there was no doubt about that. The groaning phantom of Jerningham Park was solid flesh and bone in a thick overcoat—and, in spite of the sudden

surprise and shock, as alert and active as a cat! Even as Len Lex grasped, the figure twisted over and grasped in return, struggling and wrenching. Len found himself struggling in a grip that was too strong for him, sturdy as he was. But he held on, and shouted:

"Harvey! Come back, you men! I've got the rotter! Stop!"

The trampling footsteps up the path ceased. A startled voice called back—Harvey's.

"Lex! Is that you? What——"

"Come back! Help!" shouted Len, exerting all his strength, as his unseen antagonist wrenched to free himself. "Help!"

There was a sound of running feet. The three Oakshott boys were running back along the footpath. A loud yelp told that Porringe had dashed into a tree. Harvey and Banks came running on.

A crashing blow caught Len under the chin. His grasp relaxed as he stumbled and fell, and the unseen one wrenched himself away. There was a rustle in the frosty wood as he plunged away in the darkness and vanished. A moment more, and Harvey and Banks were stumbling over Len as he sprawled, dizzy from that crashing blow.

"Lex!" shouted Harvey. "Where are——"

"Here!" panted Len.

He scrambled up, panting.

"I got him, but he's got away! He's nearly knocked my chin through the back of my head! He's got a hefty punch, for a spook! Your family ghosts must do a lot of physical jerks, Harvey! They've got muscle!"

"It—it—was—somebody!" gasped Harvey.

"Playing ghost!" said Len. "Goodness knows who, or how, or why—I

don't! I know he's given me a first-class jolt! Ow!"

Len groped for his suitcase and picked it up. Harvey and Banks stared round them in the dark. A rustle died away in the distant wood—the unknown was gone!

"I say!" Pie's voice came plaintively. "I've banged my dashed nose on a dashed tree, and the dashed claret's simply pouring——"

"You would!" said Banks.

"Let's get on!" said Len. "I don't think that sportsman will trail us any farther—he won't want another cosh on the napper from this bag!"

"Not a giddy spook, anyhow," said Banks. "But who the dickens can——"

"Come on!" said Harvey.

They tramped on—with no further sound of a ghostly pursuer. They emerged from the park at last. Harvey led the way through frosty gardens to a bridge that spanned the ancient moat encircling the mansion. They arrived in a high stone porch, and Harvey groped for the massive old knocker and crashed it with a thundering knock that must have awakened every echo of the ancient Moat House.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

STARTLING NEWS!

THE great oaken door opened to reveal the lighted hall within, with a log fire leaping and blazing in a wide old hearth, lights gleaming on polished oak walls, antlers, weapons, and holly and mistletoe.

Hospitable and welcoming looked the old hall of the Moat House. But the plump, portly, apple-cheeked butler who had opened the door stared at them wide-eyed in startled surprise.

"Master Cedric!" gasped Whishaw.

"You—and your friends!"

"Sort of!" said Harvey. "And glad to get in! Why the dickens wasn't the car sent, Whishaw?"

"The—the car?" stammered the butler.

"We've had to leg it," said Harvey. "What are you blinking at, Whishaw? Taking me for a ghost, or what? Where's my uncle?"

"Your uncle!" gasped Whishaw. "Oh, Master Cedric——"

Len Lex eyed the portly face of the Moat House butler curiously. Banks and Porringe exchanged a queer glance. It was evident that Whishaw was not expecting the party—that he was startled and surprised to see them walk in. Something, it was clear, was wrong, though they could not imagine what.

Harvey looked grim. He was as surprised as his friends, and still less pleased. A manservant came forward to help them off with their coats. In his face was reflected the surprise in the butler's. A door at the back of the hall opened, revealing booklined walls, and a rather tall and handsome young man looked out.

"What is it, Whishaw?" he called. "Inspector Shute again—what? Great Scott! Is that Cedric?" He stared at Harvey, jammed an eyeglass into his eye, and stared again. "You here, Cedric!" he barked.

"What the thump do you mean, Cecil?" hooted Harvey. "Why shouldn't I be here? Aren't I expected? What do you mean?"

Harvey's three friends could guess



"Come back, you men! I've got the rotter!" shouted Len Lex, hanging on to the dark figure.

that this was his cousin, Captain Jerningham, nephew and heir of the lord of the Moat House. His look expressed angry surprise and annoyance.

"Didn't you get my letter at the school?" he exclaimed. "You must have had my letter!"

"Your letter?" repeated Harvey. "Oh, it was from you, then—I thought it was from Uncle Lucian."

"Are you mad?" barked the captain. "If you had the letter——"

"I never read it—it dropped in the study fire before I had a chance to!"

"You young fool! Is this the place for a schoolboy party? Pah! Whishaw, has Chard come in yet?"

Captain Jerningham took no further notice of the Oakshott party.

"No, sir," stammered Whishaw. "I thought Mr. Chard was with you, sir——"

"We went separate ways in the wood," growled Captain Jerningham. "I got in a quarter of an hour ago. Tell Chard to come to me when he comes in—and Shute, if he calls again."

"Look here, Cecil Jerningham!" bawled Harvey. "I want to know what all this means?"

Slam! Captain Jerningham stepped back into the library and closed the door with a bang, without taking the trouble to answer. Harvey's face was red as he looked at his friends.

"That's my cousin," he said. "I've told you he is a sidey ass, but I've never seen him like this before. By gum, he's never had the nerve to carry on in this style in my uncle's house. Whishaw, you old ass, what's the matter with him?"

"Oh, sir!" murmured Whishaw. "Captain Jerningham wrote specially to tell you that in the circumstances it would be wiser not to bring your friends to the Moat House this Christmas, and to suggest that you should, if possible, go with one of them for the holidays, sir——"

"He wrote that?" gasped Harvey. "My hat! Is Cecil Jerningham master of this house, and undertaking to give orders whether I accept my own uncle's invitation or not? By gum! I'll tell him soon enough where he gets off, blow his dashed impudence! Where's my uncle, Whishaw?"

"Oh, Master Cedric——" stammered the butler.

A sudden change came over Harvey's face, and he grasped at the portly butler's arm.

"What's up? Speak, you ass! My uncle—is he ill or—or what?" Harvey's face had paled. "Whishaw, where's my uncle?"

"No one knows, sir," faltered the butler. "The police are searching for him everywhere. Sir Lucian Jerningham disappeared last Monday, Master Cedric, and has not been heard of since!"

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

A CRY IN THE NIGHT!

IT was long past midnight, but Len Lex was not sleeping.

The December wind wailed in the leafless old trees round the Moat House, and the old house itself was full of strange sounds. Lying wakeful in the old four-poster, while the leaping and falling flame of the dying log-fire on the hearth filled the room with mysterious shadows, Len was thinking of the spectre that was said to haunt the Moat House—the restless spirit of the old lord of Tudor times, who had been done to death by a greedy heir in his own dark dungeons.

Len was thinking of it with the suspicion in his mind that perhaps history was repeating itself this Christmastide!

Harvey of the Fifth was, perhaps, sorry that he had brought his friends to his uncle's house for Christmas in the strange and tragic circumstances. Len Lex was far from sorry. What Banks and Porringe thought about it he did not know, but he was glad he was there—not as Lex of Oakshott Fifth, but as the nephew of Detective-Inspector Bill Nixon of Scotland Yard—as the schoolboy detective!

To his friends, and to everyone at the Moat House, Len Lex was a schoolboy, like any other Oakshott fellow; but that made his task easier as a detective. He had come to the Moat House as a schoolboy on holiday—he was going to stay as a detective with grim business in hand.

Poor old Harvey had been absolutely knocked over when Whishaw, the butler, told what had happened to his uncle. He was going to find Len Lex a friend in need—at least, so the schoolboy detective hoped.

The strange, eerie sounds of the old house echoed in Len's ears as he lay wakeful, thinking. But among those many and varied sounds there was none to fix his attention, until there came a metallic clank from the passage outside his room.

Len sat up, his heart beating with a sudden throb, his breath coming faster. That was no natural sound of the ancient building. It was the clank of a chain, rattling as it moved. According to the legend of the Moat House, the spectre of the old lord stalked abroad at midnight's hour, clanking and rattling the rusty chains that had held him a prisoner in the dungeon beneath his own mansion. Even the cool, clear-headed schoolboy detective felt, for a moment, a superstitious thrill.

The next, Len was out of bed, stepping swiftly to the door. Silently he opened the door and peered into the dark, oak-walled passage. The darkness was intense. He could see nothing. But he could hear, faintly but unmistakably, that clanking of an iron chain. Human or ghostly, the spectre of the Moat House was walking within a few yards of him.

The rooms of the four Oakshott fellows were together, two on either side of that old passage. Harvey's

was next to Len's. A faint glimmer, from a dying fire within, showed him that Harvey's door was open. Did he detect a moving shadow in that faintly glimmering doorway? It was from that direction that the jingle of iron came.

Len, with set teeth, stepped out into the passage, silent with his bare feet, heedless of the cold. Harvey's door was open—he could not have left it open.

From Harvey's room came a startled cry:

"Who—who—what—— Oh, good heavens!"

Light shone from the doorway. Harvey had flashed on his bed-lamp, and in the lighted doorway a strange, weird, startling figure stood. It was the figure of an old, old man, in the ruff and trunk hose of Tudor times, with long hair, white as the driven snow, a long, white beard, and a face of such ghastly whiteness that it was like a mask of death. Round the figure's waist was a chain, old and rusty, with loose ends that clinked and clanked as he moved.

Len Lex clenched his hands and ran forward. Man or ghost, he was going to know what it was. From Harvey's room came a cry of horror and dread. It seemed from the motions of the spectral figure that it was about to enter the room of Sir Lucian Jerningham's schoolboy nephew—but it stopped and turned, with a sudden clanking of chains, towards Len Lex, no longer silent as he came up the passage with a rush.

Instantly the figure disappeared from the lighted doorway and flitted up the passage. Len Lex rushed after it in the dark. He shouted as he passed Cedric Harvey's open door:

"Come on, Harvey!"

He was past the doorway in a

twinkling, dashing after the flitting spectral figure, unseen now in the darkness of the passage. Ghost or trickster, he had it now, for at the end of that passage there was no exit, only a tall window that looked out over the moat. Man or ghost, it must be cornered there. There were long, heavy hangings over the window to black out the light. His outstretched hands came in contact with them, and he groped to right and left.

"Harvey! A light!" he yelled. "Porringer! Banks!"

A calling voice answered—that of Banks, from his room. A door opened, light gleamed into the passage and Banks ran out in his pyjamas. Another door opened, and Porringer looked out, rubbing his eyes. Harvey appeared the next moment—his face white, his eyes starting. Bright light illumined the passage from end to end, as Banks found the switch and turned it on.

It shone on four faces—the faces of the Fifth Formers of Oakshott—on glimmering old oak walls, the floor, the dark hangings at the windows—and on nothing more!

Len Lex stared round him. The spectre of the Moat House was gone. He had almost touched it as he rushed after it, but in the darkness it had vanished utterly; and the four Oakshott fellows were left staring at one another blankly in a passage otherwise empty!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

HANDS OFF!

CAPTAIN JERNINGHAM tramped in at the doorway, kicking snow from his boots. He threw down his hat, to which several white flakes clung, as Whishaw helped him off with his coat. It was a bitter morning; and to judge by the ex-

pression on Cecil Jerningham's face, his temper was as bitter as the weather.

His face, naturally rather handsome, was darkly clouded, his brows knitted. His glance shot to an open doorway across the hall, from which came a sound of boyish voices, and his look grew blacker. The plump, apple-cheeked butler of the Moat House coughed.

"The schoolboys, Whishaw!" muttered the captain.

"Yes, sir, they are at breakfast!" murmured Whishaw.

"Is Chard down yet?"

"Mr. Chard is at breakfast in his own room, sir!"

Captain Jerningham strode into the breakfast-room, where his cousin, Cedric Harvey, and his friends were at breakfast. A great log-fire crackled and roared in the grate, booming in the wide old chimney. The diamond-paned windows were rimmed with frost. The four schoolboys looked round as the captain appeared in the room.

Cecil Jerningham stood for a moment or two regarding the four schoolboys in silence. Harvey rather ostentatiously helped himself to rashers and kidneys, no doubt to show his cousin Cecil exactly how much he cared for his black looks. But the captain, when he spoke, was unexpectedly quiet and civil.

"It seems, Cedric, that you never got the letter I wrote you at the school before Oakshott broke up," he said.

"That's so," said Harvey.

"It's unfortunate, but I suppose I can't blame you for having come, as you never knew what had happened. But now you're here, you can see for yourself, Cedric, that this is no place for holiday-making."

"I'm not going!" said Harvey.

Captain Jerningham breathed hard. But he answered quietly :

"Sir Lucian is not here, Cedric. His fate is unknown. He may be dead—indeed, I fear he must be dead, for otherwise, how can his disappearance be accounted for?"

"I'll believe that when I have to," said Harvey. "Not before."

"Alive or dead, he is missing, and this is no place for schoolboys on holiday," said the captain sternly. "I tell you plainly, Cedric, since you seem to have no idea of the fitness of things, that I can endure nothing of the kind. I will order the car, if you tell me what train you are going by."

Len and Banks and Pie were silent. Harvey did not speak immediately.

He gave the captain a long, hard look, then glanced round at his friends.

"We'd better have this clear, you men," he said. "My Uncle Lucian asked us here for Christmas. We were booked for a jolly holiday. That's all washed out now. You can guess I'm not feeling jolly—and I don't suppose that the state of affairs here makes you fellows feel bucked. If you'd rather clear, I shan't take it amiss. In fact, speaking as a pal, I'd advise you to, if you want to enjoy your holidays."

"You're sticking on?" asked Banks.

"Like glue!" answered Harvey grimly. "I'm not going till I know what's happened to my uncle."

The tall young man jammed an eyeglass into his eye and stared at Harvey. "You here, Cedric!" he barked. "What the thump do you mean, Cecil?" hooted Harvey. "Why shouldn't we be here?"



"Same here—if you want us."

"Of course I want you, fathead, if you can stick it."

"Done!" said Banks.

"Done!" said Len Lex, like an echo.

"Brace up, old man!" said Porringe. "We're sticking to you! It will be jolly if we find nunky, old bean—no end jolly! And we're going to find him!"

Captain Jerningham started, and fixed his eyes on Pie.

"What do you mean?" he snapped harshly. "Do you imagine that you have the remotest chance of discovering what has become of Sir Lucian Jerningham?"

"Lots!" answered Pie cheerfully. "I know I'm jolly well going to root about till I jolly well put salt on his tail, and chance it!"

"Fool!"

Pie looked warlike.

"I'd jolly well boot you for that at Oakshott!" he said. "Who are you calling a fool, blow you?"

"If you can't speak to my friends civilly, Cecil, you'd better not speak at all!" exclaimed Harvey hotly. "You're not master of the Moat House and Jerningham Park, Cousin Cecil, so long as my uncle lives—and I'm his nephew as much as you are! You've got no more authority over me than I have over you. You can give orders till you're black in the face—and that's what I care for them!" And Harvey snapped his fingers contemptuously at the angry face across the breakfast-table. "I came here on Uncle Lucian's invitation, and I'm staying until Uncle Lucian washes it out—and I'd no more go at your orders than I'd go at Whishaw's!"

Len Lex sipped hot coffee, his eyes on the captain's face, watching it grow crimson with anger.

"By Jove!" Captain Jerningham almost panted. "You insolent young rascal! Do you want me to drive you out of the house with my riding-crop?"

"Try it on!" roared Harvey. "We'll handle you fast enough if you do. You're not master of the Moat House yet, Cousin Cecil—though you may think you've got good reasons for fancying you are! What do you want to get shot of me for? Are you afraid I shall find out what's become of Uncle Lucian?"

Captain Jerningham started as if an adder had stung him. His face paled and reddened, and paled again.

"You—you dare to hint——" He choked with rage, strode round the table, and laid his hands on Harvey.

"Now, you young scoundrel—now you——"

Len, Banks and Pie rushed to the rescue. Three pairs of hands grasped Captain Jerningham and he was wrenched away from Harvey. He went staggering across the room, stumbled over backwards and fell full length with a crash. He lay sprawling dizzily on the floor, spluttering for breath. The Oakshott fellows watched him warily. Whishaw's startled and amazed face looked in at the doorway, his eyes almost popping from his head.

"Hands off, you rotter!" panted Harvey. "Keep your paws to yourself, Cecil Jerningham! Wait till you're master of the Moat House!"

Captain Jerningham staggered to his feet. The Oakshott fellows lined up promptly. He looked for a moment as if he would hurl himself upon them in a burst of fury. But he choked back his rage. Perhaps the horrified gaze of Whishaw, at the doorway, recalled him to self-control.

He gave Harvey one long, bitter look, brushed past the butler, and tramped out of the room.

THE NINTH CHAPTER

PIE ON THE TRAIL!

THE stocky, red-faced man in uniform came across the bridge over the ancient moat, glanced at the four schoolboys who stood in a group under the mullioned windows of the library, and raised his eyebrows a trifle. Judging by that glance, Inspector Shute, of Holme, shared Captain Jerningham's opinion that the Moat House, with its shadow of mystery and tragedy, was no place for schoolboys on holiday. Pie Porringe looked round at him.

"That's the jolly old inspector, Harvey," he said. "Come on, and get the tip straight from the horse's mouth—what?"

Harvey nodded, and went quickly towards Mr. Shute, his friends following him. The inspector was going towards the great stone porch at the front of the old mansion, but he stopped and fixed a look of rather grim inquiry on the Oakshott fellows.

"Inspector Shute?" asked Harvey. "You've heard of me, perhaps—Cedric Harvey, Sir Lucian Jerningham's nephew. We came here for Christmas—to hear that my uncle had disappeared a couple of days before. I want you to tell me exactly what happened—so far as you know. You can guess that I'm worried and anxious!"

The rather grim expression on Inspector Shute's face relaxed as he read the lines of anxious trouble in Harvey's face. He could see that the boy was fond of his uncle, and that what had happened had been a heavy blow to him.

"I quite understand that, Master

Harvey," he said. "I'm sorry that there's no news, so far. As for what's known, I can put it in a nutshell.

"Sir Lucian Jerningham disappeared on Monday night. He was in the library with his secretary, Mr. Chard, dealing with matters of business, up to eleven o'clock. At that hour, Mr. Chard bade him good-night and went to bed, leaving Sir Lucian smoking a cigar and looking over the evening paper.

"In the morning, Whishaw found the french window of the library open when he came down. Sir Lucian's valet, Peek, reported that his master was not in his room, and that the bed had not been slept in. Captain Jerningham and Mr. Chard were at once called, and a search was made of the grounds on the supposition that Sir Lucian had gone out and for some unknown reason failed to return.

"This supposition was borne out by the discovery of a half-smoked cigar near the bridge-end, on the outer side of the moat. Nothing, however, was seen of Sir Lucian—and a fresh fall of snow had covered all footprints. As nothing was learned by lunch-time, the police were called in. Search has been going on ever since. That is all."

"Look here! If old Harvey's uncle was snaffled by somebody, ten to one there'd be signs of a struggle!" said Pie, when the inspector had gone.

"Inspector Shute may have thought of that!" murmured Len Lex. "He may have looked, old bean!"

"Oh! Think so?" said Pie.

"Fathead!" said Banks.

"Well, we want to know all the jolly old details if we're going to look for Harvey's uncle and find

him," said Pie. "And that's what we're jolly well going to do, if it takes us till the new term at Oakshott. You buck up, Harvey, old man!"

Harvey smiled faintly.

"Yes, that's a good tip, though it comes from Pie," said Len Lex quietly. "Buck up, old man! Your uncle is alive—and while there's life there's hope!"

"Feel sure of that?" asked Harvey. Of Len Lex's connection with Scotland Yard and detective business he knew nothing, but he had an instinctive faith in his cool, clear-headed judgment.

"I feel so sure of it," said Len, "that I'm going to back up old Pie all along the line—searching for your uncle till we find him—alive and well!"

"Lex, old man, you're talking sense!" said Pie approvingly. "I've thought sometimes I should make a pretty good detective! Between ourselves"—Pie lowered his voice—"we jolly well know where to look for the man. We jolly well know who comes into the whole bag of tricks if Sir Lucian never turns up, and who's already putting on the airs of a master in the house, as if it was his already—what?"

Harvey breathed hard. That thought was in his own mind; he could guess that it was in every mind at the Moat House. Pie was the man to jump at the obvious, and fancy that he was making wonderful discoveries.

"Detectives look for the motive first of all," went on Pie. "And there's the motive, sticking up like a goalpost! The old sportsman walks out to finish his cigar on the terrace before going to bed—a certain party follows him out—and has him just where he wants him. That party is

pretty hefty, easily able to handle an old man who's walked out of the reach of help!

"But he's not villain enough to knock his own relation on the head. So long as the old bean disappears and never turns up again, he snaffles the loot all right. What we've got to find is, where's he parked him—what?"

"If you've got it right, old man, the detective business must be a pretty easy job," said Banks. "It hasn't taken you long!"

"Easy to some chaps, not to others, Banker," said Pie. "It wants thinking out. Now, Harvey knows this place like a book. Any place in the grounds, Harvey, where a prisoner could be hidden away—outside the moat?"

"Not that I know of," said Harvey.

"Why outside the moat?" asked Len.

Pie gave him a pitying look.

"The old bean's cigar was picked up at the other end of the bridge," he said. "Didn't you hear the bobby say so? That's where the brute got him, and he dropped it, I fancy. Anyhow, we know he went as far as that. May have turned back there after his stroll and was grabbed by the other party. That party, naturally, wanted him as far from the house as possible when he grabbed."

"The police are still searching the park," said Harvey. "A body could be hidden there, but a prisoner—never!"

"What about a car?" said Pie. "The party I'm speaking of got him to a car and ran him off—place all ready to park him in umpteen miles away! Has that cousin of yours got a car of his own, Harvey?"

"Yes—it's in the garage here!"

"I fancy I'll stroll round to the



Three pairs of hands grasped Captain Jerningham and he went staggering across the room and fell full length with a crash!

garage," remarked Pie, winking at his friends. "I'd like to know whether that car was out on Monday night."

He walked away. Harvey glanced after him, with a faint grin, then looked at his friends.

"Come into the house," he said. "I want to see Chard, if he's down yet. I've got an idea, and I think Chard may be able to help."

As they went to the porch, Inspector Shute came out again with Captain Jerningham. Taking no notice of the schoolboys, they walked

across the bridge and disappeared into the snowy park beyond. Len Lex noted how lined, almost haggard the captain's face looked. Whether he had, or had not, a guilty secret on his conscience, it was clear that he was feeling the strain severely. They found Whishaw in the hall.

"Chard down yet, Whishaw?" asked Harvey.

"Not yet, sir. He has breakfasted in his room," answered the butler.

"That's a new thing for Chard, isn't it?" asked Harvey. "He was always an early bird!"

"Mr. Chard has caught a slight cold, sir, helping in the search in the park. He keeps to his room somewhat the last few days."

"We'll wait for him in the library," said Harvey. "Come on, Lex!" Harvey and Banks went to the library, but Len lingered a moment to speak to the butler.

"Which end of the bridge did you pick up that cigar-end on Tuesday morning, Whishaw?" he asked.

"The other end, sir," answered Whishaw. "But it was not I who found it—it was Mr. Chard!"

Len followed his friends into the library.

THE TENTH CHAPTER

WHAT HARVEY SUSPECTED!

LEN LEX looked about him with keen interest in the old library of the Moat House. It was a large, lofty apartment, with book-lined walls. Mullioned windows and a more modern french window looked out on the moat and the terrace before the house. Here and there, among the endless books, were ancient paintings of dead-and-gone Jerninghams.

Harvey stopped before one full-length portrait of a man in Tudor costume and made a gesture towards it.

"Old Sir Lucian," he said. "My uncle's jolly old ancestor, who was locked up in the dungeons by his nephew and died in chains." He shivered slightly. "You saw him, Lex, when I did—last night!"

Len nodded, eyeing the ancient, faded portrait curiously. It closely resembled the phantom of the night, except for the deathly paleness of the spectral face. If that strange apparition had been trickery, no doubt the trickster had taken that old portrait

as his model. The Tudor costume had been reproduced to the last detail.

"I never saw it, you know," Banks glanced dubiously from one to the other. "Sure you didn't fancy it, Harvey, old man? You were a bit upset, you know——"

"If I fancied it, Lex didn't!" answered Harvey shortly.

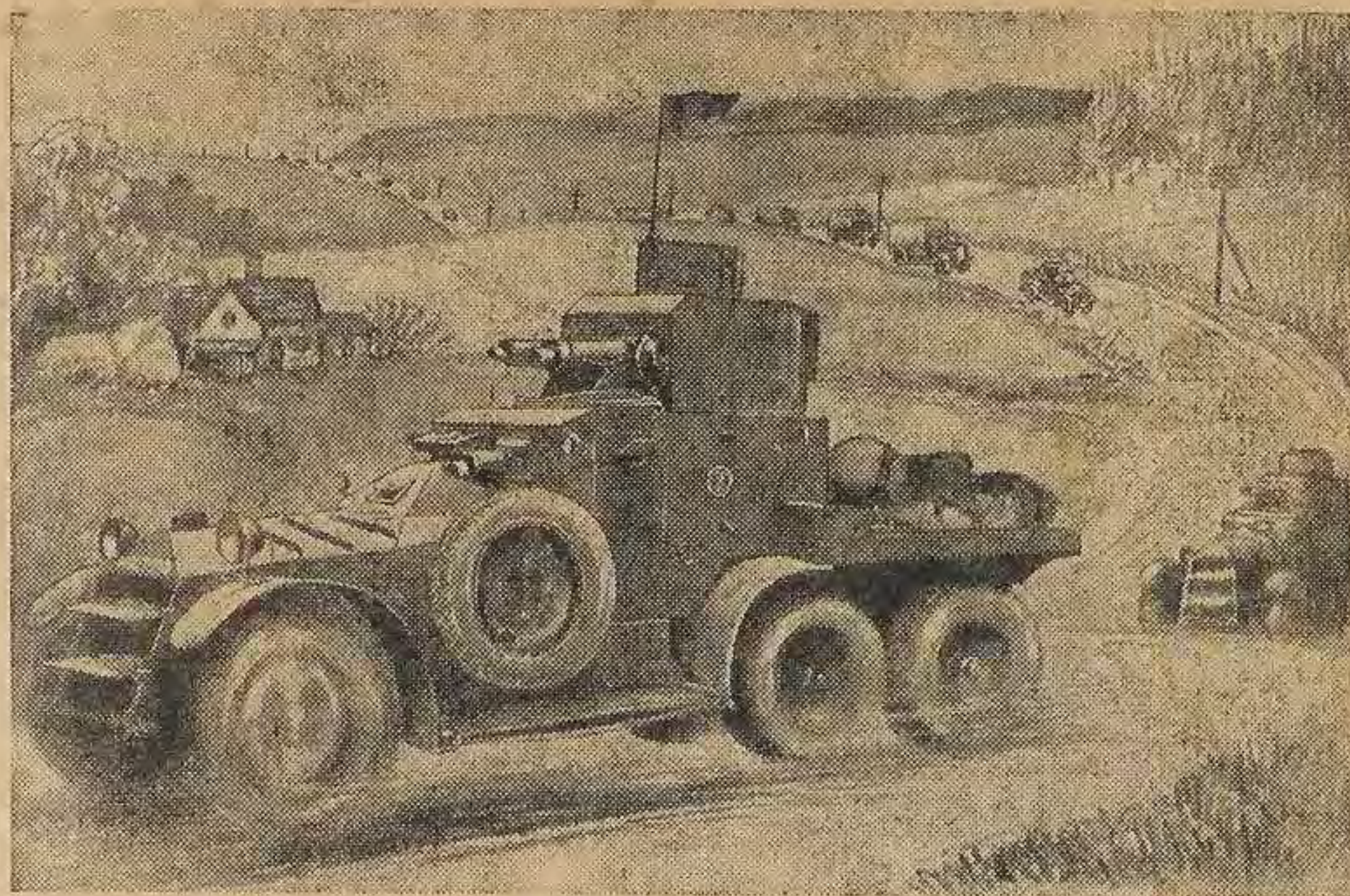
"But——" Banks shook his head. "Ghosts are a bit thick—and if it was some sportsman playing ghost, how did he get clear? We had him cornered, unless he glided through a solid wall."

"That's what I want to talk to Chard about," said Harvey. "Let's wait for him here—this is old Chardy's den."

With a swish of rings on a rod, he drew aside long velvet hangings that screened a deep alcove in the wall of the library near the great fireplace. It was like a small room, with a large writing-table, a roll-top desk, two deep leather armchairs, and a shaded electric lamp. A diamond-paned window admitted the wintry sunshine. From floor to ceiling the walls were of solid oak, black with age, in panels carved here and there with curious scroll-work.

Books and papers lay on the table, many of them obviously connected with the business of the estate. But among them was a black-letter manuscript, under a paper-weight, on which Len's eyes lingered. The strange old letters and monkish Latin were not easy to read, but Harvey had told him that this sort of thing was "pie" to Mr. Chard, who was librarian at the Moat House, as well as the old baronet's secretary. A pile of more modern manuscript, in a clear, beautiful calligraphy, indicated that Mr. Chard had lately been at

THE MODERN BRITISH ARMY IN ACTION



The Mechanised Cavalry, besides using light tanks, is equipped with armoured cars of several different types. There is the "light" six-wheeled car weighing 5 tons, armed with two .303-inch machine-guns; the "heavy" six-wheeled car weighing 7 tons 5 cwt., armed with one .5-inch and two .303-inch machine-guns, and a lighter four-wheeled car of 4 tons armed with one Vickers machine-gun.

The illustration shows a troop of armoured cars escorting a convoy of lorries. The car ahead flies the "Squadron Column Flag," a blue pennant only carried by officers in command. The cars shown are Lanchesters, armoured against small-arm fire and shrapnel, carrying one .5-inch and two .303-inch

machine-guns, though if they are equipped with wireless only two guns are carried. They have a crew of four and weigh 6½ tons, with a cruising speed of 25 m.p.h. When necessary the plating of the cars can be electrified to prevent the enemy boarding them when operating in hostile towns or at close quarters with enemy infantry.

Not being equipped with caterpillar wheels it is easy for a retreating enemy to stop the advance of the armoured cars by digging pits or putting obstacles in their path, but to combat this the cars are equipped with detachable running boards for use as temporary bridges. In this way fairly difficult obstructions may be surmounted.

work on his projected volume on the "Antiquities of Jerningham."

"Chard works here," explained Harvey. "We always called it his cosy corner. Jolly little place for a bookworm, what?"

"Chard's a bookworm?"

"Live, moves, breathes, and has his being in stuff that would make an Oakshott beak's head ache!" said Harvey. "But he's a jolly good man

of business, all the same. Worth his weight in gold to Uncle Lucian. He does practically all his business for him. He's been with nunky for years. Decent old boy—always civil to a chap—a bit different from my Cousin Cecil."

"Thank you for an unsolicited testimonial, Master Cedric!" said a rather rich, fruity voice, and the three looked round at a plump but sinewy

man with a bald forehead, who had entered the library and arrived at the "cosy corner." He carried a green baize bag in his plump hand.

"Oh, here you are, Chardy!" said Harvey, shaking hands with him. "These chaps are my friends from Oakshott—Lex and Banks. You'll see Porringe presently. He's gone off playing the goat. We're going to hunt for my uncle. I want you to help."

"I don't quite see what can be done, Master Cedric. Almost every foot of the grounds, and the park, has now been searched——"

"That's not what I'm thinking of," said Harvey. "Look here, Chard, I'm going to speak plainly. Once upon a time a Sir Lucian Jerningham was shut up in a dungeon by a nephew who couldn't wait. I want to know whether that's happened over again."

The secretary's plump face became exceedingly grave.

"That is a terrible suspicion to enter your mind, Master Cedric!"

"Terrible or not, it's there," said Harvey. "Look here, Chard, don't gammon—you must have thought of it, too! Who would want to get rid of my Uncle Lucian, except——" Harvey broke off. "You see what I mean? I want to spot that old dungeon where Sir Lucian of Tudor times was shut up. You get me?"

"I follow your meaning, certainly," said Mr. Chard gravely. "But you are aware that the old legend is only a legend—nothing is actually known of a secret dungeon beneath the Moat House." He smiled. "You will remember, Master Cedric, that when you have spent previous holidays here, you have explored, hunting for that non-existent dungeon. I remember once that Sir Lucian, in jest, offered you a motor-cycle as a prize

if you succeeded in discovering it. It has no real existence."

"Well, I jolly well believe it has," said Harvey, "and I'm jolly well going to find it, and you're going to help, Chard! And I jolly well believe, too, that the man who snaffled Sir Lucian knows that that's the very thing I should think of at once, and wants to clear me off, for that very reason."

Mr. Chard started.

"You think that?" he exclaimed.

"I jolly well do!" said Harvey.

"It's not only because he doesn't want my company, Chard, though he's never liked me. He's afraid of what I may spot, taking that line in hunting for my uncle. That's not all. Somebody spotted us coming through the park on our way here last night and played ghost! Captain Jerningham was out of the house at the time!"

"He was in my company, searching the park, most of the time——"

"But not all—he came in first and was here when we arrived, and you were still out!" said Harvey. "I heard him tell Whishaw that you separated and went different ways in the park."

"That is certainly true. But I cannot think——"

"Well, I can!" said Harvey. "And that's not all, either! Last night we saw the ghost of old Sir Lucian!"

"Master Cedric!"

"It gave me a turn, too!" said Harvey with a shiver. "Lex and I got after it, but it vanished through a solid wall. I'm going over that wall with a small comb to-day, Chard! It's pretty well known that there are secret passages in this old place. I want you to root through those dashed old parchments—there's a chest full in this library—and see if



The three boys looked round to see a plump but sinewy man with a bald forehead, who had entered the library. He carried a green baize bag in his hand. "Oh, here you are, Chardy!" said Harvey.

you can spot anything like a clue to the secret dungeon. It's a chance, at least—and you're the man to find it."

"I will certainly do as you wish, Master Cedric. But you appear to overlook the fact that Sir Lucian was out of doors, at a distance from the house, when he was attacked."

"Was he?" said Harvey. "For all I know, he might have been tackled in this very library!"

"Wha-a-t?" Mr. Chard stared.

"Well, think of it," said Harvey. "Easy enough to open the french

window and to chuck the end of poor old nunky's cigar across the moat. Just his game, if he'd got old nunky parked under the Moat House all the time."

"Oh gum!" said Banks, staring at his chum.

"I am afraid, Master Cedric, that you are allowing the ancient Jerningham legend to influence your judgment," said Mr. Chard, with a smile. "At all events, I will do what you have asked me to do, and—and hope that something may come of it. At the moment I have some matters of business to which I must attend."

The Oakshott fellows took the hint and left the alcove. Mr. Chard, still with the green baize bag in his hand, stood watching them, a faint smile on his plump face, as they went out of the library. Then, with a swish of rings, he drew the velvet hangings across

the alcove, shutting himself off from the apartment.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

A CLUE?

PORRIDGE grinned as the sound of Captain Jerningham's angry voice reached him. Looking into the library from the hall, he had a view of the back of the captain's sleek, well-brushed dark head over the top of an armchair.

It was near lunch-time, and the captain had come in tired from a weary tramp in the frosty woods. He

scowled at the sight of Harvey, Len, and Banks gathered round the fire, and threw himself into the armchair, his feet stretched out to the logs. The three Oakshott boys were also glad of the warmth of the fire, for they had spent most of the morning exploring the ancient vaults under the Moat House—dark and dank and dismal and chilly.

"You young fools!" The captain's voice was deep with angry annoyance. "I hear from Whishaw that you asked him for the key of the vaults. Is that where you have been?"

"That's where!" said Harvey curtly.

"And what, in the name of all that is idiotic, do you expect to discover in the vaults?" snapped the captain.

"I fancy you know," said Harvey. "Anyhow, you can't stop me—any more than the ghost can frighten me away from the Moat House."

Captain Jerningham stared at him.

"The ghost? Are you mad? Have you been fancying that you have seen ghosts?" He laughed harshly, and glanced round at Mr. Chard, in the alcove. The hangings were drawn back now, and the secretary was standing at the table, packing a number of documents into his green baize bag, apparently to take away to his room. "Do you hear that, Chard? These young fools——"

Mr. Chard coughed. His manner indicated that he did not desire to be drawn into the dispute between Captain Jerningham and his school-boy cousin. And with that non-committal acknowledgment of the captain's remark, he picked up his bag and left the library, passing the grinning Porridge at the door.

Pie strolled in. His three friends glanced at him, but the captain, seated in his armchair with his back

to Pie, did not notice his entrance. Pie moved along to the "cosy corner" that Mr. Chard had left. The fatuous grin on Pie's face would have revealed to his chums that Pie was going to play the goat, if they had given him their attention. But Harvey and Banks and Len were giving their attention to the angry man in the armchair. They hardly noticed Pie lounge into Mr. Chard's alcove, stoop by the writing-table there, and reach to the wastepaper-basket that stood under it.

"Play the fool if you like," went on the captain's angry voice. "I cannot at present, as you say, stop you. But there is one thing I will stop—with a horsewhip, if necessary. One of you—the young idiot who is not here now—went to the garage this morning, and asked questions that can have only one possible meaning. No doubt he was surprised to learn that the chauffeur sleeps over the garage, and is therefore able to bear witness that no car was taken out on Monday night."

"That goat Pie!" sighed Banks.

"You hear me, Cedric? I will not tolerate this!" Captain Jerningham's voice was louder, sharper, angrier. "You have already hinted pretty plainly that you suspect me of knowing more than I dare say of Uncle Lucian's disappearance. I've seen the same thought in that fool of an inspector's face. I've seen it in others——" He seemed to choke for a moment. "Now this fool of a boy asks the chauffeur questions which amount to as good as an accusation! Do you imagine that I will tolerate this?"

The three Oakshott fellows stood silent. They were listening to the captain, but they were looking at Pie now.

Pie had emerged from Mr. Chard's cosy corner with the wastepaper-basket in his hands. It looked as if the secretary had been rather busy that morning, for it was half-full of crumpled fragments. What Pie fancied he was up to, and what he was going to do with that wastepaper-basket, his friends could not imagine—till he did it!

Pie stepped quietly and swiftly behind the captain's chair. Up went the wastepaper-basket—and came down, up-ended, over Captain Jerningham's head, bonneting him!

"Ha, ha!" roared Pie.

"You goat!" shrieked Harvey.

From the interior of the basket came a suffocated gurgle. Captain Jerningham, utterly astounded, grabbed frantically with both hands at the surprising bonnet on his head.

Off came the basket with a wild wrench, and its contents flew far and wide, scattering like snow round the captain's chair. The wastepaper-basket went to the floor with a crash, and Captain Jerningham bounded to his feet, his face crimson with rage.

"Who——" he spluttered. "What the——"

"Ha, ha!" shrieked Pie, as he faded through the doorway.

"You—you——" Spluttering fury, the captain rushed after Pie.

Pursued and pursuer vanished, both going strong. Harvey and Banks and Len looked at one another.

Captain Jerningham had made himself thoroughly disagreeable, and this was Pie's idea of tit for tat! It was worthy of the goat of the Oakshott Fifth!

"Pick up the jolly old scraps," said Banks.

The three stooped to gather up the scattered contents of the wastepaper-basket and replace them. The school-

boy detective paused with a torn sheet in his hand. His eyes, for a second, were glued on that torn sheet. It vanished the next moment—though not back into the wastepaper-basket.

The fragments were cleared up, the wastepaper-basket replaced in Mr. Chard's cosy corner, and then the three Oakshott Fifth Formers left the library.

"Better go and see what's happened to Pie," said Harvey.

"Let's," agreed Banks.

But Len Lex did not follow his friends. He was equally interested to know what had happened to the goat of Oakshott, but he was still more keenly interested to take a second look at that fragment of paper he had slipped unseen into his pocket. He turned from the hall into the breakfast-room, now deserted, drew the torn paper from his pocket, and examined it with minute care.

Harvey and Banks, if they could have seen it, would have wondered how it could interest Len Lex or anyone else. But the glint in the schoolboy detective's eyes told that it interested him, deeply and keenly. Yet there was nothing on the paper but a list of apparently meaningless figures:

"34, 9, 8, 15, 32, 26, 0, 22, 8, 17."

That was all, but that was enough to afford Detective-Inspector Bill Nixon's nephew a clue to the mystery of the Moat House!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER CAUGHT IN THE GHOST TRAP!

PORRIDGE rubbed his eyes and grinned a sleepy grin as from somewhere in the deep silence of the Moat House came the stroke of twelve.

When Pie and his chums had

gone to bed at ten o'clock, it had been easy for Pie to make up his mind to stay awake, sitting on the bed, and wait for midnight. But he had fallen asleep in his clothes.

The night was frightfully cold, and Pie woke up shivering, his feet feeling like lumps of ice, as the last stroke of twelve died away. He listened.

All was silent in the Moat House. Everybody was—or should have been—in bed and fast asleep. Pie had no doubt that his three friends were deep in slumber. It was unlikely, he thought, that the idea of sitting up and keeping watch for the chain-clanking ghost of the Moat House had occurred to any of them, and if the ghost walked that night, as it had done the previous night, it was going to walk into his clutches.

And Pie had little doubt that the ghost would turn out to be Harvey's swab of a cousin, Captain Cecil Jerningham.

Pie did not believe in ghosts, but he believed that Harvey's cousin, for some reason of his own, would stop at very little to get rid of the school-boy visitors to the Moat House.

Sleepy but resolute, Pie got out a large cardboard box and stooped in front of the old-fashioned chimney of his room. Taking the poker in his other hand, he raked down soot into the box.

A lot went over Pie's arms and shoulders, and some flecked his face, and some settled on his hair. Some went into his mouth, and he gurgled. A few flecks found a resting-place in his nose, and he very nearly sneezed.

Pie had not foreseen this when he planned his scheme, and he did not find it nice. But he was a stickler. He lifted the cardboard box out of

the grate at last, nearly full of soot, resolutely regardless of the fact that he was approximating in appearance to a chimney-sweep who had had a busy day.

He jammed a handkerchief to his nose and stifled a sneeze. The quarter chimed from somewhere. Taking the box in hand, Pie silently opened the door and peered into the darkness of the passage outside.

Vague sounds came to his ears as he listened, but not the sound he expected. Leaning on the door-post, the box of soot in his hand, he waited and listened.

Last night the ghost had walked, and Lex had gone after it and failed. Pie was not going to fail. With deep cunning, Pie had got that box of soot ready for the spectre of the old lord of Jerningham. For if the ghost was indeed, as he suspected, Captain Jerningham, trying to frighten the Oakshott fellows away, it would not be a lot of use grappling with him. Pie was no weakling, but Harvey's cousin could have tossed him across the passage with ease.

Pie was not going to collar the ghost; he was going to smother him with soot from head to foot, and he calculated that that would keep the trickster busy for a minute or two while his friends came on the scene. Even if he got away, he would be in such a state that it would be a complete show-up.

Standing in the doorway, Pie was prepared to wait well on into the small hours, if necessary. But he had not been five minutes on the watch when he heard a faint sound and felt a thrill of excitement.

It was the softest of footfalls. His grip closed hard on the box of soot.

Last night the ghost had walked with clanking chains. This time there

was no sound of a clanking chain. Very likely he was going to turn on the clank at Harvey's room. It was Harvey he wanted to scare away—if Sir Lucian's nephew went, naturally the fellows who had come with him for Christmas would go as well.

Pie listened, with thumping heart. Someone was in the darkness of the passage, and nobody had a right to be there except the Oakshott fellows—there were four rooms on that passage, occupied by Harvey, Banks, Lex, and Porringe.

To Pie's intent ear came a faint sound of suppressed breathing, and he grinned. Ghosts, if there were such things as ghosts, would hardly emit a sound of breathing. The ancient lord of Jerningham, who had been done to death in the secret dungeon by a greedy heir, and who was said to haunt the house, might clank his rusty chains as he walked; but he would not be heard breathing, neither would his footfalls be audible, however soft.

As the unseen prowler passed him, Pie woke to action. Judging

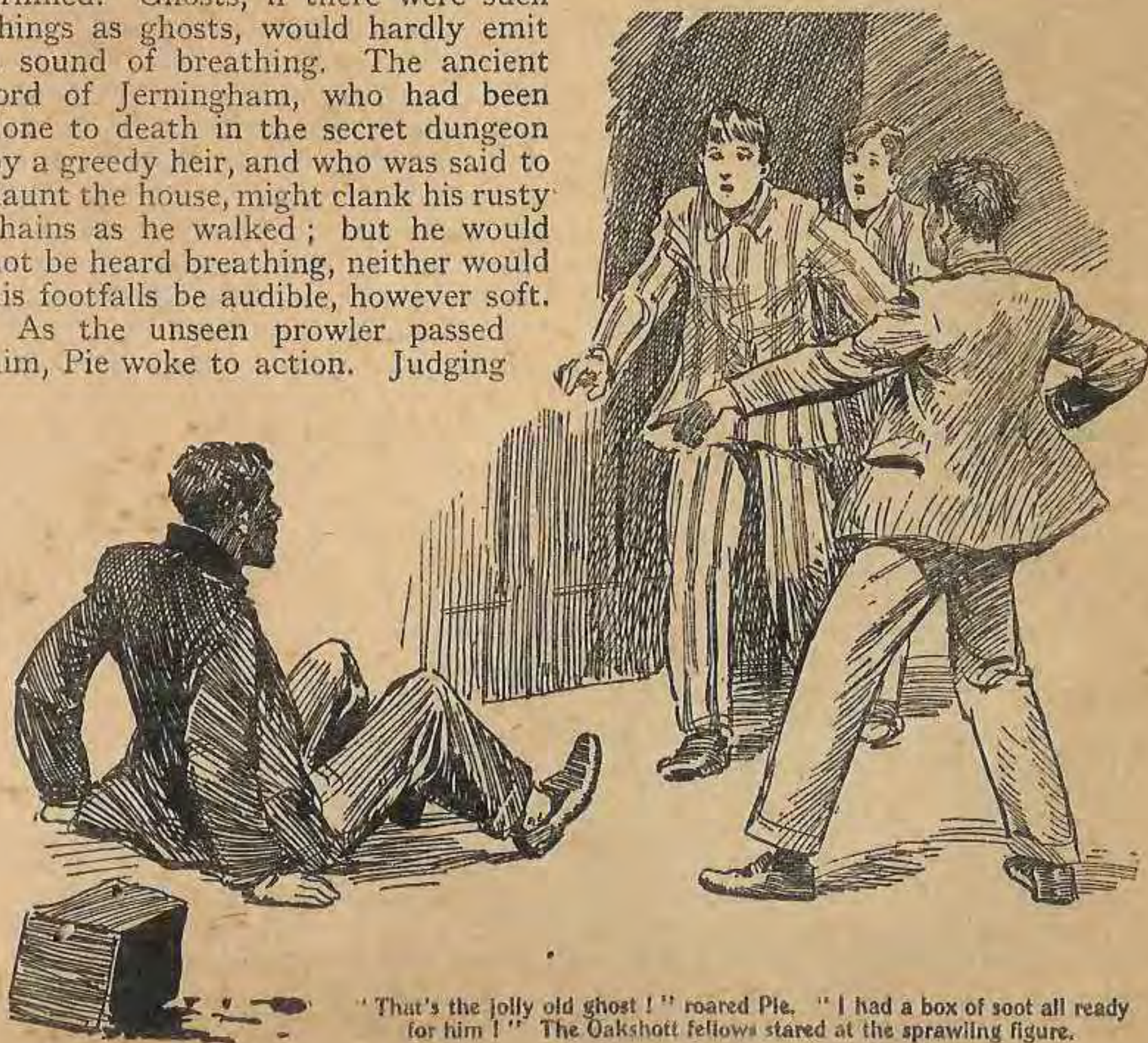
his movement by the faint sound he could hear, he made a step forward, the box of soot raised in both hands, and slammed it hard.

Crash! The cardboard box crumpled, and the soot flew out in black masses. There was a horrible gurgle from the dark, a sound of tottering feet, and a heavy fall.

"Got him!" yelled Pie.

Soot enveloped him, and he almost sneezed his head off.

"Urrggh! Got him! Wake up, you fellows! Atchooh—atchooh—atchooh! I say—yurrrrggh! I say—gurrgh! Got him—atchooooooh!"



"That's the jolly old ghost!" roared Pie. "I had a box of soot all ready for him!" The Oakshott fellows stared at the sprawling figure.

There was a sound of startled voices—of opening doors, and lights flashed on. From one doorway rushed Harvey, from another Banks. They stared in amazement at a sooty Pie, with a still more sooty figure sprawling at his feet, spluttering.

"Got him!" trilled Pie.
"Atchooooh! Got him!"

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER

TERRIFIC UPROAR!

LEN LEX, the schoolboy detective, was an extremely wary bird.

But on the present occasion he was taken utterly by surprise.

Len had not turned in that night. He had only waited for his friends to settle down before he slipped out of his room, in rubber shoes, to keep watch in the dark passage. Last night the unknown trickster who played ghost at the Moat House had escaped—apparently through a solid wall. No doubt that would have been easy work to a genuine spectre; but to Len it indicated a secret door in the old panels lining the walls of the passage.

A long and careful scrutiny in the day time had failed to reveal any such secret; but Len calculated that if the ghost of the Moat House used that hidden door while he was on the watch, he would spot it. So for two hours Len had watched—till a faint sound in the dark guided him towards Porringe's door.

That the goat of Oakshott had the same idea of keeping watch he did not know—still less did he dream of the measures Pie had taken for identifying the ghost beyond the shadow of a doubt. When a box of soot crashed on him, smothering him, suffocating him, and knocking him over, Len Lex had received the surprise of his life.

When the light flashed on in the passage, it came dimly to his eyes through a veil of soot. Voices came to him faintly through ears bunged up with soot.

Heedless of his own sooty state, Pie danced round the sprawling figure on the floor.

"I say, the jolly old ghost won't walk again in a hurry!" he chortled.

"Who—who is it?" gasped Cedric Harvey.

"What—what is it?" stuttered Banks.

"That's the jolly old ghost!" roared Pie. "Ha, ha! I sat up to wait for him—and I got him! I had a box of soot ready for him! See?"

"Oh crumbs!"

The Oakshott fellows stared at the sprawling figure. Recognition was impossible. Len Lex's uncle, the keenest detective-inspector at Scotland Yard, could not have identified him at that moment. Only the whites of his eyes relieved the sooty blackness.

"Who are you?" roared Harvey.

"Gurrrrrggh!"

Len sat up, but he could not speak. Soot was in his mouth and throat, almost throttling him. He could only utter horrible gurgles.

"Needn't ask that!" chortled Pie. "I jolly well knew it was your swab of a cousin—Captain Jerningham. Ha, ha! He never knew I was waiting for him with a box of soot! Ha, ha!"

"You've woke the house!" said Banks.

Lights flashed on at the end of the passage. Startled voices and footsteps showed that others had been awakened by the alarm.

"O.K.!" chuckled Pie. "Let them all see the gallant captain! He's worth seeing! Ha, ha!"

Harvey and Banks, staring blankly at the sooty one, were struck by the fact that he did not look so tall as the Army man. But Pie was thinking of nothing but his triumph over the cheeky swab who had shaken him, and who had the neck to set up as master of the house because Sir Lucian Jerningham had mysteriously disappeared. Pie had no doubts.

"Call Lex!" chortled Pie. "I wonder he hasn't woke up, with all this row! Hallo, here they come!"

Whishaw, the butler, came round the corner of the passage from the landing. Others could be heard following him. Evidently the whole household had been awakened by the terrific uproar. Whishaw, half-dressed, startled out of his usual calm, jumped almost clear of the floor at the sight of what met his eyes.

"What—what——" he gasped.

"The jolly old ghost, Whishaw!" chortled Pie. "I got him with a box of soot! Know who he is, Whishaw? Ha, ha! They wouldn't know Captain Jerningham if he turned up on parade like that! What? Ha, ha!"

"Captain Jerningham!" gasped the butler. "But——"

"What-ho!" trilled Pie. "I say, look at him! Ha, ha!" Then his merry chortle broke off at sight of a figure that followed Whishaw round the corner. Pie stared, with starting eyes, at Captain Jerningham!

"What the dickens is all this disturbance?" roared the captain angrily, as he strode up the passage. "What silly schoolboy trick is this?"

Pie did not answer. Up to that moment he had not had the faintest shadow of doubt that Cecil Jerningham sprawled at his feet, smothered with soot. Now he could not speak! He could only goggle!

"What does it mean?" thundered

the captain. "Cedric, is this the kind of trick you play, a mad schoolboy joke, in the house of your uncle whose fate is unknown—for whose body the police are searching the park? Good heavens, have you no sense of propriety, no sense of shame?"

Harvey gave him a defiant glare.

"You can shut up, Cecil!" he retorted.

"You young rascal! You and your mob of silly schoolboys!" panted Captain Jerningham. "You shall leave this house to-morrow!"

"Chuck it!" answered Harvey. "You're not master here yet, Cecil Jerningham—and won't be, if my uncle is found. And——"

"How dare you play such silly tricks?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" snapped Harvey. "Somebody's been playing ghost here, and Porringe seems to have got him!"

"Who is that?" Captain Jerningham stared down angrily at the sooty figure. He made a movement to grasp at it, but drew back his hand; it was too sooty to touch. "Who—who is it? Whishaw, do you know who it is?"

"No, sir!" gasped the butler.

"Who are you?" roared the captain, and backed away a little as the sooty figure tottered to its feet, shedding clouds of soot.

"Oooooogh! Urrrgh! Groooooogh!"

A crowd of startled servants stared from the end of the passage. Whishaw looked round at them.

"I—I—I cannot imagine who it is, sir!" stammered the butler. "Everyone is here, except Mr. Chard——"

Mr. Chard was Sir Lucian's librarian and secretary.

The captain gave an angry laugh.

"It cannot be Mr. Chard! Who is it?" His eyes gleamed at the

Oakshott fellows. "Where is the other one—the boy Lex? Is he who has been playing tricks?"

"Rot!" snapped Harvey. "Lex is in bed in his room——"

"Blessed if I know why he hasn't woke up, with all this row!" said Banks. "I'll call him!"

"It is Lex!" thundered the captain. "Good heavens! This is the kind of thing your friends think appropriate in a house of mourning, Cedric! A stupid schoolboy practical joke!"

"It—it can't be Lex!" stuttered Harvey, and added as Banks came out of Len's room with a startled face: "Haven't you called Lex, Banker?"

"He—he—he's not there!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Urrggh! I—I'm—— Oooogh!" spluttered Len, trying to get the words out. "I'm—— Urrrggh! Ooooch!"

"This is Lex!" snarled the captain. "A schoolboy prank—in such a place—at such a time! Pah!"

He turned on his heel and strode away. Harvey and Banks gazed at Len—they knew it was Len now, though they were as far as ever from recognising him. Pie blinked at him.

"That ass Lex!" gasped Pie. "That ass playing ghost—my hat! I thought it was that Army swab! Lex! Oh crumbs!"

"You fool!" came through the soot. "Urrggh! You dunderhead! Ooooch! You silly—grooogh—ass! Ooooch!"

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Pie indignantly. "What were you playing ghost for, I'd like to know?"

"You born idiot!" Len was getting his voice back at last. "You goat! I was keeping watch for the ghost!"

"Oh!" gasped Pie.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Banks.

"Goodness gracious!" gasped Whishaw, then grinned. "Really—ha, ha!"

"That goat Porringe!" said Harvey. He grinned. "Poor old Lex! That priceless goat Porringe has——"

"I—I thought——" gasped Pie. "Here, keep off! Keep off, Lex, you silly ass!" he yelled as the sooty figure leaped at him.

Generally, Len was very good-tempered and patient with the goat of the Oakshott Fifth. But his temper failed him now. He hurled himself at Pie, hitting out right and left.

Pie, yelling, landed on his back with a crash. Then, breathing wrath and soot, the schoolboy detective tramped away to the bathroom. He had plenty of work on hand for a considerable part of the night with soap and hot water!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER

NO LUCK!

"BREAKFAST, sir!" hinted Whishaw to Len Lex, who was leaning on the oaken balustrade of the high gallery that surrounded the hall of the Moat House, deep in the columns of a newspaper, reading what it had to say about the mysterious disappearance of Sir Lucian.

Len glanced up from his newspaper, keeping his place with a finger-tip, and said:

"Tell the others I'm coming in two ticks, Whishaw!"

"Very good, sir!" said the butler, and disappeared down the staircase. Len was deep in his newspaper, again before Whishaw was gone. Even breakfast on a cold and frosty morning, and the summons from his friends

to join them, seemed unable to tear him away from his perusal.

Little sleep as Len had had overnight, he had been up early in the morning. He had paced in the oak gallery over the hall while he waited for his friends to turn out; but when they went down he did not follow. Had anyone in the Moat House been aware that Len was a detective as well as a schoolboy, such a one might have inferred that he had some reason for remaining where he was, apart from his desire to ascertain all that the newspapers had to say about lost Sir Lucian.

Deep as that perusal was, Len was keeping watch and ward. Captain Jerningham passed him—emitting an audible sniff as he passed—and went down, Len apparently deaf to it. But when John, one of Whishaw's staff of menservants, came up with a well-laden tray in his hands, Len closed the newspaper and stepped right in John's way.

Like all the other menservants in the Moat House, John had turned out at the alarm in the night, and had seen Len sprawling in soot, and he grinned at the recollection. He ceased to grin, however, as Len very nearly barged into the tray. John halted, and jerked back the tray out of his way.

"Oh, sorry!" said Len. As if he feared that the tray would be upset, he caught hold of it. Finding it safe in John's hands, he let go again,



"Here, keep off, Lex, you silly ass!" yelled Pie as the sooty figure leaped at him, hitting out right and left.

flicking away the spotless table-napkin that covered what it bore. Breakfast—a very ample breakfast—was revealed on the tray.

"Well, I'm getting clumsy!" remarked Len, with a smile, as he put the table-napkin back in place. "Mr. Chard still breakfasting in his room, John?"

"Yes, sir," said John. "I'm taking it up now, sir!"

"Mr. Chard's cold does not seem to have spoiled his appetite!" smiled Len. "But I suppose most of that will be taken away again!"

"Oh, no, sir!" said John. "Precious little, sir! I think Mr. Chard

believes in feeding a cold, sir. Cook says it's wonderful how his appetite has improved since he caught that cold in the park, looking for the master!"

John marched on with his well-laden tray. Having seen him turn into Mr. Chard's rooms, Len went downstairs and joined his friends at breakfast. Captain Jerningham was not there; he did not choose to breakfast with the Oakshott party.

Len sat down with a good appetite, and a smiling glimmer in his eyes. Detective-Inspector William Nixon would have recognised that glimmer had he been present, and would have known that the schoolboy detective was satisfied with the way matters were going.

"The ghost never walked after all," said Harvey. "But I fancy he would have if that goat Pie hadn't kicked up a shindy and warned him that he was being watched for. I expect he heard it all from behind the secret panel in the passage. You might have got him but for that goat!"

"Well, I like that!" said Pie warmly. "I'd have got him if he walked—if Lex hadn't barged in and bagged the soot! Lex spoiled the whole thing!"

"Well, we mucked it up between us," said Len amicably. "I'll leave keeping watch to you after this, Porridge."

"Do!" said Pie, with a grunt.

Banks gave Len a penetrating look.

"You mean that you don't think the ghost will walk again, Lex!" he remarked.

Len grinned. Of his three friends, old Banker was the keenest, and he had read what was in Len's mind.

"It's rotten, you know," said Harvey. "It gives my dashed cousin a handle against us. Not that I

care what he thinks, blow him! Like his cheek to butt in! But he makes out that we've been going in for schoolboy larks, while my poor old Uncle Lucian——" Harvey's voice trembled a little, and he buried his face in his coffee-cup.

"Cheeky swab!" said Pie. "Look here! Let's go after him when he goes out and give him a jolly good snowballing—what?"

Pie's three friends replied together: "Shut up, you goat!"

Pie snorted. The Oakshott fellows finished their breakfast—Len, who had started last, finishing first and rising from the table.

"Anything on?" asked Banks.

"What about another squint at those oak panels upstairs?" suggested Len. "We jolly well know there must be a secret door where the ghost vanished the other night!"

"We've had a jolly good look for that!"

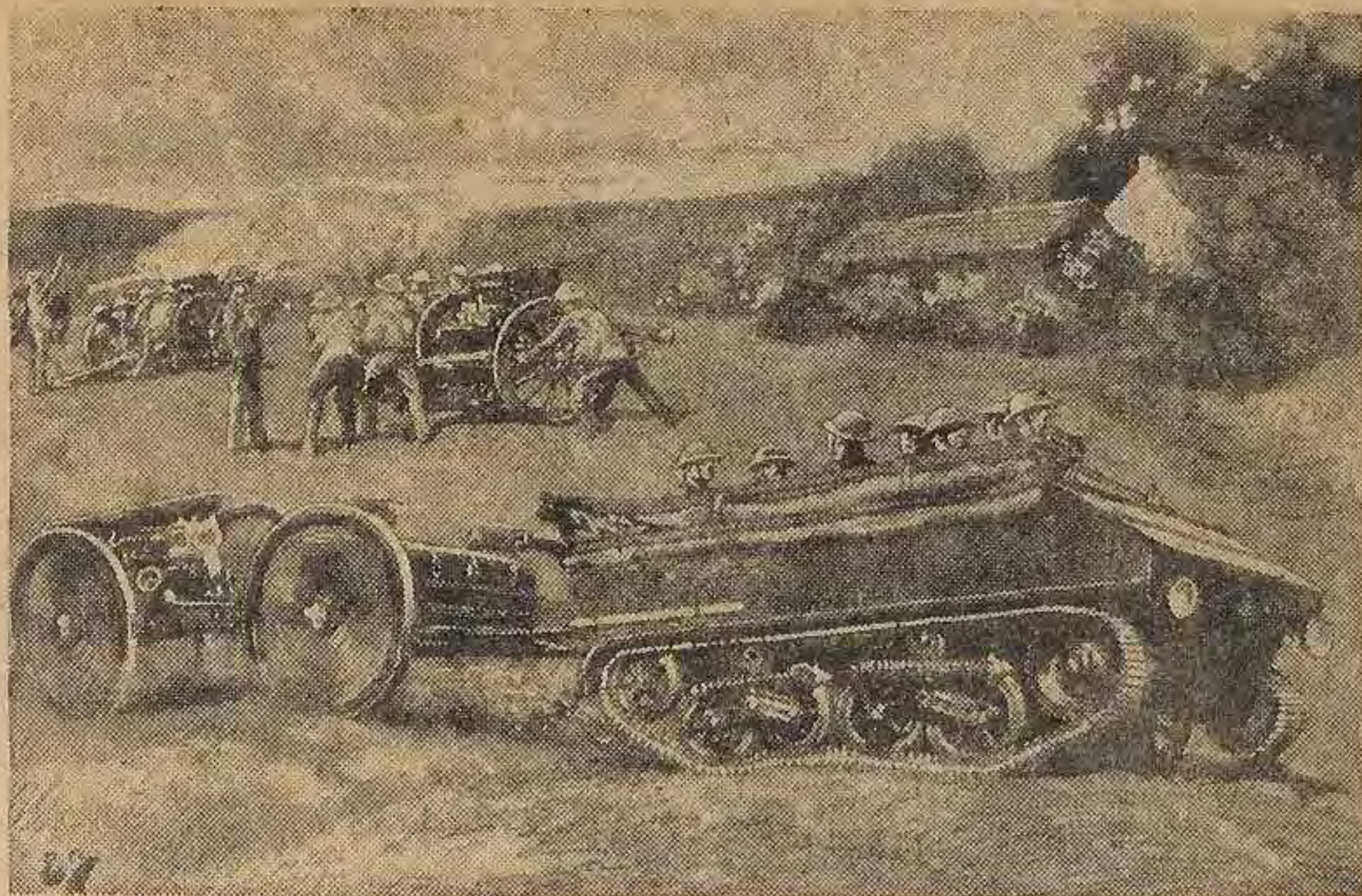
"Let's have another!"

"Oh, all right!"

The Oakshott fellows went up to where their bedrooms were. While his friends rooted up and down that passage, however, Len Lex gave his attention to the old oak wall of the gallery. If he hoped to spot any secret in that wall, he had no luck; and he ceased his scrutiny when Mr. Chard came along from his room, a green baize bag in his hand.

"Good-morning, sir!" said Len. And his friends came out into the gallery to bid Mr. Chard good-morning also. All of them liked the plump, good-tempered librarian of the Moat House. Len glanced at the well-filled bag in Mr. Chard's hand. The librarian carried books and documents from the library to his room in that bag. Harvey had told his friends that old Chard was a

THE MODERN BRITISH ARMY IN ACTION



The use of mechanised transport has more than doubled the mobility of the Field Artillery. The average speed of horse-drawn guns is 4 to 5 m.p.h. ; tractor-drawn guns can travel at 15 to 20 m.p.h.—a great advantage for a field battery forced to shift to a position miles away within a few minutes.

The illustration shows a battery of 18-pounder field guns in action. The gun in the centre of illustration is being hauled into position by its crew, while the gun and limber, at detachable front of gun carriage, is being drawn into place by a tractor. The type illustrated is the Dragon Light MK 2, which carries a gun crew of six besides ammunition for the gun, and has a speed of 16 m.p.h.

For ammunition an 18-pounder uses high explosive,

shrapnel, or "carrier" shell. Shrapnel shell is loaded with bullets which burst over a wide area. "Carrier" shells may contain chemicals for raising a smoke screen, or starting fires.

A battery of six guns fires 70 H.E., or 90 shrapnel shells per minute, the guns having a maximum range of 10,000 yards. The gun crew are numbered : No. 1 is in command—In left of illustration No. 1 is giving the signal to fire by raising his arm ; No. 5 and No. 6 supply ammunition ; No. 4 sets the time fuse of the shells and loads the gun ; No. 3 aims the gun ; while No. 2 opens and closes the breech and fires the weapon. The battery is commanded by a major and is divided into three sections of two guns, each under a lieutenant.

bookworm, and it certainly looked as if he was.

"Any luck yet, sir?" asked Harvey eagerly.

"I am sorry to say no!" answered Mr. Chard. "I am making a very careful search, Master Cedric, among the old parchments and plans in my charge. If the secret dungeon exists, as you fancy, I may chance upon

some hint concerning it. But I fear that I can hold out little hope!"

Harvey's face set obstinately.

"The secret dungeon does exist," he said. "That old legend was not founded on nothing. Sir Lucian of Tudor times was shut up in that hidden dungeon, and left to die in chains by his nephew and heir; that was the beginning of the ghost story.

Ten to one there's some clue to it in the Jerningham papers ! ”

“ There are a vast number of ancient parchments dealing with the records of the Jerningham family,” said Mr. Chard. “ I am going through them, annotating them for my work on the ‘Antiquities of Jerningham.’ So far I have found no allusion whatever to the existence of a secret dungeon. But I have very many yet to examine. I shall do my best, Master Cedric.”

“ I’m sure of that ! ” said Harvey.

“ We’re going down now, sir,” said Len, as the librarian turned towards the stairs. “ Please let me carry your bag down for you ! ”

He put his hand on the green baize bag as he spoke. Mr. Chard jerked it away quite sharply.

“ Thank you—not at all ! ” he said.

“ Going down, Lex ? ” asked Porringe, with a stare. “ I thought you came up here to hunt for—My hat ! ”

Why Len Lex gave him a sudden barge, Porringe did not know. It was not like Len to play such thoughtless tricks ; it was much more like Pie himself to barge a fellow headlong, and think it funny ! This time, however, it was Len who barged, so suddenly that Pie went staggering and crashed right into Mr. Chard—sending him staggering, too, and the green baize bag shooting from his hand.

“ You ass ! ” roared Pie.

“ Lex ! ” gasped Harvey and Banks together.

Len, unheeding, leaped for the green baize bag. Quick as he was, Mr. Chard was quicker. He jumped at the bag, grasped it, and pushed Len back with the other hand. For the moment, the good-humoured expression had quite left his face.

“ Sorry, sir ! ” gasped Len. “ I——”

“ You clumsy young fool ! ” gasped

Mr. Chard. Evidently his good temper had for once failed him.

Harvey reddened with annoyance. Captain Jerningham was coming up the stairs, and he stopped in the gallery, looking on with a sarcastic sneer on his face. It was intensely annoying to Cedric Harvey. Whatever might be said of the sooty episode of the night, there was no doubt that this was reckless skylarking ; extremely inappropriate in a house of which the master had mysteriously disappeared just before Christmas, and whom few expected to see in life again. This time, at least, Captain Jerningham had reason for his contemptuous sneer.

“ So you are getting the benefit of schoolboy high spirits, Chard ! ” said the captain. “ I heard you say that you liked youthful company in the house. I hope you find it enjoyable.”

Mr. Chard gasped for breath, but did not answer. And the young Army man, with a curling lip, walked away to his room.

“ You utter ass, Lex ! ” panted Pie. “ Gone mad, or what ? ”

“ I hope you’ll excuse me, Mr. Chard,” said Len penitently. “ I really hope——”

“ Really, such frolics are quite out of place in this house, Lex ! ” said Mr. Chard, in quite a good-humoured tone, however. He seemed to have recovered his temper in a moment. “ You might have scattered my documents all over the place, and some of them are of inestimable value from an antiquarian point of view. However, there is no harm done ! ”

Mr. Chard went down the stairs. Len’s friends looked at him expressively.

“ You frabjous ass ! ” Pie recommenced. “ Barging a fellow over—right into poor old Chard, too ! ”

"Oh, come on!" said Len.

He followed the librarian down the stairs, and his friends followed in rather grim silence. Mr. Chard went into the library and shut the door after him. The Oakshott fellows remained in the hall.

"Well, are we going down to the vaults again this morning?" asked Harvey, rather gruffly. "That was the programme."

"Let's!" said Len. "But—I think I'll speak to Mr. Chard. He might care to come with us!"

He went into the library to inquire of Mr. Chard. In the alcove in the wall by the fireplace the librarian had set the green baize bag on the table, and was about to draw the velvet hangings which shut off the alcove from the great room. In that cosy corner Mr. Chard did most of his work. As Len came up, the librarian glanced at him and sat down, taking up a pen and dipping it into the ink.

"We're going down to explore the vaults again, Mr. Chard," said Len. "I was wondering if you'd care to join us?"

Mr. Chard smiled.

"I am afraid I must decline," he said. "I have a slight cold, and the damp air of the vaults would hardly

do it good. Moreover, I have promised Master Cedric to go through the Jerningham papers. I shall be busy here till lunch-time."

"Then we'll see you again at lunch, sir," said Len. "We shall stay down till then."

Mr. Chard nodded and began to write a letter. Len left the library and rejoined his friends.



The schoolboy detective leaped for the green baize bag. But quick as he was Mr. Chard was quicker. He jumped at the bag, grasped it, and pushed Len back with the other hand. "You clumsy young fool!" he gasped.

"Chard coming?" asked Harvey, with a touch of sarcasm.

"No; he doesn't seem to like the idea."

"You must be an ass to think he would!" said Pie. "A man who has a cold, and has to breakfast in bed, going down into damp vaults—I must say you're an ass, Lex, old man!"

"Oh, come on!" said Banks. "Let's get going!"

Whishaw provided the key, and the Oakshott fellows proceeded to the old arched entrance of the vaults at the end of a dark stone passage. Dark and gloomy looked the old vaults as they descended the stone stair—far from inviting. Three of the fellows flashed on torches—but Len went through his pockets and failed to produce one.

“Mean to say you’ve forgotten your torch?” asked Pie. “Well, some fellows are blithering idiots!”

“Three will be enough,” said Harvey. “Let’s get on!”

“Well, you fellows get on! I’ll cut back and get my torch and follow you,” said Len. And he ran up the stone stair. Harvey grunted, and led the way through the series of gloomy stone arches, Banks and Porringe at his heels. Len emerged above ground; and perhaps he thought that he might have left his torch in the library, for it was to that apartment that he proceeded. He crossed over to Mr. Chard’s cosy corner and looked in between the hangings.

“If you’ve seen a torch lying about, sir——” he said.

He did not finish the sentence. The cosy corner was unoccupied. Mr. Chard, who had said that he would be busy till lunch, had apparently changed his mind, for he was gone. The green baize bag also was gone.

For a long moment Len stood looking into the deserted cosy corner; then he left the library, a faint smile on his face. He went upstairs to his room, where he found the missing torch without difficulty, and hurried down to the vaults to join Harvey & Co.

Winking lights far down the gloomy vaults guided him. In a few minutes more he was with his friends. For

three hours the Oakshott fellows explored the dark vaults that stretched far and wide beneath the Moat House—tapping walls, peering into corners and cavities, Len as industrious in the quest as his comrades.

In Harvey’s mind was the fixed conviction that the secret dungeon, in which the Sir Lucian of ancient times had been done to death, still existed—and almost as strong was his conviction that the Sir Lucian of the present day was immured in it, like his remote ancestor, and for the same reason—the ruthless greed of a nephew and heir who could not wait!

But if the secret dungeon existed, it was well hidden. The Oakshott fellows came up, grubby and tired and glum, in time to get a wash before lunch. And Mr. Chard, at the lunch-table, had no news—his search of ancient documents had been as futile as the schoolboys’ search in ancient vaults. No discovery had been made by either party—unless, indeed, the schoolboy detective had made a discovery that morning, of which he said no word!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER

UNCLE BILL TAKES A HAND!

“Too thick for a car, Chard!” said Captain Jerningham. He was standing in the doorway, looking out into the dusk. All day the snow had been coming down, and the old roofs and red chimney-pots of the Moat House were hidden under it; the ancient moat was filled to its brim, and the leafless trees in the park were ridged with snow. Snow lay banked among the trees, and the search for lost Sir Lucian in that direction had been abandoned for the time. The drive—from the doorway to the bridge on the moat—was piled with snow.

Mr. Chard, looking out at the captain's side, nodded. It was obvious that no car could be taken out.

"I shall walk to the station!" said Mr. Chard.

"I'll walk with you, Chard," said Captain Jerningham. "I shall be glad to get out for an hour!" His glance rested as he spoke on the group of four Oakshott fellows standing by the crackling log-fire in the hall. "What train are you catching?"

"The five-thirty at Olkham—to change at Holme for London."

"Plenty of time, then! A rotten night for your journey, though!" said the captain.

"I shall not enjoy it," said Mr. Chard. "But it is a matter of duty. For many years I have never failed to spend one night a week with my aged father—nothing short of actual illness would keep me from it!"

"With your cold——"

"That is very slight!" Mr. Chard smiled apologetically. "If it were a matter of pleasure, sir, I should naturally forgo my accustomed weekly visit to London, in the present tragic circumstances here. But it is, as I have said, a matter of duty. I shall hope to hear good news when I return to-morrow."

"Not much chance of that!" muttered the captain. "I've been clinging to the hope that my uncle still lives. But what is the use? If he lives, where is he? Kidnapped? Nonsense! Who could have any imaginable motive——"

"That is hard to say, sir!" said Mr. Chard. "But I shall still hope and trust that Sir Lucian will yet be found alive and well."

"But how—where?"

"That is beyond me, sir! But I have great faith in the sagacity of the police."

Captain Jerningham gave a grunt which indicated that he did not share Mr. Chard's faith. They moved away from the door and went to prepare for the walk to the station. The Oakshott fellows exchanged glances.

"Ever hear such an awful humbug?" breathed Pie. "Doesn't he jolly well know all the time where your uncle is, Harvey, old man?"

"I believe so," said Harvey, between his teeth.

"Chard's a decent old boy," said Pie. "He's not a young man, and it's not every man of his age who would trip up from Hampshire to London to see his jolly old pater in weather like this."

"He's always done it ever since I've known him," said Harvey. "One night a week in London, regular as clockwork. My uncle would have been glad for him to bring his old father down here sometimes, but the old chap's too old—over eighty, I believe. Chard's a jolly good sort."

"I don't envy him the trip," said Banks.

"Same here! Look here, as Chard's going out, I'm going to squat in his cosy corner and root through some of those dashed parchments," said Harvey. "Might turn something up. You fellows like to help?"

"Like a shot!" said Banks.

"I say!" Porringe glanced round mysteriously and lowered his voice. "I say, I've got an idea, you men! That swab's walking to the station with Chard. Lots of time to get ahead of them and give him a few snowballs——"

"Fathead!" said Banks.

"Goat!" said Harvey.

And they walked away to the library, leaving Pie indignantly frowning and Len Lex grinning. Len touched the goat of the Fifth on the arm.

"I'm game!" he murmured.

Pie brightened again.

"Good man!" he said. "Let's get our coats."

Well ahead of Mr. Chard and Captain Jerningham, Pie and Len slipped out of the house. They crossed the bridge over the moat and tramped down to the gates on to the Olkham road.

"Frightfully parky!" said Pie, coming to a halt at last. "This will do, Lex. No need to go farther."

"Unless they take the short cut," murmured Len.

"Oh, crumbs, I hadn't thought of that!"

"Let's get on to Olkham. Bound to see them at the station."

"Oh, all right!"

Pie had not anticipated so long a walk, and he was tired of tramping through snow by the time the cottages of Olkham village glimmered through the December gloom. He trudged on wearily towards the railway station, without noticing in the dark that his companion dropped behind for a few minutes.

During those few minutes Len Lex was occupied in a way that would have surprised Pie, had he been aware of it. Len stopped at the window of a cottage on the outskirts of the village and tapped at the glass—three sharp taps. Immediately the lower sash was pushed up. A glimmer of firelight within dimly revealed a stocky, muscular figure. A voice whispered from the gloom:

"You young rascal! What's the game now?"

Detective-Inspector William Nixon of Scotland Yard peered at the half-seen figure of his schoolboy nephew outside.

"I'm glad you were able to run down here, Bill," murmured Len. "I

jumped for joy when you told me on the 'phone that you'd come. I thought a spot of country air would do you good, Bill. In this delightful weather, too!"

"Cough it up!" said Mr. Nixon briefly.

"I hate to take you away from these delightful rural surroundings, Bill. But you've got to catch the five-thirty, change at Holme, and carry on till you see the lights of London."

"Give it a name!"

Len whispered. The man at the cottage window listened without interruption. Once or twice he grunted; that was all. When Len had finished, Mr. Nixon said briefly: "I get you!" and shut the window.

From the darkness came Pie's calling voice:

"Lex, you ass! Where are you? Lost yourself, or what? Of all the blithering asses——"

Len hurried on.

"Blessed if I know how you missed me!" snorted Pie. "I thought you were at my elbow, and when I looked round——"

"Come on, old bean."

They tramped on to the station. Taking up a strategic position at a convenient corner, they watched. A few minutes later a stocky man muffled up in a thick overcoat loomed from the gloom. Pie made a movement—Len gripped his arm and pulled him back. Mr. Nixon passed on into the station without even seeing them, and disappeared. It was a quarter of an hour later that two figures appeared, and Pie made another movement. Again Len held him in check.

"Wait till Chard's gone!" he murmured.

"Oh, all right!"

Mr. Chard and Captain Jerningham

passed into the station. Ten minutes later the sound of the train was heard. The engine shrieked; the train rolled away, glimmering through the December dark, carrying away Mr. Chard and Mr. Nixon among its other passengers.

A minute or two more, and Captain Jerningham would be coming out of the station, to walk back to the Moat House. Pie gripped snowballs in both hands, and grinned in happy anticipation. He chuckled softly—but his chuckle was turned into a frantic howl as his companion suddenly wedged a handful of snow down the back of his neck.

"Yuuuurrggh!" gurgled Pie. "You mad ass—urrrgh—I'll—"

He whirled fiercely on Len, who, laughing, beat a retreat up the village street. After him rushed the infuriated Pie, hurling snowballs. They missed by yards. But a snowball that came whizzing back did not miss—it landed right on Pie's nose, and squashed there. Pie staggered.

"Oh, you swab!" gasped Pie, and rushed on.

He forgot that Captain Jerningham would be coming out of the station—forgot everything but vengeance on that swab Lex. That Len was leading him away from the spot, undesirous



Len whispered, and the man at the cottage window listened without interruption. Once or twice he grunted, that was all.

that Captain Jerningham should see anything of them, or that Pie should carry out his stunt of snowballing the Army man, Porringe did not guess—any more than he guessed that Len Lex had private reasons for taking that walk down to Olkham.

Pie had enough to think of in the way of snowballs, for Len, as he retreated, whizzed one after another. Snowball after snowball squashed on Pie's infuriated countenance—and a dozen times he nearly had the retreating enemy—but never quite.

A hand reached out of the darkness and grabbed his cap.

"Race you home!" said Len.

"Gimme my cap!" shrieked Pie.

The chase was breathless—right up to the porch of the Moat House. Then, at last, Pie had his enemy cornered. He grabbed back his cap, jammed it on his head, and punched and punched and punched.

Len, feeling that poor old Pie was entitled to some compensation, let him land a few punches, which did not do much damage on a thick overcoat. Whishaw opened the door and stared at them.

"Pax!" gasped Len. "Give you best, old man!"

"I've a jolly good mind——"

"Pax, old man! You win!"

And Pie, mollified by his victory, tramped in after Len, gasping for breath, under the disapproving eye of Whishaw.

Harvey and Banks, looking tired and dispirited after a fruitless search for mention of the dungeon in the ancient documents, met Len and Pie in the hall.

"So you're back!" growled Harvey. "I'm surprised at you, Lex. Everyone knows Pie's a goat, but you—surely there's been enough trouble in this house to-day, without you giving my cousin additional cause for going off the deep end!"

A hot retort sprang to Len's lips, but he bit it back. It certainly did look as if he'd been playing the fool, and it was impossible to account for his actions without disclosing the fact that he was a detective.

"Captain Jerningham will have no cause for complaint when he returns," he replied quietly, and went up to bed.

"Poor old Harvey's all strung up," he murmured, as he got between the

sheets. "But unless I'm hopelessly out in my reckoning, he'll be enjoying his Christmas to the full before very many hours have passed." And with a happy smile on his face he fell asleep!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER

BEHIND THE SETTEE!

TWO mornings later Harvey, Banks and Porringe stood in the open doorway, looking out through the stone porch into the winter sunshine. Harvey's face was glum. The problem of his uncle's disappearance seemed more hopeless than ever.

"Where's Lex?" asked Pie.

"Gone out, I think," said Banks.

"Here comes Inspector Shute," said Harvey bitterly. "Lot of use his hanging round the place."

Inspector Shute, stocky, impassive, came across the bridge over the moat, and up to the porch. He glanced at the Oakshott fellows and came in. Captain Jerningham came out of the smoke-room and gave him a nod. He did not glance at the schoolboys.

"Anything new, Shute?" asked the captain wearily.

"As a matter of fact, sir, I have certain reasons for ordering a search in the corner of the park by the Olkham Lane," said the inspector. "If you would care to give my men your assistance——"

"Gladly! Anything is better than doing nothing," said the captain. "Whishaw, my coat, please." The butler helped him on with his coat and handed him his hat. "You are coming, inspector?"

"I wish to speak to Mr. Chard—but I will see you later, sir."

Captain Jerningham tramped into the snow and disappeared across the moat bridge. The inspector glanced at Harvey & Co.

"If you boys would care to help——" he suggested.

"Is there anything we can do?" asked Harvey in surprise.

"The search will be somewhat extensive, and every little helps," said the inspector. "If you are willing——"

"Of course!" said Harvey. "Come on, you men—we can help, and keep clear of my cousin all the same. I dare say we shall see Lex on our way."

Harvey, Banks, and Porringe put on their coats and followed the way the captain had gone.

"Is Mr. Chard down yet?" asked the inspector after they had gone.

"No, he is breakfasting in his room as usual," answered the butler. "No doubt in half an hour——"

"Then I will wait. Please tell Mr. Chard that I am waiting in the library when he comes down." The inspector went into the library, and Whishaw closed the door after him.

The officer stood before the fire, warming himself. Then he moved along to a great oak settee close by the wall, within a short distance of Mr. Chard's cosy corner. And, though the library of the Moat House was, to all appearance, untenanted by anyone but himself, he said in a low voice:

"Well?"

From behind the settee came an answering voice, in equally low tones. It was the voice of the schoolboy detective:

"You got my uncle on the 'phone after what I said to you yesterday, Mr. Shute?" he asked.

"Having — after communicating with Mr. Nixon—decided to accept your assistance, Master Lex, I have done exactly as you desired. Captain Jerningham and your friends are now on the other side of the park, and likely to remain there till lunch. I am here, finding you in concealment,

as you asked. I am acting on Mr. Nixon's assurance that you have information to give."

"Bill isn't letting you down, Mr. Shute!" came the quiet voice from the unseen schoolboy detective. "Thanks for getting here in good time. We've got a good twenty minutes before Chard blows in—more than enough."

"I presume that your presence here is unknown?"

"It is. I went out for a walk, nipped in by the french window, and here I've been for the last hour."

"What have you to tell me?"

"Sir Lucian is a prisoner in the secret dungeon under the Moat House, like his ancestor in the legend. His kidnapper visits him once a day, generally in the morning, to take him food."

"You accuse Captain Jerningham, as the boy Harvey suspects?" said Inspector Shute.

"No."

"Who, then?"

"Chard! And now look at this!"

A hand from behind the settee passed up a torn sheet of paper. Mr. Shute took it and fixed his eyes on it. In neat figures was a strange list:

"34, 9, 8, 15, 32, 26, 0, 22, 8, 17."

"That was found in Chard's waste-paper basket," murmured the voice from behind the settee. "Chard's fist! You don't need telling that it is a list of roulette numbers. The learned and respectable librarian of the Moat House sits at the green table, Mr. Shute, taking down the numbers when the ball spins on the wheel. And he sits in his cosy corner, not always at work, but calculating the run of numbers, planning a system, I've no doubt, for beating the jolly old croupier at his game."

"Having given that bit of paper the once-over, Mr. Shute, I had an idea

that our friend's weekly visit to London to see his aged father might bear looking into. Bill looked—at a tip from me! And the night before last Chard did not visit any aged father—I doubt if he has one—he spent the night, to a very late hour, at a certain roulette club in Soho, losing money hand over fist, with Bill looking over his shoulder!”

Mr. Shute slipped the paper into his pocket-book as the murmuring voice went on:

“Somebody doesn't want schoolboys here rooting over the place—especially old Harvey, with his belief in a secret dungeon. Somebody spotted us in the park the night we came, and put up a spectral performance. The captain was in the park—but so was Chard! That somebody carried on the game, got up as old Sir Lucian's giddy spectre, startling Harvey, and the whole household turned up—except Chard!

“Whoever played ghost was behind a secret panel—and Chard was not awakened by a row that awakened everybody else.”

“Is that all?”

“Hardly! Chard managed to catch a bit of a cold, which causes him to take brekker in his room—he had to give some explanation of a new habit since Sir Lucian disappeared. John takes up his breakfast, and has confided to me that Mr. Chard's appetite has seemed to improve. Big breakfast—nothing ever left. Chard takes books to his room in a green baize bag—but does not, I think, bring the books down again in it. Very particular about that bag is Mr. Chard—flies into a temper if a fellow barges it out of his hand, and tries to pick it up for him—as I happened to do one morning——”

“Food?”

“Exactly! A prisoner must be fed. Chard settles down in his cosy corner and tells an inquiring schoolboy that he will be busy till lunch; that inquiring schoolboy looks in a quarter of an hour later and he is gone—green baize bag and all. Chard's cosy corner is oak panelled, and that inquiring schoolboy has found opportunities to test the panels—no luck! Better luck this morning, I hope!”

“I understand!”

“Bill watched the good man losing in one night more than his year's salary as librarian and secretary here. He has charge of Sir Lucian's investments. Query: Whose money does he lose on the green table? Does he want a signature to a cheque or to a transfer of stocks and shares, and is Sir Lucian parked in a quiet spot till he decides to sign?”

The murmuring voice ran on softly for a few minutes more. Then Mr. Shute left the settee, resumed his place before the fire, where he stood warming his coat-tails when Mr. Chard came into the library with a green baize bag in his hand.

He laid the bag on the table in his cosy corner and bowed politely to Inspector Shute. The inspector's eyes lingered on the bag.

“Whishaw says that you desired to see me, Mr. Shute,” said the librarian. “I am quite at your service.”

“Thank you, Mr. Chard,” said the inspector. “I am carrying on a search in the park close by Olkham Lane. Captain Jerningham and the boys are helping me, and if you would care to accompany me——”

“I have every desire to help,” said Mr. Chard. “Say, in half an hour's time——”

“Very well, Mr. Chard. I will expect you,” said the inspector, and left the library.

Mr. Chard followed him to the door and watched Whishaw let him out of the house. Then he closed the library door, returned to his cosy corner, and drew the hangings across.

The velvet curtains completely shut in Mr. Chard's cosy corner. They also concealed from Mr. Chard a boyish figure that emerged silently from under a settee, slipped quietly across to the alcove, and applied an eye to a narrow slit in the velvet recently made by a penknife.

Unaware of that eye, Mr. Chard picked up the green baize bag and walked to the back of the alcove. Reaching the wall, he pressed a

certain spot in the ancient carved scrollwork, and a panel flew open on silent, well-oiled, hidden hinges.

Len Lex smiled as the secretary disappeared through the wall and the panel shut after him, strolled to the french window, opened it, and waved a hand to a stocky figure hovering on the terrace. Inspector Shute joined him, mutely inquiring.

"Follow on!" murmured Len Lex.

The secret panel flew open again, and Shute, breathing hard, followed the schoolboy detective through. As they trod softly down a seemingly endless spiral stair in the thickness of the ancient wall, there came,

"Sir Lucian!" gasped the butler. He gazed at the silver-haired man who leaned on the sturdy arm of Len Lex; and at Mr. Chard, livid with fury, the handcuffs on his wrists.



faintly from the darkness far below, the clank of a chain.

Whishaw almost fell down when the bell summoned him to the library, as he supposed, to answer the ring of Mr. Chard. The colour wavered in his cheeks, and his eyes bulged at what he saw.

"Sir Lucian!" he gasped.

He gazed at the silver-haired man who, pale, worn, haggard, leaned on the sturdy arm of Len Lex; at Mr. Chard, livid with fury, the handcuffs on his wrists, the grip of Inspector Shute on his arm; at a panel that stood wide open in the oak wall.

"Your master is found, Whishaw," said Len. "Inspector Shute has found him. Help him to his room."

"Help me, my good Whishaw!" said Sir Lucian Jerningham faintly. "Mr. Shute, will you take care of that scoundrel?"

"I have him safe, sir," said Mr. Shute stolidly, and Sir Lucian tottered from the library on the arm of the astounded butler—gazed at in awed amazement by startled servants, one of whom, at a word from the inspector, hurried away into the park to call Captain Jerningham and the Oakshott fellows to the house.

The master of Moat House was in bed, Whishaw had telephoned for the doctor, and Len Lex had seen Mr. Shute off in a car with his prisoner, when there was a tramp of hurried feet on the terrace. Smiling, Len opened the door to Captain Jerningham, Harvey, Banks, and Pie. They rushed in, breathless. The captain caught Len by the arm.

"My uncle——" he panted. "Is it true?"

"Quite!" said Len.

Harvey grabbed him by the other arm.

"Len—he's found?"

"Safe and sound in bed, waiting for the doctor. He's had a hard time, but he's pulling round all right."

"It was Chard," explained Len. "Acting from information received, Inspector Shute got him this morning. There is a secret panel in Chard's cosy corner that gives access to a spiral stair leading down to the secret dungeon, and Chard——"

"Chard!" stuttered Harvey.

"Old Chardy!" agreed Len. "Sir Lucian was tapped on the head from behind that night in the library, and woke up to find himself in the secret dungeon with a chain locked on him. And a man with a mask on his face came once a day with food——"

"But Chard!" gasped Captain Jerningham. "Why?"

"It seems that he wanted Sir Lucian to sign a paper—transfer of bonds, for a few thousand pounds," said Len. "Chard has been losing money. Your uncle never knew who the man was—never suspected Chard—till Mr. Shute followed him down into the dungeon to-day, slipped the handcuffs on him, and pulled the mask off his face."

"Where is the scoundrel?" panted Captain Jerningham.

"Mr. Shute has taken him over to Holme—charge of kidnapping and attempting to extort money," said Len.

Harvey looked at his cousin. His cousin looked at him.

"Sorry, Cecil!" muttered Harvey. The captain smiled faintly.

"A good deal was my fault," he said. "I was all nerves, with the anxiety and stress—and knowing what people suspected——"

"I was a fool——"

"So was I! Wash it all out! Come with me, kid—we must see him."

The cousins hurried up the stairs together.

"But how," gasped Pie, "did Shute spot the villain? I never dreamed of suspecting old Chard—and I'm a keen chap, as you know. How the thump did Shute do it?"

"From information received, I understand," said Len Lex. "That's what they call it, you know—information received!" For it had been agreed that nothing was to be said about his part in the case. The fact that he was a detective as well as a schoolboy was to remain a secret!

"Merry Christmas!" roared Pie Porringe.

Len roared, too, as a snowball caught him in the ear.

Bright and cheery was that Christmas morning. As bright and cheery was every face in the old Moat House. One accustomed face was missing—Mr. Chard was awaiting trial in a

cell no less secure than the ancient dungeon in which Sir Lucian had been a prisoner. But nobody at the Moat House wasted a thought on him.

Captain Jerningham, strolling on the terrace, grinned as Len staggered under Pie's snowball, stooped, gathered a handful of snow, and let Pie have it in turn—and Harvey and Banks, chuckling, joined in.

Sir Lucian Jerningham, looking from the library windows, laughed loud and long as the goat of the Fifth slipped in the snow and went head over heels into the moat—discovering that there was mud under the snow!

"Jolly, after all, you fellows!" said Harvey, when they sat down to Christmas dinner in the old oak hall, Sir Lucian at the head of the table, Captain Jerningham grinning under a paper cap, Whishaw hovering and benign. "Jolly, what?"

THE DUFFER'S DIARY

by Peter Cuthbert Gunner

(Champion Ass of Rookwood)

THEY all said, "Silver's up the pole!"

When he selected me for goal
Last week, against the Modern side.

"Just wait and see!
Leave this to me,"
I skornfully replied.

I took my stand inside the nett,
And round the goal, to my regret,
Speektators gathered, and began
To talk a lot
Of silly rot,
As only asses can!

I had to leave the goal to deal
With some of them, inkluding Peele;
And while I was thus ockupied,
The Moderns roared,
Bekause they skored
A goal against our side.

Then Silver had some words to say
In what I thought a nasty way.
I followed him, with self-kontrol,
Around the ground,
Until I found
They'd skored another goal!

Soon after that, I left the pitch
To deal with Lattrey, during which
The ball went in the nett from Doyle!
The crowd told me
I ought to be
Immersed in boiling oil!

Six—one we lost that giddy game!
For that, they all gave me the blame!
And so I tell them jolly plain—
They'd best beware,
And take good care,
Or I shan't play again!

An Old Boy Remembers!



*An interesting article
by Lieut.-Comdr. PAT
STANLEY, R.N., one-time
Captain of St. Jim's.*

IT was my privilege a few weeks ago to pay a visit to my old school for the first time since I left there sixteen years ago. I should certainly have gone earlier but for the fact that I have spent most of those sixteen years in sloshing about the seven seas in a cruiser. And many times, when I have been stewing in the China Sea or drinking iced lime-juice at Malta, my thoughts have gone back to the little sleepy hollow of Rylcombe and the ivy-covered school. I expected to find a great many changes in the old place.

Well, the first thing I saw on disembarking from the train was the identical horse-cab that took me away from the school, driven by the same identical driver, who was wearing (judging from its appearance) the same identical coat. The cab had not changed by so much as a single

splash of paint, but the horse was, perhaps, just a shade bonier than before. I climbed aboard this decrepit Ark and told Noah to get me to the school in one piece, if possible.

Rylcombe Village was also unchanged, save for a new cinema at the end of the High Street. It appeared to me that the village tuckshop still had the same slab of hard-bake, complete with dead flies, in its window. And when I reached the school I was quite staggered to find everything the same. It seemed as though the cab, instead of taking me away across the world for sixteen years, had merely turned round and brought me back.

Taggles was certainly a little older and a little crustier than when I dropped a couple of half-crowns into his horny palm as I went away. Otherwise he was not changed. Same

old bunch of keys, same old hat, same old grunt; and I even thought I saw his lips frame the same old remark about "young rips."

Dr. Holmes was as kindly as ever, but my old Housemaster, Mr. Kidd, had gone, his place being filled by a decent, athletic-looking chappie named Railton, who gave me tea in his study and proved a rattling good sort. One new feature, which I noticed at once, was electric light—we had gas lamps in my time.

And there was another change—Railton told me that caning was administered by "bending over." In my day we had it on the hands, but I really can't say which is the better method. Neither has any particular attraction.

I met Mr. Ratcliff, who was feature for feature the same old sourpuss as ever, bless him! One day he will forget himself and smile, and then his face will crack in halves and he'll have to be thrown away. I asked him if he remembered a fellow named Pelham. He replied sharply, "No, I do not!"—which was a lie. It's not easy to forget a Sixth Form man who, in a fit of exasperation, jams a wastepaper basket over your head and pushes you downstairs. Pelham was sacked on the spot, of course. He's sub-editor on a well-known daily paper now, I hear.

I looked into my old study in the Sixth, now occupied by a pleasant fellow named Darrell. Several prefects had dropped in to tea with him, and we had an interesting chat. I told them about an unexpected tea-party I myself once gave to the prefects. In those days I had a fag—a real gem of a fag—named Whibster, who was given me, for my sins, when he first came to St. Jim's. He was the dreamiest duffer I've ever seen.

One afternoon I decided to invite a friend, Crofter of the New House, to tea, as I wanted to have a chat about the cricket eleven. I sent Whibster over with the invitation. As he did not know Crofter by sight, it occurred to his brilliant brain that the best way of making quite sure that Crofter came to tea was to invite every prefect in the New House, and the right man would be bound to be among them.

Consequently, just as I had served up a nice little tea for two, my study was invaded by nine hungry men, who proceeded to make short work of the food on view, and then looked round for some more. I had to send an urgent SOS to the tuckshop, and as I was out of tin at the moment I had to borrow money all along the Sixth Form passage. The prefects of the New House owed a vote of thanks to Whibster, but he received something quite different from me.

I don't know what happened to Whibster when he left St. Jim's, but I should doubt whether he is alive to-day. Somebody must surely have slain him before now.

The present captain of the school, an Irish fellow named Kildare, is the right sort. I saw that at a glance. So are they all, if it comes to that. I



The vision of the ink-covered Conway shooting off the banisters into Mr. Kidd's waistcoat rose before my eyes.

watched the junior eleven in a match against Rookwood. The skipper, a youngster named Merry, made fifty-eight sparkling runs, and a fat New House fellow named Wynn bowled like a demon. Rookwood were well beaten by seven wickets, and we rarely did better than that in my day.

An elegant youth in spotless flannels and a monocle came up to welcome me to St. Jim's. Addressing me as "deah boy," he proceeded to do the honours with Chesterfieldian grace, and asked if it were not "twue" that I had been a friend of Lord Conway, his "eldah bwothah." I replied that it was perfectly true, but I felt rather dazed at the thought of Conway being related to such a peerless specimen of the old nobility. For Conway, as I knew him, had rather preferred his bags to be shabby, and he seemed to adorn his face with ink for reasons of personal taste.

It would surely be a deep blot on the D'Arcy escutcheon if it ever became known that Conway had, on one occasion, been sent up to the bathroom to wash ink off his face.

"I believe," beamed my youthful patron, "that my bwothah Conway was gweatly wespected in the school?"

"Oh! Ah! Yes!" I murmured.

"Yaas! My young bwothah, Wally, is wathah lackin' in wepose of mannah, but he is still quite young, you know. I'm suah old Conway had a tremendous wegard for his personal dig."

The vision of an ink-covered Conway shooting head-foremost off the banisters into Mr. Kidd's waistcoat rose before my eyes, but I fought it down.

"There's no doubt of it," I said loyally.

Before I went, I stepped into the tuckshop to see Mrs. Taggles, who welcomed me with her old good-humoured smile. A fat youth named Trimble (of Trimble Hall, I gathered) wanted to treat me to ginger-pop and tarts, but as I refused he kindly reversed the procedure and allowed me to treat him instead.

I thoroughly enjoyed my afternoon at the old place, and I am glad to see the present lot of fellows are keeping up its old traditions. They are a fine lot of modern boys, full of progress and common sense, and I am proud to think I once belonged to the same school.

Well played, the Saints! Keep the ball rolling in the good old way, and all the Old Boys of the school will wish you well.

GREYFRIARS FRAGMENTS

By BOB CHERRY

ODE TO A SKYLARK

(Not by Shelley)

I hate thee more than I can tell.

On winter mornings, cold and dark:

When Gosling rings the rising bell,

He always rises with the lark!

Oh, beastly bird! Canst thou not rest

Within the comfort of thy nest?

WELL, THAT'S TRUTH, ANYWAY!

If Bunter lies all day,

What does he do all night?

"Lies still!" did someone say?

You're absolutely right!

And when he bursts, and meets his doom,

They'll put "Here Lies" upon his tomb!

STUDY IN BLACK AND WHITE

Now Inky is a "white man,"

And Smithy's a "black sheep";

Yet Inky's black and Smithy's white—

It fairly makes you weep!

PROBLEM PIECE

A snowball crashed upon the nose

Of Dr. Locke, with force!

Another dropped upon his head—

By accident, of course;

But which of these two, so to speak,

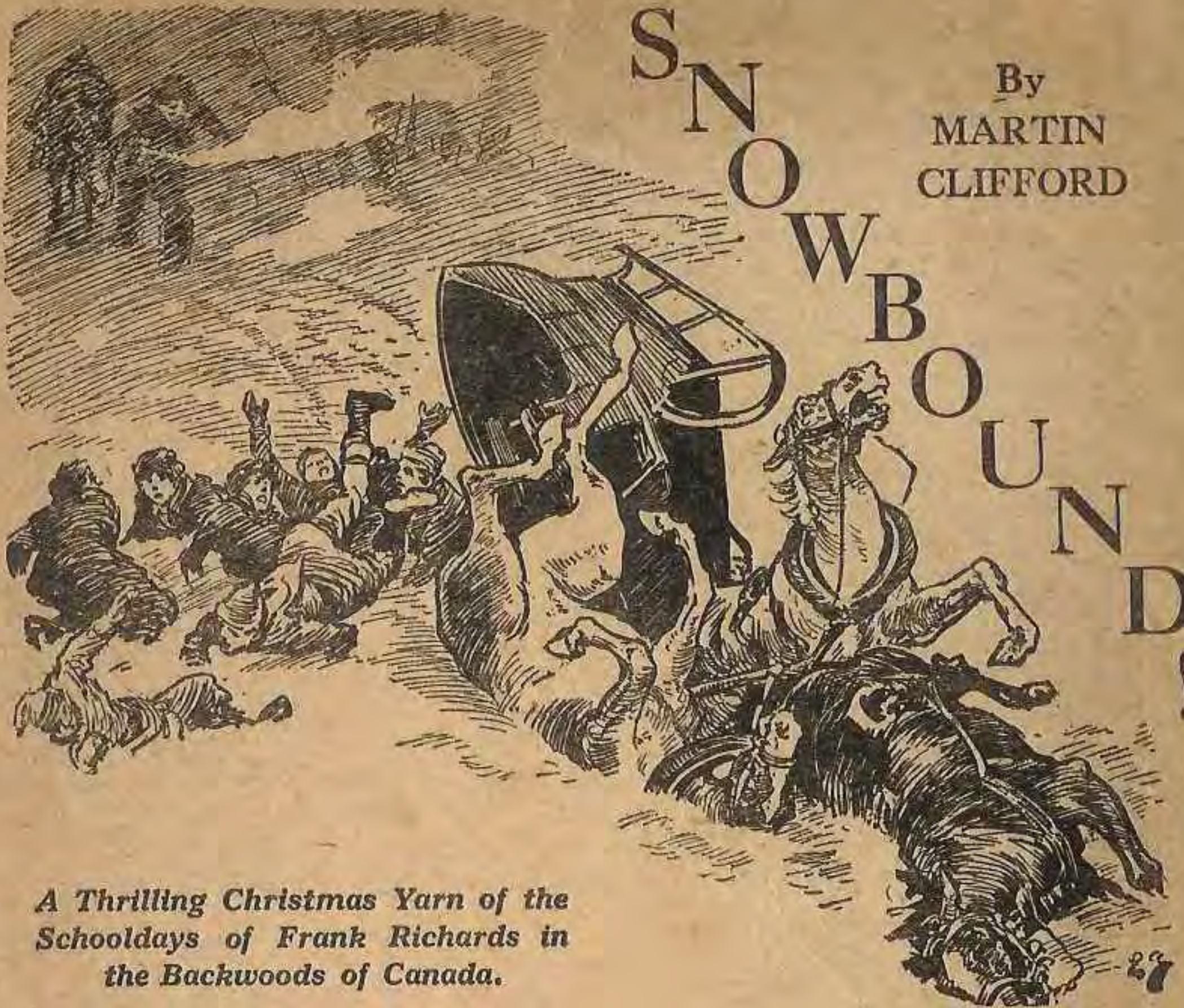
Would cause the greatest dread—

To hit the Head upon the beak,

Or the Beak upon the head?

SNOW BOUND!

By
MARTIN
CLIFFORD



*A Thrilling Christmas Yarn of the
Schooldays of Frank Richards in
the Backwoods of Canada.*

THE FIRST CHAPTER CHRISTMAS EVE!

JINGLE, jingle!
The sleigh-bells rang merrily
through the frosty air.

The early dusk of the Canadian
winter had closed in, and the stars,
as they came out one by one, glittered
like points of fire in a sky of steel.

Round the Lawless Ranch the plains
lay white under a winding sheet of
snow. There had been a heavy fall
for several days, and light flakes were
still fluttering down in the starlight
of Christmas Eve.

Frank Richards looked out of the
doorway of the ranch-house and drew

his fur collar closer about his neck.
"Here's the sleigh!" he said
cheerily.

Bob Lawless followed him out.
The big sleigh, with its three steaming
horses, was ready. Rancher Lawless
stood in the doorway and glanced
rather uneasily at the sky.

"I guess there's more coming
down," he said. "You'll have to be
careful, Bob. I hardly think you
ought to go."

"But we've promised to call for the
Lawrences, popper," said Bob Law-
less. "And Molly will be waiting."

"And we've got to call for Beau-
clerc, coming back," said Frank

Richards. "We can't leave them in the lurch, uncle."

Mr. Lawless nodded.

"I know you're a careful driver, Bob," he said. "Look out for the drifts, and don't take risks."

"Nary a risk!" said Bob cheerily. "Safe as houses, popper. Haven't I driven a sleigh from here to Fraser in mid-winter?"

"Well, off you go!" said the rancher, still rather dubiously. "If it wasn't for the dance at the mission——"

"But it is!" said Bob brightly. "The big dance of the year, popper."

The rancher laughed.

"Well, take care—that's all!" he said. "Off with you!"

The chums of Cedar Creek climbed into the sleigh, and Bob Lawless took the "ribbons."

Thick rugs were wrapped round them in addition to fur coats.

Billy Cook was holding the horses. He let go at a signal from Bob; the whip cracked, the bells jingled, and the sleigh was off.

Out on the smooth snow the sleigh glided, gathering speed as it went.

The rich grassland was deep under snow, which stretched for miles on all sides; in the distance, leafless frosty trees loomed shadowy.

Clatter, clatter! Jingle!

"Ripping, isn't it, Franky?" remarked Bob Lawless, when the ranch-house had vanished behind and the sleigh was skirting the timber on its way to the upper valley.

"Topping!" answered Frank.

"The popper's a bit of a weather-prophet, but I guess he's off the mark this time," said Bob. "The snow's slacking off. A few flakes like this won't hurt even Molly."

"No fear!"

"There's the Cherub's shebang,"

said Bob, pointing with his whip as a light gleamed out across the snow.

The sleigh ran within a hundred yards of the Beauclerc cabin. Frank and Bob were to call for their chum, Vere Beauclerc, and his cousin Algy on their way back from the Lawrence's homestead. It was a great occasion at the mission—the dance on Christmas Eve, when Mr. and Mrs. Smiley entertained all the young folk of the section, and the boys and girls of Cedar Creek School turned up in great force.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Frank suddenly. "There's Beau!"

A fur-clad figure was running towards the sleigh through the snow from the direction of the remittance-man's cabin.

Bob Lawless pulled in his horses.

Vere Beauclerc came up, panting.

"Coming along?" asked Frank.

"You're going over to the Lawrences?" asked Beauclerc.

"Yes—to call for Molly and Tom."

"Father says the weather's likely to be thick to-night," said Beauclerc. "He doesn't seem to think it quite safe——"

"Just what popper seemed to think," said Bob cheerily. "But he's let us come, all the same. You come along with us, Cherub."

"If you're going, I certainly will."

"Jump in, then!"

With the Cherub on board, Bob cracked his whip again, and the sleigh rolled on.

"Jolly glad you're with us, Beau!" said Frank Richards. "Where's Algy?"

Beauclerc laughed.

"Sorting out some beautiful evening clothes that he brought from England," he answered. "He's going to turn up at the dance in style."

"Ha, ha, ha!"



"Give us a lift, Bob!" roared Chunky Todgers. The sleigh halted. "Roll in, Chunky!" exclaimed Bob. "The more the merrier!"

"Good old Algy!" chuckled Bob. "His evening clobber will make a sensation at the Mission dance. All the girls will want to dance with Algy. I guess we shall be left out in the cold."

And Bob drove on merrily.

The Thompson River, frozen fast and hard as iron, was left on the right, and the sleigh-bells jingled cheerily through the main street of Thompson, past the "Press" office and the Occidental Hotel and Gunten's store and the Red Dog.

Then out on the north side of the town by an invisible track that Bob Lawless followed without a fault.

Lights gleamed ahead at last—the lights of the Lawrence farmstead.

With a jingle of bells and a fusillade

of whip-cracks, Bob Lawless drove up to the farmhouse and stopped his steaming team.

There was no need to knock; the farmhouse door flew open at the sound of the sleigh-bells, and ruddy firelight gleamed out into the snow.

Molly and Tom Lawrence were ready.

Molly's pretty face showed prettier than ever among her furs as she came out to the sleigh. Kate Dawson came with her, and brother Tom followed. The sleigh was large, but it was well filled. But there was still a corner for Algy if that elegant youth was ready when the sleigh passed the Beaclercs' cabin en route to the Mission Hall.

"Hustle along!" called out Bob.

"Can't keep the horses standing! Now, then, all aboard?"

"Buck up, Molly!" said Tom Lawrence. "Give Frank a shove!"

"Lots of room!" called out Frank Richards, laughing. "Here's your cloak, Molly. Here's your rug, Kate. Now then, Tom, squeeze in."

Tom Lawrence squeezed in next to Kate Dawson.

Then Bob's whip cracked again, and the sleigh whirled away through the flakes.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

HELD UP!

"**M**ORE snow!" remarked Vere Beauclerc.

The light, fluttering flakes had thickened, and snow was coming down more heavily, as the sleigh glided back through the main street of Thompson town. A fat figure appeared and waved a fur-gloved hand at the sleigh and yelled:

"Stop for me!"

"Chunky Todgers!"

"Give us a lift, Bob!" roared Chunky Todgers.

Again the sleigh halted.

"Roll in, Chunky! You'll have to let Algy sit on your head when he gets in. The more the merrier!"

"I say, it's jolly cold, isn't it?" gasped Chunky Todgers. "Give a chap room! I've got a bag here. Mind you don't drop it, Franky."

"What on earth are you taking a bag for?" demanded Tom Lawrence.

Chunky gave a fat wink.

"Grub!" he answered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's refreshments at the Mission dance, you fat clam," said Bob Lawless. "Old Smiley always does us well."

"I guess there aren't refreshments

going and coming back, though," answered Chunky Todgers sagely. "I haven't got much——"

"It only weighs about a ton!" remarked Frank Richards.

"Well, there's a ham, and some corncakes, and a pudding, and some sausages and things," said Chunky. "It's nearly an hour since I ate anything."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was hungry last time I went, I know that," said Chunky Todgers warmly. "You give me my bag."

And the bag reposed on Chunky's fat knees as the sleigh jingled on again.

The snow thickened as the party turned out of Thompson and glided along by the frozen river. Thick clouds were blotting out the stars now, and Bob Lawless glanced once or twice anxiously at the sky. It was pretty clear that Mr. Lawless' foreboding had been well founded, and that there was a heavy fall coming on. But the rancher's son had driven through a heavy snowfall before.

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Tom Lawrence, as the sleigh turned from the river and struck across the plains for the three-mile run to the Mission Hall.

"What's which?" asked Frank.

"We're being followed!"

"My hat!"

Frank Richards looked back.

The snow-clouds were blotting out the stars, and a dim twilight reigned on the plains. Through the dimness a form was seen—the figure of a horseman, looming up eerily.

"Silly jay, to be riding in this!" said Chunky Todgers. "What the thunder is he following us for?"

"Lost the track, and using the sleigh as a guide, perhaps," said Frank Richards.



ERNEST
IBBOTSON

Facing page 86

Colour Plate by Ernest Ibbotson

THE GUNMAN'S CHALLENGE!

"I guess that's it."

As the sleigh ran on, the little party looked back several times at the lonely rider in the mist and snow.

"He's overtaking us," said Beauclerc presently.

With a thudding in the snow the horseman came alongside the dashing sleigh, and a hoarse voice shouted:

"Stop!"

Bob Lawless did not stop, but he glanced round.

"What's the trouble?" he called back.

"Stop!"

"Stop be blowed!" answered Bob, with more force than elegance. "Go and chop chips, whoever you are!"

"Stop!" shouted the horseman again. "Do you want me to drop your leader?"

There was a glitter of steel in the horseman's hand.

Molly Lawrence gave a cry.

"My hat! It's a thief!" exclaimed Frank Richards. "He's trying to hold us up! My only hat!"

"It's Keno Kit, of the Red Dog," said Vere Beauclerc quietly. "Are you going to stop, Bob?"

Bob Lawless set his teeth.

The whip cracked and the reins shook, and the team galloped on. For the moment the horseman was left behind. But the schoolboys and schoolgirls, peering anxiously back, saw the dim figure riding on furiously through the falling flakes.

Crack!

Through the frosty air and the jingling of the sleigh-bells came the sudden report of a revolver.

The bullet sped through the air high over the sleigh. It was a threat—so far.

Bob Lawless drove on savagely.

It was a race now.

Keno Kit, as the man was called,

was one of the loafers of the Red Dog Saloon in Thompson; and no doubt he had expended his last cent in tanglefoot, or in the game of euchre, at the Red Dog, and was "out" to make a "raise" by any means that came to hand.

The desperate ruffian was reckless of consequences.

Probably he was celebrating Christmas in his own way by a "bender" at the Red Dog, and his dollars had run out and he was desperate.

His object was to go "through" the Christmas party in the sleigh—perhaps to steal the horses and sleigh, which were worth a very large sum.

It was evident that he meant business, at all events. He drove on his horse savagely with whip and spur, and drew alongside the sleigh again at last.

His hard face was flushed with rage. He rode beside the trampling team and flourished his revolver at the schoolboy driver.

"Halt!" he shouted.

Bob Lawless did not reply.

He made a sudden lash with the whip and caught the ruffian full across the face.

There was a wild yell from Keno Kit as he reeled backwards in the saddle. His horse stumbled in the snow and went over, and the ruffian landed on his back.

"Bravo!" shouted Frank Richards.

Bob Lawless drove on furiously.

It was less than a mile to the Beauclercs' cabin, whither the highwayman would scarcely dare to follow. Keno Kit scrambled out of the snow, pouring out a string of savage oaths.

Crack, crack, crack!

He was firing recklessly after the sleigh.

There was a sudden whinny of pain from the leader, and he went plunging

into a drift, dragging the other horses down with him.

The next instant the sleigh was on its side, and the occupants were rolling in the snow.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

IN DEADLY PERIL!

BOB LAWLESS scrambled up and rushed to the kicking, plunging horses. His first thought was for them. Frank Richards and Beauclerc helped the two girls to their feet.

"He's coming!" yelled Chunky Todgers.

Through the snow, now falling in thick masses, came the horseman, riding furiously, his horse knee-deep in snow, churning it up as he rushed.

"Look out!"

Chunky Todgers' bag had burst open by the overturned sleigh, and packets of "grub" and a stone bottle had rolled into the snow. Frank Richards spotted the stone bottle and caught it up.

"Look out!" yelled Chunky, "that's my peppermint!"

But Frank Richards did not heed. Chunky Todgers' supply of peppermint was not an important matter at that moment.

As Keno Kit came plunging up through the snow, Frank Richards hurled the stone bottle with a deadly aim.

The ruffian received the missile full in his brutal, stubbly face, and it struck him like a bullet.

He gave a gasping howl, and pitched off his horse.

"On him!" panted Beauclerc.

Bob Lawless was too busy with the horses to help, but the other fellows rushed at the fallen ruffian. They knew that their only chance was to tackle him before he rose.

Vere Beauclerc was the first to reach him, and he hurled himself upon the dazed ruffian.

Keno Kit, who was making a dizzy effort to rise, was flung back, with Beauclerc's knee on his chest.

The next moment the other fellows were upon him.

The ruffian sank into the snow under a shower of blows. Tom Lawrence grabbed away his revolver, and the butt of the weapon crashed on Keno Kit's head.

The horse, frightened by the fracas, was dashing away through the snow, with trailing reins and dangling stirrups. Keno Kit squirmed in the snow, struggling feebly and howling for mercy.

"Give me the shooter, Lawrence!" Vere Beauclerc grasped the revolver. "Now, you scoundrel, hoof it!"

He jammed the muzzle to Keno Kit's ear.

"Let up!" gasped the ruffian. "I guess I give in! Let up!"

"Get out, you rascal!" said Frank. Keno Kit staggered up.

There was no fight left in him, and Beauclerc's finger was on the trigger of the revolver, and his look showed that he was quite ready to shoot.

Keno Kit staggered away dazedly on the track of his runaway horse, and the snow and the twilight swallowed him up in a few moments.

"I guess we're clear of him!" panted Lawrence. "Cheer up, Molly, it's all right!"

"We'll be going again in a few minutes," said Frank.

"I say, where's that bottle?" howled Chunky Todgers. "Look here, Richards, my peppermint's lost."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Why couldn't you chuck something else at him?" demanded Todgers indignantly. "Look here, you

help me look for that bottle—it's trampled in the snow somewhere — Yaroooooh ! ”

Frank Richards took the fat and wrathful Chunky by the collar and sat him down in the snow. Then he ran to help Bob Lawless.

During the tussle with Keno Kit Bob had succeeded in cutting free the injured horse and getting the other two upon their feet.

The schoolboys gathered round the sleigh to set it right.

Bob Lawless' face was very grave as he examined it.

“ Anything up ? ” asked Lawrence.

“ One of the runners is smashed,” answered Bob quietly.

“ Phew ! ”

“ I guess it can't be moved.”

“ Oh ! ”

“ We're only a mile or so from my home,” said Beauclerc. “ We can get help there.”

Bob Lawless looked at the falling snow.

The whole sky was blotted out now. Snow was coming down in great masses, and piling up round the sleigh and the horses. The injured horse, already at the point of death, was covered with it. The chums of Cedar Creek looked at one another with serious faces.

The sleigh was hopelessly wrecked, and only two horses remained, and the snowstorm was fairly coming on now.

“ Hang the man ! ” muttered Bob, between his teeth. “ We should have been close to the cabin by this time, and I guess it would have been too thick for us to get on to the Mission. But now——”

He broke off.

“ Can't we walk to the cabin ? ” asked Molly Lawrence in a low voice.

Bob did not answer. Well he knew

that it was impossible to cross the plain on foot and live.

“ There are the horses,” muttered Frank.

“ Keno Kit's done for if he doesn't find his horse,” said Lawrence.

“ Serve him right ! ” muttered Bob. “ He's the cause of all this ! But we——”

“ We can't stay here ! ” whispered Kate Dawson.

Chunky Todgers came up with a stone bottle in his hand and a cheery smile on his fat visage.

“ I've found it,” he announced.

“ Found what ? ” snapped Bob.

“ My peppermint.”

“ You silly chump ! ”

“ Oh, I say ! I was afraid Frank had broken the bottle, biffing it at the bulldozer ! ” said Chunky. “ But it's all right. I say, what are you all looking so jolly serious about ? Is my grub lost ? ”

“ Oh, dry up, for goodness' sake ! ” said Bob crossly. “ You fellows, you can see the snow—nobody could get through that on foot. Look how it's coming down. There's the two horses, but——”

He stared into the shadows.

“ Two of us could go for help on the horses,” said Beauclerc.

Bob Lawless nodded.

“ After this blow is over,” he said. “ Get into the sleigh now—it's all the shelter we've got.”

It was almost a blizzard that was raging on the plains now. An icy wind from the frozen slopes of the Rockies came across the flats like a knife-edge, and heavy flakes whirled in it.

The dead horse was hidden from sight now ; the two remaining animals shivered and whimpered. On horse or on foot it was impossible to get through the snowstorm.

Molly and Kate were wrapped in rugs in the sleigh, their faces very pale now. But Lawless and Frank covered up the horses with cloths as well as they could, and followed their companions into the slanting sleigh. Thicker and thicker the snow came down, and its level rose higher and higher round the wrecked sleigh.

There was a grunt from Chunky Todgers as he drove his teeth into a corn-cake. Whatever might betide, Chunky Todgers was not likely to lose his appetite.

Bob Lawless uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Stop that!"

"Eh! Stop what?" ejaculated Chunky.

"Stop gorging, you fat clam! We may want every ounce of that!"

"Oh, I say!"

Bob Lawless took the bag away from the fat Chunky, who blinked at him speechlessly. A chill fell upon the party in the sleigh. Up to that moment they had not looked at the situation as it was—it was too terrible to realise. But they realised it now. They were snowbound on the open plain, and if help was long delayed it was the shadow of death that hung over them!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

SNOWBOUND!

THICKER and thicker the snow came down. Black darkness, broken only by the glimmer of the snow, enwrapped the sleigh.

There was a deep silence.

Frank Richards & Co. thought of the Mission Hall—of the rafters hung with lanterns and holly, of the light feet pattering to the strains of the wheezy Mission piano and the fiddler from Kamloops. The dance at the Mission was in progress by that time,

though the rough weather would have made the attendance unusually thin. And within a few miles of the merry scene, here they lay—snowbound and in grim peril.

The night grew older.

Still the snow was coming down, thickly, heavily. It was round the sleigh like a sea of white, several feet deep. The horses were almost buried in it as they shivered under their coverings. There was nothing to do but to wait—and waiting was dreary.

Sleep came to their help at last.

Molly Lawrence, with her head resting on Frank's shoulder, slept peacefully, and gradually the others dozed.

Chunky Todgers, after in vain endeavouring to reclaim his provisions, resigned himself to slumber—the next best thing, in Chunky's opinion.

Frank Richards was the last to sleep.

It was warm enough in the closely packed sleigh, under the thick fur cloaks and rugs. It was not till the dim morning sun was glimmering through the snowflakes that the Cedar Creek party awoke.

Bob Lawless rubbed his eyes and looked round him.

The wind had fallen, and the snow was coming down lightly; the blizzard had passed off in the night.

The two horses were no longer to be seen.

The bitter cold had been too much for them, and they had sunk in the snow, and now lay frozen like iron under the spotless covering.

Round the sleigh was a sea of snow and mist, which blotted the sight at a distance of a few yards.

Bob Lawless rose to his feet and stepped from the sleigh on to the frozen body of a horse with a foot of snow over it.

Molly opened her eyes.

"I say!" Chunky Todgers was awake now. "I say, isn't it lucky I brought some grub with me? I'm awfully hungry. You give me my grub, Bob Lawless. I'll whack it out with you fellows, of course!"

"Shurrup!" grunted Bob.

"But I say—I'm hungry!"

"Dry up!"

Chunky Todgers gave a snort of indignation. As a matter of fact, Chunky was not the only member of the party who was hungry.

"Christmas morning!" said Beauclerc, with a shiver.

"What will our people be thinking?" muttered Lawrence.

"It is useless to think of that."

"They'll be searching for us, anyhow," said Lawrence. "What the

thunder are we going to do, Bob? Where are the horses?"

Bob pointed to the snow.

"Oh! We—we can't get away, then?"

"I guess a horse couldn't get through these drifts, anyhow."

"We're landed," remarked Frank Richards as cheerfully as he could.

"We've got to make the best of it!"

"I'm not afraid!" murmured Molly.

"Nothing to be afraid of," said Bob sturdily. "We—we've only got to get help!"

"That's all," murmured Frank.

"I've been snowbound before," said Kate. "But that was in a cabin, with fire, and food, and shelter. But here——" She shivered.

"We've got food," said Bob cheerfully. "Thanks to Chunky for that! I guess it's lucky he's such a greedy clam."

"Look here!" began Chunky hotly.



Frank Richards hurled the bottle with deadly aim as Keno Kit came riding through the snow, and the ruffian received the missile full in his brutal face.

"There's enough in Chunky's bag to last us a couple of days, on strict rations," said Bob. "We may as well begin now."

"Strict rations!" murmured Chunky. "Oh, dear!"

"Lucky we gave you a lift, Chunky!" grinned Bob.

"Ye-e-es, isn't it?" said Todgers, rather doubtfully, however.

Bob Lawless examined the supplies, and handed out the rations. It was a frugal breakfast, but it made the snowbound party feel better.

Chunky Todgers sighed deeply when Bob wrapped the remainder of the provisions in the bag. His eyes followed them mournfully. Chunky was a good fellow, and was quite willing to "whack" out his supply. But he really considered it would have been wiser to whack it out more liberally, and trust to luck for the morrow. Bob Lawless was leader, however, and Bob was not in the habit of trusting to luck for the morrow.

"I say, Bob," murmured Chunky, "I've got an idea——"

"Well?"

"Suppose we finish up the grub now," suggested Chunky. "It—it will give us strength, you know, to—to——"

"Let me catch you trying to finish up the grub!" growled Bob. "Dry up, Chunky, and go to sleep!"

"Well, I may as well, I guess," said Chunky. "I can bear hunger better when I'm asleep."

And Chunky's melodious snore was soon heard again.

While Chunky was snoring, Frank Richards & Co. held a consultation outside the sleigh.

"We've got to get help!" said Bob quietly. "They're searching for us, of course, already; but they don't

know where to look. Two of us had better try to get through this!"

Frank Richards gave an almost hopeless look at the sea of snow.

"I know what you're thinking—it's as good as going to a funeral!" said Bob. "It can't be helped. The girls have got to be saved somehow. It's about a mile to Beauclerc's shebang, and if we can struggle through we're all O.K. I'm going!"

"I'm coming with you, then!" said Frank.

"And I!" said Beauclerc quietly.

"Count me in!" said Tom Lawrence.

Bob smiled faintly.

"No good all going," he said. "Besides, somebody's got to take care of the girls while we're gone. You'd better stay, Lawrence, as you're Molly's brother. Chunky stays anyway. We three'll try it!"

Frank Richards turned back to the sleigh, and Molly's eyes met his anxiously.

"We're going for help, Molly," said Frank quietly. "Most likely we shall be back before long. Don't worry!"

"You cannot get through!" whispered Molly.

"We're going to try. Keep in the sleigh and keep warm. Tom and Chunky will clear away some of the snow here so that you'll have room to move. Keep your pecker up."

"Oh, Frank!"

"Good-bye, Molly! You'll see us again soon!"

And the three chums of Cedar Creek prepared for the desperate venture.

Bob Lawless led the way through the clinging mist that hung over the plain, and his comrades followed him unquestioningly. The snow was like a soft barrier that had to be trampled,



"This way!" shouted Bob. Through the mist the horses loomed up, plunging through the snow. "By gad! Here they are!" It was the voice of Algernon Beauclerc, the dandy of Cedar Creek.

and pushed aside to allow progress to be made, and it was heavy work.

As the three schoolboys proceeded, they left a deep gully in the snow-carpet behind them.

"You're sure of the way, Bob?" Frank Richards asked at last.

His Canadian cousin gave him rather a grim look.

"Almost!" he answered briefly.

They tramped on.

Taking it in turns to lead and force a way through the snow, the three chums pressed on.

They could not see the sun, but a wintry light glimmered faintly through the thick, hanging mists.

Fatigue grew upon them as they fought their way onward, but with fierce determination they stuck to their task.

For two hours or more they struggled on; and still the snow was thick about them, and the mist closed

suffocatingly in upon them. Frank Richards stopped at last.

"I—I can't keep on, Bob," he gasped. "I—I'm done!"

Bob Lawless breathed hard.

"I guess it's the same with me," he muttered. "We haven't done a quarter of a mile yet. We—we can't win through!"

The three schoolboys sat in the snow, too exhausted almost to speak.

Hope was dying in their breasts.

But they did not think of returning. To crawl back through the gully they had made in the snow, and to let the girls know, by their return, that they had failed and that there was no hope was impossible. Somehow, they would contrive to keep on—when they had rested. But in their hearts they knew that there was no keeping on for them.

And it was Christmas Day!

Frank Richards struggled to his feet at last.

"We've got to try again!" he muttered.

Crack!

Suddenly, through the silence of the mists, came an echoing report—the report of a rifle!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

ALGY TO THE RESCUE!

FRANK RICHARDS & Co. started, and stared through the mists. The report died away in a thousand echoes round them. They looked at one another blankly.

"A rifle!" breathed Bob Lawless. "It's somebody——"

"A signal, perhaps," muttered Beauclerc. "If they are searching for us, it may be a signal——"

"Shout!" said Frank.

The mist was full of echoes, and they could hardly define the direction from which the sound of the shot rang out.

"Help!"

The three schoolboys shouted together with all the strength they could muster.

Crack!

As if in answer, came a second report.

Beauclerc uttered an exclamation.

"The revolver!"

He felt in his pocket hastily. He still had the revolver that had been taken from Keno Kit.

"Good!" exclaimed Bob joyfully. "They'll hear that——"

"There are two cartridges in it," said Beauclerc.

"Let them go!"

Vere Beauclerc pointed the revolver into the air and pulled the trigger twice in rapid succession.

Crack! Crack!

The reports rang loudly across the snow.

Then the chums listened.

Had the signal been heard? Had it been understood?

Bob Lawless grasped Frank's arm suddenly, squeezing it in his excitement.

"Listen!" he breathed.

"Bells!" shouted Frank. "Sleigh-bells!"

Jingle, jingle!

Never had the merry sound of sleigh-bells sounded so musically in the ears of the chums of Cedar Creek.

"This way!" shouted Bob.

"Help, help!"

Through the mist the heads of two steaming horses loomed up, plunging through the snow.

"Look out!"

"By gad! Here they are!"

It was the voice of Algernon Beauclerc—the dandy of Cedar Creek. The horses plunged to a halt and the bells ceased to jingle. The three chums crushed through the snow towards the sleigh.

"Algy!" shouted Beauclerc.

An eyeglass glittered from the sleigh. Algy was alone in it, handling the reins. A rifle lay beside him.

"Hallo, you fellows!" said Cousin Algy cheerily. "Glad to see you! Where have you been, hey?"

"Snowbound."

"Yaas, I thought so. No end of a row goin' on at the ranch!" yawned Algernon. "Your pater's out in a sleigh, Bob, and the cattlemen are searchin', and my Uncle Beauclerc is with them, and Old Man Lawrence—no end of a big fuss. I offered my services, and what do you think they said? Better stay at home and keep my feet warm!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I didn't!" grinned Algy. "I trotted down to Thompson and hired a sleigh and a gun, and here I am. My idea to pop off the rifle every now and then as a signal, you know. You heard it—what?"

"Yes, and we were jolly glad to hear it!" gasped Frank.

"Yaas, I suppose so! But where are the others?"

"Left with the sleigh—we were going for help!" said Bob.

"You've found help, old top! Let's go and round up the rest of the giddy party," said Algernon. "You can drive if you like. These gees are a bit skittish, and they've made my arms ache. Hungry? I've no end of stuff in the sleigh!"

"Well, my hat!" said Frank.

The three schoolboys clambered in, and Bob took the reins. With light hearts they drove back to the wrecked sleigh, and the jingle of the bells told Molly and her companions that help was coming. Progress was slow through the heavy snow, but the snowbound camp was in sight at last.

"Hurrah!" shouted Tom Lawrence as Algy's sleigh came plunging up.

"Bravo!" yelled Chunky Todgers. "Have you got any grub?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Algy touched his fur cap to Molly and Kate, whose faces were very bright now.

"Merry Christmas!" he said politely. "Can I help you to change carriages? Then we'll move on."

Chunky Todgers' mouth was full, and his jaws were busy when the whole party were crammed into Algy's sleigh. The whip cracked, and they rolled away to a merry jingle of bells.

Christmas Day was cheery enough, after all, at the Lawless Ranch. The dance at the Mission had been missed by Frank Richards & Co., but there were dances enough to follow at the ranch during the Christmas festivities, and Molly and Kate and the chums of Cedar Creek enjoyed themselves immensely.

THE END

THE DETERMINIST'S DIARY

By Herbert Skimpole

(the St. Jim's Determinist)

ON Monday morn I felt forlorn,
They wanted me to play
A cricket game, but 'twas a shame
To pass my time away
In juvenile amusement while
My work was being missed;
I went on strike against it, like
A true Determinist.

"Such wanton waste is not my taste.
There's work," I said, "to do!
To spread the truth to every youth,
Beginning here with you!
Oh, pay no thought to idle sport,
But gather round and list!
You'll find the time well spent, for I'm
A true Determinist!"

They gathered round, but not, I found,
To listen to my talk;
They took my frame and bumped the same
Upon the gravel walk!
Such brutal force left me, of course,
Unable to resist;
It was a sore experience for
A true Determinist.

They little know such antics show
A savage state of mind;
In point of fact, an ape would act
More justly to its kind!
I pity—nay, despise—the way
They raise the cruel fist!
But come what will, you'll find me still
A true Determinist!



AT BREAKFAST HE HAS BEEN KNOWN TO ASK FOR FOUR PLATES OF PORRIDGE!

HE IS AWAKENED BY THE APPLICATION OF A SQUELCHING SPONGE IN THE HEAVY HANDS OF BOB CHERRY

REGARDING HIS SCHOLASTIC ATTAINMENTS — PERHAPS THE LEAST SAID THE BETTER!



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF BILLY BUNTER!

HE PAYS A VISIT TO THE TUCK SHOP

GORGES TARTS & TOFFEE!



AND STRUGGLED WITH HIS PREP.



AFTER LISTENING AT KEY-HOLES

— AND HAVING BULLIED A FEW SMALL FAGS

RETIRES TO BED.

BILLY BUNTER'S BUSY DAY!

By FRANK RICHARDS



THE FIRST CHAPTER VENTRILOQUIAL!

"**B**LESS my soul!"

Peter Todd jumped.

It was enough to make any fellow jump.

The words in themselves were not, of course, very startling. Often and often had every fellow at Greyfriars heard Dr. Locke, the headmaster, utter that ejaculation. And the revered headmaster's voice, though deep, was quite a pleasant one; there was nothing startling in that.

Yet Peter Todd jumped in utter amazement.

For he was coming up the Remove

passage, and it was from his own study No. 7 in the Remove that the ejaculation proceeded.

The door of Study No. 7 stood slightly ajar. Peter could not see into the study; but he could hear.

And that was what he heard—the deep, familiar voice of the Head uttering that ejaculation—in Peter's own study.

"My only hat!" murmured Peter.

He halted.

What the Head could possibly be doing in his study was a mystery to him. Sometimes Dr. Locke visited the junior quarters of the school on a tour of inspection. But then he came in

*A humorous long complete story of
Harry Wharton & Co., starring
Billy Bunter, the ventriloquist of
Greyfriars.*

state, as it were, with the Remove master—a sort of stately procession. Remove fellows, spotting him from a distance, would have their rooms all ready to meet his august eye—Bob Cherry would take his football boots off the mantelpiece, and Skinner would slip his cigarettes under the hearthrug.

For the Head to dodge, as it were, into a fellow's study in his absence, in a sort of surreptitious way, was absolutely unknown and unheard of; and Toddy would not have believed it possible. The Head might drop informally into a Sixth Form study for a chat—say, Wingate's or Gwynn's study. But he did not, of course, drop in on Lower Fourth fags for purposes of chatting.

So Peter Todd stood amazed, staring at the door of Study No. 7, wondering whether, in the amazing circumstances, he could venture to enter his own study.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry came up the Remove passage and greeted Toddy with a smack on the shoulder. The smack rang a good deal like a pistol shot; Bob had a heavy hand.

"Ow!" gasped Peter. "Keep off, you ass!"

"What's the row?" asked Bob. "What are you standing here for blinking at your study door? Anything up?"

"Hush!"

"Eh! Why hush?"

"The Head!" whispered Peter.

Bob Cherry stared at him, and then stared round him. There was no sign of the Head in the Remove passage, that Bob could see.

"What the thump——" began Bob.

"Hush!" breathed Peter. "I tell you the Head——"

"The jolly old Head isn't here," said Bob blankly.

Peter made him a frantic sign to be silent. Bob's voice, undoubtedly, was audible in Study No. 7. What would Dr. Locke think, hearing himself described as the jolly old Head?

The surprised Bob was about to speak again, when there was a voice from Study No. 7—a familiar voice, but very startling in that quarter.

"Upon my word!"

Bob Cherry jumped, just as Peter Todd had done.

"Oh!" he gasped. "The Head!"

He stared at the door. That door of Study No. 7 seemed to fascinate the gaze of both the juniors.

"He's in my study!" whispered Peter. "Something's up! Goodness knows what's the matter, but I suppose it means a row. The Head wouldn't come up to the Remove passage for nothing."

Four juniors came up the staircase and glanced along the passage towards Bob and Toddy. They were Harry Wharton, Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. They were about to go into Wharton's study, No. 1; but their gaze was attracted by the two juniors staring blankly at Study No. 7.

"What's on there?" called out Harry Wharton.

"Bunter burst?" asked Johnny Bull.

Peter made a sign of silence, and the mystified juniors came along the passage in wonder.

There was no need then for explanation; for the voice from the study went on again.

"Bless my soul! I must speak of this to Mr. Quelch."

"The Head!" breathed Wharton.

"What on earth——" began Nugent.

"Beats me!" whispered Peter Todd. "It's not like the Head to sneak into a fellow's study like this. I went down only ten minutes ago and left Bunter there. Now——"

He broke off as the voice went on.

"I shall certainly speak to Mr. Quelch! Bunter!"

"Yes, sir!"

That was the well-known squeak of Billy Bunter, the Owl of the Remove. The juniors exchanged glances. Apparently Billy Bunter was in Study No. 7, along with the headmaster.

"What does this mean, Bunter?"

"What, sir?"

"The untidy state of this study, Bunter! I am surprised, Bunter—I may say I am shocked! Whose are these boots?"

"Toddy's, sir."

"Does Todd generally keep his football boots in the bookcase?"

Peter Todd, in the passage, made a grimace. It was true that his football boots were in the bookcase in Study No. 7; but he did not generally keep them there; neither would they have been there had he expected a visit from the Head. But this occurrence was extremely unexpected.

"Well, sir, Toddy's rather slovenly," came Bunter's voice. "I do my best, sir, to keep the study in order. But it's rather hard with a study-mate like Peter Todd."

"Is it, you fat villain?" murmured Peter under his breath. Only that afternoon he had been slanging Bunter for untidiness.

"I am sure of that, Bunter," resumed the Head's voice. "I have the highest opinion of you, Bunter, and I am assured that you do everything in your power to restrain the slovenly habits of your study-mate."

Harry Wharton & Co. blinked at one another. This was the first they

had heard of the Head's high opinion of William George Bunter. Upon what he founded it was a mystery to them.

"Thank you, sir!" squeaked Bunter.

"I shall certainly speak to Mr. Quelch. I shall request him to administer some correction to Todd."

Peter made another grimace.

"Where is Todd now, Bunter?"

"I think he's hanging about outside the study, sir," squeaked the Owl of the Remove. "I fancy he can hear everything you're saying, sir."

Peter's expression was quite indescribable as he heard that.

"Bless my soul! Todd! Todd, I say! If you are there, come into the study at once!"

"Oh dear!" murmured Peter.

And he pushed open the door of Study No. 7 and entered.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

ONLY BUNTER!

BILLY BUNTER grinned cheerfully at the newcomer.

The fat junior's face was, in fact, irradiated by its most expansive grin. Bunter seemed to be immensely entertained about something.

But Peter was not looking at him.

He was looking for the Head.

A bewildered look came over Peter's face. He had entered the study in response to the Head's command. But, amazing to relate, the Head was not visible within the walls of Study No. 7. Billy Bunter was there, fat and grinning. But Dr. Locke was not to be seen.

Peter Todd blinked about the study, bewildered, almost unnerved. Unless the Head had vanished suddenly up the chimney, Peter could not guess what had become of him.

"What—wha-a-a-at——" stammered Toddy.

"He, he, he!"

"What—where's the Head?"

"He, he, he!" chortled Bunter.

Peter stared round the study again, and then his eyes fixed on Billy Bunter with a deadly look.

"You—you—you fat villain! This is one of your ventriloquist tricks, is it?"

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter. "I fancy I pulled your leg, old bean. He, he, he!"

"You—you——" gasped Peter.

Bunter chortled spasmodically. There was no doubt that the Greyfriars ventriloquist had pulled Peter's leg—most effectually and completely. Not for a moment had Toddy doubted that the Head was in Study No. 7; he had never even dreamed that the dialogue he had heard from outside was carried on entirely by Bunter, speaking alternately in his own voice and in the Head's.

Bunter grinned at him cheerily.

"You see, I heard you coming!" he explained. "I thought I'd make you jump, you know. He, he, he!"

Peter breathed hard and deep.

"Well, you did make me jump," he admitted.

"He, he, he!"

"And as one good turn deserves another, I'm going to make you jump."

"I say, Peter—— Yaroooooooooh!" roared Bunter, as Peter Todd grabbed him by the collar and proceeded to tap his head against the study table.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"What——"

Harry Wharton & Co. stared in. There was no sign of the Head in the study, but Bunter's head was rapping on the table in a series of postman's knocks, and the yells of William

George Bunter rang the length of the Remove passage.

"I say, you fellows, draggimoff!" yelled Bunter. "Yarooooh! Only a joke—only a j-j-j-joke! Whoop! Stoppit! I'll jolly well lick you, Peter Todd! Oh crumbs! Draggimoff!"

Crack, crack, crack!

"You fat villain!" gasped Peter. "I've warned you what would happen if you played your beastly ventriloquial tricks in this study any more! Take that—and that—and that——"

"Yarooooogh! Rescue!" yelled Bunter, struggling frantically.

Harry Wharton & Co. rushed to the rescue. The excited Peter was collared and dragged off his victim.

"Hold on!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Enough's as good as a feast, you know, Toddy."

"Mustn't slaughter Bunter!" said Johnny Bull.

"Leggo! I—I—I'll jolly well burst him!" exclaimed Peter Todd. "He made me believe that the Head was here—going to report me to Quelchy for slovenliness! He——"

"Only a jest, old man," said Harry Wharton soothingly. "You really might have guessed that it was Bunter, knowing his tricks."

"You didn't guess!" snapped Peter.

"Well, no," admitted the captain of the Remove. "Bunter had the Head's toot wonderfully. Blessed if I know how he does it."

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "Keep that idiot off! It's a gift, of course—a wonderful gift——"

"Must be a gift," said Bob. "If it needed brains, you couldn't do it."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Will you leggo?" roared Peter Todd. "I tell you I'm going to squash him! Ventriloquism is barred in this study!"

"Todd!" It was a sharp, stern voice outside the door, the voice of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove. "Todd, what does this violence mean?"

Peter Todd jumped, and the Co. released him at once. Apparently the terrific yelling in Study No. 7 had brought the Remove master on the scene. Certainly Bunter's frantic howls must have been heard all over Greyfriars.

"Oh, sir!" gasped Peter. "I—I—I——"

"How dare you, Todd?"

"I—I—I——"

Peter broke off. The door was wide open, and there was nothing to be seen of Mr. Quelch there. Peter understood all of a sudden; really it was impossible that Mr. Quelch should be keeping out of sight round the corner while he was speaking to Todd. It was the Greyfriars ventriloquist again!

Bunter's faculty for imitating voices was really marvellous. But his weird gift earned him more kicks than halfpence, so to speak, in the Greyfriars Remove.

"Quelch's not there," said Bob Cherry. "It's Bunter again! How the dickens does he do it?"



"I say, Peter—— Yaroooooooooh!" roared Bunter as Peter Todd grabbed his head and proceeded to tap it against the table. "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry as Harry Wharton & Co. looked in.

"He, he, he!"

"I—I—I'll make an example of him!" roared Peter. "Why, a fellow's life isn't worth living with a potty ventriloquist in the study! I'll burst him!"

"Whooop!" roared Bunter.

Peter's grasp was on him again, and he was yanked out of the armchair. He bumped on the carpet with a heavy bump.

"There!" gasped Peter.

"Yow-ow-ow! Help!"

"Todd! How dare you?"

It was Mr. Quelch's voice again, but this time it was the genuine article; the din in the Remove passage had, in fact, drawn the Form master to the scene.

Mr. Quelch came whisking along to Study No. 7 with a frowning brow and a cane in his hand.

He stared into the study wrathfully. Peter Todd, with his back to the door, was bumping Bunter's hapless head on the carpet.

"Todd! Cease this at once! You ruffianly boy, how dare you?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, cheese it, you spoofing rotter!" howled Peter Todd. "How the dickens you do it while I'm bumping your head is a mystery to me, but I'll jolly well stop you!"

As Peter had his back to the door, and did not see Mr. Quelch, it was natural that he should suppose that it was some more of Bunter's ventriloquism.

Bump, bump!

"Yaroooh! Help!"

"Toddy!" gasped Wharton.

"Todd!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Are you out of your senses?"

"Shut up, I tell you!"

"What?"

"I'll jolly well make you chuck it somehow, you silly idiot!"

Mr. Quelch stood transfixed.

Really, it was incredible that a junior in his own Form should talk to him like this. But he had to believe his own ears.

"Toddy!" yelled Bob. "You frightful ass, it's really Mr. Quelch this time!"

"What?"

Peter Todd released Bunter as if he had suddenly become red-hot, and spun round.

His jaw dropped at the sight of his Form-master in the doorway.

"Oh, my hat! Oh crikey! Mr. Quelch! Oh!"

"Todd!" stuttered the Remove master. "You—you—you unruly, disrespectful young rascal! You—

you—— How dare you? I shall take you to the Head for a flogging! I—I——"

"Oh, sir! Sorry!" gasped Peter, in dismay. "I—I thought—— I didn't know it was you, sir; I never knew—I swear——"

His utter dismay was convincing, Mr. Quelch calmed down a little.

"If you were too excited to recognise my voice, Todd, that is very little excuse for you. I shall cane you severely for creating this disturbance, and for not paying immediate attention to your Form-master."

"I—I—I——" babbled Peter.

"Bend over that armchair, Todd!"

"Oh dear!"

Whack, whack, whack, whack, whack, whack!

Peter Todd squirmed and wriggled and gasped as he received "six"—the severest "six" he ever had received.

"Now, let there be no more of this," said Mr. Quelch, tucking his cane under his arm. "Any repetition of this disorderly conduct, Todd, will be followed by a flogging from your headmaster. Take care!"

And Mr. Quelch, with a grim warning frown, marched out of the study, leaving Peter Todd wriggling in anguish.

Bunter rolled out after him. Just then Billy Bunter did not regard Study No. 7 as a safe place to linger in, and undoubtedly he was right. Peter Todd leaned on the table and gasped.

"Oh dear! Oh crumbs! I—I'll burst that fat villain! Ow, ow, ow! What are you grinning at, you silly owls? Ow! Is there anything to grin at, you chuckling chumps? Get out! Ow, ow, ow!"

And Harry Wharton & Co. got out, still grinning, leaving Peter to gasp and groan till, at long last, gasping and groaning brought him relief.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

BUNTER ASKS FOR IT !

" I SAY, you fellows——"

Bob Cherry looked astonished.

" How did Bunter know we had a cake for tea ? " he asked.

" Oh, really, Cherry ! I didn't know you had a cake ! Still, I don't mind taking a whack, as you ask me."

" Nobody asked you, sir, she said," sang Frank Nugent. And the chums of the Remove chuckled.

Billy Bunter rolled into Study No. 1.

There was a large cake on the table, and the Famous Five were beginning tea with bread-and-butter, intending to finish with the cake. Billy Bunter decided to start on the cake. He picked up a knife, sliced off about a quarter of it, and started.

" I haven't really come to tea," he remarked. " I'll leave you chaps all the bread-and-butter."

" Go hon ! " said Bob sarcastically.

" You might leave us a little of the cake, too, if it isn't asking too much, Bunter," remarked Johnny Bull, still more sarcastically.

But Bunter had no attention to waste on sarcasm. His attention was concentrated on the cake.

" You're not tea-ing in your own study ? " asked Harry Wharton, with a laugh.

After the exciting events of the afternoon Wharton could guess that Bunter was not keen to revisit No. 7 until he had to.

Bunter shook his head with his mouth full.

" No ; I'm fed-up with Toddy. Dutton told me he's got a fives bat on the table waiting for me to come in to tea."

" Ha, ha, ha ! "

" Blessed if I see anything to cackle at ! Pretty hard cheese for a fellow to be kept out of his own study in this

style, I think," said Bunter warmly.

" I've a jolly good mind to go straight to No. 7 and give Toddy a hiding with his own bat. But—but I won't."

" No ; I think I wouldn't," grinned Bob Cherry. " It would be a jolly painful thing—not for Toddy."

" The fact is Quelchy's licked him, and I'm letting him off," said Bunter magnanimously. " I say, you fellows, this is a rather decent cake. Not like the cakes I get from home, of course, but quite good. I'll have some more."

And he did.

" Don't mind us ! " said Frank Nugent, also in a deep, sarcastic vein.

" Right, old fellow, I won't ! I like cake better than bread-and-butter, myself ; but every chap to his taste," said Bunter. " I'll do some ventriloquial stunts after tea, if you like. I don't mind ! "

" We do," said Harry Wharton.

" Jolly queer thing, isn't it, how fellows are jealous of my gifts ? " said Bunter. " Jealousy and detraction all round, that's what I'm accustomed to. I suppose it's a sort of penalty for being clever."

" Oh, my hat ! "

" The cleverfulness is not really terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

" If you fellows could do what I do——" went on Bunter.

" We'd like to, but you've got all the cake," remarked Johnny Bull.

" I wasn't alluding to the cake, fathead."

" I was," said Johnny Bull.

" I hope you're not going to be mean about a cake. I'll let you have the next one they send me from Bunter Court, if you like."

" We shall be past cakes then," said Bob Cherry. " People don't eat cakes in extreme old age."

" Yah ! "

Bunter sliced the cake again. Harry Wharton reached across the table and rescued what was left. It made a moderate slice each for the owners of the cake.

"I say, you fellows, I really came in to tell you the news," said Bunter, munching busily. "The Head's son is coming home."

"Is he?" said Bob. "Did the Head tell you so?"

"Yes; confided it to me," said Bunter. "I don't think anybody else at Greyfriars has been told. You know young Locke is in the Army. He's been out in Mesopotamia, or somewhere, a jolly long time. Well, he's coming back to England, and may land at Southampton any day—the ship's been delayed by foul weather, or something."

Harry Wharton & Co. were mildly interested. They were acquainted with the Head's son, Mr. Percy Locke; he had been at Greyfriars, some time ago. He was quite a nice young man, they remembered, and they had no doubt that the Head was attached to him, and glad he was coming home again.

"The Head's going to Southampton to meet him when the steamer gets in," said Bunter. "He's rather bothered by the delay, you know, as he can't get away from Greyfriars for long; but he wants to be sure not to miss Percy when he lands."

"He told you all that?" grinned Bob.

"Yes; we had quite a chat. I understand that Quelch will be left in charge while the Head's gone. Quelch's the Head's right-hand man, you know, though he's only Lower Fourth master. From what old Locke was saying I think the steamer may get in to-morrow; if so, the Head will buzz off in his car at once,

leaving Quelch in control. Any more cake?"

"Nix."

"Not much of a spread to ask a fellow to," said Bunter, with a sniff. "I rather wish I had gone to Smithy's study now."

"And so say all of us!" said Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But about young Locke," went on Bunter. "The Head said he was thinking of giving Greyfriars a holiday when the chap comes home."

"Good egg!"

"Good old Head!"

"Bravo!"

This was much more interesting news.

"The goodnessful is terrific, if true," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But how does the esteemed and fat-headed Bunter know?"

"The Head told me," said Bunter calmly. "He was quite chatty, in fact. I don't know whether it's to be a whole holiday or a half; the Head was just going to say when Quelch looked round and I had to clear——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I mean the Head didn't mention that in his chat with me. I don't see anything to cackle at. I say, you fellows, it will be ripping to get an extra holiday, especially if it's on a day when we have maths. I thought I'd tell you fellows, as you're pals of mine. If you're done with the table you might clear the things off, will you? I'm going to do my lines here."

The Famous Five looked at Bunter. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, to whom Study No. 1 belonged, did not seem in the least enthusiastic about Bunter doing his lines there. Neither did they seem keen to clear the tea-table for the purpose.



"Bend over that armchair, Todd!" ordered Mr. Quelch. "Oh dear!" gasped Peter. Whack, whack, whack, whack, whack, whack! Toddy squirmed and wriggled as he received "six."

"You see, Toddy'll be cutting up rusty if I go to my own study," explained Bunter, "and I've got to get through the lines. There's two hundred now—they've been doubled twice, because I haven't done them. Quelch's told me it will be a licking if they're not handed in by five to-day."

"It's five now!" said Nugent.

"Yes; all the more reason for hurrying. If I don't take them to Quelch he will come up here inquiring after them, you know, and that means bending over."

"Then it means bending over," said Harry Wharton. "You can't possibly get two hundred lines done in time."

"I expect my old pals to stand by me, especially when I've come here to tell you the latest news," said Bunter. "Two hundred lines won't take long with all of us working at them."

"Oh!"

"I'll do a line at the top of each sheet, see, and you fellows can copy my fist," said Bunter. "It only needs a little sense."

"Oh, my hat!"

"You've got a Virgil here," said Bunter. "I don't want to go to my study for mine. Now, there's no time to lose. Clear the table sharp."

The Famous Five did not stir.

They were not looking for lines to do, as a matter of fact. To Billy

Bunter it was extremely important that those lines should be done in a hurry, and he considered that it was a case of all hands to the mill. The importance was not so obvious to the Famous Five.

They considered that if Bunter did not want a licking for leaving his impots unwritten, he should have written them while there was yet time. That consideration did not seem to occur to the Owl of the Remove.

"Deaf?" asked Bunter, looking round irritably at five grinning faces. "I keep on telling you that there's no time to lose. If Quelchy remembers my impot, he may come up here any minute after me."

"And catch us all copying your fist!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Not quite good enough, Bunter."

"The not-quiteness is terrific."

"I say, you fellows, I'm relying on you, you know," urged Bunter. "I've had the rotten impot doubled twice, and Quelchy always makes it a licking after that."

"Why haven't you done your lines, lazybones?" demanded Johnny Bull. "Do you think we're going to do two hundred because you're too jolly lazy to do fifty?"

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"Call in some other study," said Nugent.

"I say, you fellows, I expect my old pals to stand by me at a time like this," said Bunter reproachfully. "I really think they ought."

"They ought," agreed Bob Cherry. "Go and tell them so, whoever they are."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cut the cackle!" exclaimed Bunter. "I tell you old Quelchy will be after me if I don't bung those lines on him soon. Look here, are you

going to pile into those lines, or are you not?"

"Not!" said five voices in unison; and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh added emphatically that the notfulness was terrific.

"Well, this is rather thick," said Bunter, in a deeply aggrieved tone. "You won't write my lines in an emergency like this, when I've come here specially to tell you what old Locke told me, about having a holiday when young Locke comes home—— What are you making faces at, Wharton?"

Wharton was making an extraordinary face, intended to convey a warning to Bunter to ring off. The door of Study No. 1 was wide open, and a figure in cap and gown was passing—the figure of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove. Obviously the Remove master was on his way to Study No. 7, in search of Bunter and the—as yet—unwritten lines.

Bunter's voice floated out of Study No. 1, and Mr. Quelch came to a sudden halt and turned to the door.

Then the Owl of the Remove learned the cause of the extraordinary expression on Wharton's face.

"Bunter!"

"Oh lor'!"

Bunter spun round like a teetotum. His fat knees knocked together as he blinked at Mr. Quelch, his eyes almost bulging through his spectacles with terror.

"Bunter," thundered the Remove master, "is it possible that you were alluding to your headmaster as 'old Locke'?"

"Oh crumbs! No, sir!" gasped Bunter. "Certainly not, sir! I—I wouldn't dream of such a thing, sir!" "I distinctly heard you use the words 'old Locke,' Bunter."

"Did—d-did you, sir?"

"I did, Bunter!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, with a terrifying glare at the hapless Owl. "How dare you deny using words which I distinctly heard you use? Such an expression applied to the headmaster of this school——"

"I—I wasn't speaking of the Head, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"What, boy?"

"I—I was sus-speaking of—of—of——" stuttered Bunter.

"Of whom?" said Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice.

"Nobody at all, sir," gasped the terrified Owl. "I—I was speaking of—of the lock on a door, sir."

"Wha-a-t?"

"The—the lock on my study door, sir," babbled Bunter. "I—I was saying it was an old lock, sir, and—and we want a new one, sir. That—that's all, sir. I—I hope you believe me, sir."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry, almost overcome.

The chums of the Remove gazed at Bunter open-mouthed.

Bunter was a fabricator of unusual powers. His first resource in a scrape was to roll out the first "whopper" that came into his obtuse head, and to back it up with more and more "whoppers," bigger and bigger, like Pelion piled on Ossa. But if Bunter hoped that Mr. Quelch believed his extraordinary explanation, it showed a remarkably sanguine disposition on his part. His hope was not destined to be realised.

"Boy," stuttered Mr. Quelch, "how dare you—how dare you, I say, look me in the face and tell me such absurd untruths?"

"Oh, really, sir——"

"You were alluding to your headmaster in the most disrespectful terms," exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "But worse than that, Bunter, you were

speaking of a private matter that has hitherto been known only to the Head and myself, outside Dr. Locke's own family. I demand to know how you became aware that Dr. Locke's son is about to return home from abroad?"

Bunter's teeth chattered.

He had told Harry Wharton & Co. that he had been having a chat with the Head. But even Bunter was not likely to make that statement to Mr. Quelch.

"You have been eavesdropping, Bunter."

"Oh! No, sir! Oh, no!" gasped Bunter.

"The matter has not been mentioned before to-day. You must have listened to Dr. Locke's conversation with me."

"Certainly not, sir! I—I wouldn't."

"Then how do you know anything about the matter, Bunter?"

"I—I—I don't, sir."

"What?"

"I—I don't know anything about it at all, sir! It—it's quite a mistake to—to think I know anything about it."

"Are you out of your senses, Bunter? I heard you making the statement to these juniors——"

"I—I didn't know you were listening, sir!"

"What?" shrieked Mr. Quelch.

"I—I mean, I didn't know you were passing, sir. Oh, dear!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I wasn't really telling these fellows about young Locke coming home, sir. I—I don't know anything about it really, sir. I—I was only speaking in—in a general sort of way, sir."

Mr. Quelch breathed hard.

"Bunter, go to my study at once!"

"Wha-a-t for, sir?"

"I am going to punish you, Bunter, for outrageous untruthfulness, and for listening to a private conversation."

"Oh, sir! I——"

"Go!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

The hapless Owl quaked and went. Mr. Quelch whisked away after him.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another.

"Well, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Bunter does take the cake—the whole cake! Ananias was a fool to him; he could give George Washington fifty in a hundred and beat him hollow!"

"Poor old Bunter; he's for it now!" said Harry.

"Well, he asked for it, and no mistake."

There was no doubt that Bunter had asked for it, and no doubt at all that he was getting what he had asked for. A few minutes later loud sounds of anguish were heard proceeding from Mr. Quelch's study—the voice of William George Bunter raised in woeful lamentation. The vials of wrath were being poured upon the Owl of the Remove, and the celebrated lamentations of Job were a mere jest compared with the lamentations of William George Bunter.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

WOEFUL!

PETER TODD glanced round, and reached for the fives bat that lay handy on the study table. The bat was all ready for Bunter when he came in, and Bunter was coming. There was a well-known footstep and a well-known grunt in the Remove passage outside Study No. 7.

The door opened.

Peter gripped the bat with a business-like grip.

But as the Owl of the Remove rolled in Peter unloosed his grip. It needed only one glance at Bunter's anguished face to tell that he had been gathering up punishment somewhere, and that he was not in need of any more.

The Owl of the Remove blinked at Peter with a lack-lustre eye. He had forgotten the bat.

"What on earth's the matter?" asked Todd, staring at him.

Groan!

"Loder been licking you?"

Groan!

"Too much tuck, and a pain amidships?" asked Peter.

Groan!

Bunter limped across the study to the armchair and sank down. The next moment he leaped to his feet with a howl. For reasons of his own, the hapless Owl did not want to sit down. As a rule he never stood if he could sit; just now he was keen on standing.

"Licked, I suppose?" asked Peter.

"Ow! Wow! Yes! Wow! Ow!"

"Well, don't make such a row about it, old chap!"

Groan!

"I'll let you off the bat," said Peter generously. "There! You were going to get a licking, anyhow! So shut up!"

Groan!

"Chuck it, old man!"

Groan!

Billy Bunter leaned on the table and groaned as if he were getting his form up for a groaning match.

Peter eyed him. He could see that the fat junior had been through it severely; it was not humbug this time.

"Well, if you've had it bad you can groan a bit if you like," he said.

"Dash it all, you can howl if you like! Try howling!"

Groan!

"I'll get out of the study, if you really don't mind," said Todd, rising. "Keep it up if it relieves you, old fat man, but it's a bit horrid to listen to!"

Groan!

Peter crossed to the door. But he turned back. Bunter was not a fellow whose ways were likely to make him popular or beloved, but Peter could feel for him in this dreadful state. He fumbled in his pocket.

"I've got a packet of toffee here," he said.

Obviously, Bunter's sufferings were acute. For he showed no interest in the toffee.

Peter took out the packet and held it out to Bunter. The Owl of the Remove shook his head feebly.

"Mean to say you can't eat toffee now?" asked Peter, in wonder.

Groan!

"Great Scott! You must have it bad! Well, if you don't want it I do," said Peter, and he was about to slip the toffee back into his pocket when Bunter held out a fat hand. "Oh,

changed your mind—what? Well, here you are."

Bunter accepted the toffee. But he did not transfer it immediately to his mouth, as he generally did with anything eatable that came into his possession. He slipped it into his pocket. His interest even in food was at a low ebb in this state of suffering; but even in the midst of his woes he had an eye to the future.

Peter Todd grinned.

"Well, you can have the study to yourself till you've done groaning," he said. "Get through before prep, won't you?"

Groan!

Peter Todd left the study and



With a groan Bunter sank down in the armchair. The next moment he leaped to his feet with a howl. Bunter was not keen on sitting after receiving a licking from Mr. Que'ch!

Bunter was left to groan, which he did loud and long. Mr. Quelch had not spared the rod; he had felt that this was an occasion for severity, and he had handed out a dozen of the best. No doubt the Remove master was quite right, from his own point of view; but his point of view and Bunter's were wide as the poles asunder.

Bunter leaned on the table in deep tribulation, and the sounds of his woe echoed through Study No. 7.

He was still groaning, quite a considerable time later, when the door was tapped and opened, and Lord Mauleverer's kind face looked in.

Bunter blinked dismally at his lordship.

"I hear you've been through it, fatty," remarked Mauleverer, with a sympathetic look at the Owl of the Remove.

Groan!

"Feelin' awf'ly bad?"

"Oh! Oh, dear! Wow! Yes! Frightful!"

"Can't take an interest in anythin' just yet—what?"

"Ow! No."

"No good askin' you to supper in my study, then?"

"Eh?"

Bunter pricked up his fat ears. It dawned upon him that his pains and aches had considerably lessened, and that he was still groaning from, as it were, force of habit.

"Don't feel like supper?" asked the sympathetic Mauly. "We've got fish and chips——"

"Oh!"

"And a pie——"

"Ah!"

"And a cake! But if you don't feel equal to it——"

"I do!" gasped Bunter, in a great

hurry. "The—the fact is, I feel a lot better now, Mauly! Lots and lots!"

Lord Mauleverer grinned

"If you're sure——"

"Quite."

"Come on, then, old fat bean!"

And Billy Bunter rolled after his amiable lordship to Study No. 12. He had a twinge as he sat down at Lord Mauleverer's hospitable board, and gasped; but the feed consoled him. His woeful face brightened over the fish and chips, he was smiling when he came to the pie, and over the cake he grinned with expansive enjoyment.

Bunter was himself again!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

STICKING TO IT!

MR. QUELCH frowned as he glanced at Bunter in the Remove Form the following morning.

Any fellow but Bunter would have been wary; he would have noted his Form master's frown, and taken warning thereby; he would have remembered that he had lately given dire offence, and would have been extremely circumspect. Not so Bunter.

He was thinking almost entirely of his inner Bunter; and so far from observing the danger-signals, he was not thinking of Mr. Quelch at all.

Far more important considerations occupied his fat mind.

Harry Wharton was called upon to construe, and Vernon-Smith followed, and Ogilvy followed Smithy. Bunter was not giving much attention; he hoped that he would not be called upon, but if it happened, he was prepared to render his usual excruciating construe, which certainly would have made P. Virgilius Maro tear his hair, could that ancient classic gentleman have been present to hear it.

While the other fellows were giving Virgil beans, so to speak, Bunter was groping in his pockets.

He was hungry, and getting hungrier. He groped in his pockets in the faint hope of finding some article of a comestible nature overlooked there. A chocolate, however dusty, a fragment of liquorice, howsoever sticky, even a single aniseed ball, would have been very welcome.

Bunter's fat face lighted up as his groping fingers came in contact with a toffee-packet.

It was the toffee Peter Todd had given him in the study the evening before. In the enjoyment of Lord Mauleverer's munificent feed, Bunter had forgotten all about that toffee.

He smiled.

That toffee came now like corn in Egypt in one of the lean years. It was the right thing in the right place!

Surreptitiously, under his desk, Bunter extracted the toffee from the packet, and then, stooping down for a dropped pencil, he transferred a chunk of it to his mouth.

He sat up again happily.

Mr. Quelch's attention was fixed upon Redwing, who had been called upon to follow Ogilvy. For the moment, at least, he had no eyes for Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove chewed away at the toffee, in a happy and satisfied state.

"That will do, Redwing. You will go on, Bunter."

Bunter jumped.

Mr. Quelch's gimlet-eye was upon him now.

Bunter thought wildly of bolting the chunk of toffee. But it was too bulky to be bolted in a lump without imminent danger of choking. And he could not construe Virgil with a

large chunk of toffee in his mouth. It was a desperate moment.

The Owl of the Remove brought his teeth together on the chunk of toffee to bite it in halves.

Thus divided, it could have been bolted rapidly in two gulps—at least that was Bunter's idea. Perhaps it was fortunate for him that he was prevented from disposing of the toffee in that heroic manner. Prevented he certainly was. His teeth almost met in the sticky chunk as he bit at it desperately, but they would not come out again. To his utter horror, he found his teeth fast in the toffee, stuck as if they were glued.

"I called to you, Bunter!" snapped Mr. Quelch, quite unaware so far of the agony of mind that oppressed his hapless pupil.

Bunter was quite willing to respond to the call, and render a construe as bad as usual. But he couldn't.

The effort he made to draw his teeth from the toffee almost uprooted the teeth from his gums.

And they would not come out.

In fact, they seemed as likely to come out of his gums as to come out of the toffee into which they were deeply driven.

Bunter gasped and spluttered, his face growing as red as a turkey cock's. His eyes goggled horribly.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

Peter Todd reached out a friendly foot to kick Bunter as a warning to attend to his Form master.

But a kick was no use to Bunter. He wanted a dentist at least to help him out of this fearful predicament.

Mr. Quelch frowned portentously. He was already displeased with Bunter—extremely displeased with him. It seemed to him now that the fat junior was adding deliberate insolence to his other many offences. Called upon to

construe, he did not rise to the occasion, but sat with his mouth tight shut, his eyes goggling at his Form master. Really, it was beyond all patience.

"Bunter! Will you heed me, or will you not?" thundered the Remove master. "Are you deaf, Bunter? What does this mean? Answer me!"

"Mmmmmmm!"

That was the best Bunter could hand out in the way of an answer. A fellow whose teeth were stuck together by toffee was not in a state for conversation. Bunter, as a rule, was an incessant talker. In season and out of season his fat voice was heard. Often and often—in fact, unnumbered times—Remove fellows had implored him to shut up. Now he had shut up with a vengeance!

"Bunter!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Goooooooh!"

"Boy!"

"Moooooooooh!" mumbled Bunter helplessly.

The Removites stared round at Bunter. Nobody knew what was the matter with him—unless he had suddenly taken leave of his senses. Why a fellow, if sane, should sit there making a mooing noise like a cow was a complete mystery to all the Remove.

Mr. Quelch strode towards him. He came among the forms with thunder in his brow, and his eyes fairly gleamed at Bunter.

"Stand up, Bunter!"

Bunter stood up. He could obey that order.

"Now answer me!"

Bunter gurgled. That was an order he couldn't obey.

"Do you hear me, Bunter?"

"Mmmmmmmmmmm!"

"Have you something in your mouth?" exclaimed the Remove

master, beginning to comprehend what was wrong.

"Moooooooooh!"

"You are eating in class, you greedy, disgusting boy!"

"Moooooooooh!"

"What are you eating?"

"Ug-gug-gug-gooh!"

"How dare you utter such ridiculous sounds, Bunter?" roared the Form master. "This is deliberate insolence!"

"Mmmmmmmmm!"

Mr. Quelch had been sorely tried by Bunter, and now he was tried again, and his temper was found wanting. He grasped the fat junior by the collar and shook him vigorously.

"Ooooooooooch!" mumbled Bunter helplessly.

Strive as he might, he could not drag his teeth from the toffee. And as he was trying to answer Mr. Quelch, he really could not help uttering what the Form master described as ridiculous sounds. Articulation was out of the question.

Shake! Shake! Shake!

"Mmmmmmmmm! Mmmmmmm!"

"You greedy, disobedient, disgusting boy!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, and he marched Bunter out of the class and hooked him over to the wastepaper basket. "Now eject whatever is in your mouth!"

"Mmmmmmmmmmmoooooooooh!"

Bunter would have been only too glad to obey. But he couldn't! The toffee had the last word in that matter.

"For the last time, Bunter, will you obey me?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Ooooooooooch!"

Bunter pointed desperately to his mouth. He tried to make Mr. Quelch understand that he could not speak. That fact dawned on the Form master at last, but it did not lessen his anger.



Called upon to construe, Bunter did not rise to the occasion. He just sat, his eyes goggling at his Form master. "Bunter!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "What does this mean? Answer me!" "Mmmmmmm!" answered Bunter.

"Is that an adhesive substance in your mouth, Bunter?"

"Mmmmmmmmmmm!"

"Toffee, or butterscotch, I presume?" hooted Mr. Quelch.

"Moooooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from the Remove. They could hold it in no longer.

They knew that Mr. Quelch was in a dangerous mood, and they were well aware that it was not safe to laugh. But they could not help it. There was a limit to human fortitude, and the Remove broke out quite suddenly into a roar.

Mr. Quelch glared round at his class.

"Silence!" he roared.

The laughter died away. The look

on Mr. Quelch's face would have induced gravity in an ancient jester or a modern judge. The Lower Fourth were suddenly solemn.

"Every boy present will take a hundred lines!" hooted the Remove master, greatly incensed.

The gravity of the Remove, if possible, increased in intensity. It was really impossible to foresee what another chuckle might have cost.

"There is no occasion for merriment in this disgusting, this revolting exhibition of a greedy boy!" hooted Mr. Quelch.

The Remove did not agree with him, but they tried to look as if they did. Form masters, especially in

Mr. Quelch's present mood, had to be given their head.

"Bunter!"

Mr. Quelch turned to his victim again.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Ow! Groooogh!"

Desperate efforts had brought success at last. His teeth emerged at long last from the clinging toffee.

His face was crimson, his eyes watered. He blinked in the direst apprehension at Mr. Quelch.

He had cause for apprehension.

"Oh! You can speak now, Bunter?"

"Ow! Yes, sir! Oh dear! Oh, quite, sir!" stuttered Bunter.

"I shall not cane you for this disgusting exhibition, this reckless interruption of classes, Bunter."

"Oh! Thank you, sir!"

"I shall send you to the Head!"

"Ow!"

"I shall request Dr. Locke to administer a severe flogging."

"Wow!"

"Stand there while I write you a note to take to the Head."

"Oh dear!"

Mr. Quelch scribbled a note at his desk. The Remove watched him in breathless silence, Bunter in quaking terror. Mr. Quelch sealed the note, handed it to Bunter and glanced at the Form-room clock. It was not yet time for Dr. Locke to have taken the Sixth.

"Go to Dr. Locke's study, Bunter, at once! Hand this note to him."

"Oh dear! I—I say, sir——"

"Silence!"

"But——"

Mr. Quelch grasped Bunter by the shoulder and walked him across to the door of the Form-room.

"Go!"

"Oh, crikey!"

Bunter went; and the Form-room door closed after him. While Mr. Quelch's back was turned, smiles had crept round the Remove. But as soon as he turned back an almost preternatural gravity reigned. Mr. Quelch gave his class a suspicious look.

"We will now resume!" he said in a grinding voice.

And they resumed; and for once in their career the Greyfriars Remove were an absolutely faultless Form. In Mr. Quelch's present mood, they had to be circumspect; and they were very, very circumspect indeed.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

BUNTER'S LUCK!

TAP!

Buzzzzzz!

Billy Bunter tapped on the door of Dr. Locke's study, and at the same moment the telephone-bell rang in the room—just as if Bunter's tap had started the instrument.

Bunter opened the door, having tapped.

"Bless my soul!"

Bunter heard the Head utter that well-known ejaculation, as he blinked into the study.

But the Head was not looking at Bunter—he was standing at the telephone, with the receiver in his hand. Bunter had only a view of the back of his gown.

Bunter blinked at the Head's back.

He had a note to deliver to Dr. Locke, and he more than suspected that the note was to elicit a Head's flogging. In the circumstances, it was really too bad to be kept on tenterhooks like this. Bunter felt rather bitterly that the Head might have done his telephoning at a more convenient time.

With a flogging impending over his

head, Bunter was still Bunter! Whatsoever the Head had to say on the telephone was no concern of his; so naturally he listened with both his fat ears. That was Bunter's way.

"My dear, dear boy! Immediately!" the Head was saying into the transmitter.

Although Bunter could see only the Head's back, he could discern that the old gentleman was a little agitated.

"Certainly, my dear Percy!" went on the Head. "I shall order the car immediately—I shall be with you at lunch, I hope. Yes, yes, and you will return with me in the car. My dear boy!"

Obviously, Dr. Locke was speaking to his son, who must have landed from the steamer which had brought him home from Mesopotamia.

"I shall lose not a moment!" said the Head, in a voice of happy agitation. "And you are well, my boy—quite well? I am thankful for that! My dear boy, I shall use the greatest haste."

Dr. Locke hung up the receiver.

He turned from the telephone, and there was a brighter smile than Bunter had ever seen before on his kind old face. Evidently his son's return from the arid sands of Mesopotamia had delighted the old gentleman. Dr. Locke took a turn up and down in the study, not even noticing the fat junior in the doorway, for the moment.

Bunter coughed.

He was wondering inwardly whether, in this happy mood, the Head would be likely to lend ear to a plea for mercy. Certainly, Dr. Locke did not look as if he would have cared to flog anyone that morning.

Bunter had slipped Mr. Quelch's note into his pocket. He decided to

try the effect of his eloquence on the headmaster before he handed over that epistle.

Dr. Locke started a little as Bunter coughed, and looked round at him.

"What? What? Bunter! What are you doing here, Bunter?"

"Mr. Quelch sent me, sir——" began Bunter.

The Head interrupted him.

"But it is fortunate, as it happens," he said, without heeding Bunter, or perhaps even hearing him. "I have not a moment to spare. You will take a message to Mr. Quelch."

"If you please, sir——"

Dr. Locke waved away Bunter's intended remarks with a wave of the hand.

He had no time to listen to Bunter. He was totally ignorant and regardless of the importance of hearing him.

"Bunter, you will go to Mr. Quelch and——"

"But, sir——"

"Tell him I am called away to meet Mr. Percy at Southampton. He will understand."

"Yes; but—— Yes, sir. But——"

"Request him to take the Sixth Form, and make what other arrangements are necessary."

"Yes, sir! I——"

"That is all, Bunter."

"But, sir——"

But the Head was gone.

Billy Bunter blinked after him as he hurried down the corridor, with a haste very unusual in the grave and dignified old gentleman.

"Well, my hat!" murmured Bunter, in utter disgust.

Really, it was too thick!

The Head seemed to think that his own trivial family matters transcended in importance the weighty affairs of William George Bunter, of the Remove.

It was another sample of the selfishness to which Bunter was accustomed!

It was Bunter's duty to repair immediately to the Remove Form-room and deliver the Head's message to Mr. Quelch.

But Bunter was in no hurry.

He had himself to think of, though the Head, apparently, did not consider him of any consequence.

Taking the Head's message to Mr. Quelch was all very well, but what was to happen then? The flogging, doubtless, would be off. The probability was that Mr. Quelch would take Bunter's punishment into his own hands, after all. On reflection, Bunter considered that most likely. He would have a caning from Mr. Quelch instead of the threatened Head's flogging.

But Bunter did not want a caning any more than he wanted a flogging.

The matter, therefore, required thinking about, even if the Head's trivial affairs had to be a little neglected.

Bunter rolled into the Head's study to think it out.

There was no hurry.

The Head was in a hurry, but Bunter wasn't! Mr. Quelch, supposing that he was getting a flogging, would not expect him back in the Remove-room yet. Bunter had time to think the matter out. The Head was gone, he was already in his own house, dressing hurriedly for the motor-car journey, no doubt. Certainly he had not expected Bunter to remain in his study, but it was quite safe for Bunter to remain there. He closed the door so that no chance passer should see him. Then he reflected.

Suppose he returned to the Remove-room, leaving Mr. Quelch to suppose that he had had his flogging! Bunter dallied with the idea, but he was forced

to give it up. Quelch was a suspicious beast and as sharp as a razor—and he might ask the Head later, too!

Supposing he had given Mr. Quelch's note to the Head—who had shoved it into his pocket unread in the hurry of the moment! That might really have happened, and Bunter felt that it was more plausible.

The fat junior extracted Mr. Quelch's note from his pocket and dropped it into the Head's grate.

It was consumed in a moment.

That, at least, was done with.

Bunter figured it out in his mind. In considering this important matter he quite forgot that he had an urgent message to deliver to Mr. Quelch.

The Sixth Form would be going to their room in a few minutes, and would not find the Head there; neither would he come! The high and mighty Sixth would be left at a loose end.

Still, that did not matter. Bunter did not give that the fag-end of a thought.

The great question was, how was Bunter, having escaped a licking from the Head, to escape a licking from Mr. Quelch in turn?

Faintly, from a distance, Bunter heard the echoing sound of a departing car.

The Head was gone! Already he was on the road, with his back to Greyfriars, speeding away from the school, his face towards the distant seaport and his thoughts already there. Bunter was done with the Head for the day.

If only he could have been done with Mr. Quelch also! Mr. Quelch, unfortunately, remained to be dealt with.

The problem was a difficult one. It beat anything in Euclid. From whatever aspect Bunter considered it, the

certainly seemed that since his punishment had not been administered by the Head, it would be administered by Mr. Quelch. The Head had been in a melting mood. Mr. Quelch was not likely to be in anything of the kind. If the flogging was off the caning was on—that seemed certain. It was an improvement, but it was not good enough.

With that prospect before him on his return to the Remove-room, Bunter was naturally in no hurry to return. The Head's message to Mr. Quelch, of course, could wait.

But the minutes were passing.

The Sixth had gone to their Form-room, and Mr. Quelch would soon be wondering why Bunter did not return.

Bunter was not much accustomed to thinking, but his fat wits were hard at work now. If Mr. Quelch could be made to believe that Bunter had had his licking, or if a fictitious message could be invented from the Head, causing Mr. Quelch to remit the punishment, either would do. But—

Deep in that problem, Bunter heard a sound of footsteps in the corridor outside approaching the study door.

He started.

Back into his fat mind came the recollection of the Head's reference to the Sixth Form which Mr. Quelch was to "take" in Dr. Locke's absence.

There was no one to "take" the Sixth, and they had obviously been waiting, and now some beast was coming along about it. Bunter even



"Bless my soul!" Bunter heard the Head utter that well-known ejaculation as Dr. Locke stood at the telephone, with the receiver in his hand.

thought he recognised Wingate's footsteps. Of course, with nobody in charge of the Sixth Form-room, the head prefect would naturally come to the Head for instructions.

Bunter hardly stopped to think.

He crossed rapidly to the door and silently, softly, turned the key in the lock.

He was only just in time.
Tap!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

HIS MASTER'S VOICE!

BILLY BUNTER breathed hard.

Wingate, or some other Sixth Form beast, was tapping at the door of the Head's study—most likely Wingate.

Bunter made no sound.

If Wingate supposed that the Head was not there, and did not look in, all was well. Bunter would have gained a respite, at least, and would still have time to solve his problem.

Tap!

The newcomer knocked again.

Then the handle turned.

"By Jove!"

Bunter heard George Wingate's voice murmur that ejaculation. Doubtless the captain of Greyfriars was surprised to find the Head's door locked and to receive no answer to his knock.

Bunter stood silent, his fat knees knocking together, wondering what the prefect would do.

Knock!

It was a louder knock than before. Bunter's eyes gleamed through his big spectacles. Why couldn't the beast go? He must know that the Head didn't want to be disturbed if he had locked the door and didn't answer a knock. But Wingate did not go. He was surprised, and perhaps startled.

Knock!

"Are you there, sir?" called out Wingate of the Sixth. "The door seems to be locked, sir!"

Bunter breathed hard.

"Dr. Locke!" called out Wingate, and there was a note of uneasiness in his voice now. "Dr. Locke! Are you ill, sir?"

"Oh, dear!" breathed Bunter.

The silly ass actually supposed that the Head was ill, because he did not answer. Knowing nothing of Dr. Locke's sudden departure from Greyfriars, and finding the Head's door locked, Wingate could really hardly suppose anything else. But it was extremely irritating to Bunter. It meant that the beast wouldn't go!

"Dr. Locke!" Wingate called out again.

And then, like a flash, came Bunter's brain-wave. There was a way of satisfying Wingate—quite an easy way, though Bunter had not thought of it before. The episode of the previous day in Study No. 7—it was only necessary to repeat it. The ventriloquial voice that had deceived Peter Todd and Harry Wharton & Co. was good enough for Wingate of the Sixth.

Bunter gave a little fat cough, his usual preliminary to ventriloquial stunts.

"Bless my soul!"

"Oh, you are there, sir!" exclaimed Wingate, as he heard that well-known ejaculation in the study through the oak door.

"Yes, certainly. Is that you, Wingate?"

It was the Head's voice to the last tone!

"Yes, sir. I knocked, and you did not answer, and I thought perhaps you might be ill, sir."

"Bless my soul! Not at all, Wingate. I have—hem!—locked my door so that I shall not be disturbed. I have a very important matter of business to deal with."

"Yes, sir," said Wingate, in wonder.

"As I shall not be at liberty this morning, Wingate, I desire Mr. Quelch to take the Sixth. Will you tell him

so, and will you take charge of the Remove, Wingate?"

"Very well, sir."

"You will inform Mr. Quelch that I have dealt with the boy Bunter, Wingate. Bunter was sent to me for punishment, and I have dealt with him."

"Yes, sir."

"Kindly inform Mr. Quelch, also, that I have given Bunter leave from class this morning," went on Bunter, almost surprised at his own facility of invention, and still in the Head's voice. "After administering—hem!—a severe punishment, I considered it judicious to excuse him from class. You will tell Mr. Quelch so."

"Very good, sir!"

And Wingate, greatly to Bunter's relief, walked away down the passage.

Bunter grinned.

The captain of Greyfriars obviously had not the slightest suspicion, though doubtless he was a little perplexed.

Bunter was safe!

Safe from the Head—safe from Mr. Quelch—safe from classes! He had a morning off, instead of a flogging or a caning! Really, it had been well worth while to cultivate his weird gift of ventriloquism.

He sat down in the Head's comfortable armchair, and put his feet on the Head's mantelpiece.

He was in no hurry to leave the study.

It was judicious to wait till Mr. Quelch was settled in the Sixth Form-room with the seniors, and all the school at work. Then he would be able to slip out of the study without the slightest danger of detection.

True, he had not yet delivered the Head's message to Mr. Quelch. He had, in fact, forgotten that, in the stress of circumstances. But that could come later. For the moment,

obviously, Mr. Quelch could not be allowed to know that the Head was gone, since he was to believe that the Head had just been giving Wingate directions.

Bunter sat in the Head's armchair and groped in his pocket. He still had a chunk or two of Peter Todd's toffee left, and he proceeded to dispose of it with satisfaction.

Footsteps again!

Bunter started up.

If that beast Wingate was coming back, or Mr. Quelch—Fortunately, the door was locked. Bunter listened with painful intentness. Then he recognised the heavy, ponderous tread of Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth. Portly Mr. Prout had a tread that was unmistakable—indeed, Potter of the Fifth had applied to him a quotation from Macaulay, describing him as the "huge earth-shaking beast."

What the thump did the Fifth Form master want? He ought to have been in his Form-room with his Form, but here he was!

Knock!

The Greyfriars ventriloquist answered at once; he did not want Mr. Prout to become suspicious.

"Who is there?"

"It is I, Dr. Locke," answered Mr. Prout's portly voice, and he turned the handle of the door.

"The door is locked, Mr. Prout. I must not be disturbed this morning. I am engaged upon—hem!—some pressing business."

"Oh, quite so, sir!" said Mr. Prout. "I am sorry to disturb you, sir, in that case, but as you instructed me to come at ten-thirty——"

"Eh?"

"Perhaps you could spare one moment, sir, to hand me the Latin paper for which I have called, and for

which you instructed me to call," said Mr. Prout, with a faint note of sarcasm in his voice.

Bunter breathed quickly.

Of all unlucky things it seemed that the Head had been preparing a Latin paper for the Fifth, and told Mr. Prout to ask him for it that morning! Really, it was not an unusual incident, but it was very unfortunate in the circumstances—the peculiar circumstances. Bunter was at a loss for a moment, and did not know what to reply, and Mr. Prout went on:

"I have been to the Sixth Form-room, sir, and was told that you were in your study, sir, so I came here. I am loth to disturb you, sir; but your own instructions——"

"Yes, yes; quite so, Mr. Prout," said Bunter, in the Head's voice, "quite so! But the fact is—the—the fact is——"

"Yes, sir?"

Mr. Prout evidently wanted to know what the fact was!

"The—the fact is——" Bunter cudgelled his fat brains. "The—the fact of the matter is—is this, Mr. Prout—I have gone to Southampton to meet——"

"What?"

"I—I mean, I am going to Southampton to meet my—my son, who is returning from India——"

"From India, sir?"

"I mean from Mespot—that is to say, Mesopotamia. I have had a telephone message from my—my son, Mr. Prout, to say that he has landed at Northampton——"

"At Northampton?"

"I mean Southampton. In the circumstances, Mr. Prout, I quite forgot the Latin paper, and I have not—not prepared it. I shall have no time to attend to the matter to-day."

"Very good, sir."

"I am now expecting a trunk call from Southampton, so I must not be disturbed. Kindly go back to your Form-room at once, Mr. Prout, and remain there!"

"What?"

"Remain there!"

There was a sort of gurgling grunt outside the Head's door. Dr. Locke was extremely popular with his staff, for his urbanity of manner, his old-world courtesy, was unfailing. So this kind of talk from him was very surprising and disconcerting, and Mr. Prout was very much surprised and very much offended.

"Dr. Locke!"

"Yes, yes!"

"You will excuse me, sir," said Mr. Prout, his portly voice trembling with resentment. "You will excuse me, Dr. Locke, if I take exception, sir, to this mode of address, to which, sir, I am unaccustomed—quite unaccustomed. I came to see you, sir, on your own instructions—your instructions, sir, given to me personally. I will return to my Form-room, sir, immediately, and I shall certainly remain there, sir—most certainly; but, although you are my chief, sir, and I respect you highly, sir, I am bound to say that I take exception to such a mode of address, sir—I am bound to say that, Dr. Locke!"

And Mr. Prout, extremely offended, marched away down the corridor with his heavy tread.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bunter.

He had escaped again, at all events; and the offence taken by Mr. Prout did not matter much—to Bunter. He sat down in the Head's armchair to finish the toffee.

The toffee finished, Bunter decided that it was time to get out of his present quarters before some other troublesome person came along.

He unlocked the door quietly, opened it a few inches, and blinked into the corridor.

Like Moses of old, he looked this way and that way. After what had occurred, it was extremely important that the Greyfriars ventriloquist should not be seen leaving the Head's study.

The next moment Bunter's head popped back into the study, like that of a tortoise into its shell.

A few yards along the corridor was a window. At that window stood Trotter, the House page, polishing the glass.

Bunter's heart thumped.

He closed the door again softly,

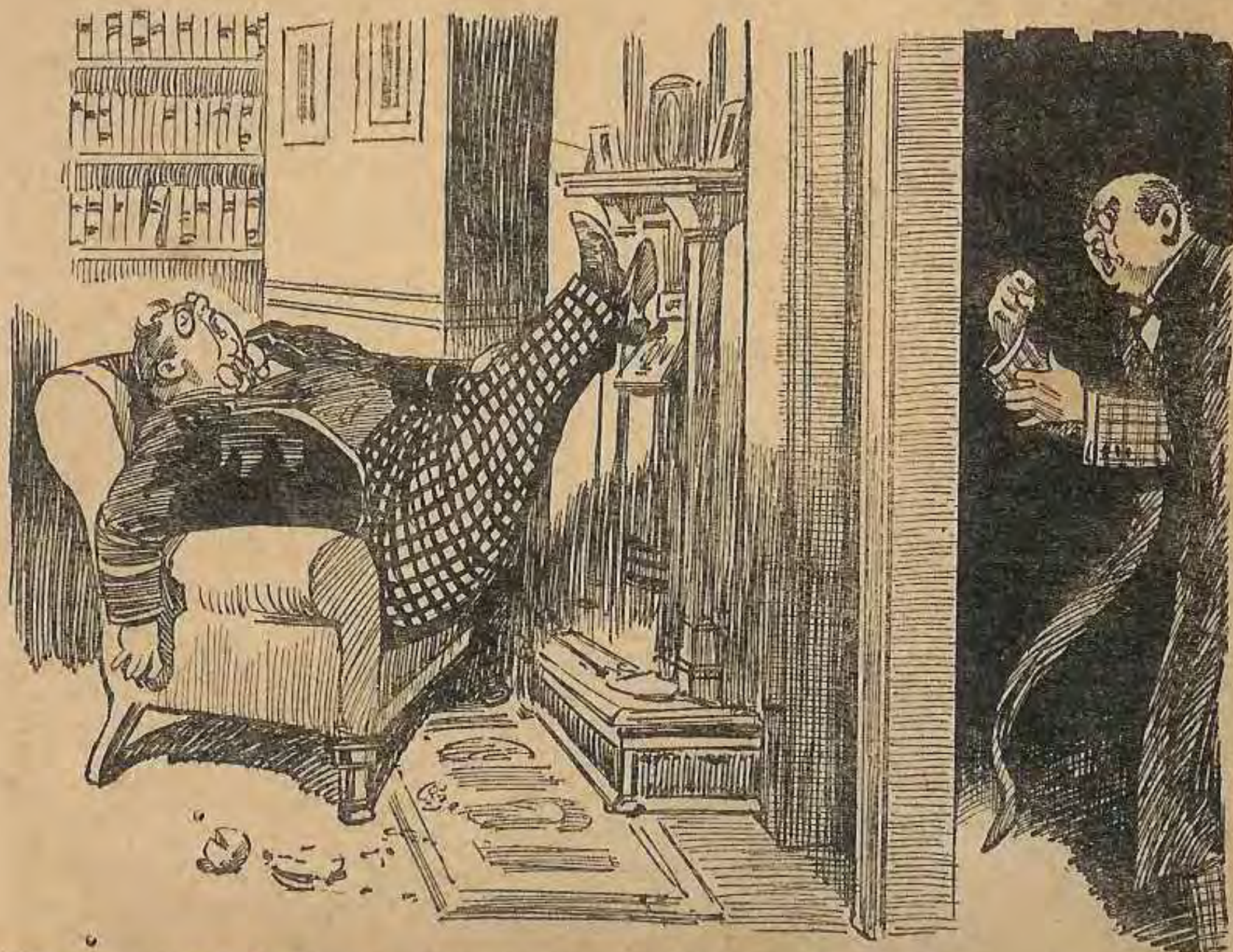
and as softly turned the key in the lock.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bunter.

He had not been seen, but the escape had been narrow. Evidently he could not leave the Head's study yet.

"Oh dear!"

Up to that moment all had gone well—remarkably well! But the peculiar situation had developed awkwardness! Billy Bunter was a prisoner now in the Head's study, and how long his imprisonment was to last was a troublesome question to which there was, as yet, no answer.



"The door is locked, Mr. Prout," said the Greyfriars ventriloquist in the Head's voice. "I must not be disturbed this morning. I am engaged upon—ahem!—pressing business."

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

MYSTERIOUS !

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Not Bunter!" whispered Nugent.

The door of the Remove Form-room had opened, and all eyes in the Remove turned upon it in the expectation of seeing Billy Bunter.

All the Remove knew what Mr. Quelch's note to the Head meant. It meant that the Head was requested to give Bunter a flogging.

So the Remove fellows expected to see Bunter return to the Form-room in a crumpled condition, squirming.

But it was not Bunter—it was Wingate of the Sixth who entered the Remove-room.

Mr. Quelch glanced at him in surprised inquiry.

"The Head sent me, sir," said Wingate. "I am to tell you that he is very busy this morning, and desires you to take the Sixth Form in his place, sir."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Quelch.

"I am to take the Remove in your absence, sir."

"Very good, Wingate!"

"The Head desired me to tell you that he has punished Bunter, sir, and has excused him from classes this morning in consequence of his punishment."

Mr. Quelch raised his eyebrows a little.

"Indeed! Bunter is excused from class?"

"The Head said I was to tell you so, sir."

"Very good!" said Mr. Quelch, compressing his lips a little.

Mr. Quelch saw no reason whatever why Bunter should be excused from classes simply because he had been

flogged. But this was not the first occasion that Dr. Locke had taken a more lenient view than the somewhat severe Remove master. It was slightly irritating, but it was not a matter of surprise.

Mr. Quelch glanced over his class.

"I shall leave you in Wingate's charge this morning," he said. "Wharton, you will acquaint Wingate with the order of work for the lessons. I shall expect order to be kept in this Form-room during my absence."

And Mr. Quelch left the Remove-room and went away to take the Sixth, nothing doubting.

The Remove brightened up considerably.

Mr. Quelch's temper had been very tart that morning, and the juniors were by no means displeased to change him for Wingate.

First lesson was over and second lesson went off quite amicably with the captain of Greyfriars in control.

Then came morning break, and the Removites were dismissed for a quarter of an hour, and they streamed out cheerily into the sunny quadrangle.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Where's Bunter?" inquired Bob Cherry.

The juniors had expected to find Bunter in the quad, but he was not to be seen.

"Lucky bargee, to get off classes for the morning," said Skinner. "Almost worth a flogging."

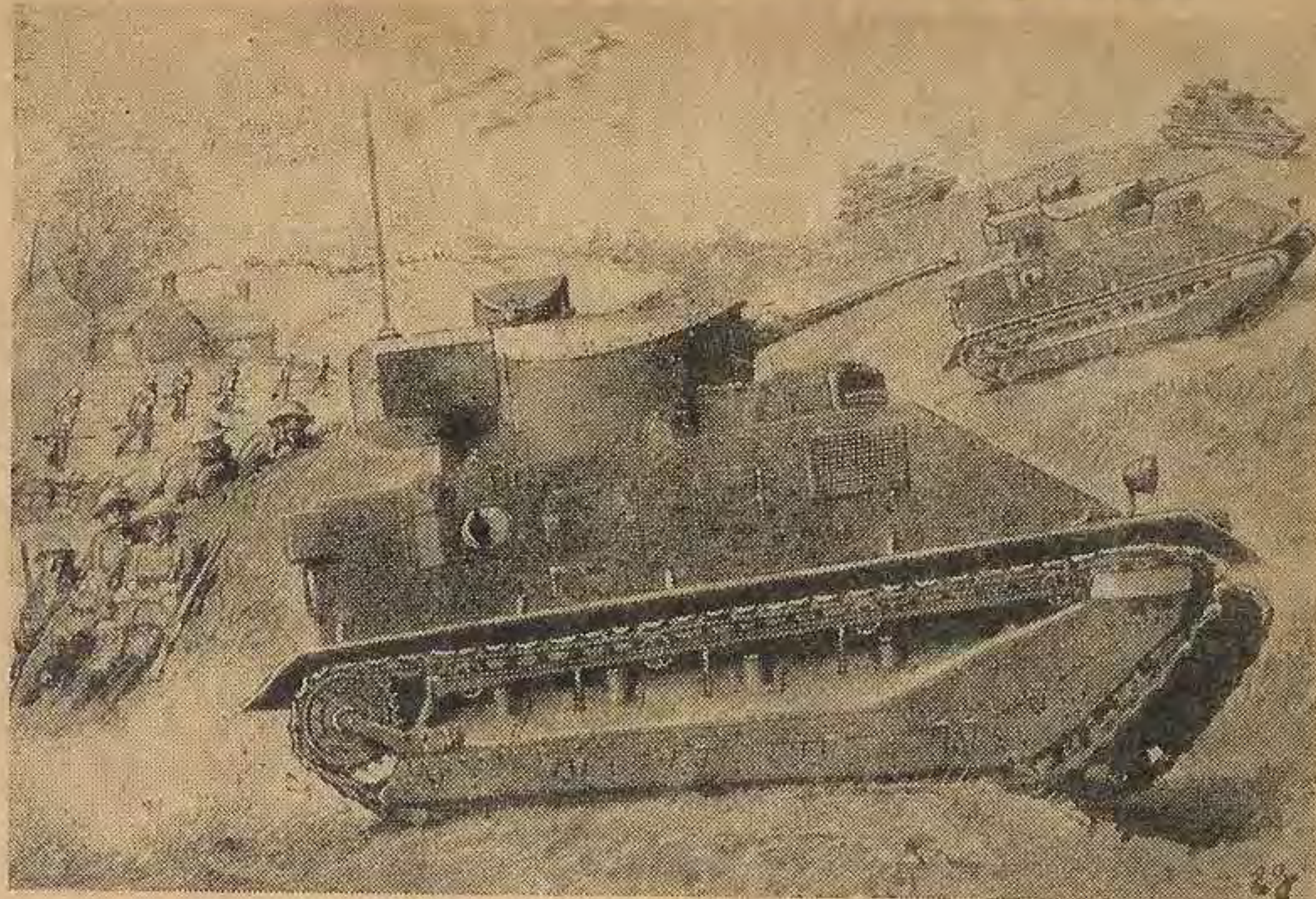
"Not quite, I think," said Bob, laughing. "I'd rather have Quelch and Latin irregular verbs than a Head's flogging. I wonder where he is?"

"Gone up to the study to sleep it off, perhaps," suggested Johnny Bull.

"Poor old Bunter!"

"The sufferfulness of the esteemed Bunter is probably terrific," remarked

THE MODERN BRITISH ARMY IN ACTION



During the early years of the 1914-1918 World War, when the success of the Allied Forces hung in the balance, and the use of a new weapon by either side might spell victory or defeat, mysterious orders were issued to British commanders concerning the delivery and use of certain "tanks."

Had the enemy got knowledge of these orders they would have been little the wiser, for the tanks mentioned might have been for holding water or oil—they certainly would not have connected them with the new and deadly instrument of war they actually were. That is how it was possible for the Tank to be brought into action secretly and used with terrible effect on the unprepared foe, and how these bullet-proof armed motor-tractors came to get their name.

Tanks now form the most effective attacking force in the modern army. Used as "shock-troops" in the vanguard of an infantry attack—as the Heavy Cavalry was used in the old days—they smash through enemy lines, destroying machine-gun nests, breaking through barbed-wire entanglements and tearing across trenches. Practically nothing can stop them. At the same time, they are keeping the enemy under heavy fire.

Our illustration shows a section of the Royal Tank Corps advancing under fire. The machines shown are the Mark 2 type, a 14-ton tank armed with one three-pounder gun, three large-calibre machine-guns and equipped with wireless. A crew of five men is carried at a cruising speed of 15 m.p.h.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Let us seekfully look for him, and administer the harmless and necessary sympathy."

"Good!" said Bob. "I've got a packet of chocs. They'll help to comfort Bunter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co. proceeded

to the Remove passage to look for Bunter, with sympathetic intentions. No doubt Bunter had asked for trouble that morning; still, a fellow who was up against trouble enlisted the sympathy of the heroes of the Remove.

Bunter was not to be found in Study No. 7.

The juniors looked in the other studies. Knowing Bunter's little ways, they would not have been surprised to find him raiding some fellow's study cupboard.

But the whole Remove passage was drawn blank. Bunter was not there.

"Oh, where and oh, where can he be?" sang Bob Cherry.

"Can't be gone out of gates," said Johnny Bull. "There's no leave out of gates till after third lesson. I say, Toddy, where's your prize pig?"

Peter Todd came up to the Famous Five in the quad. He was looking puzzled.

"I've been looking for him, and I can't find him anywhere."

"Same here!" grinned Bob.

"Of course, he doesn't matter," said Peter; "but as the fat duffer seems to have had a flogging, I thought I'd look for him. If the Head's given him leave, he may have given him leave out of gates, though."

"Let's ask Gosling."

The Removites walked down to the school-porter's lodge. The ancient and gnarled William Gosling was sunning himself in his doorway.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Seen a porpoise rolling by this morning, Gossy?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Has Bunter gone out, Gosling?"

Gosling shook his head.

"Agin' orders," he answered, "and wot I says is this 'ere, you young gentlemen ain't going out, neither!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We're not after that, Gossy; we're looking for Bunter. He's got leave from class this morning, and he seems to have vanished. The Head let him off class after giving him a flogging."

Gosling eyed the captain of the Remove.

"Gammon!" he answered.

"Eh?"

"You can't pull my leg, Master Wharton. I don't know why you're spinning me this yarn, sir, but wot I says is this 'ere, you can't pull my leg!"

Wharton stared at him.

"But I'm not pulling your leg, old bean," he answered. "Bunter was up for a flogging in first lesson, and the Head let him off class afterwards."

"Chuck it!" said Gosling derisively. "Think I wouldn't know if a feller had been flogged? When it's a Head's flogging, ain't I always called in?"

"Well, weren't you?"

"No, I wasn't!" said Gosling.

"And I know the 'Ead's been too busy to flog anybody this morning, too, seeing that he's gone off to Southampton in his car quite early."

"The Head's gone to Southampton, has he?" asked Bob. "Does that mean that Mr. Percy Locke has landed, after all?"

"It do!" said Gosling. "The 'Ead was off mighty quick; I s'pose he 'ad it by telephone. Jest a word as he went—he knowed 'ow glad I should be to 'ear that Mr. Percy was safe 'ome again." Gosling's crusty face was quite genial for a moment. "So don't you spin me any yarns about 'Ead's floggings, Master Wharton, 'cause why, I know he ain't flogged anybody!"

"Well, my hat!" said Harry.

The juniors walked away from Gosling's lodge, quite mystified. In an official Head's flogging, Gosling had a part to play; and certainly he should have known whether it had taken place or not.

"I suppose it wasn't really a first-class, gilt-edged flogging," said Bob Cherry, with a grin. "The Head just

made him bend over, like a prefect, I suppose. When it's an official ceremony Gosling has to hoist the giddy victim."

"I suppose that's it," said Harry. "Quelchy was awfully ratty with Bunter; but I dare say the Head didn't quite see it. He isn't quite such a Tartar as Quelchy."

"That's so."

"But where is Bunter?" asked Peter Todd. "If he's only had a mild licking, he must have got over it

before this. Where is he? We've looked everywhere."

"Goodness knows."

It was near the end of morning break now, and Harry Wharton & Co. walked back to the House, much puzzled. In the quad they passed Coker and Potter and Greene of the Fifth. The three seniors were chatting and chuckling.

"Prouty was quite wild!" Potter was saying. "Can't quite understand it; but the Head must have said something to get his rag out. Did you spot his face when he came back to the Form-room in second lesson?"

Coker and Greene chortled.

"Didn't we?" said Coker. "I dare say the Head sat on him. My



Bunter unlocked the Head's study door and blinked into the corridor. The next moment he popped back as he saw Trotter, the House page, polishing the glass of a window.

opinion is that Prouty needs sitting on at times."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Greene.

"And he didn't give us the Head's Latin paper, either," remarked Potter. "And he was in a fearful temper! I wonder what the Head said to him?"

Harry Wharton & Co. paused and looked at one another. Then they walked on, leaving the three seniors still discussing—with hilarity—what the Head could possibly have said to Mr. Prout in second lesson.

"I say, that's jolly queer!" said Wharton. "You heard what those chaps were saying—the Head seems to have ragged old Prout in second lesson."

"And Gosling says he has gone to

Southampton," said Bob, with a nod. "Wingate told Quelch that the Head was too busy to take the Sixth this morning—that must have been when he was going off, I suppose. But that was before second lesson."

"It's jolly odd!"

"The oddfulness is terrific!"

According to Gosling, the Head had departed in his car quite early, and it was at the close of first lesson that Wingate had come in to tell Mr. Quelch to take the Sixth in the Head's place. That should have marked the time of the Head's departure.

Yet after that—some time after that, in second lesson—Mr. Prout appeared to have had an interview with the Head, according to what the Fifth-Formers were saying. And Wingate had brought the information that Bunter had been flogged; and, according to Gosling, there had been no flogging. And Bunter had mysteriously disappeared! Really, it was very, very puzzling and mystifying, and the heroes of the Remove did not know what to make of it.

The bell for classes called them in to third lesson; and they found that Wingate of the Sixth was taking them again, in place of their Form master. Apparently, Mr. Quelch was to stick to the Sixth that day—for which relief his Form were duly thankful. Yet how odd it was that the message had been that the Head was busy, and not that he had left the school for the day!

In third lesson the juniors forgot the matter—Wingate kept them up to their work. But if they had thought about it, with wet towels round their heads, they would not have been likely to guess the astounding truth, and still less likely to guess what was to follow during that remarkable day at Greyfriars.

THE NINTH CHAPTER

UNPRECEDENTED!

MR. QUELCH walked down the corridor to the Head's study with a very firm step and a knitted brow.

The Remove master was not in the best of tempers.

He was annoyed, and, like the ancient prophet, he felt that he did well to be angry.

The Head only the day before had been kindness and courtesy itself; discussing with Mr. Quelch his son's return in the most amicable spirit. That was only yesterday; and to-day there was an unpleasant change. To-day the Head lacked his usual polished politeness, always unfailing to his subordinates. He had let Bunter off lessons—although the mere fact that Mr. Quelch had sent Bunter to the Head demonstrated that the junior was most seriously an offender. He had sent quite a cavalier message to Mr. Quelch—merely saying that he was busy and that Mr. Quelch was to take the Sixth while Wingate took the Remove.

Really, a gentleman, though only a subordinate, could not be treated with friendly courtesy one day and off-hand casualness the next. That was not the way to treat a Form master, a Master of Arts, an elderly scholastic gentleman of dignified character and rather touchy temper. It was not the way at all.

Moreover, it had not been stated how long Mr. Quelch was to take the Sixth and how long Wingate was to take the Remove. Such matters, too, could not be settled off-hand by a careless verbal message. If a prefect was to take his Form for a whole day, Mr. Quelch had to arrange matters accordingly. He was left quite in the dark as to what the Head

really wanted, after third lesson. It was quite unprecedented.

For which reasons Mr. Quelch's brow was knitted, and his step had an unusual decided firmness as he approached the Head's study in morning break. He wanted to know.

Knock !

It was a very decided knock at the Head's door. As the Head's message had been that he was busy, Mr. Quelch supposed that he was busy in his study. Mrs. Locke was away, so it could hardly have been any household matter that had so suddenly claimed the Head's special attention. Neither did Mr. Quelch suppose that it was any news of young Mr. Locke, for in that case the Head surely would have told him, after their very friendly discussion on the subject the day before.

Knock !

Mr. Quelch turned the handle of the door.

"Upon my word ! " he murmured.

The door was locked on the inside. That was proof that the Head was there—at all events, it was naturally taken as such proof.

Had the door opened, Mr. Quelch would have beheld a fat and terrified junior shaking in his shoes.

Fortunately, it could not open. Billy Bunter was safe from observation, even if Mr. Quelch looked through the keyhole—which he was not likely to do. Bunter, judging others, even Form masters, by himself, kept out of the line of vision from the keyhole.

He knew that it was Mr. Quelch who had knocked—he knew that determined tread. He knew that it was Mr. Quelch, and that Mr. Quelch was in an annoyed temper. And Bunter quaked.

But ventriloquial tricks were second

nature to Bunter now ; his facility in that curious line never failed him. It was in the Head's voice, to the final shade of a tone, that he spoke as he answered the knock.

" Bless my soul ! Really, I should not be disturbed like this, when I have given strict injunctions that I should not be disturbed this morning ! Bless my soul ! "

" Dr. Locke ! "

" Ah ! Is that you, Mr. Quelch ? "

" It is I, sir," answered Mr. Quelch, in his iciest tone. Chilly dignity now enwrapped Mr. Quelch as a garment.

" I have no desire, sir—no intention to disturb you."

" Very good, Mr. Quelch ! The fact is I am exceedingly busy."

" I simply desire to know your wishes, sir," said Mr. Quelch frigidly. " If I am to continue to take the Sixth——"

" Oh, certainly ! "

" For the remainder of the day——"

" Precisely."

" In that case, I shall instruct Wingate, I presume, to remain in charge of my Form for the remainder of the day also ? "

" Just so, Mr. Quelch."

" Very good, sir ! That is all ! "

Mr. Quelch's voice trembled a little, in spite of his icy self-control. It was the very first time in his long experience that he had ever been kept on the doormat in this style.

He had never expected to talk with Dr. Locke through a door—the Head not even troubling to unlock the door to answer him. It was treating him like—like—Mr. Quelch scarcely knew what. But he knew that he did not like it—he knew that very clearly.

Bunter's fat heart was thumping.

He knew that Mr. Quelch was deeply, intensely angry ; which made

it all the more important that Mr. Quelch should not discover him in the Head's study. It was no time to think of remote consequences—even if Billy Bunter had been accustomed to looking far ahead. The immediate danger was pressing—Mr. Quelch had to be barred off.

"One word more, sir——"

"Really, Mr. Quelch, you are disturbing me seriously."

"I am sorry, sir!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "But I am bound to ask you concerning Bunter. Is he excused from third lesson as well as earlier classes?"

"Certainly."

"Oh!" said Mr. Quelch.

"In fact, I have decided to excuse Bunter from classes for the whole day, Mr. Quelch."

"What?"

"The boy appears to me to be somewhat delicate, Mr. Quelch. Considering everything, I have given him a day's leave."

"It is for you to decide, of course, sir," said Mr. Quelch, almost choking. "As Bunter's Form master, I feel compelled to say that I do not share your view. But, of course, it is for you to say."

"Quite so."

"Is that all, sir?" gasped the Remove master, pale with anger.

"Let me see! Yes! I have been somewhat disturbed by someone cleaning windows in the corridor, Mr. Quelch. Please give instructions that no one is to enter this corridor again unless I ring—either the boys or the servants."

"Regarding the servants, sir, doubtless you will ring for Mrs. Kebble and give her instructions."

"I have given you instructions, Mr. Quelch, and I expect you to carry them out."

"Oh!"

Mr. Quelch glared at the oak door.

"Kindly convey my wishes to Mrs. Kebble, sir."

"Very well, Dr. Locke."

"That is all," said the voice from the study. "You may go."

Mr. Quelch trembled with wrath. He was told that he might go—as if he were a fag of the Second Form—or Trotter the page! He could not trust himself to speak. He went.

Billy Bunter breathed more freely when his footsteps receded along the corridor. He had escaped once more—and if the corridor remained unvisited after that, he had an excellent chance of dodging unseen out of the Head's study later. Dinner would be coming along presently, and dinner could not be missed. That was very important.

Mr. Quelch's face was very set as he turned out of the Head's corridor. By the corner he met Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth. There was an unusual frown on Mr. Prout's flushed, portly face. He stopped Mr. Quelch.

"You have been to see the Head, Quelch?"

"I have!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Possibly you have noticed something a little unusual in the Head this morning, my dear Quelch—a lack of respect and consideration which members of Dr. Locke's staff had always considered that they had a right to expect."

Mr. Quelch started a little.

"I have certainly noticed it, Mr. Prout. May I ask if your experience has been the same?"

"It has, sir!" said Mr. Prout. "Most decidedly, sir!"

"It has pleased Dr. Locke, on this occasion, to talk to me through a locked door," said Mr. Quelch bitterly.

"Precisely the same as my experience, sir," said Mr. Prout, "and the expressions used by the Head, sir, were not such as I am accustomed to hearing."

"I can quite credit it," said Mr. Quelch, compressing his lips. "My experience is similar."

"It is very unpleasant and disconcerting, Mr. Quelch."

"It is exceedingly so, Mr. Prout."

"I scarcely understand Dr. Locke this morning, Mr. Quelch."

"I fail to understand him at all, Mr. Prout."

"It is really extraordinary!"

"Unprecedented, sir — unprecedented!"

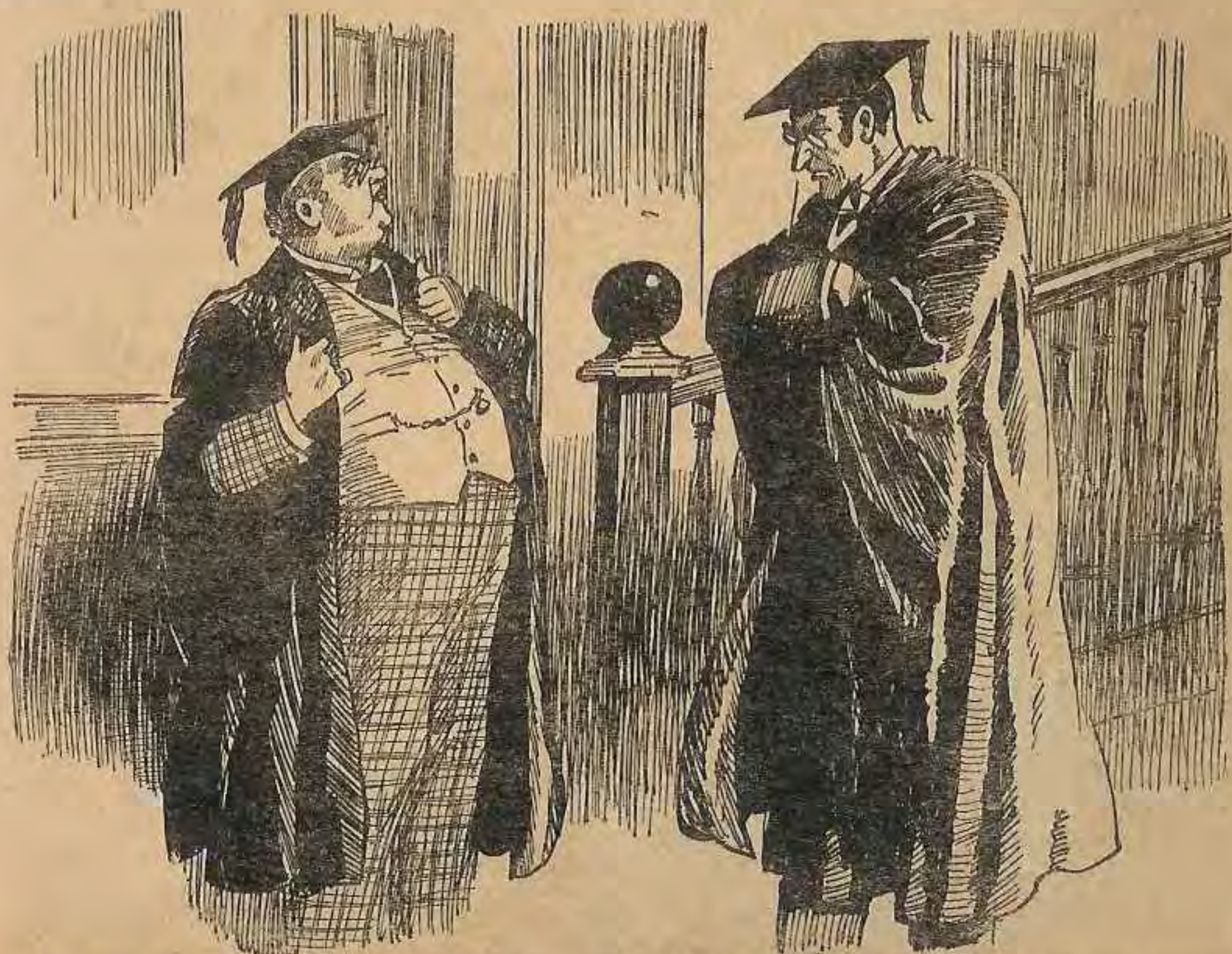
And the two masters separated, having comforted one another a little by a mutual grouse.

Really, the proceedings of the Head that morning were decidedly extraordinary and unprecedented. But the occupant of the Head's study, at that time, was also rather extraordinary and unprecedented, if the two masters had only known it.

THE TENTH CHAPTER

NO EXIT!

WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER gasped with relief when Mr. Quelch's footsteps died away down the corridor.



"You have been to see the Head, Quelch?" asked Mr. Prout. "I have," replied the Remove master. "Possibly," went on Mr. Prout, "you have noticed something a little unusual in the Head—a lack of consideration and respect to the staff."

There was silence ; and Bunter grinned.

Mr. Quelch was gone, and was not likely to return. The supposed Head's instructions would keep the corridor clear—and as soon as all the fellows were fairly settled down in the Form-rooms for third lesson, the fat junior would be able to make his escape from the Head's study. The coast would be clear at last.

Once he had escaped unseen, who was to know that he ever had been there ? Mr. Quelch did not know at what time the Head had started for Southampton—he did not know yet that the Head had gone at all. When he learned that much, he would not know how long the Head had been gone—he would suppose that he had started during third lesson—after that talk on the doormat. That was a reasonable expectation—and if it so turned out, it would see Bunter clear. Once he was safe out of the Head's study, all was serene—only it was frightfully important to get out unseen. The mere thought of the facts coming to light made Bunter shiver.

He waited ; and a glance from the window showed him the quadrangle deserted. The Greyfriars fellows had all gone in to class.

Now was the time.

Tap ! came at the door as Bunter turned from the window. His eyes fairly glinted through his spectacles ! It seemed to be raining visitors at the Head's door that morning.

" Who is there ? " called out Bunter, with the amazing imitation of Dr. Locke's voice which was now growing habitual.

" Me, sir ! " replied the voice of Mrs. Kebble, the house-dame.

The handle turned.

" I cannot be disturbed now, Mrs. Kebble. Another time——"

" The door don't open, sir."

" I have locked it, Mrs. Kebble, in order not to be disturbed. Kindly go away at once."

" What ! What did you say, sir ? "

" Go away at once, my good woman ! I am exceedingly busy."

Mrs. Kebble bridled, outside the study door.

" Far be it from me, sir, to disturb you, you being a busy gentleman, sir," said Mrs. Kebble, with dignified acerbity. " But you will remember, sir, I'm sure, that I asked you most particularly whether your study could be done this morning."

" Eh ? "

" Now Mr. Quelch, sir, comes to me and says that no one is even to enter the corridor, sir."

" Quite so, Mrs. Kebble—quite so ! "

" I thought, sir, that I had better speak to you, sir, as it was most distinctly said, sir, that your study could be done this morning while you was in the Sixth Form, sir."

" Nonsense ! "

" Eh ? "

" You are interrupting me, Mrs. Kebble. I am exceedingly busy with—with a Greek translation. Kindly go away."

" Sir ! "

" Go away at once, Mrs. Kebble."

There was a sound of flouncing in the corridor. Mrs. Kebble was going away—in a frame of mind that made things unpleasant for the maids when she arrived below stairs again.

" Oh, my hat ! " murmured Bunter, wiping his fat forehead, which was perspiring.

A good part of third lesson had elapsed—and Bunter simply had to be clear of the Head's study before it ended, unless he was to remain there a prisoner. He waited anxiously at

the door, listening, giving Mrs. Kebble plenty of time to get clear.

There was silence, and Bunter softly turned back the key at last. Softly he opened the door.

Footsteps!

With feelings too deep for words, Bunter shut the door again and turned the key once more in the lock. There was a renewed sound of flouncing in the passage. Mrs. Kebble had come back!

Knock!

"Dr. Locke, if I may make so bold as to say a word, sir," said Mrs. Kebble, with dignified indignation.

"What is it now, Mrs. Kebble?"

"Which I am not accustomed, sir, to speaking to a gentleman through a locked door, sir."

"Nonsense!"

"Sir!"

"Go away, my good woman!"

"I have come back, sir, to ask you whether the corridor floor, sir, may be done? That being the arrangement made. You will remember, sir, that you told me quite distinct——"

"No!" roared Bunter.

"Very well, sir—very well. But I presume, sir, that it will not disturb you in your study, sir, if Trotter polishes the window fastenings. I will tell him to be very quiet."

Bunter shook a fat fist at the door. It was plain that Mrs. Kebble was annoyed at having her household arrangements thrown out of gear in this inconsiderate manner. She was annoyed, and she actually wanted to annoy the Head in retaliation. Knowing—at least, believing—that the Head was very busy, she was interrupting him again from sheer irritation of temper.

"Go away, Mrs. Kebble!" snapped Bunter. "Go away, and do not let

anyone come anywhere near my study!"

"Very well, sir—oh, very well! I will tell Trotter not to come nearer than the corner of the passage."

Mrs. Kebble flounced away again.

Bunter stood rooted to the floor. If Trotter was going to polish window fastenings at the corner of the corridor he might as well be just outside the Head's study—Bunter could not get away without being seen.

"Mrs. Kebble!"

But Mrs. Kebble was gone.

"Oh, crikey!" murmured the new Head of Greyfriars in dismay.

The Head's study, which had been a refuge, now began to appear to Bunter a good deal like a lion's den—which it was easy to enter, but extremely difficult to get out of.

"Oh crumbs! What's a fellow going to do?" murmured the dismayed Owl of the Remove.

He dared not open the door.

Trotter was practically certain to see him if he emerged. Besides, as likely as not, Mrs. Kebble might be keeping an eye on Trotter, to see that he did his work thoroughly—which Trotter did not always do unless an eye was kept on him.

But to remain in the study—— Later, doubtless, there would be plenty of opportunities of escape. But what about dinner? Missing dinner was absolutely impossible!

And the minutes were passing fast! Every minute was precious to Bunter in this peculiar predicament—and the minutes were going!

He turned to the window at last.

It was risky. He might be seen dropping from the window—Gosling might see him—Mr. Mumble, the gardener, might see him—he might be observed from some other window.

But Bunter was getting desperate.

He longed and yearned to be safe out of the Head's study.

He blinked from the window and groaned. There was Mr. Mimble, the gardener, sedulously attending to a grass border on the Sixth Form green—in full view! What he would think if he saw a junior dropping from the Head's study window Bunter could not guess. But he knew that he could not afford to give Mr. Mimble an incident of that kind to think about.

He watched the gardener savagely.

Mr. Mimble moved off at last. Bunter watched him go, and then—

Then there was a sound of a joyous whoop in the quadrangle. The spaces that had been silent and deserted suddenly swarmed.

Third lesson was over, and the Greyfriars fellows were out!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

LIGHT AT LAST!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. came out of the Remove-room after third lesson and trooped cheerily into the quadrangle. They were the first out, but the Fourth were only a minute behind them, and then came a riotous swarm of the Third and the Second. The old quad was alive with voices.

Little dreaming of the dismay their appearance caused to a fat junior watching from the window of the Head's study, the Greyfriars fellows came out into the sunshine in cheery mood.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Anybody seen Bunter?" called out Bob Cherry

Nobody had!

"The fat bounder's disappeared!" said Harry Wharton. "He must have gone out of gates without Gosling noticing him."

"He'll be back for dinner!" grinned Bob.

"Ha, ha! That's a dead cert!"

But it did not turn out to be a "cert." When the Remove fellows went in to dinner a place at the Remove table was empty. William George Bunter did not join up for dinner.

Mr. Quelch took his usual place at the head of the Remove table, with an unusual acerbity of manner. He noticed at once that one member of his Form was missing—the member who was already in his black books.

"Wharton!" he rapped out.

"Yes, sir?"

"Where is Bunter?"

"I don't know, sir."

"What! Todd, you are Bunter's study-mate. Do you know where he is, and why he has not come in to dinner?"

"No, sir," answered Peter.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips hard. The Head had given Bunter a day off, as it seemed, and perhaps Bunter considered that he was free to go out of gates and "cut tiffin." If so, it was a mistake on Bunter's part, for which Mr. Quelch intended to call him to severe account when he turned up again.

Dinner over, the Greyfriars fellows marched out, the Remove discussing Bunter's absence in wonder. It was remarkable—indeed, amazing—for the Owl of the Remove to miss a meal. Such a thing had never happened before in the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

"Bunter's going it and no mistake!" said Bob Cherry, as the chums of the Remove went out after dinner. "The Head can't have given him leave to cut tiffin."

"Quelchy looks waxy!" murmured Nugent.

There was no doubt about that. Mr. Quelch passed the juniors with rustling gown, like a thunderstorm.

The Remove master went to his study.

He did not sit down there and take up a newspaper, as was his wont after lunch.

He was too disturbed and angry. Indeed, Mr. Quelch was seriously thinking of tendering his resignation to Dr. Locke. The Sixth had not had a pleasant time with Mr. Quelch that morning.

Buzzzzzz!

Mr. Quelch started angrily. He did not want to be worried with the telephone just then.

However, he jerked the receiver off the hooks.

"That is Courtfield 242?"

"Yes," snapped Mr. Quelch.

"A trunk call from Southampton."

Mr. Quelch sniffed. Then his face cleared a little. Dr. Locke's son was expected to land at Southampton any day; possibly the call was from Mr. Percy, a pleasant young gentleman, to whom Mr. Quelch was rather attached. Yet it was odd that he should ring up Mr. Quelch, instead of ringing up the Head—if it was Mr. Percy Locke.

"Is that you, my dear Quelch?" came the voice over the wires.

Mr. Quelch almost fell down.

It was not Percy Locke's voice. It was the voice of Herbert Henry Locke—Dr. Locke, the Head of Greyfriars!



Buzzzzzz! Mr. Quelch started angrily as the telephone rang. He did not want to be worried with the 'phone just then; he was thinking of tendering his resignation to Dr. Locke.

"Mr. Quelch!"

The Remove master could not answer. He could only stare dazedly at the instrument.

Was the Head ringing him up from his own study? Yet they had said from the exchange that it was a trunk call. What did it mean? Mr. Quelch wondered whether he was dreaming.

"Are you there, Mr. Quelch?"

The dazed master made an effort, and spoke.

"Who is speaking?"

"Dr. Locke, from the Grand Hotel, Southampton. Do you not know my voice, my dear Quelch? I recognise yours quite distinctly."

Mr. Quelch's head seemed to be turning round and round.

Certainly he knew the Head's voice, just as he had known it from his study. There was no difference that Mr. Quelch could detect. But what could it mean? What could it possibly mean, in the name of all that was mysterious and miraculous? It was a long journey to Southampton; Dr. Locke could not have made that journey since Mr. Quelch had spoken with him at his study door. What could it mean?

"My dear Quelch, are you there?"

"Yes," gasped the Remove master, "I—I am here! But you—are you there? I do not understand this."

"What?"

"Are you not in your study? I mean are——"

"Mr. Quelch!"

"Is that really Dr. Locke who is speaking?" stuttered the astounded Mr. Quelch.

"Certainly it is! I have rung you up, Quelch, because I left in so great a hurry this morning. My son telephoned that he had landed, and I left instantly to meet him here. I am glad to say that I have met him, and he is well—fit and well. You will be glad to hear that, Mr. Quelch."

"Undoubtedly, but——"

"Bunter gave you my message, I presume?"

"B-B-Bunter?"

"Yes. Bless my soul, is it possible that the boy did not give you my message, Mr. Quelch?"

"Bunter gave me no message, sir. I have not seen Bunter since I sent him to your study during first lesson this morning."

"Bless my soul!"

"I received your message sent by Wingate——"

"Wingate! I have not spoken to Wingate this morning. I have not seen Wingate! What do you mean, Mr. Quelch?"

The Remove master's head spun. This was too much for him.

"Dr. Locke!" he gasped. "I—I suppose I am speaking to Dr. Locke? I certainly seem to know your voice. You—you are at Southampton?"

"Certainly!"

"Then — then what — who — how——" Mr. Quelch became almost incoherent. "Dr. Locke! When—when—when did you leave Greyfriars?"

"During first lesson. Bunter had just come to my study, and I gave him a message for you——"

"Upon my word! You—you—you left Greyfriars during the first lesson?" babbled Mr. Quelch.

"Certainly!"

"But I spoke to you, sir—I—I spoke to you in your study, sir, after second lesson——"

"Eh?"

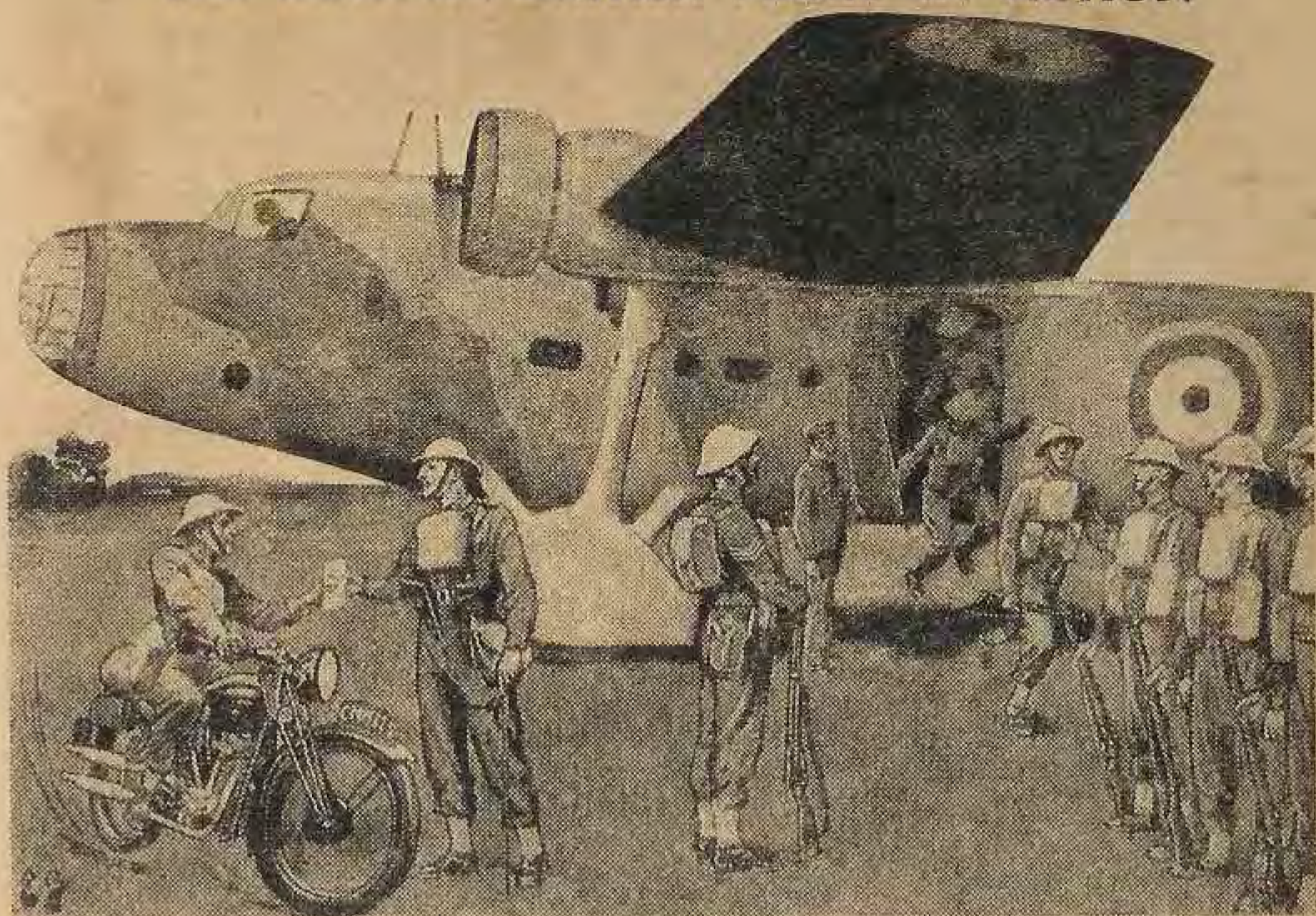
"In the morning break, sir, I spoke to you at your study door——"

"Mr. Quelch!"

"There is some trickery here!" exclaimed the Remove master. "You, sir, cannot be in two places at once. If you are indeed Dr. Locke speaking it cannot be you who spoke to me from your study this morning."

"Decidedly not. Are you—are you ill, Mr. Quelch?" The Head's tone seemed to imply that he really meant had Mr. Quelch been drinking!

THE MODERN BRITISH ARMY IN ACTION



The use of aeroplanes for transporting troops is comparatively recent. Although it is difficult to transport large armies by this means, the advantage lies in being able to land a small striking force for a surprise attack far in advance of the main army, or to land reinforcements quickly at some distant position where they are urgently needed.

Troop-carrier 'planes are specially useful in desert warfare, and also where an enemy is strongly entrenched but open to attack from the rear. Then a small body of troops, flying over the enemy's

lines and landing behind them, can attack from the rear.

The illustration shows an R.A.F. Co-operation 'plane landing troops. It is a Bristol Bombay Transport fitted with two 1,010 h.p. Bristol Pegasus XXII's, and is constructed of metal with a stressed skin. Its seating capacity varies according to its bomb freight, but 25 to 30 men with equipment would be an average load. It has a wide cruising range at high speed, and has been used with great effect in Palestine and the Far East.

"No, sir; I am only amazed—astounded—dazed, sir! There is some trickery at work here! Sir, if you are Dr. Locke speaking, and you have met Mr. Percy, doubtless Percy Locke is with you."

"He is at my elbow now."

"Then kindly ask him to speak to me; I shall know his voice. If you really are Dr. Locke there is some unknown person locked in your study here, pretending to be you."

"Good heavens, Mr. Quelch!"

"Let Mr. Percy speak to me."

"Certainly!"

There was a pause, and then a fresh, cheery young man's voice came through over the wires.

"Are you there, Mr. Quelch? Do you know my voice, my old friend, after I have been away all this time?"

"Yes, yes," gasped Mr. Quelch. "I know your voice, Mr. Percy. I

am not likely to forget it, my dear lad. Your father is with you?"

"He is here now."

"Then that is proof! Some impostor—some wretched rogue and criminal—is locked in your father's study at this very moment, imitating Dr. Locke's voice with such extraordinary skill that he has deceived everyone who has heard him speak. Now I understand why the door was kept so carefully locked. Some criminal—probably a burglar or thief—excuse me, I must go instantly! He must be seized—arrested——"

Mr. Quelch hardly stayed to jam the receiver back on the hooks ere he rushed from the room. He left the telephone rocking.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER

AN AMAZING DISCOVERY!

BILLY BUNTER groaned.

He groaned dismally.

The Owl of the Remove felt that it was hard cheese. Dinner, the most important event of the day, the central fact round which the whole universe revolved—dinner was going on and Bunter was not there! Bunter was a prisoner in the Head's study. Once his refuge from classes, from lickings, from Quelchy, it was now his dismal prison. Like the flighty little fly who walked into the spider's parlour, he was in, and he could not get out.

After his series of amazing tricks he dared not—simply dared not!—let it be known that he had been in the study at all. He could not—must not—be seen leaving the study. Even the thought of dinner did not tempt him to run that awful risk. The flogging he had escaped would be as nothing compared with the flogging he might expect for playing such an astounding

series of tricks—even dinner was not worth it. But it was hard cheese! Bunter had been hungry after breakfast—that had caused all the trouble. So at dinner-time he was famished. He understood, and sympathised with, the feelings of fellows lost in open boats at sea as the dinner-hour glided by dinnerless. He knew now what they must feel like!

Until the school had settled down for afternoon classes he dared not venture forth.

By that time he was likely to be in a ravenous state, almost on the verge of cannibalism.

Footsteps in the corridor again. Was everybody at Greyfriars coming to the Head's study that day? Really, it seemed like it, for this time the footsteps came in a swarm. Quite a crowd was gathering outside the Head's study, much to Bunter's surprise and alarm.

Knock!

"Bless my soul! Who is there?" Bunter put on the Head's voice again. "Kindly go away at once. I am very busy."

"Open this door!"

Bunter's heart thumped. Was it because "the Head" had not left his study for lunch that this crowd had come along?

"Nonsense!" he rapped out. "Kindly go away! I repeat that I am busy; I shall lunch later——"

"Upon my word, Mr. Quelch!" came Mr. Prout's deep voice. "Are you sure, sir, that you are not mistaken? That is certainly Dr. Locke's voice."

Bunter started. Did that mean that Quelchy was getting suspicious? Of old, Bunter knew that Quelchy was a downy old bird.

"Mr. Prout, I am not mistaken," said Mr. Quelch's voice. "Dr. Locke



Wingate grasped the table and whirled it away. There was a yell of terror from the revealed Bunter. "Ow! Keep him off! Yaroooh!" "Bunter!" shrieked Mr. Quelch.

is at Southampton at this very moment."

Bunter quaked.

"There's no doubt about it, sir," came Wingate's voice. "I have spoken to Gosling, and he says that the Head left early in his car. He saw him go."

"Amazing!" said Mr. Prout. "That certainly seems to place the matter beyond doubt. But the voice——"

"The voice is undoubtedly remarkably like the Head's, but it cannot be the Head's voice, as Dr. Locke is now in Southampton," came Mr. Quelch's icy tones. "Some wretched impostor—some criminal—has obtained admission to the school. I have little

doubt that he has robbed the Head's safe, and is now waiting for an opportunity of escape."

"Very probable, sir, very probable," said Mr. Prout. "Indeed, the scoundrel can scarcely have any other motive for this extraordinary imposture."

Bunter leaned on the Head's table, scarcely breathing.

Knock!

"Open this door, whoever you are!" said Mr. Quelch grimly. "I warn you not to resist arrest; you will be seized and handed over to the police. Every point is guarded, and you cannot escape."

"Ow!"

"Will you unlock this door, you scoundrel, or shall it be forced?" demanded Mr. Quelch.

Bunter groaned.

The game was up now, with a vengeance! This was worse than missing dinner.

He rolled hurriedly to the window. At any risk, now, he had to get out of the Head's study before the door was forced.

But a glance from behind the window curtains made him jump back.

Outside, there was a swarm of Greyfriars fellows.

Evidently the alarm had spread; all Greyfriars knew that some unknown person—probably a burglar—was hidden in the Head's study, no doubt robbing the safe!

Really it was not so bad as all that! But that was the most natural supposition in the strange circumstances.

The window was guarded. Under it stood Loder and Gwynne of the Sixth, and half a dozen other sturdy seniors, and Mr. Mimbler, the gardener, and a swarm of the Fifth. Behind the seniors was an army of juniors, all watching eagerly, all keen to lend a hand in collaring the unknown scoundrel, if he attempted to escape by the window. Harry Wharton & Co. were there, half the Remove with them, and a swarm of the Fourth and the Shell.

Bunter backed away from the window.

There was no escape that way.

In desperation, he thought of the chimney! But there was a blazing fire in the grate!

"Oh dear!" groaned the Owl of the Remove.

Knock!

"For the last time!" came Mr.

Quelch's grim voice. "Will you unlock this door, you scoundrel?"

The "scoundrel" was not likely to unlock the door. Bunter made no answer—it was useless to mimic the Head's voice further, now that the secret was out. Of all that crowd of Greyfriars fellows, not one was likely to heed "his master's voice"—in the circumstances.

"Very well! Gosling!"

"Yessir?"

"You will force the lock, Gosling. You have your tools?"

"Yessir."

"Oh crikey!" moaned Bunter as Gosling began operations on the lock of the Head's door.

He blinked wildly round the study, his eyes almost starting through his big spectacles. Almost, he forgot that he was hungry!

Crack! Creak! Groan! Creak! Crack!

The lock was strong, but it was giving! In a few minutes the door would be open. And then——

Bunter dived under the Head's writing-table. There were flaps to that table which let down when not in use. Between the flaps Bunter was well hidden from sight.

Really, there was little to hope from taking cover. The study was certain to be searched. But it was a case of any port in a storm. Perhaps Bunter indulged a wild hope of being overlooked; at all events, he was postponing the awful moment of discovery.

Crash!

The door flew open.

"Take care, my dear Quelch!" came Mr. Prout's portly voice. "He may be armed—he may have fire-arms! Take care!"

Unheeding, Mr. Quelch strode into the Head's study.

Mr. Prout followed him in, and Mr.

Capper, and Wingate of the Sixth, and several more hefty seniors. The rest of the crowd blocked the doorway, ready for a desperate rush on the part of the cornered "scoundrel."

But the scoundrel was not to be seen!

Mr. Quelch stared round the study.

"Where is he?"

"The window is shut—he has not escaped that way," said Mr. Capper.

"He is in concealment!" exclaimed Mr. Prout. "The scoundrel has hidden himself! Take care—he may be armed! One moment while I get the poker." The Fifth Form master grabbed up the heavy poker from the grate. "Now I am ready for the villain!"

"Search through the study!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Come forth!" roared Mr. Prout.

"Scoundrel, come forth!"

The scoundrel did not come forth.

"Under the table, I think sir," said Wingate. "There's no other place. You fellows stand ready to collar him while I pull the table away."

"Ow!"

"I hear him!" exclaimed Mr. Prout, uplifting the poker. "Drag away the table, Wingate, and I will stand ready! I will brain him if he lifts a finger—before he can use his revolver——"

"Wow!"

Wingate grasped the table and whirled it away. There was a yell of terror from the revealed scoundrel.

"Ow! Keep him off! Keep that poker away! Yaroooooooooh!"

"BUNTER!"

"Great Christopher Columbus!" gasped Wingate.

"Bunter!" shrieked Mr. Quelch.

"Bunter!" went in a yell down the corridor.

"Bunter! It's Bunter!"

Mr. Quelch gazed spellbound at the fat junior. Mr. Prout, with a rather sheepish look, dropped the poker into the fender with a clang. Evidently that weapon of war was not required.

"B-B-Bunter!" stammered Mr. Quelch. "Can I believe my eyes? Bunter, is—was anyone else in this study with you?"

"Yes, sir! No, sir! Oh, sir! I—I—I wasn't——"

"What?"

"I—I didn't—— I never——"

"Stand up!" bawled Mr. Quelch. Billy Bunter quaked to his feet.

"Bunter! It's Bunter—Bunter of the Remove! It's Billy Bunter!" the fellows in the corridor were yelling, and word passed out to the eager crowd in the quadrangle.

"Bunter!" howled Bob Cherry.

"Oh, my hat! That's where Bunter was all the time, then!" gasped Peter Todd.

"Bunter! Great pip!"

"The Bunterfulness is terrific."

"Bunter!" stuttered Harry Wharton. "Bunter! The giddy ventriloquist! You remember his game yesterday mimicking the Head's toot! That's it! Bunter's giddy ventriloquism——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Peter. "Bunter will be the death of me!"

"I fancy Quelchy will be the death of him—or jolly near it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The roars of laughter echoed in the Head's study. But in that apartment there was no merriment. Billy Bunter stood quaking before his incensed Form master.

"Bunter!" Mr. Quelch's voice almost seemed to bite. "Bunter! It—it—it was you! You! You have

been locked in the Head's study during his absence——"

"No, sir! I——"

"What?"

"I—I mean yes, sir——"

"You have imitated the Head's voice. I remember now that I have had to punish you for similar trickery, though never before have you ventured to play tricks involving your headmaster. Upon my word! This is almost beyond belief!"

"Wretched boy!" thundered Mr. Prout. "It was you—you who answered me through the door, and made me believe that Dr. Locke was speaking to me discourteously."

"No, sir! Oh, sir! Yes, sir! Oh, dear!"

"You!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, dear! I—I—I—— The fact is, sir, I wasn't here. I mean, it wasn't me! I never did, sir! I wouldn't!" stuttered Bunter.

"Rascal!" boomed Mr. Prout.

"Ow!"

Mr. Quelch calmed himself with an effort.

"Wingate! Take that wretched boy to the punishment-room and lock him in! He will be expelled from the school for this offence, and he must remain in security till the Head returns to deal with him."

"Wow!"

"Come along," said Wingate, dropping his hand on Bunter's shoulder.

"I—I say, sir——"

"Silence! Go!"

And Bunter quaked and went.

Greyfriars was in a buzz that afternoon over the mystery of the Head's study and its amazing outcome. There was only one opinion on the subject of Bunter: it was, as Smithy put it, Bunter for the long jump! Bunter, as a matter of certainty, would be "bunked" from Greyfriars. The Owl of the Remove, a dismal prisoner in the punishment-room, was of the same opinion, and fellows who passed near his quarters heard dismal groans proceeding therefrom. It was not a happy day for Bunter.

No doubt it was fortunate for Bunter that the Head, returning to Greyfriars with his son, was in a happy and amiable mood—a mood to regard even Bunter's heinous proceedings with a lenient eye. Certainly the Owl of the Remove had fairly asked for the "sack," and it seemed certain that he would get it. But under the influence of Mr. Percy's happy homecoming the Head was unexpectedly lenient.

Bunter was not "bunked." He was handed over to his Form master for punishment, and Mr. Quelch did his duty well—too well, in Bunter's opinion. For a long, long time after Mr. Quelch had done his duty, nothing more was heard of Billy Bunter's ventriloquism. Bunter was fed-up with ventriloquism, and the Owl of the Remove was chiefly occupied with groaning, while the rest of the school were chuckling over the mystery of the Head's study.



WALKING *the* PLANK!

By TOM BROWN



The New Zealand junior of Greyfriars chose an unfortunate moment to get his own back on the bully of the Remove.

WHEN I first came to Greyfriars, George Bulstrode was captain of the Remove. Harry Wharton had not then arrived at the school. As Bulstrode was a bit of a bully, he could make things warm for a new kid.

I was put into his study (where I still am). Bulstrode did not like this. He said the study was already full, without shoving a South Seas Island kid into it. I replied that I had no choice in the matter, since Mr. Quelch had told me to come to Study No. 2.

"Blow Quelch!" snorted Bulstrode. "We don't want you in here, new kid! So clear off!"

"I'm sorry, but I must do as I'm told," I answered.

That started the first fight. Bulstrode came at me like a lumbering elephant. I managed to get in two or three good punches, but I was nowhere near his weight in those days and he soon slung me into the passage on my neck and slammed the door. As it happened, Quelch came along a moment later and quickly took in the

situation. He stepped in to speak to Bulstrode, accompanied by a stout cane. I was sorry for that, because I knew I should catch it, and I did.

Bulstrode accused me bitterly of sneaking. He knew—he must have known—that I hadn't sneaked, but that made no difference. He declared war against me from that moment, and things rapidly grew very uncomfortable in Study No. 2. Besides actual kicks and punches—which I repaid as far as possible—he resorted to what I considered mean tricks. With his elbow he would accidentally knock the inkpot flying over my preparation. He would fling my books about and tie the sleeves of my jacket, and so on.

In the end I went to Quelch and asked him if I could change my study, as I did not agree very well with Bulstrode and Hazeldene in Study No. 2.

"No," replied Quelch at once. "I see no reason why you should change your study, Brown. Boys are expected to get over these trifles and make themselves as agreeable as they can. I recommend you to try again, my boy."

This was all right, but he took the opportunity of speaking severely to Bulstrode on the quiet, so my last state was worse than my first. Bulstrode certainly ignored me, more or

less, in the study, but he set himself to make things hard for me wherever he could. For instance, being captain of the Remove, he could leave me out of the cricket—and he did, until the rest of the Form demanded that I should be put in the eleven against Highcliffe.

Unfortunately, I had the ill luck to run Bulstrode out. It was his own fault, but he blamed me bitterly for it. When I came out, after scoring a dozen, he wanted to fight me, but the other fellows held him back. For days afterwards he taunted me about my running.

"You can't run!" he jeered. "Why didn't you bring your crutches? Why, I could run faster on my hands and knees."

"Prove it!" I retorted hotly. "I challenge you to a race. We'll start from the gates, go down Friardale Lane and Oak Lane to the towing-path, and back through the wood to the gates. That'll make it about a mile."

With all the Form clustered round, Bulstrode couldn't back down, so we fixed up the race for the next afternoon.

Now I had deliberately suggested the course of the race because I had thought out a plan to get my own back on the bully. In Friardale Wood there is a deep stream crossed by a plank. I meant to lodge this plank on the very edge of the stream and then let Bulstrode be in front as we reached the spot. He would go in, and serve him right.

Accordingly, just before the race, I dodged into the wood and fixed the plank. Then I came back and we both started together from the gates, to the cheers of the Remove.

Bulstrode was no runner, really. He was too big and heavy. I could have left him standing, but that wasn't my plan. I wanted to show him that I could beat him, so I forged ahead and was well in front as we raced along the towing-path towards the wood. Then, however, I had an "accident." I stumbled and twisted my ankle.

"Ricked my ankle!" I called out, concealing a grin, as Bulstrode lumbered up. "I'm out of it!"

I had never doubted for a moment that the bully would go on his way rejoicing. That was my mistake. Under his rough surface, Bulstrode's not a bad fellow. He stopped and hoisted me on his back.

"Can't walk back to school with a ricked ankle," he said gruffly. "Better let me carry you!"

"Oh, I—I—you needn't bother!" I gasped. "I'll manage all right."

"Rats! You'll make it worse if you try to walk on it. Hang on to my neck!" And he trudged away towards the plank, with me on his back.

It was an awful situation. I wasn't worrying about the fact that I should share Bulstrode's ducking—though that wasn't nice. It was the underhand trick I had played on a fellow who was decent enough to sink his spite when I was in trouble—that's what worried me. I couldn't go through with it. I jumped off his back as we reached the plank.

"Hold on!" I exclaimed. "I'm not injured at all!" And I told him the truth, and then—walked the plank!

Spla-a-ash!

I got my ducking, and from that awful moment good resulted, for he and I have been friends ever since.



SLOT- MACHINE EDUCATION

Monty Lowther, the humorist of St. Jim's, puts forward some startling ideas for automatic education. But we fear that if Monty ever suggested them to the powers that be his punishment would be automatic, too!

OUTSIDE the tuckshop, Dame Taggles has placed a handy automatic machine from which we can now obtain chocolates, toffees and packets of biscuits after closing hours. And the question arises, brothers, cannot this brainy idea be usefully extended in other directions?

I think it can.

Why not, for example, equip all studies with penny-in-the-slot loudspeakers spouting lessons as required? Our tame inventor, Bernard Glyn, could make the necessary apparatus as easily as you or I could make a rabbit-hutch!

With such a gadget about the place, prep., at present a penance, would become a pleasure. Instead of sitting round the study-table, grinding away at text-books, we should be able to lounge back in arm-chairs with our feet on the mantelpiece. While the loudspeaker blared out a non-stop stream of knowledge, we could amuse ourselves by chewing toffees and throwing the paper wrappings at each other!

The same wheeze could be applied, with variations, to the Form-room. Each desk could have a lesson-

machine stuck behind it with headphones attached, the lesson commencing on a penny being inserted in the slot. It would need a speed control so that chaps could adjust the speed of the lesson to their capacity for absorbing it.

The immense possibilities in the idea must be obvious to any fellow with an imaginative mind. I can imagine, to give one example, a small screen being fixed to the front of each desk to illustrate the history lesson with moving pictures. While the headphones were telling a fellow all about the Battle of Hastings, the Normans and Saxons would be whacking each other on the napper with battle-axes in front of his eyes! How could any man fail to learn history dished up in this way? And other lessons could similarly be dealt with.

Naturally, there are other places besides studies and Form-rooms where slot-machines would supply a long-felt want.

For a start, every junior passage, in my opinion, should contain a machine retailing pea-shooters and ammunition. Think of the time and shoe-leather wasted at present in

trudging down to the village to replace these essential weapons of war! An automatic supply in our own quarters would save all this.

Then again, it would be a boon and a blessing to have small packets of booby-trap essence on tap at suitable spots in the School House. Most of us spend far too much time scooping out soot from chimney flues and smuggling red ink from Form-rooms for this purpose. A packet of mixed soot and red ink powder delivered out of a machine for a penny would provide an ideal solution to the problem!

I could go on reeling off bright ideas like this all day if I liked. Slot-machines containing games, puzzles and other amusements for winter evenings, for instance, should add a pleasing touch of novelty to the Common-room. A cricket bat that would work properly only when oiled with a penny in the slot at the top would be just the thing to lend to a persistent bat borrower.

You can think of plenty of bright wheezes on similar lines yourselves, if you turn your brainboxes to it!

The only objection I have heard raised to the idea is that it would throw the masters out of work. But I really don't see why it need do so.

If automatic education ever comes to St. Jim's, we shall need all the beaks to look after the machines. The only difference I can foresee is that instead of wearing caps and gowns they will get into overalls and carry long chains of keys round their necks.

The Head, of course, would sit in his study, counting out the shekels and giving change.

Altogether, St. Jim's will be a much brighter place if the powers that be ever decide to adopt Slot-machine Education!

BUNTER'S LOVE LAMENT

By the Owl Himself

ALAS, I'm in love at last!
Though some fellows think it is stoopid!
I thort so myself in the past,
But now I'm a vicktim of Kewpid!

The object of my regard
Is neither too yung nor too nimble;
At times she's unkommonly hard,
And yet I adore Mrs. Mible!

I worship her doenuts and pies,
I love every tart that she touches,
I yearn for her cakes—wot a size!—
To me she is more than a duchess.

I smile and I si and kontrive
To dress in my kostliest raiment;
But she glares every time I arrive,
And talks on the subjeck of payment!

"Kan it be that mere munny should part
Troo lovers, oh, bootiful maiden?"
I ask with a wait on my hart,
My voice is with sorro oar-laden!

"Go away, Master Bunter, now do!"
She sez in a pettulant fashion.
"Oh, crool one, and kan it be troo
You turn a deff ear to my passion?"

Alas, not a tart or a pie
She gives me to soffen the angwish!
Crool creacher! She leaves me to die,
In hunger she leaves me to langwish!

My love is now turned into hate,
I tell the whole world that I skorn her,
And now I go fourth to my fate,
To perrish alone in a komer!

SOOTHING SKINNER!

"There's a toad in my bed!" cried Skinner;
He hopped out of bed in a fright.
"We know," we said,
"There's a toad in your bed,
It's always there, every night!"

(Frank Nugent.)

DREAM COME TRUE!

When I met Temple in the quad,
He gave me quite a friendly nod.
A nod from Temple! Oh, what bliss!
Life has no greater prize than this!

(Frank Nugent.)



JIMMY SILVER DOES THE TRICK!

by
Owen Conquest



THE FIRST CHAPTER AWFUL CHEEK!

CRASH!
The door of the end study was hurled open suddenly and forcibly.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared round wrathfully. The Fistical Four—Jimmy, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome—were all at home. The heroes of the Fourth were working hard at their prep., having left it rather late.

"What the dickens——" began Jimmy Silver, as the door crashed open.

Then he blinked in surprise.

The doorway was filled by a crowd of fellows—not members of the Fourth—as Jimmy naturally expected.

Hansom, the captain of the Fifth, stepped in, and following him came

four other Fifth-Formers—Talboys, Lumsden, Duff, and O'Rourke.

Jimmy Silver & Co. jumped up at once. It was but seldom that seniors of the Fifth condescended to call in at junior studies. And it was easy to see that this was not a friendly visit.

Hansom and his comrades crowded into the study, some of them looking grim and some of them grinning.

Jimmy Silver's hand strayed to a ruler.

"Hallo, Cabby!" he said, quite

cheerfully. "What's the game?"

Hansom frowned majestically. It always annoyed him to be called Cabby—a playful allusion to his surname.

"If you've come to tea, you're too late!" remarked Lovell. "Besides, we don't want the Fifth to tea. We draw the line somewhere, you know!"

***Hansom & Co. of the Fifth Form
at Rookwood will think twice before
they again take it upon themselves to
put Jimmy Silver and his chums in
their place!***

"Our aim," said Jimmy gravely, "is to keep this study perfectly respectable. Consequently, the Fifth are barred!"

"Take your faces away!" implored Raby.

"And bury them!" added Newcome.

"I dare say you know why we've come here," Hansom said grimly.

Jimmy shook his head.

"Can't guess. If you want help with your prep., you will have to wait till we've finished ours, and then we'll do the best we can for you."

Lovell and Raby and Newcome sniggered. It was not really likely that the seniors had come to the end study to request junior assistance with their prep.

"We've come to talk to you," said Hansom.

"Sorry, old scout. We're not holding a *conversazione* this evening," said Jimmy Silver; "besides—if you don't mind my mentioning it—you're a bit of a bore."

The Fifth-Formers sniggered at that, excepting Hansom. Hansom frowned. He gave his comrades a glare.

"What are you giggling about?" he demanded.

"Oh, nothing!" grinned Lumsden.

"Get to business."

"Don't waste all the blessed evenin' on these fags!" said Talboys.

"We've come to talk to you, plainly," said Hansom. "You kids in the Fourth have been getting cheekier and cheekier. This afternoon you tied a kite-tail to Jobson's coat, and he walked about with it for an hour or more before he found it——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You actually had the cheek to bump a Fifth-Form chap in the quad. yesterday——"

"He was bullying a Fourth-Form chap," explained Jimmy Silver. "We thought we ought to give him a lesson. We're always willing to help bring the Fifth up in the way they should go."

"Fags have to be kept in order," said Hansom. "Perhaps Muggins was a bit drastic, but fags have to toe the line. The fact is, ever since you came to Rookwood, Silver, there's been too much cheek from the Fourth, and especially from this study. Having talked it over, we've decided to put an end to it. It's really for your own sakes. Discipline is good for fags."

"You're awfully good," said Jimmy, taking a tighter grip on the ruler. "How are you going to set about it, Cabby?"

"You're going to have a licking all round, to begin with——"

"My hat!"

"And your study will be ragged, as an example," said Hansom. "I've brought a strap for the licking."

"Well, of all the cheeky idiots!" exclaimed Lovell. "Do you think this study will stand it, you silly dummy?"

"I rather think so," grinned Hansom. "This study will be rather roughly handled if it makes a fuss. Better take it quietly, like good little boys."

"You come on and see!" roared Lovell.

"Lock the door, Talboys!"

"What-ho!" chuckled Talboys.

"Rescue, Fourth!" bawled Lovell.

"And now collar them!"

"Hands off!" shouted Jimmy Silver. "I tell you, you cheeky asses—oh, my hat!"

"Collar them!"

Then there was a terrific struggle in the end study.

The Fifth-Formers had come there to vindicate the lofty dignity of a senior Form, and to give the cheeky juniors a lesson they badly needed—in the opinion of the Fifth, at least. Hansom & Co. felt that they were performing a painful duty. They did not expect much trouble, but on that point their expectations were not up to the mark.

They received a good deal of trouble.

Hansom, much to his surprise, found his hands very nearly full with Jimmy Silver.

Still more to his surprise, one of Jimmy's well-known upper-cuts took him under the chin and landed him on the study carpet with a crash.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were struggling desperately in the grasp of the seniors.

They had no real chance, but they fought it out to a finish, and by the time they were downed the invaders of the end study were looking very flushed and dusty and rumped.

Jimmy Silver had rushed to help his comrades, but Hansom was up in a moment and rushing in.

Jimmy closed with the captain of the Fifth.

"My hat!" gasped Hansom. "You cheeky little beast—yarrooh!"

Jimmy hooked his leg in his assailant's and Hansom rolled over. He dragged Jimmy Silver down with him, however, and they rolled on the carpet together. Then the senior came uppermost.

"Ow!" gasped Jimmy, as the heavy Fifth-Former sat on his chest.

"Sit on those cheeky cads!" howled Hansom.



While Lumsden, Duff and O'Rourke looked after Jimmy Silver's chums, Hansom got busy with the strap on Jimmy. Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Ow! Ow!"

"Gerrup!"

"Come and sit on this cheeky little beast, Talboys, and keep him down!" panted Hansom.

"Right-ho!"

Hansom staggered to his feet. The Fistical Four were on the carpet, each with a panting Fifth-Former sitting on him. The invaders had the upper hand, and the end study was at their mercy.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

HANSOM COMES DOWN HEAVY!

THERE was a thump at the study door, and the handle was shaken without.

"What's the row here?" It was Oswald's voice. "What's up, Jimmy?"

"Yow-ow!"

Hansom chuckled.

"Lucky we locked the door," he remarked. "We don't want a mob of fags crawling over us, by gad!"

"Rescue, Fourth!" stuttered Lovell.

"Shut up!" said Lumsden, tapping Lovell's head on the floor, and Lovell gave a howl of anguish.

"You cheeky rotters!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "We'll make you sit up for this!"

"Still the same cheeky little rascal!" grinned Hansom. "We'll give you something to cure all that, my pippin!"

He took a leather strap from his pocket.

"Look here, you rotten bully——" gasped Raby.

"My dear kid, this isn't bullying," explained Hansom. "It's a much-needed lesson—a long-felt want supplied, as they say in the advertisements. It's really for your own good. Roll him over, Talboys!"

Talboys grinned and rolled Jimmy Silver over.

Then the captain of the Fifth got to work with the strap.

Whack! whack! whack!

"Yaroo!"

"Rescue!" yelled Lovell.

There was a hammering on the door. The voices of Van Ryn and Pons and Conroy were heard, and Oswald's and Higgs' and Jones minor's. The Classical Fourth were rallying to the rescue.

But the locked door stopped them effectually.

They raged in vain outside the end study, while the Fistical Four "went through it" within.

Hansom was doing his work thoroughly.

Jimmy Silver received a dozen with the leather strap, wriggling and yelling the while.

Then came Lovell's turn, and he had six. Six each followed for Raby and Newcome.

Then Hansom surveyed the wriggling four with a grin.

Jimmy Silver & Co. gave him furious glares. Never had such an indignity been inflicted upon the end study.

The cool cheek of the Fifth-Form fellows took away the breath of the four juniors; but even that was not so bad as the strapping.

"I fancy that's about enough!" remarked Hansom. "Mind, we've done this for your own good, Silver. It's discipline."

"Yow-ow!"

"You have to learn discipline, you know. You'll be going into the army when you're old enough and you'll find it valuable."

"Ow, you rotter!"

"Now we'll be off," said Hansom. "We've wasted enough time on these

fags. Mind, any more cheek from this study, Silver, and you get a little more of the same."

"Grooh!"

"I say, there's a crowd of fags out there," remarked Talboys, rather uneasily.

"Rats! We'll knock 'em right and left if they bother us," said Hansom disdainfully.

"Well, come on," said Duff.

The Fistical Four were released, and Hansom unlocked the door. Jimmy Silver & Co. scrambled to their feet, prepared to renew the combat at once. But Hansom & Co. rushed into the passage at once.

"Stop them!" yelled Lovell.

The Classical juniors closed up round the five seniors, but the rush of the big fellows drove a way through the crowd.

The heroes of the Fifth went down the passage at a run, knocking the juniors right and left, though they did not escape unscathed themselves. Van Ryn was still clinging to Hansom's neck when the Fifth-Formers reached the stairs.

There he was dragged off and bumped down, and the five seniors went downstairs rather hurriedly. As a matter of fact, they were glad to get out of the hornets' nest they had roused.

In the end study, Jimmy Silver & Co. rubbed their injuries and gasped. They had been severely handled.

"The cheeky rotters!" exclaimed Oswald, grinning a little. "Did they have the nerve to come here and lick you?"

"Yow-ow! Yes!"

"Like their cheek!" chuckled Higgs.

"Yow! There's nothing to cackle at, you chump!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mornington.

"Why didn't you mop them up, you fistical fellows?"

"How could we?" howled Lovell.

"Five to four—and seniors, too!"

"Well, I wouldn't have taken a lickin', I know that," sneered Mornington.

"You'll take a licking now if you don't shut up!" snapped Lovell.

"By Jove, you will take one, anyway. Take that!"

Mornington went headlong out of the study, with Lovell's fist thumping on him. The Fistical Four were in no mood to endure the jeers of the dandy of the Fourth.

"Sure, it's hard cheese on yez," said Flynn, but he was grinning, too.

"You ought to make the Fifth sit up for this, entirely, Jimmy!"

"Yow-ow! We're going to! Ow!"

There was unlimited sympathy for the sufferers. But somehow all the juniors, excepting the victims, seemed to see a humorous side of the affair.

Jimmy Silver was not sorry when the grinning sympathisers left.

Left alone, the Fistical Four blinked at one another dolefully.

"The awful cheek!" said Raby.

"Ow! The rotters!" growled Newcome.

Jimmy Silver's eyes gleamed.

"We're going to make them sorry for this!" he growled. "Why, we shall be cackled at by all Rookwood if we take it lying down!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander," said Jimmy Silver. "This study is going on the warpath!"

"Hear, hear!" said Raby feebly.

Prep. was forgotten. It was no time for prep. For the next hour or so the Fistical Four were groaning over their injuries and laying plans

for reprisals. The Fistical Four were not pacifists; they believed in reprisals, and plenty of them.

THE THIRD CHAPTER SAUCE FOR THE GANDER!

"COME in!"

Hansom of the Fifth called out carelessly as a tap came at his study door later in the evening.

Hansom and Talboys, who shared that study, had finished their prep., and were just finishing a Welsh rarebit for supper. They had been chatting over the raid on the end study, which was a very entertaining subject for them.

They quite agreed that that drastic lesson would have its effect, and that the cheeky members of the Fourth would, henceforward, treat the great and mighty Fifth with due respect.

They were somewhat surprised, therefore, when the study door opened and revealed Jimmy Silver & Co.

"Hallo, what do you fags want?" demanded Hansom.

The fags did not reply.

Jimmy, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome marched in quickly, and after them came the Colonial Co.—Van Ryn, Pons, and Conroy. Seven sturdy juniors were in the study, and Conroy, the Cornstalk, locked the door.

Hansom and Talboys started to their feet.

It was surprising, after they had taken so much trouble to reduce the end study to a proper state of discipline and respect for their elders, but it was quite clear that this visit meant war.

"Unlock that door at once!" thundered Hansom.

"Bow-wow!"

"By gad! What do you want?" stammered Talboys.

"We want you!" said Jimmy Silver grimly. "Sauce for the gander, you know. As you're rather big beasts, we're taking you in detail—two at a time. Where's that strap, Hansom?"

"That—that strap?" stuttered Hansom.

"Yes. I'm going to lick you!"

"Lick me?" yelled Hansom.

"Yes!"

"Why, you—you—you—you——" Words failed the Fifth-Former. The bare idea of the captain of the Fifth being licked by a junior was astounding—in fact, appalling. If such a thing happened, it was time for the skies to fall. But it was pretty clear that it was going to happen.

"Better take it quietly," grinned Lovell. "We're doing this for your own good, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see, we think the Fifth are too cheeky!" explained Lovell.

"Too cheeky by half!" said Conroy. "After this, you will treat the Fourth with proper respect—what?"

Hansom found his voice at last.

"You cheeky young scoundrels!" he roared. "Get out of my study before I pitch you out!"

"You'd better begin with the pitching, Cabby."

"Go ahead!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hansom advanced on the juniors with frowning brow and clenched fists. Even yet he could hardly believe that the Fourth-Formers meant to lay sacrilegious hands upon so great a person.

But he was quickly undeceived on that point.

"Collar them!" rapped out Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four jumped at Hansom as one man.



"What does this mean?" thundered Mr. Greeley. "Is it possible that this study has been wrecked by insubordinate juniors? Silver, what are you doing here?"

Talboys struggled in the grasp of the Colonial Co. at the same moment. Singly, the juniors would have had no chance, naturally, against the big seniors. But seven to two was long odds.

Hansom, to his surprise and rage, found himself dragged down and bumped on his study carpet with a mighty bump.

Lovell sat on his chest, and Raby on his head, and Newcome trampled recklessly on his sprawling legs.

"Got him!" trilled Lovell.

Talboys was down even more quickly, in the grasp of the Colonial Co.

Two of them sat on him and pinned him down.

"This looks like business!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "Are you ready, Hansom? Sauce for the gander, you know."

Hansom spluttered with rage and apprehension.

"You young rotter! Lemme gerrup!"

"Where's that strap?"

"Lemme gerrup!" roared Hansom.

"Well, a cricket-stump will do!"

Jimmy Silver picked a stump from the cupboard. "Roll him over!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Even yet the captain of the Fifth could not quite believe it; but proof was immediately forthcoming.

Struggling furiously, he was rolled over. Then the cricket-stump rose and fell.

Whack—whack—whack!

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

Hansom roared in quite another manner.

"Go it, Jimmy!" yelled Lovell.

"Give him two dozen! We must pay

a debt with interest, you know!"

"Yah! Oh! Oh! Oh! Help!"

"Oh, by gad!" gasped Talboys.
"What's Rookwood comin' to? Oh, gad!"

"Your turn's coming!" chortled Conroy. "Wait a bit!"

Whack—whack—whack!

"Yah! Help!"

There was a sharp knock at the door.

"What is this disturbance? Open this door at once!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver, as he recognised the voice of Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth.

The avengers of the end study had not counted on that; but they really might have expected it.

In the Fourth-Form passage rags and rows frequently failed to attract attention, but in the august quarters of the Fifth it was quite a different matter.

"Hansom!" thundered Mr. Greely.
"Open this door at once!"

"Yow-ow! I—I can't!"

"What! I command you to let me in, Hansom! How dare you create such a disturbance in a senior study! Admit me instantly!"

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Lovell.

There was nothing for it—the victims of vengeance had to be released.

Form-masters were not to be argued with.

Hansom staggered to his feet as the juniors let go, and unlocked the door.

With rustling gown and frowning face, Mr. Greely strode into the study.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

RATHER A FROST

JIMMY SILVER & Co. stood crimson and silent.

They waited for the storm to burst.

Although reprisals were strictly justified—from the juniors' point of view, at least—they did not quite expect the Fifth-Form master to see the matter in that light.

Mr. Greely stared at the disordered study, the overturned table, the smashed crockery, the panting Fifth-Formers, and the silent juniors.

"What does this mean?" he thundered. "Is it possible—I repeat, is it barely possible—that this study has been wrecked by insubordinate juniors? Silver, what are you doing here?"

"Ahem!"

"Hansom, what has happened?"

"These cheeky little rotters——"

"What?"

"I—I mean, these juniors, sir, have wrecked the place."

"Silver, how dare you?"

"It was tit for tat, sir," said Jimmy Silver. "Hansom licked us, so we licked him."

Mr. Greely gave him a thunderous look.

"You dare to admit, Silver, that you came here to assault members of a senior Form?"

"Oh, no, sir! Not at all! Only—only to lick them!" murmured Jimmy.

"Don't use foolish, slang expressions to me, boy! I can scarcely believe my ears," said Mr. Greely. "Had you been administering correction to these juniors, Hansom?"

"Well, yes, sir."

"You should have reported them to a prefect, Hansom, if they were at fault. But nothing could excuse this outbreak of hooliganism. Silver and the rest, follow me at once. I shall take you directly to your Form-master, and I have no doubt that Mr. Dalton will deal with you severely—as severely as you deserve!"

"But—but, sir——"

"Silence! Follow me!"

The Fifth-Form master fairly flounced out of the study. The seven juniors with grim looks followed him.

Hansom and Talboys exchanged a grin. They had had a somewhat rough experience; but there was no doubt that the mutinous juniors would have the lessons of their lives, and would learn that seniors of the Fifth could not be handled in that manner.

Jimmy Silver & Co. followed Mr. Greely to their Form-master's study. They went in a doleful mood.

Mr. Dalton looked astonished as the Fifth-Form master marched the delinquents into the study.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "What is the matter?"

"I have brought these juniors to you, Mr. Dalton," gasped the Fifth-Form master. "They have raided a Fifth-Form study and wrecked it. I need say no more. I leave them to you!"

"Very good, Mr. Greely."

Mr. Greely whisked out, and Mr. Dalton took up his cane.

"I am surprised at you, my boys," he said severely. "You have acted outrageously! I think you must have been out of your senses!"

"If you please, sir——"

"You do not contradict Mr. Greely's statement, I presume?" said Mr. Dalton sternly.

"Nunno, sir! But——"

"You need not acquaint me with your motives for this act of outrageous insubordination," said Mr. Dalton. "The fact itself is sufficient. There is no possible justification. Hold out your hand, Silver!"

"But, sir, we——"

"Enough! Hold out your hand!"

"Swish—swish—swish!"

For several minutes there was a steady sound of swishing in Mr. Dalton's study, to an accompaniment of gasps and mumbling.

Mr. Dalton was not often severe, but he felt that this was a case for severity, and he did not spare the rod.

It was but seldom that such a licking had fallen to the lot of Jimmy Silver & Co.

When he had finished, the Fourth-Form master looked somewhat breathless. It had been an unaccustomed exertion for him.

He pointed to the door with his cane.

"You may go," he said sternly.

And the juniors went.

Afterwards, in the end study and in No. 3, there was a chorus of groans. Like Rachel of old, the unhappy sufferers mourned, and could not be comforted.

Jimmy Silver was the first to recover a little. He blinked at his chums as they rubbed their hands and mumbled.

"That was a bit of a frost, you chaps!"

"Yow-ow-ow!" came from the unhappy chaps.

"But that isn't the finish!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"We're going for the Fifth——"

"Wow-wow!"

"And we're going to make Hansom squirm."

"Groooh!"

"Ow!"

"Wow!"

Jimmy Silver gave it up.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

MORNINGTON ON THE WARPETH

FOR the next day or two Jimmy Silver & Co. understudied the celebrated Brer Fox, and lay low.

When the effects of the licking had worn off, their determination revived in full force to vindicate the inviolability of the end study, and to make Hansom & Co. thoroughly sorry for themselves. But they realised that they had to tread warily.

It was no light matter for juniors to tackle senior fellows in the Fifth; the heavy hand of authority was only too likely to intervene, as it had already done once.

But it was a maxim with the Co. that the end study never gave in, and the four were only biding their time.

Meanwhile, Hansom was quite satisfied with his drastic measures. The cheeky juniors had been put in their places for good. The Fistical Four were giving Hansom a wide berth at present, and the captain of the Fifth grinned when he noted it. But after a day or two he dismissed them from his mind.

There were many discussions in the Fourth-Form studies, especially No. 3 and the end study. It was agreed that, as the Fifth had declared war, they should be the first to cry "Hold, enough!" and that the terms of peace should be stiff. Exactly how to make them sue for peace, however, was not an easy problem to solve. But Jimmy Silver's active brain was at work.

Not only the Fistical Four and the Colonial Co., but Mornington had taken up the matter. The outrage to the prestige of the end study only amused Mornington, and he had no sympathy to waste on Jimmy Silver. But Mornington knew that if he could succeed in bringing down the overbearing Fifth-Formers from their perch, it would help him very materially in his ambition to oust Jimmy Silver from his place as leader of the Fourth Form.

Morny dearly loved the limelight,

and limelight would fall in an ample share to the fellow who succeeded in making the foes of the Fourth squirm.

So Morny discussed it in his study, where he found a plentiful lack of enthusiasm.

Peele and Gower weren't enthusiastic. Neither were Townsend and Topham and the other nuts. They carefully avoided "scraps," as a rule, and a scrap with seniors of the Fifth was an idea that made them gasp.

"But think of it," urged Mornington to a meeting of the nuts in his study. "It's up to somebody! The Fifth can't thrash our Form as much as they like, I suppose. By gad, they might give us the next turn!"

"Jimmy Silver can look after himself," said Townsend. "Let's keep out of their rows and rags. They're no class."

"Leave it alone," said Peele. "We don't want to get the seniors down on this study."

Mornington sniffed. He had more pluck than the rest of the "Giddy Goats" put together, and he was not afraid of the seniors.

"Chap who downed the Fifth would have a chance of squeezing Jimmy Silver out," he said.

"Well, you can't do it!"

"I could with some backing."

"Ask Jimmy Silver to back you, then," yawned Topham.

"Oh, rats! Look here, suppose we caught Hansom and Talboys outside the school; they generally go out together on a half-holiday when there's no match on. There's enough of us to collar them!"

"Oh, rot!"

"And tie 'em leg by leg, and send 'em hoppin' home," said Mornington eagerly. "The school'd laugh 'em to death. They wouldn't dare to show

their faces afterwards. And it would show all the fellows that Jimmy Silver isn't the great chief they think he is if we did it."

"Too jolly risky," said Topham.

Mornington's lip curled.

"Oh, don't keep harpin' on that. Suppose they put up a fight, and you got your necktie disarranged, you'd recover in time. Look here; I know they're going down to Coombe to-

Look here, we'll rig 'em up in their merry theatrical costumes and make 'em come home to Rookwood like that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Even the nuts were tickled at that suggestion.

The difficulty was that the Giddy Goats of Rookwood were not fighting men, and had a deep antipathy to getting hard knocks.



"Go for 'em!" yelled Morny as the two Fifth-Formers came abreast of the ambush, and he led the rush. "My hat!" ejaculated Hansom. "What—oh, crumbs!"

morrow afternoon to see about the costumes for their rotten play-actin'. They've been rehearsin' 'Hamlet' for their silly amateur theatricals. They rehearse in the woodshed, and I've heard 'em spoutin'. They go there to play the goat, because the other fellows chip 'em when they rehearse in the senior room. Well, Hansom and Talboys will be goin' out together, and we could lay for them.

But Morny gained his point at last. He pointed out that even two seniors wouldn't have much chance in a scrap with half a dozen fellows; it would be a cheap victory, and no end of glory to be won without much risk.

That was the kind of glory that appealed to the nuts, and they gave way at last, though with inward misgivings. Mornington had a very

masterful character, and he generally had his way with his followers in the long run.

On Wednesday afternoon the nuts were prepared to go on the warpath, though only Morny was looking forward to it. But Morny kept his men up to the scratch. The merry party were lounging about the school gates when Hansom and Talboys came down together, the former carrying a bag.

Hansom was great on amateur theatricals, and rehearsals went on almost every evening in the woodshed of the drama that was to stagger humanity at Rookwood when it came off. Costumes for the play were on order, and they had been promised for that day for the dress rehearsal, and Hansom was going for them.

The two seniors did not even glance at Morny & Co. as they went out. Fourth-Formers to them were trifles light as air. Morny grinned after them as they went down the road.

"Come on!" he said.

"I—I say, suppose we make an afternoon of it at the Bird-in-Hand?" suggested Peele. "We could have the billiard-table!"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Morny. "We're goin' for Hansom."

"Hallo"—Jimmy Silver came out with his chums—"what's that? Are you going after our game, Morny?"

Mornington stared at him angrily.

"You're not going after them?" he exclaimed.

"We are—we is!" said Lovell.

"Leave 'em to us!" said Mornington. "I'm goin' for them! I've got a scheme for makin' them sit up, and I don't want you fellows shovin' your oar in."

"Rot!" said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"Oh, give 'em a chance," he said.

"I didn't know you merry nuts were on the warpath! Isn't there some risk of getting your neckties soiled or your hair disarranged?"

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

"Oh, cheese it!" snapped Mornington. "If you want to see something be at the gates in an hour's time or so, an' you'll see Hansom and Talboys come hoppin' home with their legs tied up."

"I'll believe that when I see it," grinned Jimmy.

"Well, you'll see it this afternoon."

Mornington & Co. walked away down the road, leaving the Fistical Four grinning. Jimmy Silver was quite willing to give Morny a chance, as he was keen on it; but he doubted very much whether the nuts of the Fourth would stand up to the big fists of Hansom and Talboys, however great the odds were in their favour.

Morny was looking quite keen. He had a strong whipcord in his pocket all ready to tie the Fifth-Formers leg to leg. There was no doubt that if the scheme succeeded the Fifth-Formers would be the victims of much merriment at Rookwood, and would never get over the humiliation.

But Morny's followers looked anything but keen. There were certainly enough of them to handle two seniors. But—but somebody would be hurt before the enemy were downed, and each of the merry nuts had a strong objection to being the fellow that got hurt.

In the loneliest part of the lane Morny & Co. stopped and took cover among the trees. There they waited for their prospective victims to come by on their return from the village.

They had some time to wait, which they filled in by smoking cigarettes in their nutty way. But the enemy came in sight at last.

Hansom and Talboys came sauntering along the lane from Coombe, chatting, and quite unconscious of danger.

Mornington's eyes gleamed.

"We shall take the cads by surprise!" he muttered. "When I give the word, rush on 'em. We'll have them down before they know what's happenin'!"

And the nuts looked a little brighter at that prospect.

The two Fifth-Formers came abreast of the ambush. Morny gave a sudden yell.

"Go for 'em!"

He led the rush.

"My hat!" ejaculated Hansom.

"What—Oh, crumbs!"

He went down on his back, and Talboys sprawled beside him, with half a dozen juniors sprawling over them.

"Got 'em!" grinned Mornington.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

NOT AS PER PROGRAMME!

"WHAT the thunder——"

"Gerrup!"

Mornington grinned down at Hansom, on whose broad chest his knee was planted.

"No good wrigglin'!" he said coolly. "We've got you! Take the whipcord out of my pocket, Towny, an' tie their hands!"

"What are you up to?" roared Hansom.

"I'll tell you," chuckled Mornington. "We're goin' to tie you leg to leg, and send you hoppin' home to Rookwood. We're goin' to daub mud on your chivvies, and rig you up with the theatrical clobber you've got in that bag!"

"My hat!" gasped Hansom.

"Then perhaps you'll see that you'd better let the Fourth alone—

what?" smiled Mornington. "Get 'em tied up, Towny!"

Hansom made a terrific effort, and almost threw Mornington off. The dandy of the Fourth clung to him savagely.

"Pin 'em down!" he gasped.

Hansom got one hand loose, and smote with it, and Topham rolled over in the road with a howl. He smote again, and Peele jumped away in time to avoid the blow. He was left with Mornington to deal with and he grasped Mornington, and scrambled to his feet with Morny still in his grasp.

Mornington was fighting like a cat; but alone and unaided, he had no chance whatever against the big senior.

"Buck up!" shrieked Mornington.

But alas for the nuts!

Topham and Peele were already in full flight. They had had quite enough of Hansom's heavy fists at close quarters.

Talboys was rolling on the ground with three more nuts; but one of them broke away and ran, and Talboys pitched off the other two and jumped up. Gower was hurled into the road, and he stayed only to pick himself up before he burst through a hedge and fled.

Townsend would gladly have followed his example, but Talboys had a grip of iron on Towny's collar.

Hansom burst into a roar of laughter.

The tables had been turned with startling suddenness.

Four of the assailants were fleeing as if for their lives, and Morny and Towny were wriggling helplessly in the grasp of the Fifth-Formers.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the captain of the Fifth. "Hold that young beggar, Talboys! Don't let these two get away!"

"No fear!" chuckled Talboys.

"Let go, hang you!" panted Mornington, frantic with rage and apprehension. "I'll kick your shins! Yow-ow! Leggo!"

"Not just yet!" grinned Hansom. "So you were going to tie me up—ha, ha!—and send me hopping home—what?"

"So I would have if those rotten funks had backed me up!" panted Mornington.

"Ha, ha! I understand you've got a whipcord in your pocket. I'll borrow that whipcord," said Hansom.

Mornington's struggles were not much use. The big senior held him with one hand and turned out his pockets with the other. He found the whipcord and shook it loose.

"Bring that young cad here, Talboys! Shove 'em together!"

"I—I say——" stuttered Townsend.

"Shut up!"

The two juniors were quite helpless. Hansom, grinning hugely, proceeded to tie Mornington's right leg to Townsend's left. He bent the legs up at the knee, and fastened them so. Morny and Towny were left with one leg each to stand upon. Townsend submitted meekly, but the dandy of the Fourth ground his teeth with rage and wriggled to the last.

"There you are!" smiled Hansom. "Now you can hop it!"

"Oh, dear!" groaned Townsend.

"Oh, you rotter!" hissed Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The two Fifth-Formers, roaring with laughter, walked on to Rookwood, leaving Mornington and Townsend standing on one leg apiece, and hopping furiously to keep from falling. Morny's scheme had been a success—the wrong way. It was the unfortu-

nate Morny himself who had to hop home.

Hansom and Talboys found quite a little crowd at the school gates. The word had passed round of Morny's campaign, and half the Classical Fourth and half a dozen Moderns had gathered to see the luckless Fifth-Formers hop in. They stared as Hansom and Talboys came sauntering up sedately.

"My word!" said Tommy Dodd, of the Modern Fourth, as the two Fifth-Formers walked in. "What's happened to Morny? The circus hasn't come off!"

"Funked it, of course!" said Lovell, with a sniff.

"Hallo! Here's some of them!"

Peele and Topham came slinking in, looking dusty and rumpled. They had kept their distance till the Fifth-Formers were gone.

"Well, what's happened?" asked Jimmy Silver. "You look as if you've been dust-collecting!"

"Oh, rats!" snapped Peele.

The nuts tramped in without satisfying the curious questioners. A few minutes later Gower and St. John arrived, also dusty and rumpled and savage-tempered. They were not allowed to pass unanswering. The Fistical Four surrounded them. Jimmy Silver meant to know what had happened.

"What did you do to Cabby?" demanded Jimmy.

"Oh, rats!" snorted Gower. "We got licked, and we bunked for it!"

"Where's Morny and Towny?"

"Don't know and don't care!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gower and St. John went in. The juniors looked down the road, but there was no sign of Mornington or Townsend. Some of the fellows walked down the road towards

Coombe. They were curious to know what had happened to the leaders of the nutty brigade.

"Hallo!" roared Lovell suddenly. "Look!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

A curious-looking object had come into sight.

At a distance it looked like a very fat fellow with legs very wide apart. But on closer view it proved to be two juniors with a leg each tied up behind them, hopping, one on his right and one on his left leg.

Morny and Towny had delayed some time, wondering how on earth they could get out of their fix. They had to face laughter at Rookwood or take their chance of being "chivvied" by a crowd if they hopped into Coombe for help.

They wisely decided on Rookwood, and started for the school. Progress was slow and difficult, and the things

Morny and Towny said to each other during that painful progress were emphatic.

The Fistical Four yelled at the sight. The two crimson, furious nuts hopped clumsily up to them.

"Let us loose, you cacklin' hounds!" howled Mornington.

"It's worked out the wrong way, then!" said Jimmy Silver, wiping away his tears. "That was Hansom's part in the show, wasn't it?"

"You silly fool, let us loose!"

"Go and eat coke!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Keep on! You're right for Rookwood!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mornington ground his teeth, and hopped on with Townsend, leaving the Fistical Four yelling.

Another yell greeted the unhappy pair as they arrived at the school gates. They reeled against the gate and gasped for breath.



"Keep on!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "You're right for Rookwood!" Mornington ground his teeth and hopped on with Townsend, leaving the Fistical Four yelling.

"Let us loose!" shrieked Mornington. "We can't go in like this! Let us loose, you fools!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do let a chap loose!" pleaded Townsend. "Conroy, old chap, don't let us go in like this, you know! Oh, dear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Cornstalk junior, weeping with merriment, opened his knife and cut through the whipcord. The unhappy twins were free at last. Mornington scowled savagely at the yelling juniors, and Townsend shook his fist in Morny's scowling face.

"You silly rotter!" he shouted. "Catch me backin' you up again, you silly, burblin' chump! Yah!"

And Townsend strode away furiously. Mornington ground his teeth and followed, his face crimson with rage and humiliation, and a roar of laughter followed them both.

"I don't think the merry nuts will bother with Hansom again after this!" chuckled Tommy Dodd.

And Tommy was right; they didn't.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

CORNERING THE ENEMY

"ALL here?"

"Yes."

"Good!" said Hansom.

It was evening, and the Fifth-Form Thespians were getting down to business.

The Thespians were quite an institution—miles above the Classical Players, of the Fourth, in importance and dignity. The Thespians sometimes gave Shakespearian performances, to which even the Head condescended to come.

It was a little humiliating for the lofty Thespians to have to hold their rehearsals in the woodshed. Certainly it was quite a spacy apartment

—for a woodshed. There was plenty of room, and it was quiet and secluded—away from the vulgar herd, as Talboys expressed it.

In the senior Common-room the Sixth-Form fellows simply refused to be bored by Thespian rehearsals, and the Form-room was not always at their disposal; and, moreover, mocking fags would sometimes howl in at the door or the window there, and spoil the effect of Hamlet's soliloquy or Mark Antony's oration.

"Hamlet" was the play now, and Hansom & Co. were going to make a tremendous success of it when it came off. And this was the dress rehearsal, and the costumes were all ready.

There were eight Fifth-Form fellows in the woodshed, every one of them a born Roscius, more or less. Hansom was the last to arrive, and after he came in he slipped the bolt on the door. Even in the secluded precincts of the woodshed the Thespians had sometimes been interrupted by cheeky juniors with pea-shooters.

"Now, we've got an hour," said Hansom briskly. "Get into your clobber, you fellows, and let's get going!"

Hansom, Lumsden, O'Rourke, Duff, Jobson, Muggins, Talboys, and Brown major were very soon in costume.

There were small parts which were going to be played by other fellows, but they were not present. The exigencies of lines, prep. and other occupations kept them away. Ere long the voice of Hansom was booming through the woodshed, Hansom being Hamlet—though, as Jimmy Silver had remarked, under the circumstances Hamlet was not handsome.

"To be or not to be—that is the question!"

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to
suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous
fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of
troubles."

Hansom was going quite strong. Naturally, he did not hear some slight sounds outside the woodshed. Indeed, it was difficult to hear anything else when Hansom's voice was booming away.

"That's Cabby's toot!" murmured Jimmy Silver, as he paused outside the shed door. "He's going it!"

"He is—he are!" grinned Lovell; and Raby and Newcome chuckled softly.

The Fistical Four were on the war-path.

From the shed window came only a faint gleam of light. It was a small window, and covered with a dark blind on account of the lighting regulations. Outside, it was very dark.

In the gloom the forms of the Colonial Co. loomed up, with Oswald and Flynn.

Jimmy Silver, standing close to the shed door, was fumbling in his pocket.

"What's the game?" asked Conroy. "We've come, Jimmy, but what the merry dickens have we come for? We don't want to hear Hansom murdering Hamlet!"

Jimmy chuckled.

"Wait and see!" he replied.

"Well, we're waiting," said Oswald.

Jimmy drew a small bundle from his pocket. His comrades blinked at it in the gloom, and Conroy whistled softly.

"Gimlets!" he said.

"Just so."

"What on earth are you going to

do with half a dozen gimlets?" asked the mystified Australian.

"Screw up the door," said Jimmy cheerfully. "It's a bit awkward for screwing up with screws, so I've collected all the gimlets I could find among the fellows' tool-boxes. They'll fix it. Lend a hand, and drive 'em right in, and don't make a row!"

"But what——" began Flynn.

"Don't jaw, old chap; go ahead!"

Jimmy Silver had not imparted his great plans to his followers yet. He was content to let them wait and see.

The half-dozen gimlets were handed round, and the Classical juniors set to work. It was not easy to drive them into the hard wood, but they progressed steadily with the work. There was little danger of their being heard in the woodshed. The rehearsal was going great guns, and the Fifth-Form Thespians had no ears for anything but their own spouting.

Slowly but surely the gimlets were driven in, through door and doorpost, right to the hilt.

The woodshed door was as fast then as if it had been screwed up. It was a simpler process, but just as effective.

"That's done!" said Jimmy Silver in tones of satisfaction.

"Is that all?" asked Pons.

Jimmy sniffed.

"No, fathead! We've got them prisoners now; the window isn't big enough for those fatheads to get out without squeezing, and we shall see they don't do that. Get round the woodshed and bring the garden hose here!"

"The—the hose?" said Oswald.

"Yes. Buck up!"

"But the hose isn't kept behind the woodshed!" exclaimed Oswald, in astonishment. "It's kept in the shed!"

"I know that, ass! But I came here

and yanked it out and hid it behind the shed an hour ago ! ”

“ Oh, I see ! ”

“ Time you did. ”

Oswald and Conroy groped round the shed for the hidden hose. They came back with it in a few minutes.

Jimmy's plan was dawning upon his comrades now, and they were grinning joyously.

“ Where are you going to fix it ? ” murmured Lovell.

“ The tap in the yard, of course. ”

“ Good ! It's more than long enough ! ”

“ Plenty long enough—yards over. Come and help me fix it. ”

The hose was soon secured and ready for action.

Then Jimmy Silver carried the nozzle to the window of the woodshed. He tapped at the window with it.

Voices in the woodshed stopped suddenly. Jimmy Silver tapped again imperatively.

“ That's some blessed fag ! ” said Talboys' voice.

“ Keep on with the bizney ! ” growled Hansom.

Tap—tap—tap !

“ My hat ! I'll go out and skin him ! ” muttered Hansom. “ Wait a minute till I've squashed him, you fellows ! ”

Hansom caught at the door to open it. The door did not move. Hansom dragged at it—in surprise at first, and then in rage.

“ By gad ! They've fastened up the door ! ” he ejaculated.

“ Oh, rot ! How could they ? ” said Talboys.

“ Try it yourself, fathead ! ”

Talboys tried it, but the door did not open. The Thespians were looking exasperated and furious by this time.

Tap—tap—tap ! came the summons at the window ; and Hansom strode up to it angrily and dragged the blind aside. Through the glass he could see the grinning face of Jimmy Silver.

The captain of the Fifth tore the little window open and glared at the junior.

“ You cheeky young rotter ! Have you fastened up the door ? ” he shouted.

Jimmy nodded coolly.

“ Right on the wicket ! ” he assented.

“ I'll come out and—— Yarooop ! ” spluttered Hansom as Jimmy raised the nozzle of the hose and let fly.

Squish—swish—splash !

“ Ha, ha, ha ! ” came in a yell from the darkness outside.

Hansom was in all the glory of Hamlet's costume before the sudden flood of water smote him. By the time it had played upon him for a few seconds he looked more like a half-drowned tramp.

“ By gad ! ” stuttered Talboys. “ You young demons—Ooooooch ! ” The jet of water smote Talboys and fairly bowled him over, and Laertes rolled on the floor spluttering. And from the rest of the dramatis personæ came wild yells and hoots as the water swamped right and left.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

THE FALL OF THE FIFTH

“ G ROOCH ! ”

“ Gug-gug-gugg ! ”

“ Yarooop ! ”

Swish—squish—splash ! Behind Jimmy Silver a crowd of grinning faces looked into the woodshed, the juniors craning their necks round the little window.

To and fro in the woodshed the Thespians dodged and rushed in vain



"I'll come out and—— Yarooop!" spluttered Hansom as Jimmy Silver raised the nozzle of the hose and let fly.

attempts to escape the searching stream.

Hansom led a rush to the window, with a wild idea of squeezing through somehow and getting at close quarters with the enemy. The powerful jet struck him fairly under the chin and threw him back.

The yells and splutters of the Thespians rang through the woodshed, and were answered by yells of laughter from outside.

"Go it, Jimmy!" gasped Lovell. "Oh, my hat! What a merry family of drowned rats! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fourth-Formers.

"Yow-ow! Ugh!"

"Grooh-hooh!"

"Oh, dear! Oh, crumbs! Stop-pit!"

Jimmy Silver shut off the water at last. (He was laughing too much to

take aim. The floor was swimming with water, the actors were drenched and dripping, and their drenched costumes clung around their limbs. Hansom gouged water from his eyes, and glared at the grinning faces in the window.

"I'll smash you for this!" he roared. "I'll pulverise you! I'll slaughter you! I'll—I'll—I'll——"

"Looks as if the Fourth are top dogs now," grinned Jimmy Silver. "Don't come too near the window, Cabby, or you'll get some more!"

"Oh, you young rotter! Ow!"

"Are you going to apologise for raiding my study?"

"No!" yelled Hansom. Hansom was wet and he was cold, but the bare thought of the captain of the Fifth apologising to a junior made him boil with rage.

"Have some more, then!"

Squish ! Swoosh !

Hansom yelled and rushed at the window again, but again the steady jet drove him back. He dodged and fled round the shed, but wherever he ran the jet found him out.

" Stop it ! " he shrieked at last. " I—I—I'm willing—yow—to say—yaroooh—I'm sorry—ooch ! " Hansom could stand no more.

" You apologise ? "

" Ow ! Yes ! Ow ! "

" Ha, ha, ha ! "

" Do you all apologise ? " demanded Jimmy Silver.

" We—we—we apologise ! " stut-tered the unhappy Thespians.

Jimmy shut off the water again.

" Good ! " he remarked. " That's a beginning. Now, better get to bizney, or you'll catch cold. I suppose you feel a bit wet. "

" Grooh ! "

" These are our peace terms, " said Jimmy Silver. " You give us a written apology, you tip Mack to clean up the shed so that there won't be a row about this swamping, and you make it pax. Is that agreed ? "

" No ! " shrieked Hansom.

Swoooooosh !

The water played again at full force. With wild gasps and yells the Fifth-Formers strove to dodge it, but they dodged in vain. Wet and shivering and dripping, they yelled to Jimmy Silver to stop.

The captain of the Fourth obligingly shut off the stream.

" Do you accept the peace terms ? " he asked sweetly.

" No—oh, my hat—stoppit—yes ! " shrieked Hansom.

" Right ! " grinned Jimmy Silver. " Chuck in a pencil and paper, Lovell. You'll write down the apology, Hansom, and all the rest will sign it. And sharp's the word ! "

Hansom simply gasped with rage. But there was no help for it. He wrote the apology at Jimmy Silver's dictation, and the rest of the Thespians ground their chattering teeth and signed, and the paper was passed out to the grinning Lovell. Jimmy Silver grinned and nodded as he looked at it.

" You'll tip Mack to clean up the shed, Hansom ? "

" Yes ! " hissed Hansom.

" And it's pax ? "

" Ye-e-ss ! "

" Good ! I'll mention to a Fifth-Form chap that you're here, and he can come down and let you out, " smiled Jimmy Silver. " Ta-ta, dear boys, and think twice before you tackle the Fourth again ! "

Later that evening a paper was pinned up on the wall of the junior Common-room, which the juniors read with great glee and roars of laughter. It ran :

" We, the undersigned, apologise humbly for having cheeked the Fourth Form, and beg to be forgiven, as witness our signatures :

EDWARD HANSOM.

PHILIP LUMSDEN.

PAUL MUGGINS.

TOBIAS JOBSON.

HARRY DUFF.

PHELIM O'ROURKE.

CECIL TALBOYS.

H. BROWN major. "

The Fourth Form—Classical and Modern—read that paper and yelled over it. The Shell and the Third read it and howled. Even some of the Sixth came in and read it and chortled. And even Mornington had to acknowledge that Jimmy Silver had done the trick !

A GAY DOG LOCKED OUT!



- *Cyril Peele, gay dog of the Rookwood Fourth, tells of his narrowest escape from expulsion.*

LOCKED out of school at midnight! That was my fate on a bitterly cold night in January. And, to make matters worse, I was feeling sick and ill as I stood in the old quad and surveyed the silent school. A half-moon was casting fitful gleams over the school and sparkling from a million points of frost on the flag-stones. Bare branches were rattling in the icy wind. And I stood alone and hopeless, doomed to get the bullet whether I rang to be let in or spent the night outside and was discovered absent in the morning.

I suppose I deserved it, for I had admittedly been out on the spree.

Three or four of us had gone to a Sixth Form man's party at the Peal o' Bells. Smythe and Tracy of the Shell, and Townsend of the Fourth and my pal Lattrey had been at the party. We all went out together. Our means of exit was by a small dormer window in the cloak-room on the ground floor, which we left unfastened for our return.

We hired a private room at the Peal o' Bells, and beside a roaring fire we had a good feed, followed by cigarettes and sherry—and a game of banker. The air grew thick with smoke. After a time I began to feel blue round the gills. The cigarettes and wine in the

not room had given me a peculiar feeling under the waistcoat, as though a little bird were fluttering about inside my works.

"My dear man, what on earth is up with you?" drawled Smythey, as he gathered in my pocket-money following a losing hand. "You're as white as a bally sheet."

"I—I feel a bit funny!" I gulped feebly. "I think, if you fellows don't mind, I'll get back to school and go to bed."

"Best place for you if you feel like that," yawned Towny, with rather a contemptuous grin.

So I tottered out and began to pad the hoof back to Rookwood. The cold air revived me for a minute or two, but not for long. Passing Croft Spinney I felt really ill. I sank down on a fallen tree, and for the next twenty minutes I heartily wished I was dead.

When I was able to walk again, I went on to the school, and it was there I discovered that the window had been locked. For a few moments I stood there dazed, looking blankly at the window. I could only suppose that some master or prefect had been on the prowl and, finding a window unfastened, had locked it. I wondered what I could do, and what the others would say when they arrived.

For about half an hour I stood and shivered in the black shelter of the school wall, waiting for the fellows. They seemed a fearfully long time coming. It was understood that we should all be back by midnight, as, of course, the inn was closed at that time. Misgivings thronged inside me, and slowly I began to realise the truth.

They *had* come back! It was they who had fastened the window. Thinking that I was already in bed, they had accidentally shut me out.

I was utterly done. I had, in fact, only one ray of hope. Quickly but silently I made my way to the Sixth Form windows on the ground floor. Carthew of the Sixth had been the host at our party, and I would have to wake him and get him to let me in.

I hauled myself on to Carthew's narrow window-sill and tapped cautiously on the glass with my knuckles. No answer! I tapped again. Carthew had evidently gone to sleep. I wriggled with suspense, and in doing so accidentally wriggled myself off the window-sill. I dropped on my back in the quad and let out a yell! I choked it back quickly, but the damage was done.

A window shot up.

"Who's that?" called out Bulkeley, the captain of the school.

I suppressed a groan. My number was up with a vengeance! Quickly I rushed into the shadows.

"My hat!" exclaimed Bulkeley. "That's someone breaking bounds."

The fact that I'm still at Rookwood is due wholly and solely to my presence of mind at that moment. My brain seemed to work under forced pressure. I knew Bulkeley would come out with a couple of prefects. He would come out by the side door, near which a big laurel bush grows. I was behind that bush in fifteen seconds.

It was then touch and go. If Bulkeley shut the door, and unlocked it again when he returned, it was the finish. Luckily he didn't. He left it ajar while he raced round the building with Neville and Catesby. And no sooner had they disappeared than I disappeared, too—up the back stairs. When they peeped into our dorm I was fast asleep—or looked it.

I wouldn't go through that experience again for twenty pounds.

THE END



SKIMPOLE the STAR-GAZER!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

THE FIRST CHAPTER

GUSSY IS TOO GOOD!

TAP!

"Wacke!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, tapped at the door of Racke's study in the Shell passage, and called.

He turned the handle, but the door did not open.

"Wacke!" repeated Arthur Augustus.

There was no reply from the study. If Aubrey Racke, of the Shell, was there, he did not seem disposed to take heed of the swell of St. Jim's.

Tap!

"Wacke!" said Arthur Augustus, for the third time. "Weally, Wacke, you had bettah open the door."

"Oh, buzz off!" came Racke's voice at last, gruffly.

"Weally, Wacke——"

"Hook it! You're not wanted in this study."

"You uttah wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I should wefuse to entah your wotten studay in any circumstances what-evah. I am perfectly well awah, Wacke, why your door is locked. You are smokin', and playin' bankah with Cwooke."

"Cut off!"

"Yes, cut off, D'Arcy!" came in Crooke's voice. "You're interrupting, you know. Cheese it and cut!"

"Weally, Cwooke——"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"You wottah——"

"By gad! If you don't buzz off I'll come to you with a crickèt bat!" exclaimed the exasperated Racke.

When Herbert Skimpole, the genius of St. Jim's, takes up astronomy it is Racke of the Shell who sees stars!

"If you will open the door, Wacke——"

"Ring off!"

"I have somethin' to tell you——"

"Tell it to somebody else, then," retorted Racke.

"It is wathah important to you, Wacke. I have come here to give you a warning——"

"Give it to somebody else. Cut off!"

"Yes, cut off, old bean!" chuckled Crooke. "Here endeth the first lesson, you know!"

"Bai Jove!"

The door of Study No. 9, farther along the Shell passage, was open, and from that study Skimpole of the Shell blinked out through his big spectacles.

"Is that you, D'Arcy?" asked Skimpole genially. "Step into my study, my dear fellow. I'm glad to see you——"

"I am twyin' to speak to Wacke," said Arthur Augustus. "It is awf'ly important, and he has his door locked, and wefuses to open it."

Skimpole shook his head.

"I am afraid that Racke is engaged upon his usual surreptitious and disreputable occupations, my dear D'Arcy." Skimpole of the Shell was a learned youth, and he never used a short word if a long one would do. "You had better leave him to his own disreputable devices, and step into my study. Talbot and Gore have gone out, and I should really like a little chat on the subject of my astronomical investigations. Dear me! What are you grinning at, my dear D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus could not help grinning.

Skimpole was an extremely learned fellow; his bulging brain was simply stacked with all sorts of abstruse

knowledge. What he did not know about entomology and conchology was not worth knowing. Skimpole was always willing, indeed, eager, to impart his knowledge to less learned fellows—but somehow or other fellows did not seem so willing to have it imparted to them.

"I do not see anything of a comic nature in my observations, my dear D'Arcy," said Skimpole, with a perplexed look. "I am at a loss to account for your amusement. I have lately taken up astronomy as a study, and I can assure you that it is a subject of transcendent interest. The investigation of the illimitable regions of the ether——"

"Oh, deah!"

"Pray step into my study," said Skimpole cordially. "I really should enjoy a talk with you, D'Arcy. Every other fellow I have asked seems to be busily occupied this afternoon—dear me, you are grinning again! Is it possible that there is some unconscious and unintentional humour in my observations upon a serious subject?"

"Thanks vewy much, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, with a chuckle, "but I weally have got to speak to Wacke."

He knocked at the door of Study No. 7 again.

"Will you hook it before I come out with a cricket bat?" roared Aubrey Racke.

"Weally, you wottah——"

"My dear D'Arcy, Racke does not seem really anxious for your company," said Skimpole. "I, on the other hand——"

"Yaas, but I feel bound to give him a warnin'," said Arthur Augustus. "Wacke is a fwightful wottah, and a disgwace to St. Jim's, and I would not touch him with a barge-pole, of course."

But I do not want to see him flogged, though he deserves it for his wotten conduct. I am goin' to warn him that a pwefect is comin' up to his study. It would be howwid for Wacke if Kildare of the Sixth caught him smokin' and playin' bankah——"

There was a startled exclamation in Racke's study. D'Arcy's words were audible in the room, and they caused quite a change in the mood of Aubrey Racke and Gerald Crooke.

"Great pip! Kildare's coming!" ejaculated Crooke.

"Oh gad!" gasped Racke.

"D'Arcy, you silly owl——"

"Weally, Wacke——"

"Why couldn't you tell us before, you howlin' ass?" roared Racke.

"You blitherin' chump——"

"I was twying to tell you, Wacke," answered Arthur Augustus indignantly. "You are not worth savin' fwom a floggin', but I thought I would dwop in and give you the tip that Kildare was comin'—— Ow! Wow! Yawwooh!"

The swell of St. Jim's broke off, with a wild howl, as a finger and thumb fastened upon his noble ear from behind.

He spun round, yelling.

Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, had come along from the staircase; and he had arrived on the scene at an unfortunate moment for Arthur Augustus.

"Ow! Wow! Welease my yah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Ow, wow!"

"You young rascal!"

"Weally, Kildare——"

"So you came along to warn Racke that I was coming, did you?" demanded the Sixth-Former.

"Ow! Yaas! I thought it was up to me to tip him a warnin', you know," gasped Arthur Augustus. "Ow, wow! Leggo my yah!"

Instead of letting go Gussy's noble ear, the prefect gave it a twist that elicited a frantic howl from the swell of St. Jim's.

"Now cut!" he said gruffly.

"Oh, cwikey!"

Arthur Augustus cut; probably regretting that he had come up to the Shell passage to tip Racke that good-natured warning. And Kildare turned to the door of Study No. 7 with a frowning brow and knocked on it with a heavy knock.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

UNEXPECTED!

TOM MERRY jumped.

Really, it was enough to make any fellow jump.

Tom Merry was leaning idly against a stone buttress on the wall of the School House. Manners and Lowther, with their hands in their pockets, stood before him. The Terrible Three of the Shell were chatting.

It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and, as there was no match on, Tom Merry's idea was to pick sides for a game to fill up the afternoon. Manners' idea was to take a quiet ramble through the woods around the school, and take a few photographs with his celebrated camera. Monty Lowther's idea was to drop in at the New House and jape Figgins & Co. of that House.

So the three inseparable chums were arguing the matter, when all of a sudden came the surprising incident that made Tom Merry jump.

Something smote him on the head.

It was a cardboard box; not a very heavy object in itself, but as it came whizzing down from a good height, and as Tom's head was protected only by a cap, the falling object landed with rather a hard knock.

No wonder Tom jumped.

Above him, as he leaned on the

buttress, were a good many windows; but naturally he had not supposed that fellows would be throwing things out of those windows. It was quite an unusual happening.

"Ow!" ejaculated Tom.

The cardboard box burst on Tom's unfortunate head, and its contents were scattered round the Terrible Three. There was quite a rain of cigarettes.

Tom rubbed his head.

"What the merry thump——" he exclaimed.

"Great pip!" exclaimed Manners.

"What the dickens——"

"Somebody offering us a smoke in a rather informal way!" grinned Monty Lowther. "But who—and what——" Lowther turned his face upward to stare at the windows of the Shell studies, which were high above.

The next moment he roared.

Another object came whizzing down; and it landed on Monty's upturned nose.

"Whooooop!" roared Lowther.

It was a little leather box this time, and this box did not come open; it was fastened with a catch. But it was much heavier than the cigarette-box. It rolled from Lowther's nose to the ground, and Monty clasped his injured nose and yelled.

"Oh dear! Ow, wow! My nose! Oh crumbs!"

"What thumping idiot is chucking things out of the window?" exclaimed Manners.

He, too, stared up, ready to dodge, while Tom Merry rubbed his head and Lowther caressed his nose.

Several of the windows above were open; most of them, in fact, the afternoon being rather muggy, even although it was October. No face was to be seen at any window; and

it was difficult to tell from which one the projectiles had come.

Evidently some Shell fellow had dropped the two boxes suddenly from his window; why and wherefore was a mystery.

Manners picked up the box that had smitten Lowther's nose. He slipped back the catch, opened it, and looked in it. The leather box contained a pack of playing cards.

Manners grunted as he snapped the box shut again.

"Cards and cigarettes!" he grunted. "That would be Racke's study, I suppose. But what the thump is he chucking his cards and smokes out of the window for? Might have dropped on a prefect."

"That wouldn't have mattered!" howled Lowther. "Look at my nose! I believe it's swelling."

"I believe I've got a bump on my napper!" grunted Tom Merry.

"I'll jolly well smash Racke——"

"It couldn't have been Racke," said Manners thoughtfully. "He wouldn't be chucking his own things away like this. More likely some fellow larking in his study."

"He shouldn't have such things in his study, then. I'm jolly well going to punch somebody," growled Lowther.

"Bai Jove! What's the wow, you fellows?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth, came sauntering up to the Terrible Three. He turned his eyeglass upon them inquiringly.

"I was lookin' for you fellows," he said. "Blake and Hewwies and Dig think that a game of—— Gweat Scott!"

D'Arcy stared at the scattered cigarettes.

"Bai Jove! I am surprisid at you fellows!" he exclaimed. "I was not awah that you smoked."

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Ass!"

"I wegard you as a disweputable lot, and no bettah than Wacke and Cwooke," said Arthur Augustus sternly.

"Idiot!" said Manners politely.

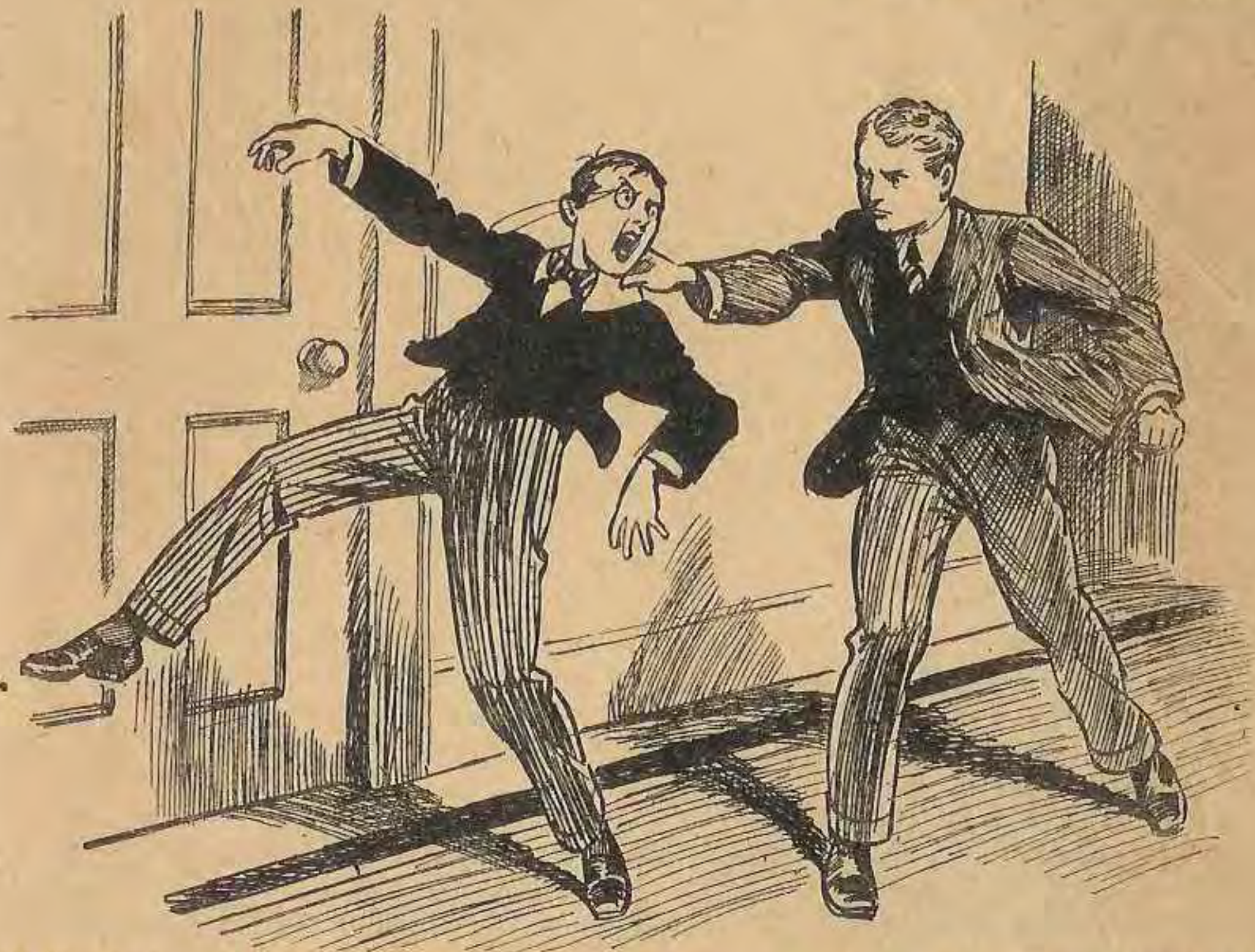
"Weally, Mannahs——"

smokes awound you on the gwound. Suppose a pwefect came by——"

"You silly chump!" bawled Manners. "This muck has just been chucked out of a study window on our nappers."

"Oh!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Now do you understand, you



"I thought I would dwop in, Wacke," said Arthur Augustus, "and give you the tip that Kildare was comin'—— Ow! Wow! Yawwooh!" The swell of St. Jim's broke off with a wild howl as Kildare's finger and thumb fastened on his ear.

"You frabjous dummy!" said Tom Merry, in measured tones.

"I wefuse to be called a fwabjous dummay, Tom Mewwy. I am surpwised and shocked at you," said Arthur Augustus, with great severity. "I am also surpwised at your wecklessness in dwoppin' your filthy

fathead?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! I am glad to see that you youngstahs are not pickin' up Wacke's wotten ways," said Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! Wathah deep of Wacke to dwop the things out of his study window before Kildare could see them, what?"

"Oh! Is Kildare after the cad?" growled Lowther.

"Yaas. I heard him speakin' to Dawwell of the Sixth, you know, and I went up to Wacke's study to tip him a warning. Kildare came up while I was there, and had the cheek to pull my yah." Arthur Augustus rubbed his noble ear, which still felt a twinge from Kildare's vigorous thumb. "I left Kildare knockin' at the door. I suppose Wacke chucked these things out of the window as the only way of gettin' wid of them in a huwwy."

Arthur Augustus chuckled.

"Fancy you fellows bein' just undahneath the window!" he said. "That is wathah funnay, isn't it?"

Monty Lowther and Tom Merry glared at the swell of St. Jim's. With a damaged nose and a damaged "napper," they failed to see where the fun came in.

"Funny, is it?" snapped Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! Awf'ly funnay, you know!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "Ha, ha, ha! Your nose looks wathah wed, Lowthah! Did the things land on your nose?"

Lowther glared at the happy swell of the Fourth.

"So it was your fault, was it?" he ejaculated.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"You had to butt in, and warn Racke, and get these things chucked out on our nappers——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" roared Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha! It weally is vewy funnay, you know, if you look at it in the wight way!" chortled Arthur Augustus. "You must have thought it was wainin' cigawettes and things! Ha, ha, ha! Oh cwumbs! Yawwoh! Leggo!"

Arthur Augustus, suddenly grasped by two exasperated Shell fellows, was up-ended before he knew what was happening. He ceased chortling quite suddenly; the humour of the situation was now lost on him.

"Leggo! You wuffians——"

Bump!

D'Arcy of the Fourth sat down in the quad. He sat down hard, and roared.

"Yawwoop!"

Handfuls of cigarettes were jammed down Gussy's noble back as he wriggled and struggled, and these were followed by the box of playing-cards. Then the Terrible Three strolled away, grinning—leaving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gasping for breath and making frantic efforts to extract broken cigarettes from the inside of his collar.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT!

AUBREY RACKE of the Shell opened the door of Study No. 7 quickly as Kildare thumped on it—so quickly that the prefect did not even observe that the door had been locked. Thanks to Gussy's good-natured warning, the black sheep of the Shell had already disposed of the cards and the smokes in the study—they had been dropped from the window, regardless of what, or who, might be below. It was the only way, with not a second to spare, and Racke could only hope that no master or prefect might be walking below. Having thus rapidly cleared away the evidence against him, Racke opened the study door at once, and Kildare of the Sixth strode in.

Racke and Crooke looked as innocent as they could.

The box of cigarettes, the box of playing-cards, were gone. They had had no time for more.

But there was a haze of cigarette smoke in the study, and there were several cigarette-ends lying about. The black sheep had had no time to deal with these details.

"Oh, it's you, Kildare!" said Racke coolly.

"Yes!" grunted the prefect, with a stare round the study and a sniff at its aromatic atmosphere.

"Good!" said Racke. "Just the man I want to see!"

Kildare stared at him. As it was clear that smoking had been going on in the study, it was rather improbable that Racke really wanted to see a Sixth Form prefect just then. Crooke also stared at his companion. But he remained silent, leaving it to Racke to lie a way out of the scrape if that was possible.

"I've got a complaint to make," went on Racke before Kildare could speak. "Somebody's been smoking in my study."

"What!" ejaculated Kildare.

"You can smell it in the atmosphere," said Racke, while Gerald Crooke almost gasped, his breath taken away by his companion's cool nerve. "Look at these cigarette-ends, too! We found them here!"

Kildare looked grimly at Aubrey Racke.

"There's been smoking in this study before, Racke," he said quietly. "You have been caned for it. I had a strong suspicion that it was going on again this afternoon, and I came to look into it. And now——"

"Now I'm making a complaint, as I said," answered Racke calmly. "Mr. Linton has licked me for smoking, and warned me not to do it again, and of course I haven't."

"You haven't?" repeated the St. Jim's captain.

"Certainly not."

"Nothing of the kind, Kildare," said Crooke, taking his cue from his worthy associate. "I suppose it's not our fault if some cad smokes in our study while we're gone out?"

"I make a complaint to you, as head prefect of the House, Kildare," said Racke. "I think it ought to be looked into."

"It will be!" said Kildare grimly. "It's barely possible that you are telling the truth, Racke. I mean to be just. If you have not been smoking here, you will not be punished. If you have been smoking——"

"If I have I deserve to be punished, of course, after the warning Mr. Linton gave me," said Racke meekly.

"Certainly," said Crooke.

"Turn out your pockets!" rapped Kildare.

"What for?"

"If you've been smoking, as I believe, you haven't smoked your last cigarette, I suppose. Turn out your pockets."

"Oh, very well."

Racke and Crooke turned their pockets inside out. Nothing in the nature of a "smoke" came to light.

"Very good," said Kildare. "I shall search the room. If I find a single cigarette I shall take it as proof that you have been smoking."

And the prefect proceeded to make a search of Study No. 7.

Racke and Crooke watched him in silence.

But for Racke's prompt action after receiving Gussy's warning, certainly plenty of cigarettes would have been discovered in Study No. 7, as well as a pack of playing-cards, which would have been more serious still.

Kildare gave it up at last. He was greatly puzzled. His suspicions were strong, and the evidence was fairly

clear. Yet it was quite possible that Racke was telling the truth; such a trick might have been played in his study by some ill-disposed fellow, and certainly there were plenty of fellows in the School House who disliked Aubrey Racke. Kildare put twenty minutes or more into his search, and he found nothing.

"I hope you are satisfied now, Kildare?" said Aubrey Racke, with great meekness.

Kildare gave him a grim look.

"I am not satisfied," he said. "But I'm bound, in the circumstances, to give you the benefit of the doubt."

He turned to the door.

"You get off this time," he said. "You may be telling the truth—I don't know. You get the benefit of the doubt, as I said. But an eye will be kept on this study, Racke, and I warn you to look out."

And with that the captain of St. Jim's left Study No. 7 and walked away to the stairs.

Racke grinned at Crooke when he was gone.

"What price that?" he said.

"A jolly narrow escape, though," said Crooke. "If that ass D'Arcy hadn't warned us, Kildare would have found the door locked, and then——"

"A miss is as good as a mile," yawned Racke. "I say, we'd better get out and bag the things I dropped from the window before they're picked up by somebody. We shall have to be a bit careful for a time."

"We shall have to chuck it, you ass. We've got out of this scrape, but Kildare will be watching this study like a cat."

"That's all right. We can carry on in the New House," grinned Racke. "We'll stick to Clampe's study for a bit, see? Clampe of the New House has been over here often

enough. Now we'll give him a turn."

Crooke chuckled.

"Good! That will be safe enough."

The two young rascals left the study and the House. They walked round to the wall under the Shell study windows. The Terrible Three were gone, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy also had vanished. On the earth lay fragments of cigarettes, and the little leather box that contained Racke's pack of cards. Manners had thrown it down after looking at it. Aubrey Racke picked it up and slipped it into his pocket.

"Somebody's been at the smokes," he said. "I suppose the box burst when it fell. Tread 'em out of sight."

Then Racke and Crooke walked away cheerily to the New House. Their shady occupations were no longer safe in their own House, for a time at least; but Leslie Clampe's study in the other House was a safe refuge. Clampe of the New House was a member of the shady circle who followed the leadership of Aubrey Racke, and the precious pair were sure of a welcome there. Kildare's authority did not extend to Mr. Ratcliff's House.

A quarter of an hour later Racke and Crooke were smoking and playing banker again, with Clampe of the Shell as a companion. And Clampe's study in the New House was calm and bright, from the point of view of the black sheep of St. Jim's. But there was more trouble in store for the black sheep, if they had known it.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

NO TAKERS!

"OH deah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that ejaculation in Study No. 6 in the Fourth.

Blake, Herries and Digby looked at him inquiringly.

"Tea was over in Study No. 6, and it had been quite a nice tea. The evening was deepening into dusky night. Three members of the celebrated study were feeling cheery and contented. But Arthur Augustus sighed and said :

"Oh deah !"

"What's the trouble ?" asked Blake lazily. "Thinking of prep ? No need to worry about prep yet."

"I was not thinkin' of pwep, deah boy."

"Then what were you grunting for ?" asked Blake.

"Weally, Blake, I was not gwuntin'——"

"Grousing, then," said Blake.

"I was not gwousin', Blake. I was thinkin' about Skimpole——"

"Who's Skimpole ?" yawned Herries.

"Bai Jove ! You know Skimpole of the Shell——"

"Yes ; I remember there is such an ass. The thumping duffer wanted to talk to me this afternoon about conchology, or astrology, or astronomy, or something of the kind," said George Herries. "I butted him in his ribs."

"Bai Jove ! What did Skimmay do, Hewwies ?"

"Sat down."

"Ha, ha, ha !"

"Weally, Hewwies, that's wathah wuff," said Arthur Augustus.

"It's rather rough Skimmy button-holing a chap and jawing him blind," said Herries. "Let him keep it for the Shell. I hear that Gore chucked his entomological collection into the passage one day, and chucked his entomological books after it, and when Skimmy objected, he chucked Skimmy after the lot."

"Ha, ha, ha !"

"Goah is wathah a wuff bwute, Hewwies."

"Just that ! All the same, I sympathise with him, being Skimmy's study-mate. Talbot stands it wonderfully well. But then, Talbot's a jolly good-tempered fellow, and can stand anything. I've seen him listening to your conversation quite politely."

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"But what about Skimpole ?" asked Blake. "Don't say you've asked him to the study. I should be sorry to slaughter a guest within these giddy walls ; but if Skimpole comes in, Gussy, there will be no alternative. Once his chin gets going, nothing short of that will stop it."

"Skimmay has asked me to his studay, Blake."

"Well, you needn't go."

"Unfortunately, I have pwomised to go."

"Hinc illae lacrymae !" chuckled Dig. "Hence these giddy tears."

Arthur Augustus looked round at his chums.

"The fact is, you fellows, Skimpole of the Shell is an awf'ly clevah chap," he said. "He knows all about a lot of things that end in 'ology.' He weads the most fwightful-lookin' books, with jaw-cwackin' words in them. He has taken up astwonomy, you know."

"I know !" agreed Blake. "I've had some."

"It is a vewy intewestin' subject, Blake. Skimpole can tell you all the latest distances of the stars from the earth, and all that. It's a fwightfully intewestin' subject. Skimmay natuwally wants to talk it over with a kindwed spiwit. Talbot and Goah do not seem to take to it, somehow, and fellows seem wathah shy of dwoppin' in for a chat with Skimpole. Some-

how, I did not like to wefuse when he asked me."

"I know!" assented Blake. "That is the sort of soft ass you are, Gussy Bores take advantage of it."

"Yaas, wathah, I feah so," said Arthur Augustus. "But I have nevah wepwoached you for borin' me!"

"Eh?"

"And weally it is only faih to let othah bores have a turn—what?"

Blake sat up and regarded his noble chum with a fixed stare. D'Arcy rattled on happily:

"The fact is, a chat with Skimmay about astwonomy ought not to bore a fellow. He's cwammed with knowledge, and it's weally worth acquiwin', you know. Skimmay doesn't specially care whethah I dwop in, so long as somebody does. How would you like to dwop in instead of me, Hewwies?"

Herries chortled.

"Not the least little bit in the wide world," he answered promptly.

"You may be losin' a lot of astwonomical knowledge, Hewwies."

"I don't mind, old chap."

"What about you, Dig?"

"Nothing about me," grinned Digby. "You're not palming Skimmy off on me, old bean."

"I was not exactly thinkin' of palmin' off Skimmay on you, Dig," said Arthur Augustus mildly. "I was thinkin' of lettin' you acquire a lot of astwonomical knowledge fwom him, instead of me, you know."

"Same thing. Forget it."

"Blake, old chap, I wondah whethah you would care to dwop in for a chat with Skimpole," said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass inquiringly upon the chief of Study No. 6.

"You needn't wonder," said Blake. "I wouldn't."

"Astwonomy is weally an entwan-

cin' subject when you geet a rty into it," said the swell of St. Jim's, seriously. "The distances of the stars fwom the earth, you know, are weally enormous, and worth knowin'. There is a star called What's-its-name, you know, at a distance of I-forget-how-many-miles fwom the earth, and the light takes, I can't quite wemembah how many yeahs to weach us. Fancy that!"

"Oh, my hat! Did you get that from Skimmy?" gasped Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Worth knowin', what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, I do not see anythin' to cackle at. Are you fellows suah you would not like to dwop in on Skimmay instead of me?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Quite sure!" chuckled the three.

"Then I suppose I shall have to go! Oh deah!" sighed Arthur Augustus, and he rose reluctantly from his comfortable chair.

Arthur Augustus left Study No. 6, Blake & Co. chuckling as he went. He walked along towards the Shell passage, but not with eager footsteps. He had told Skimmy that he would drop in for a chat, and Gussy was a slave of his word.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

ASTRONOMICAL!

SKIMPOLE of the Shell, as he opened the door, blinked at Arthur Augustus through his spectacles and grinned a welcoming grin. He was glad to see Arthur Augustus, and he welcomed him into his study. The swell of St. Jim's smiled his politest smile. He was for it, and it could not be helped now, and he made up his noble mind to endure it with fortitude.

"Trot in, old fellow," said Skimpole, beaming through his spectacles.

"I am glad, D'Arcy, to find that there is one fellow in the House with sufficient intellect to welcome the acquisition of astronomical knowledge."

"Bai Jove!"

"Take a chair, old chap—not that one," added Skimpole hastily, as D'Arcy sat down. "Dear me! You have sat down on my astronomical chart, D'Arcy, and the ink is not dry. I am afraid that you have spoiled it."

Arthur Augustus jumped up as if he had sat on a tintack instead of an astronomical chart.

"Bai Jove! My twousahs——"

"Dear me! You have smeared it," said Skimpole, blinking at the chart. "You have smudged Sirius quite out, and I cannot distinguish between Jupiter and Saturn now."

"Is there any ink on my twousahs, Skimpole?"

"The ink is of no consequence, D'Arcy—I have plenty of ink. It is the state of the chart——"

"It is the state of my bags that I am wowwyin' about," exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Is there any ink on them?"

Skimpole blinked at the bags.

"Yes, indeed, there is something like a chart on the seat of your trousers, D'Arcy—you see, the ink was quite wet and——"

"Oh cwumbs!"

"You have taken quite an impression of it," said Skimpole. "I have no objection, of course, my dear fellow, to your taking a copy of my chart, but——"

"I have a vewy stwong objection to takin' it on my bags!" mumbled Arthur Augustus.

"It means the repetition of a considerable amount of painstaking



Lowther turned his face up to stare at the windows of the Shell studies high above. The next moment he roared as another object came whizzing down and landed on his nose.

labour," said Skimpole. "However, it does not matter."

"Doesn't it?" grunted Arthur Augustus, screwing himself round in a vain attempt to ascertain the precise amount of damage done to his hitherto spotless bags. "Nevah mind — go ahead."

Arthur Augustus sat down in the armchair, after carefully ascertaining that there were no more astronomical charts there.

Skimpole shook his head rather mournfully over his blotted chart, and laid it aside.

D'Arcy looked with some curiosity at Skimpole's telescope.

The genius of the Shell had an immense allowance of brains; his bony forehead fairly bulged with intellect. There was plenty of quantity, whatever the quality was like. But he did not have a very large allowance of pocket-money, and D'Arcy was rather surprised to see so large and evidently expensive a telescope in his study.

"A good instrument, D'Arcy," said Skimpole, with pride. "With this telescope I am able to make very extensive investigations into the illimitable regions of space. I had some little difficulty at first in acquiring an instrument of which the cost was twenty-five pounds——"

"Bai Jove!"

"Several fellows declined to lend me the necessary cash," said Skimpole. "Although I explained to them that scientific investigation was a matter far transcending in importance any mere sordid question of a pecuniary nature, they did not seem to see it, somehow. Even Talbot, who is generally somewhat intelligent, and by no means parsimonious, declined to draw all his money from the bank for the purpose of purchasing

this useful astronomical instrument."

"Did—did he?" gasped D'Arcy.

"He did, indeed!" said Skimpole, blinking at the swell of St. Jim's with the seriousness of an owl. "Why, I do not know!"

"Oh!"

"Fortunately, Blankley's Stores at Wayland have instituted a method of purchase which placed the instrument within my reach," said Skimpole. "It is called the hire-purchase system, D'Arcy. I am paying for this telescope at the rate of a pound every fortnight."

"I—I see."

"The first pecuniary consideration having been duly handed over, the telescope was delivered," explained Skimpole. "I trust that I shall be able to keep up the payments. It does not appear wholly probable, as I seldom have any money. I fear, too, that if the payments are not made, Blankley's may place sordid considerations of money before the interests of science, and may take the telescope away."

"I—I think that's vewy pwob," gasped D'Arcy.

"However, we must hope for the best," said Skimpole brightly. "Blankley's can scarcely expect me to withdraw my intellect from the contemplation of starry infinitudes in order to solve so sordid a problem as that of payment for an astronomical instrument. Possibly I may borrow the money of you——"

"Oh!"

"Your gold watch, for instance, could be disposed of to raise the requisite sum."

"Bai Jove!"

"But never mind that now—these, after all, are mere sordid details, unworthy of consideration," said Skimpole. "Let us proceed, my dear

D'Arcy. I have fixed up my telescope, as you see, at the window, to cover the section of the firmament which I am now investigating. I have already formed certain theories of my own with regard to the motion of the planets, and on the much-discussed question of their inhabitants. Perhaps you would like me to explain them to you."

"Oh, deah!"

"What did you say, my dear fellow?"

"Oh! Nothin'! Wun on, old chap!"

Skimpole of the Shell ran on. He did not notice that D'Arcy's eyes had closed as he leaned back in the armchair.

The drone of Skimmy's voice had a soporific effect on Gussy.

He nodded off.

The theories Skimpole had formed, though no doubt far and away ahead of any common or garden theories on the subject, did not keep Arthur Augustus awake. In fact, they lulled him to sleep.

He awoke suddenly. It seemed to him that somebody had called his name.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "All wight—I've heard evewythin' you fellows were sayin'—I—I mean——"

"My dear D'Arcy——"

"I—I—— Oh! Yaas!" Arthur Augustus realised where he was, and realised, too, that Skimmy was not aware that he had nodded off. It was dark in the study now, only a glimmer of starlight coming in from the sky.

"I am truly gratified, D'Arcy, to perceive that you were so deeply absorbed in this enthralling topic."

"Oh! Yaas!"

"I trust that my exposition of the

subject has been perfectly comprehensible to you."

"Oh! I——"

"If not, I should have no objection whatever to explaining the whole thing over again from the beginning."

"Pway don't twouble, old chap!" gasped D'Arcy. "It—it—it's as cleah as—as anythin'!"

"Very good," said Skimpole. "Now shall we look through the telescope, my dear fellow? A little practical demonstration——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus was a little interested at last. Looking through a powerful telescope on a starry night was quite interesting. He rose from the armchair, and bent his head to the lower end of the long tube.

Skimpole blinked at him beamingly through his big spectacles.

"The telescope is now directed at the moon, my dear D'Arcy," he said. "Although it is not, of course, so powerful as the instruments in the great observatories, I hope to make discoveries hitherto hidden from less intelligent astronomers. Any deficiency of the instrument may be compensated by additional intelligence on the part of the observer. Certain traces and aspects of the lunar surface have convinced me that the moon is inhabited, and I entertain every hope of ascertaining unquestionable facts in support of my theory. What do you see, my dear D'Arcy?"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Augustus breathlessly.

"Do you discern anything that appears to partake of the nature of motion?" asked Skimpole eagerly.

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! I can make out a face—a weal face——"

"A human face?" gasped Skimpole.

"Yaas, wathah! Two of them—no, thwee!" gasped Arthur Augustus, in great excitement. "Thwee faces—gathahed wound a table. Bai Jove! They are quite young fellows—boys, in fact. They wear Eton jackets, just as we do at St. Jim's——"

"Is it possible?"

"Yaas, wathah! Now one of them is turnin' wound—Bai Jove! He looks awfully like Figgins of the New House."

"It is probable that the inhabitants of the lunar world, D'Arcy, bear a close resemblance to the inhabitants of our earth," said Skimpole. "Let me see, my dear chap—let me see—should the atmospheric conditions change, the observation may well be lost——"

"Wait a minute——"

"Please let me look——"

"Oh, vewy well!"

D'Arcy raised his head as Skimpole lowered his mighty brain.

Crash!

The back of D'Arcy's noble napper came into violent contact with the bulging forehead of the St. Jim's astronomer.

"Yawwoop!"

"Ow! Wow! Oh!"

The two juniors sat down suddenly on the floor, clasping their heads in anguish and seeing more stars than the most successful astronomer ever saw through the most powerful of telescopes.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

THE MEN IN THE MOON!

TOM MERRY stopped at the door of Skimpole's study and threw it open. Manners and Lowther stopped with him. The Terrible Three, on their way to their own study for prep, were quite alarmed by the sounds they heard proceeding from

Skimpole's room, and they stopped to investigate. There had been a crash, a thud, and a combination of anguished yells, and the latter were still going on.

"Ow, ow, ow! You fwightful ass! Yow-ow-ow!"

"My dear D'Arcy—— Yarooop! Ooooooh!"

"You feahful duffah! Ow, ow!"

"Really, I cannot avoid regarding your action as being the outcome of illimitable stupidity, D'Arcy. Wow!"

Tom Merry stared into the study.

It was dark there, but in the moonlight at the window he discerned a large telescope reared up, directed out of the window at the sky; and on either side of the lower end a junior sat rubbing his head.

"Hallo! What's the row?" asked Tom cheerily. "Anybody killed?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

D'Arcy staggered to his feet, still rubbing the back of his noble head. Skimpole was a brainy youth, and the full weight of his powerful intellect had smitten Arthur Augustus, and the result was painful.

"That ass Skimpole——" gasped D'Arcy.

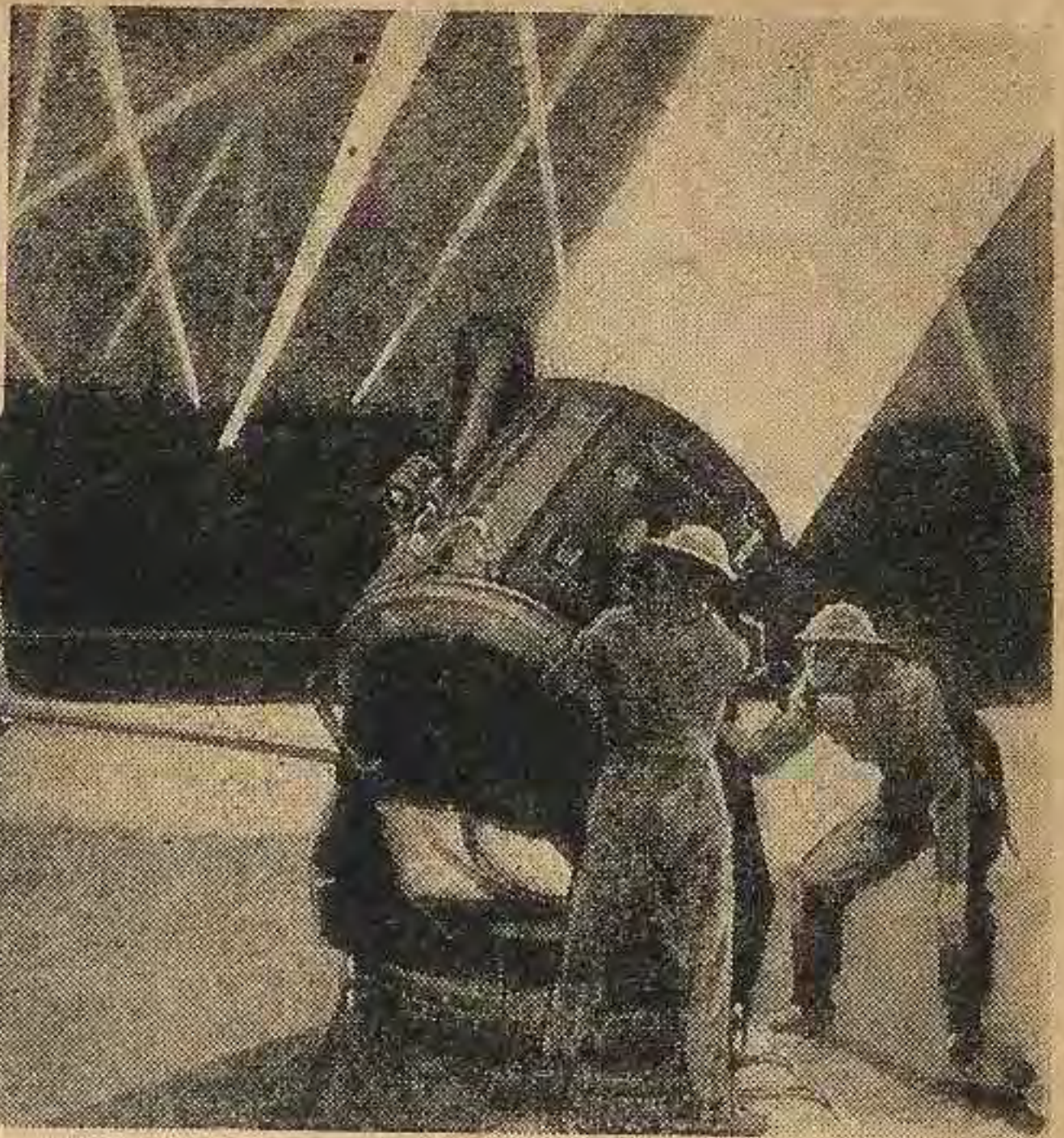
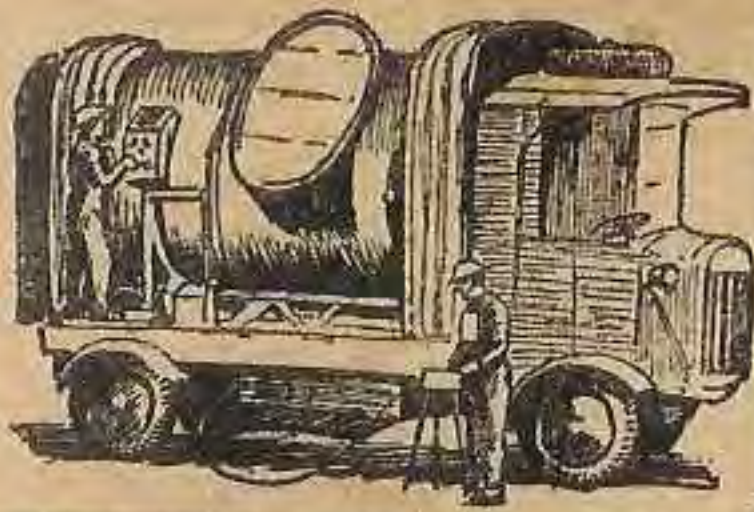
Skimpole picked himself up, caressing his bony forehead. His mighty brain had received a shock.

"My dear fellow," he said, "your inexcusable and extraordinary obtuseness in suddenly raising your head while I was stooping down to the telescope was the cause of this unfortunate and disconcerting collision with my cranium."

The Terrible Three chuckled. Evidently the two astronomical investigators had knocked their heads together at the telescope.

"All serene," said Lowther, comfortingly. "You've only banged your heads; and there's nothing in

THE MODERN BRITISH ARMY IN ACTION



When the presence of raiding bombers is discovered by the Sound Locator—shown on left of illustration—searchlights are swept across the sky in great arcs. Directly one searchlight picks out a hostile craft two other beams are concentrated on it which almost blind its crew, and the conjunction of beams is a signal for defending fighters to attack.

The illustration shows a 90 c.m. searchlight in operation; the beam controlled from a distance by the projector controller, who turns the beam by walking in a circle, and elevates it by turning the control wheel. The beam is produced by an arc-lamp, the flame of which consists of carbon vapour superheated to incandescence at a temperature of 5,430 degrees Fahrenheit.

The searchlight illustrated is mounted on a wooden

base, but they are often set on four small "track units," or caterpillar wheels, to give them mobility.

Inset is a mobile searchlight of the type invented by Major Jack Savage. It has 3,000,000 candle power, and by its light a newspaper can be read five miles away. Its peculiar advantage is that it sends up not one beam but a pattern of beams, so making a grid or a series of concentric circles in the sky. The beam consists of 300 parallel beams, each deflected by a mirror along the path required.

The searchlight is set on a revolving drum with two compartments, one for generating the mass beam, the other for breaking it up into 300 rays and transmitting them. The power for generating the electricity supply is produced by the lorry engine.

either of them to be damaged."

"Weally, Lowthah, you ass——"

"It is an extraordinary but far from uncommon circumstance," said Skimpole, "that an individual of extremely limited intellectual powers is prone to underrate the intellect of others. In your case, my dear Lowther, the deficiency of mental

power amounts almost to imbecility, if you do not mind my mentioning it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But, weally, you fellows," said D'Arcy, his keen interest in the inhabitants of the moon reviving as the pain in his noble napper abated, "we have made a wathah wemark-

able discovery. I have actually seen the chaps in the moon thwough this telescope."

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Which?"

The Terrible Three stared at D'Arcy. Skimpole, on his knees at the lower end of the slanting telescope, already had his eye glued to it. He had forgotten the shock to his bony forehead in his breathless interest in the proceedings of the man in the moon.

"What the thump do you mean, Gussy?" demanded Manners. "Mean to say you can see anything in the moon that hasn't been seen before?"

"Yaas, wathah! Can you see them, Skimmay?"

"Yes," gasped Skimpole. "The view is amazingly clear. I can see three persons—three youthful persons. One of them is a very plump youth, and he is eating what appears to be a pie."

"You can see that?" exclaimed Tom.

"Yes, yes, with absolute clearness."

"In the moon?" shrieked Tom.

"Undoubtedly, my dear Merry. The telescope is trained towards the moon. I have fixed it very carefully—in fact, with the most sedulous care."

"This will be great news for the Astronomer Royal!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "They never see these things at Greenwich."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's look," said Tom. "I've looked up at the man in the moon sometimes, but I've never seen him eating a pie before."

"Pray take my place, my dear Merry," said Skimpole. "Your absurd incredulity will soon evaporate under actual observation of this astounding phenomenon."

Tom Merry knelt down at the lower end of the telescope and applied his eye to it. He wondered what he was going to see—though certainly he did not expect to get a near view of the manners and customs of the man in the moon.

But he started as he looked.

Three figures, apparently in a lighted room, came into view—three figures that were quite distinct.

One of them was seated at a table; another, a rather long-legged youth, was standing by the table, and Tom could see his lips moving in speech; and the third was tucking into a large pie.

For a moment Tom Merry was amazed. As Skimmy had said that the telescope was carefully trained on the moon, Tom naturally supposed, for the moment, that that was so. But the next moment it occurred to him that Skimmy had got the direction a little wrong.

The long-legged fellow had features that were familiar to Tom Merry. Tom Merry had never seen the man in the moon at close quarters; but he had seen George Figgins of the New House often enough.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared suddenly.

"My dear Merry——"

"Weally, Mewwy——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Tom.

"Do you not see them, Merry?" exclaimed Skimpole.

"Ha, ha! Yes! Figgins is jawing, and Fatty Wynn eating a pie, and Kerr getting on with his prep!" roared Tom Merry.

"Figgins! Wynn! Kerr!" repeated Skimpole.

Tom Merry rose from the telescope and wiped his eyes. Owing to a little error in direction, the telescope was trained on a high window in the New House, on the other side of the St. Jim's quadrangle. It was in

Figgins' study, over the way, that Skimpole had made his remarkable discoveries.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus faintly.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Skimpole. "The telescope is directed towards the moon, my dear Merry—just over the roofs of the New House."

"Let's look!" chuckled Manners.

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"I—I thought one of the fellows looked like Figgins," said Arthur Augustus. "I mentioned it to you, Skimmay."

Skimpole did not answer. The expression on his face was one of blank dismay. His disappointment was great. Instead of a discovery that was to make the Astronomer



Arthur Augustus jumped up as if he had sat on a tincture instead of an astronomical chart. "Bai Jove! My twousahs——" "Dear me," said Skimpole, blinking at the chart, "you have smeared it."

Manners and Lowther looked in turn, and chortled. They could see nothing of the moon through Skimpole's telescope. But they had a remarkably clear view of the interior of Figgy's study in the New House.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus in disgust. "Mean to say I was look-in' at a beastly New House window all the time, you fellows?"

Royal hide his diminished head, Skimmy had only been observing the manners and customs of three New House fellows in a New House study. It was a blow.

"I wegard you as an ass, Skimmay," said D'Arcy, as the Terrible Three went chuckling from the study. "You told me the telescope was twained on the moon. It was twained

on Figgay's window across the quad. I wegard you as a fozlin' fathead, deah boy."

"My dear D'Arcy——"

"Bai Jove! It's high time for pwep," said Arthur Augustus; and he retreated to the door.

"Hold on, my dear fellow—never mind prep!" said Skimpole. "I will readjust the telescope and make an observation of the lunar surface. If the present atmospheric conditions prove favourable, I entertain not the remotest doubt that—— D'Arcy! D'Arcy! Dear me! He is gone."

Arthur Augustus had fled. Skimpole shook his learned head and proceeded to readjust the telescope, and at length had a full view of the moon sailing over the New House.

Long and earnestly Skimmy gazed at the orb of night; but apparently the atmospheric conditions were not so favourable as might have been desired, for the man in the moon did not come into view. Skimpole gave it up when Gore of the Shell came tramping into the study for prep and put on the light. Gore stared at the St. Jim's astronomer.

"Silly owl!" he ejaculated.

Talbot of the Shell followed Gore in, and gave Skimmy a nod and a smile as he prepared for prep. But neither of the Shell fellows desired to share in Skimmy's astronomical observations; both of them turned deaf ears to him when his chin began its almost-perpetual motion. Skimpole sighed and made an effort to bring down his own mighty intellect to the level of prep; Mr. Linton, in the morning, had to be considered. It was said of old that a prophet is unhonoured in his own country; and certainly in his own study the St. Jim's astronomer met with a woeful lack of appreciation.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

FIGGINS TAKES A HAND!

"TOM MERRY!"

"Fire away, old bean," said Tom.

The rugged face of George Figgins of the New House was grim and grave. On that sunny Saturday afternoon something seemed to have disturbed the usually cheery equanimity of Figgins of the Fourth.

"What's the jolly old trouble?" asked Tom.

"That cad Racke," grunted Figgins.

"Oh, bother Racke!" said Tom Merry. "What does Racke matter?"

"Nothing at all," said Figgy. "But I'm fed-up, and I'm not standing it. I'm speaking to you as junior captain of the School House, Tom. It's not a matter for House rags, so I want you to have a hand in it, too, see?"

"In which?" inquired Tom.

"I fancy something's happened to scare that shady outsider in your House," said Figgins, with a grunt. "I suppose you know his little games, as he's a School House man?"

Tom Merry nodded. He was very far from being unacquainted with the little games of the black sheep of the Shell; though, as a rule, he bestowed very little attention upon Aubrey Racke. He simply regarded him with a more or less good-natured contempt, and certainly he was not proud of him as a School House man. Still, he wondered what Figgins was worrying about. The shady escapades of a School House man had nothing to do with the leader of the New House.

But George Figgins proceeded to explain.

"The rank outsider seems to have had a scare in his own House," he

said. "He used to come over to our House occasionally, to Clampe's study in the Shell. But now he's always there."

"I see," assented Tom. "Kildare nearly nailed him a few days ago, I remember. I dare say he's got the wind up."

"Well, Clampe's a bird of the same feather—they're much of a muchness," said Figgins. "We're not proud of Clampe. Still, he's as much a fool as anything else—not such a rotter as Racke."

"I fancy Racke is leader," said Tom. "The fellow ought to be bunked from the school, as a matter of fact."

"He would be if the Head knew what we know," said Figgins. "Only we can't sneak, even about a rotten outsider, of course. But I'm junior captain of my House, and I think it's up to me. Every half-holiday, and nearly every evening, Racke comes over to my House, sometimes with Crooke and sometimes alone, for smoking and banker in Clampe's study. It's getting altogether too thick. I'm not a fellow to preach, I hope, or to butt into things that don't concern me. But there's a limit."

"There is," assented Tom.

"It means a row, too, if it comes out," said Figgins. "Mr. Ratcliff may spot them, and it would mean a flogging for Clampe, and perhaps the sack. I don't want to see a New House man bunked from St. Jim's."

"Why not speak to him?" asked Tom.

"I've spoken to him, but it makes no difference. I want Racke to keep clear of our House."

"That's all right. Kick him out next time he comes," said Tom cheerily. "Kick him hard, and give him one extra for me."

Figgins grinned.

"That's all right," he said. "But he's a School House man, and it would mean a House row. We don't want that on such a subject, see? You're his House captain; I'm Clampe's. I think we ought to chip in together. Then Racke won't be able to make a House row of it."

"Quite right," said Tom. "Racke's little games have been stopped in the School House, for the present, at least, and it's rather thick to carry on in your House. Next time he calls to see Clampe give me the tip and I'll join up, and we'll handle them together."

"He's over there now!" growled Figgins.

"Oh, I was going down to the footer!"

"Come along to the New House first. If you'll root out Racke, I'll root out Clampe, and we'll make them play footer instead of banker, what?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I'm your man," he said. "It's not compulsory practice to-day, but we'll make it so for those two shady rotters. It will do them good."

"Come on, then!"

And the rivals of St. Jim's walked away amicably together to the New House.

Tom Merry fully sympathised with Figgins, though it was seldom that the rival juniors saw eye to eye.

Since Aubrey Racke's narrow escape from Kildare the blackguard of the Shell had been extremely careful—in his own House.

Indeed, some of the fellows had wondered whether Racke was treading the path of reform at last.

Tom realised now that the cad of the School House had simply transferred his blackguardism to the other House. Leslie Clampe's study, over the way,

was now the headquarters of the black sheep of St. Jim's.

Naturally, Figgins did not like it. He was very keen about the honour and good name of his House. The New House had its own black sheep, such as Clampe. That couldn't be helped. But Figgy would not see his House being made the gathering-place of School House outsiders.

Figgins was a good-tempered and patient fellow, and at first he had said nothing; but the sight of Racke butting into his House day after day had finally "got his goat," so to speak.

He was, as he said, fed-up, and he had resolved to put a sudden end to Racke's proceedings, in the New House, at least. And Tom Merry was quite ready to lend a hand in the good work. In the same circumstances he would have taken just the same line.

The two juniors mounted the stairs, then went along the Shell studies in the New House and stopped at Leslie Clampe's door. Figgins knocked.

"Hullo, who's there?" called out Clampe.

"I'm here!" growled Figgins.

"Cut off, then!"

Figgins turned the handle of the door. It was locked.

"Let me in, Clampe," he said quietly.

"Rats! I've got some visitors, and I don't want to add you to the number, thanks!" answered Clampe.

There was a laugh in the locked study. The unpleasant laugh of Aubrey Racke was easily recognised.

Tom Merry looked inquiringly at Figgy. He was prepared to deal with any junior of his House whom he found there. But in Figgy's own House it was for Figgy to take the lead.

George Figgins was quite prepared to take it. He had been rather a long time making up his mind on the subject, but now that it was made up Figgins was quite determined. He rattled the handle of the door.

"Will you let me in, Clampe?"

"I've said no. Go and play footer, and don't bother!"

"I give you one minute," said Figgins quietly. "After that I shall smash in the lock. If the row brings a prefect up here, that's your look-out. I've warned you!"

"Good man!" murmured Tom.

There was a stir in the locked study now. Crooke's voice could be heard in an alarmed whisper.

"Better let the cad in, Clampey. We don't want Monteith or Baker of the Sixth butting in. Old Ratty himself might hear."

The door was unlocked and thrown open. Figgins strode into the study and Tom Merry followed him in, and three young rascals round a table on which lay money and cards and cigarettes, stared at them inimically.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

ROUGH ON RACKE!

AUBREY RACKE had a cigarette in his mouth, and he blew out a cloud of smoke in the direction of the newcomers. That was to show them how little he cared for their opinion of his occupation that sunny half-holiday. Gerald Crooke looked rather uneasy, however, while Clampe was savagely angry and uneasy at the same time. Certainly no member of the shady trio was pleased to see the visitors.

"Well, what do you want, now you're here?" demanded Clampe savagely. "Butting into a man's study——"

"I want these two cads to clear

back to their own House," said Figgins grimly.

"You cheeky rotter! They're guests in my study."

"They're smoky, gambling, disreputable rotters, and they're keeping clear of the New House," said George Figgins. "And if you give me any back-chat, Clampe, I'll bang your napper on the table as soon as look at you!"

Racke and Crooke exchanged glances. Leslie Clampe breathed hard with rage. But he backed away a little. The weedy, seedy waster of the New House was not looking for a fistical encounter with so hefty a fighting man as Figgins of the Fourth.

"You've no right to interfere in my study!" said Clampe.

"That's rot, and you know it! You might jolly well get bunked from the school, and a pretty disgrace that would be for our House!" exclaimed Figgins hotly.

"Oh, rot!"

"Well, it's got to stop," said Figgins. "If it was once or twice, I don't know that I should chip in; you can go your own rotten ways. But you're turning the New House into a regular thieves' kitchen. Racke and Crooke, you can get out."

"Don't go!" said Clampe.

The two School House fellows eyed Figgins evilly.

"I'm not goin'," said Racke. "And if you rag us in this House, Figgins, you'll jolly well get it back from our side, with interest."

"I expected that," said Figgins scornfully. "You'd like to turn it into a House row. I leave those cads to you, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry stepped farther into the study.

"I've nothing to do with you, Clampe," he said. "I leave you to

your captain. Racke and Crooke will travel."

"I shan't!" said Racke.

"On your feet or on your necks, whichever you prefer," said Tom calmly. "I don't mind which. Take your choice. I can handle two seedy wastrels like you two at the same time."

Crooke gave his comrade an uneasy glance, and then passed Tom Merry and left the study. His footsteps died away down the passage.

"Follow on, Racke."

"You cheeky rotter——"

"If you want to blow off steam, old bean, you can blow it off as you go. I'll come with you. You're going to change for footer."

"I'm not going to play footer, you fool!"

"Your mistake; you are. You're going to have an hour's practice along with more decent chaps," said the captain of the Shell coolly. "It will do you good, and shake some of the filthy smoke out of your lungs. Get a move on!"

"Same with you, Clampe," grinned Figgins. "Football's the order of the day."

Leslie Clampe ground his teeth.

"It's not compulsory practice to-day," he said. "I'll be hanged if I will!"

"You'll be banded if you don't!"

"Look here, Figgins——"

"'Nuff said!" interrupted Figgins.

"You're keeping me away from footer practice with this palaver. Are you going, or will you put up your hands first, and then go?"

George Figgins put his own hands up and advanced upon Clampe of the Shell. Clampe backed round the table—then to the door—then into the passage. With a face white with rage he tramped along the passage,

with the grinning Figgins walking after him.

"I'm waiting for you, Racke," said Tom Merry politely.

"I'm not goin'!" said Aubrey Racke, choking with rage. "Do you think you can order me about as you like, you meddlin' cad?"

"In this matter, yes," said Tom. "Figgins has spoken to me about your coming over to his House to smoke and gamble, and he has a right to ask me to put a stop to it. If I don't interfere, Figgins will, soon enough; but it's up to me as junior captain of the School House. I won't tell you that you ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself; you know that."

"I don't want any sermons from you!" said Racke savagely.

"I won't give you any," said Tom. "But if you don't get out of this study and this House sharp, I'll give you a thumping good licking."

"You bullying rotter——"

"Oh, rats, cut it out!" said Tom contemptuously. "You know what you'd get if Kildare spotted you here, or Mr. Railton or Mr. Ratchiff. Are you going?"

"No!" hissed Racke.

"Then I shall shift you."

Tom Merry advanced on Racke, as Figgins had done on Clampe. But Racke was made of rather sterner stuff than his associate of the New House, and his fury gave him a little more courage than usual. His hands came up, and he faced Tom Merry savagely, hitting out.

"Go it, then, if you want it," said Tom.

And the next minute they were fighting.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

The black sheep of the Shell was soon panting helplessly for breath,

and his defence weakened. A crashing set of knuckles landed on his nose, and Racke went spinning across the study into the doorway.

He landed there on his back with a yell.

"Oh gad! Oh, you rotter!" he panted, as he sat up dizzily.

"Any more?" asked Tom cheerily.

"Hang you!"

Aubrey Racke staggered to his feet.

His nose was streaming red, and he dabbed it savagely with his handkerchief. He backed out of the doorway into the passage as the captain of the Shell advanced upon him.

Racke did not want any more. Very much indeed he did not want any more.

"Well, are you finished?" demanded Tom.

"Yes, you rotter."

"Get down to the footer, then."

"I—I won't!"

"Then you're not finished," said Tom Merry quietly. "I'm going to lick you, Racke, until you get along to the footer."

"Oh, you rotter!" panted Racke.

"You can take it as a warning for the future," said Tom. "I can't have my time wasted on a half-holiday rooting smoky cads out of the New House. I ought to be on Little Side now. The fellows are waiting for me. Get a move on; you're wasting time."

Racke dabbed his nose and tramped along the passage to the stairs. He was boiling with rage, but there was no help for it. Savage thoughts of vengeance thronged in his mind as he tramped sullenly down the stairs and out of the New House. But vengeance had to wait. He did not intend to face the fists of the captain of the Shell again. Under Tom Merry's grim eye, in the School House,



Skimpole of the Shell talked on, and the drone of his voice had a soporific effect on Gussy. He nodded off to sleep.

he changed for football, and walked down Little Side with Tom.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he spotted them. "Heah comes Tom Mewwy with Wacke. You're late, Tom Mewwy."

"I waited for Racke," said Tom, with a smile.

"Bai Jove! Is Wacke playin' on a day when it isn't compulswy pwactice?" ejaculated D'Arcy in astonishment.

"Yes. Keen on it, aren't you, Racke?"

Aubrey Racke muttered something under his breath. He did not seem very keen on it, but, keen or not, he had to put in practice for an hour, with Leslie Clampe as a companion in misfortune.

When the practice was over, the

two slackers slouched away from the football-field together, scowling.

"Now let's get back to your study and finish our little game," muttered Racke.

Clampe gave him a sour look.

"What about your study?" he asked.

"N.G. Kildare has his eyes on me."

"Well, my study's N.G., too," snapped Clampe. "I'm not going to have any more rows with Figgins. Wash it out."

"If you're afraid of Figgins——" sneered Racke.

"Oh, chuck it!" said Clampe rudely. "Not so afraid of Figgins as you are of Tom Merry, and chance it."

Racke gritted his teeth.

"Then you don't want me in your study?" he asked.

"No more than you want me in yours," said Clampe sourly. "It's not good enough. We shall have to chuck it for a while, till those two meddling rotters find something else to think about."

"By gad!" Racke set his teeth hard. "I'll make both of them sorry for meddling with me!"

"Will you?", sneered Clampe. "What's the matter with your nose? Knocked it against Tom Merry's knuckles? Want to knock it there again?"

"There's more ways of makin' a fellow sit up than by punchin' his nose," said Racke between his teeth. "Lots of ways. We can put our heads together and think of a way."

"Count me out," said Clampe, and he tramped away towards his own House, leaving Racke alone.

Racke tramped into the School House in a black rage. He tramped up to the Shell passage to his study. He was tired from his unaccustomed exercise on the footer ground, and he wanted a rest. Skimpole met him in the passage and peered at him benevolently through his glimmering spectacles.

"My dear Racke, your aspect seems to indicate that you have experienced some perturbation," said Skimpole.

"Cheese it and let a fellow pass!" growled Racke.

"My dear Racke, I see no occasion whatever for this most uncalled-for ebullition of irritable temper," said Skimpole with mild reproof. "I was going to ask you, Racke, if you would care to step into my study——"

"You silly chump!"

"It would afford me considerable gratification to impart to you the result of my latest astronomical observations, and—— Yarooop!"

Whooop! Oh, dear! Ow! Yoop!"

Skimpole sat down suddenly as Racke thumped him on the chest. His spectacles slid down his nose, and Skimpy groped for them wildly, gasping for breath. Racke tramped into his study and slammed the door.

"Oh, my goodness!" exclaimed Skimpole, as he gathered himself up, gasping. "Oh, dear! I shall certainly not ask Racke into my study again. Ow! He seems to be frightfully ill-tempered. Ow-wow!"

And Skimpole ambled away, still gasping.

THE NINTH CHAPTER

ROTTEN!

"WOTTEN!"

"Your own bally fault!" growled Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Come along to the gym and chance it," suggested Dig.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook his aristocratic head.

The state of affairs was indeed rotten, or, as Arthur Augustus described it, wotten.

It was evening, and on that special evening a boxing-match had been arranged in the gym—a foursome, with Study No. 6 on one side, and Figgins & Co. and Redfern of the New House on the other side.

It was quite an important affair, and a crowd of fellows of both Houses in the Fourth Form were going to see it. The New House Fourth Formers were confident in a general victory for Figgins & Co., while those members of the Fourth who boarded in the School House were equally convinced that Study No. 6 would win all along the line. And it was exactly like Gussy, as his comrades agreed, to get an imposition at that

very time, and to have to cut the boxing.

D'Arcy had been unlucky. He had kicked Baggy Trimble of the Fourth. Every fellow in the House would have admitted freely that the more Baggy Trimble was kicked the better it was for Trimble and the House generally. It was almost a bounden duty to kick Trimble.

But Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, did not see it in that light. Form masters had their own ways of looking at things.

Mr. Lathom had come on the scene while Trimble of the Fourth was roaring and fleeing down the passage with D'Arcy's elegant boot helping him along. The swell of St. Jim's was fairly dribbling Trimble along the corridor, and the bellowing of Baggy was like unto that of the celebrated Bull of Bashan of ancient times.

Whereupon Mr. Lathom had called Arthur Augustus to order and sternly imposed upon him three hundred lines, with the further order to repair to his study immediately and write them out, which was likely to keep Arthur Augustus busy till time for prep and completely washed out the boxing fixture.

"Isn't it just like Gussy?" said Herries. "He was bound to kick Trimble just when old Lathom was coming round the corner."

"Weally, Hewwies, I did not see Lathom comin' wound the cornah!" said Arthur Augustus. "But had I seen him, I should have kicked Twimble just the same."

"Trimble would keep, fathead!" said Dig.

"Imposs, deah boy. Twimble was sayin' something about my Cousin Ethel, a thing no fellow could stand."

"Fat little beast!" agreed Blake. "Still, you could have kicked him

in the dormitory after lights out."

"I felt bound to kick him at once, deah boy. He actually had the cheek to say that Ethel asked him to meet her at the Head's gate when she was stayin' at St. Jim's. He said it loud enough for sevewal fellows to heah. I had no alternative but to kick him. I weally wish I had kicked him hardah!"

"You could have kicked him later on, fathead!"

"I will kick him latah on, as well, deah boy."

Blake grinned.

"Well, it's done now," he said. "But the New House men will be saying that you backed out of boxing Reddy."

"Wats! They must know that I should have licked Wedfern all wight. I beat him a few days ago, you wemembah. What I am doubtful about is how you fellows will get on with Figgins & Co."

"Bow-wow!"

"I do not wegard that as an intelligible wemark, Blake. Pway put your beef into it. Figgins is weally a good man, you know, and Fatty Wynn is wathah hefty, though he's so fat, and Kerr is a deep card. You will have your hands full," said Arthur Augustus anxiously.

"Oh, you can leave those New House bounders to us," said Blake carelessly.

"It's feahfully wotten!" said D'Arcy. "Pwobably you will be licked."

"What?"

"And if I had met Weddy, it would have been at least one victowry for our studay, you see."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Well, you can get on with your dashed lines," said Blake. "Just

like you to bag an impot at this precise moment."

"Oh, just!" assented Dig.

"Gussy all over!" agreed Herries.

"Weally, you fellows——"

Blake & Co. left Study No. 6, leaving their hapless chum to settle down to three hundred lines from the *Æneid*. At the head of the stairs Aubrey Racke of the Shell was loafing. He called to the three.

"I hear that you fellows are boxing Figgins & Co. in the gym presently," he said.

"You've heard aright," answered Blake curtly, and he walked on with his friends. He did not want to talk to Racke of the Shell.

Racke scowled.

"I might give you a look-in," he called out. "When's it coming off?"

"Half an hour from now," said Blake, over his shoulder. And the three Fourth Formers went downstairs.

Racke glanced after them with a sour grin and then strolled along the Shell passage. He tapped at the door of Study No. 10, which belonged to the Terrible Three. There was no answer from within, and Racke opened the door and entered. Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther had gone to the club-room after tea, where there was a meeting of the Shell Debating Society, as Racke knew. He had tapped at the door only to make sure.

Racke was about five minutes in Tom Merry's study, and when he emerged he glanced this way and that way, like Moses of old, before he stepped out into the passage.

But there was no one in sight; the Shell fellows had not yet come up for prep and the passage was deserted.

Racke walked hurriedly away.

He was loafing on the stairs again

when the Terrible Three came up. He gave them a sour grin as they came along.

"Not going to see the great doings in the gym?" he asked.

"What giddy doings?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co.," said Racke.

"My dear man, we don't take the stunts of these Fourth Form kids seriously," said Lowther. "The little fellows can amuse themselves without our assistance."

"Might give them a look-in, though," said Tom Merry, pausing. "No hurry for prep."

"Oh, come on!" said Lowther. "Too much honour for the Fourth—it will turn their infantile heads if we take notice of them."

Tom Merry laughed, and went on to the study with his chums. Aubrey Racke loafed on the stairs for some time, with his hands in his pockets, but he went downstairs at last and out of the House. He looked in at the door of the gym, which was lighted up and crowded with Fourth Form men. Blake and Herries and Digby were there with Figgins, Kerr and Wynn, with Lefevre of the Fifth as referee.

Racke stared at them for a few moments. He noticed that D'Arcy was not with his comrades, but attached no importance to that circumstance—he was not interested in the School House fellows. For reasons of his own, it was Figgins & Co. in whom the cad of the Shell was interested.

Figgins & Co. were there, thinking of a boxing victory over the champions of the rival House, and certainly not wasting a single thought on Aubrey Racke.

Racke smiled sourly and walked



D'Arcy raised his head as Skimpole lowered his mighty brain. Crash! The back of Gussy's head came into violent contact with the bulging forehead of the St. Jim's astronomer. "Yawwoop! Ow! Wow! Oh!"

away. But he did not return to his own house.

• It was to the New House that he bent his steps.

While Figgins & Co. were busy in the gym, Racke also was going to be busy in quite a different way—in Figgins' study. For many days had Racke nursed his vengeance; and now his hour had come.

THE TENTH CHAPTER

UNEXPECTED!

"My dear D'Arcy!"

"Oh cwikey!" groaned Arthur Augustus.

Really, it was too bad!

Arthur Augustus was sitting in Study No. 6, busily writing lines for Mr. Lathom instead of taking his appointed part in the boxing contest in the gym. That was bad enough, but it seemed that there was worse to come. As Shakespeare would have put it, "thus bad begins, but worse remains behind." The brainy forehead and big spectacles of Skimpole of the Shell loomed in at the doorway.

No wonder D'Arcy groaned. Missing the boxing was bad—grinding out lines was worse; but being bored in addition by the scientific genius of St. Jim's was worst of all. Added to the rest it was intolerable. Arthur

Augustus was a polite and long-suffering youth. Fellows bored him as they never ventured to bore anyone else. But there was a limit. In spite of the manners and customs that stamp the caste of Vere de Vere, D'Arcy was powerfully inclined to hurl the inkpot at Skimmy.

Skimpole was usually deaf and blind to hints, but even Skimmy would have been bound to take a hint if it came in the shape of a hurtling inkpot.

Arthur Augustus refrained, however. He expressed his feelings with a faint groan, and the inkpot remained where it was.

Skimpole blinked and peered at him.

"Are you ill, my dear D'Arcy?" he inquired.

"Nunno."

"I imagined that I heard you give utterance to a sound expressive of some kind of physical discomfort."

"Only bored, deah boy."

"Then you will be glad to see me, my dear fellow."

"Eh?"

"A little chat will relieve the monotony which has produced this undesirable effect upon your spirits," explained Skimpole.

D'Arcy smiled faintly. Evidently the ineffable Skimpole did not guess that he was the cause of the boredom.

"The fact is, I am wathah busy, Skimmay," he said. "I have to get these wotten lines done for Lathom before pwep."

"That is somewhat unfortunate, D'Arcy, as I was going to request you to join me in some astronomical observations—— Why, you are groaning again, my dear fellow. You must have a pain somewhere."

"Oh deah!"

"Gore has knocked over my tele-

scope," said Skimpole. "Both Gore and Talbot have declined to join me in the enthralling pursuit of investigating the illimitable ether this fine starry evening, and have gone to see some frivolous boxing affair in the gym."

"Eh?"

"Some foolish and frivolous boxing affair. Gore stayed behind a few minutes to knock over my telescope. Gore is a very inconsiderate fellow. He seemed to think that there was something of a humorous nature in upsetting my instrument."

"I am wathah hard at work, Skimmay——"

"Yes; you mentioned that before, my dear fellow. Now, it is not easy to mount the telescope at my study window," said Skimpole. "Owing to a shortage of mere money, I have been unable to purchase all the apparatus required for astronomical work. Instead of mounting my telescope as such instruments are mounted in observatories, my dear D'Arcy, I am compelled to fix it up on a stack of books and things, and in these circumstances the adjustment to a correct focus is a matter of considerable difficulty. For this reason I should be glad of your assistance."

"Are you wound up, Skimmay?" groaned Arthur Augustus, his thoughts and his hand straying to the inkpot again.

"I scarcely perceive the purport of that inquiry, my dear D'Arcy," said Skimpole, with a puzzled look.

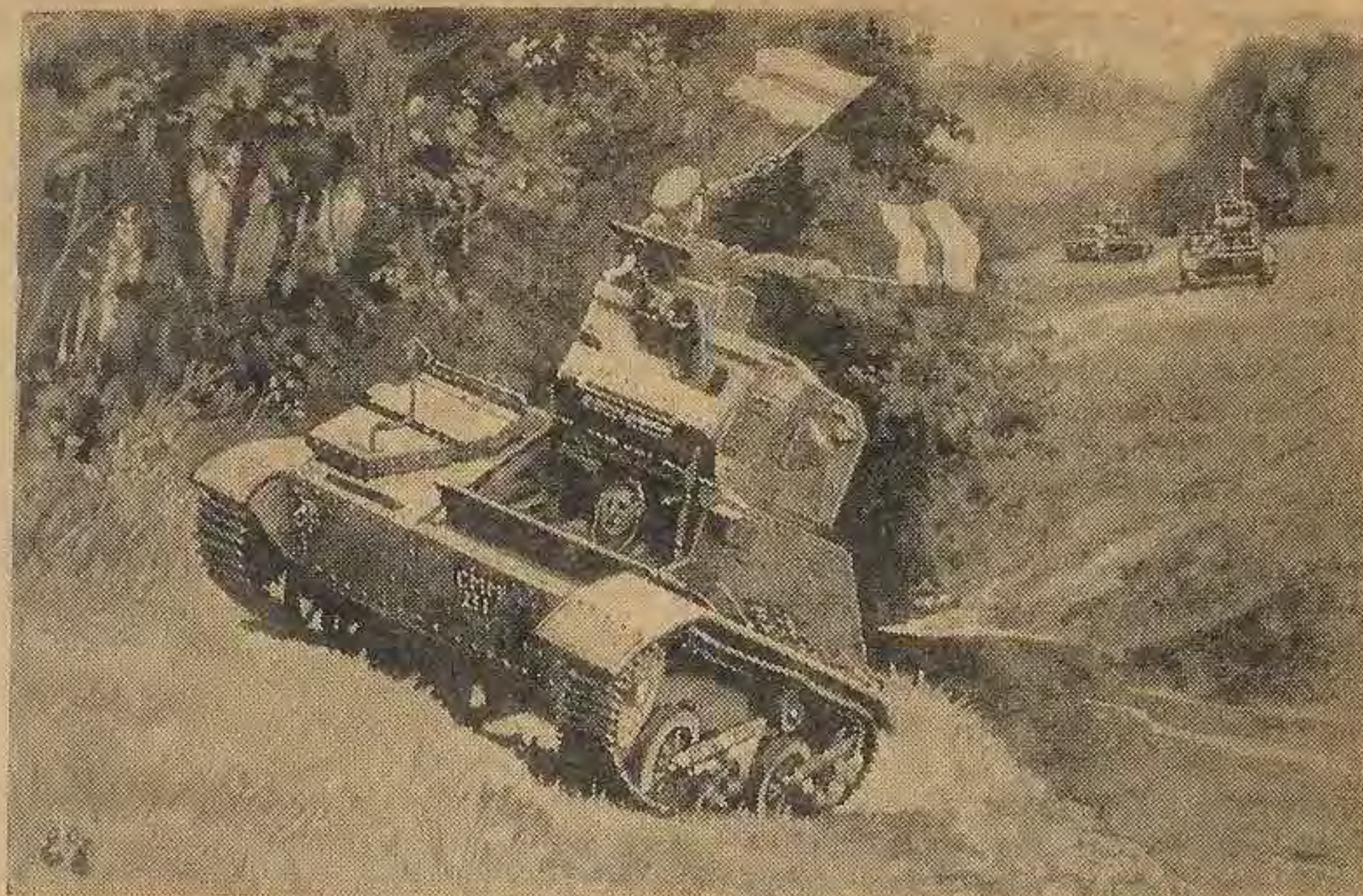
"Wun away."

"My dear fellow——"

"I've got to get these lines done before pwep!" howled Arthur Augustus. "You are wastin' time. Buzz off!"

Skimpole appeared to comprehend at last. It was not so easy for his

THE MODERN BRITISH ARMY IN ACTION



The advantage of the Mechanised Cavalry, illustrated here, over all army forces is mobility. Light tanks can cross the most difficult broken country at a speed greater than any other vehicle. Armoured cars can travel at the same rate as ordinary motor-lorries, though they have to keep to the roads.

The chief use of Mechanised Cavalry is reconnoitring—spying out the land before the advance of less mobile troops. The tanks shown in the illustration are of the Light MK V type, armoured against rifle fire and equipped with one light and one heavy machine-gun.

They weigh approximately 4 tons 15 cwt., fully equipped, and have a cruising speed of 12 m.p.h. across country. The tanks can cross a ditch 5 ft. 3 in. wide and ford a river 3 ft. deep, while on a hard surface they are capable of a speed of over 20 m.p.h.

Above is shown a section of the Mechanised Cavalry crossing open country; the signaller in the turret of the tank in advance is semaphoring information back to the tanks in the rear, while the wireless operator is receiving orders transmitted from Headquarters.

scientific intellect to grasp anything perfectly obvious—in that respect it resembled, perhaps, many more celebrated scientific intellects. But he could comprehend the meaning of a convulsive grasp upon an inkpot.

"My dear D'Arcy, if you do not care to leave the lines unwritten——"

"Cleah off, you ass!"

"Pray give me your attention, my dear fellow, and do not allow yourself to become excited," said Skimpole

soothingly. "Although the matter is quite unimportant, in comparison with my scientific investigations, I fully realise that you do not desire to be subjected to castigation by your Form master. I will, therefore, help you with the lines, and then you can come along to my study and render me assistance in the adjustment of my telescope."

"Oh!" said D'Arcy.

"I trust, my dear D'Arcy, that that

proposition meets with your unqualified approbation."

Arthur Augustus grinned and nodded. Really, it was quite a good idea. Mr. Lathom was a short-sighted gentleman, and on a good many occasions Fourth Form impots had been the work of many hands instead of one. It was no worse to be bored by the astronomical Skimmy than by grinding lines—or not much worse.

"It's a go, old chap," said D'Arcy.

And Skimpole sat down to the table in Study No. 6, dipped a pen in the ink, and undertook a section of the *Æneid*. Two pens instead of one travelled over the paper, and the impot grew apace. Skimmy did not even talk during the rapid scribbling. This was obviously not from merciful motives, but because he was in a hurry to get back to astronomy. The sooner the lines were done the sooner the genius of the Shell would be getting busy again on his hobby. So the two juniors worked in silence, save for the scratching of the pens, and for quite a long time Skimmy's chin had an unaccustomed rest.

The impot was finished at last. Arthur Augustus rose from the table with a sigh of relief.

"I'll wun down with this to Mr. Lathom," he said, "and then——"

"Then hurry up to my study, my dear fellow."

"Yaas," murmured Arthur Augustus.

The lines were duly landed in Mr. Lathom's study, and then Arthur Augustus' reluctant footsteps trod the Shell passage. Undoubtedly Gussy would have preferred to get along to the gym, where the boxing was in progress. At least he could have witnessed it and encouraged his comrades by his presence. But a

bargain was a bargain, he had finished his lines early with Skimmy's help, and he was bound to play up.

Skimpole blinked a welcome at him as he came into the Shell study.

He was already at work remounting the telescope at the study window. The long tube protruded over the window-sill, looking skywards.

"Weady, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus as cheerfully as he could, like a fellow resigned to his fate.

"Very good, my dear fellow. I desire to focus the glass on the lunar luminary——"

"The which?"

"The lunar luminary——"

"Oh! The moon! Yaas," said Arthur Augustus.

"As you will perceive, it is now rising over the chimneys of the New House," said Skimpole. "On a previous occasion we were deceived by an incorrect focus, inadvertently obtaining a view of Figgins' study instead of the lunar luminary."

Arthur Augustus chuckled.

"I do not see anything of a risible nature in that somewhat unfortunate misapprehension on our part," said Skimpole, in surprise. "However, to proceed. Pray kneel down at the lower end of the telescope and keep your eye to it. I will adjust the tube, and you will tell me when you get a clear view of the lunar luminary, and then I will secure it in position. You comprehend?"

"Yaas, wathah."

D'Arcy carefully laid a sheet of impot paper on the carpet for the protection of the knees of his trousers—a more important matter to the swell of St. Jim's than any astronomical observations, even than the discovery of a new star to add to the hundreds of millions already discovered.

Then he knelt down and put his noble eye to the lower end of the big telescope. Skimpole proceeded to adjust it.

"Now, my dear D'Arcy——"

"Yawoooooh!"

"Eh! What is the matter?"

"Oh, cwikey! You have jammed the beastly thing in my eye!" groaned Arthur Augustus.

"Dear me! Has it hurt you?"

"Wow! Yaas!"

"The momentary discomfort will probably pass away very soon, my dear fellow. It is a matter of little moment," said Skimpole. "However, I do not mind waiting while you rub your eye, if that will afford you any relief. Tell me when you are ready."

Arthur Augustus suppressed his feelings and rubbed his eye.

"Weady!" he said at last.

Skimpole proceeded again. Arthur Augustus, taking more care this time to keep the telescope out of his eye, gazed through the long tube. Blackness met his view.

"Do you see anything yet, my dear fellow?"

"Nothin'."

Skimpole continued to adjust and re-adjust the telescope. Arthur Augustus uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Hold on!"

"Is that the correct focus?"

"I can see a light," said D'Arcy.

"I don't think it is the moon, but——
Bai Jove! Hold on a minute, Skimpole!"

D'Arcy stared through the telescope while Skimpole held on.

Evidently the tube was not sufficiently raised, for it was pointing at the front of the New House across the quadrangle instead of over the roof of that building.

The Fourth Form windows in the New House were all dark, the fellows being in the gym for the boxing match there.

But suddenly a light had flashed in one of the windows.

D'Arcy had a fair view once more of Figgins' study in the New House. A junior had entered the room and switched on the light. That was the sudden light that Gussy had seen.

With the light on in Figgins' study across the way, D'Arcy had a full view of the interior of the room, with the aid of the telescope.

To his amazement he saw that it was Aubrey Racke of the Shell who had turned on the light.

What Racke, a School House fellow, could be doing in a New House study with the owners absent was rather a puzzle.

Racke had been a pretty constant visitor in Clampe's study there, but certainly he had no business in Figgy's study; certainly he would never have ventured there if Figgins & Co. had been at home.

"The wottah!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Playin' some twick on Figgay, I suppose. Wacke does not genewally go in for House wags."

"What do you see now, D'Arcy?" asked Skimpole.

"I can see Wacke of the Shell in Figgins' study."

"Dear me! We are wasting time!" said Skimpole peevishly.

"Hold on a minute, though. Wacke is up to somethin'."

Skimpole held on impatiently. He was not in the slightest degree interested in Aubrey Racke's proceedings in Figgins' study in the other House.

D'Arcy watched Racke cross to the window after turning on the light. The Shell fellow drew the blind with a quick hand.

The study was at once blotted out from view.

Arthur Augustus grinned.

Evidently Racke was in the New House for a "rag"; and upon the whole, Arthur Augustus rather approved. Ragging the New House fellows was a better occupation than smoking cigarettes and playing banker in Clampe's study.

It did not occur to D'Arcy's mind, just then, that Racke was intending anything more than a "rag" such as often took place between the rival juniors of St. Jim's. He was not likely to guess the black and bitter thoughts of a mind like Aubrey Racke's.

"Go it, Skimmay," he said.

And Skimmy went it. The telescope was raised till it commanded a view of what Skimmy called the lunar luminary. Then it was fixed in position, and all was ready for Skimmy's astronomical investigations.

D'Arcy rose and shook out the knees of his trousers and smoothed them carefully.

"That's all wight, Skimmay?"

"Quite, my dear fellow. If you would care to remain and share in my observations——"

"Thanks awf'ly, old chap!" said D'Arcy hurriedly. "But I wathah think I will get along to the gym and see how Blake and Hewwies and Dig are gettin' on with those New House boundahs."

"If you really prefer to waste your time upon such frivolous and unthinking occupations——"

Apparently D'Arcy did so prefer; for he was gone before the learned Skimmy had finished.

Leaving Skimpole to watch the latest proceedings of the man in the moon, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked cheerily into the gym and

joined the crowd of Fourth Form fellows there, in time to witness the finish of the boxing match.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

THE HAND OF THE ENEMY!

FIGGINS & Co. walked back to the New House from the gym, arm-in-arm, with cheery faces, in the midst of a crowd of New House juniors.

Figgins & Co. were quite bucked.

The boxing match had finished, and on points the New House trio had had rather the better of it. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy attributed that result to the fact that he had not been present to tackle Redfern; in which case there would have been at least one sweeping victory to the credit of the School House, in Gussy's noble opinion. Figgins & Co. attributed it to the general superiority of their House. The margin had been narrow; but there had been a margin, and the New House rejoiced accordingly.

In the New House Figgins & Co. remained chatting with their friends for a time, fighting the battle over again, and then adjourned to their study for prep. It was, as a matter of fact, rather late for prep, and the heroes of the Fourth had no time to waste.

Figgins led the way into his study and switched on the light.

As the study was illuminated the three juniors gazed round them in wonder and wrath.

The study had not been exactly tidy when they had left it. Junior studies seldom were. But its present state was not untidy—it was in a condition of havoc.

If a cyclone had struck the room during Figgins & Co.'s absence it could scarcely have done more damage.

Not a thing was in its place. Hardly a thing that could be broken remained whole.

The three juniors gazed at the wreck, aghast.

Evidently some determined ragger had been hard at work, and the outcome of his labours was almost unnerving.

The table lay on its side with one leg wrenched off it. The looking-glass lay in the fender in three pieces. Ink and jam and other things soaked in the carpet and splashed the walls. Broken crockery littered the floor, with smashed inkpots and pens and torn books.

For a moment or two Figgins & Co. were silent, their breath quite taken away by what they saw.

"My only hat!" stuttered George Figgins at last.

"The—the—the rotters!" ejacu-

lated Fatty Wynn. "Look—my pie—the steak-and-kidney pie we were going to have for supper! Smashed on the floor—trodden on! My pie!"

Kerr gritted his teeth.

Study raggings were not uncommon among the St. Jim's juniors; but there was a limit. It was an understood thing that no real damage was done on such occasions.

The utmost possible damage had been done on this occasion. The study looked as if some utterly reckless hooligan had wreaked his rage upon it.

"Somebody's got to pay for this!" said Kerr. "This isn't a rag—this is a rotten outrage! Who can have done it?"

"A House raid, of course," said Figgins. "No New House man would do it. Some of the School House cads came over while we were busy



"Oh gad! Oh, you rotter!" panted Racke as he sat up dizzily. "Any more?" asked Tom Merry. "Hang you!" gasped the black sheep of the Shell.

in the gym. All the studies were empty—it was a chance for the rotters."

"But who?" said Kerr, wrinkling his brows. "Blake and his gang were in the gym with us. Tom Merry's lot have been gassing about raiding us, but they wouldn't do a thing like this."

"No fear!"

Fatty Wynn gasped with wrath. In the general wreck of things the ruined state of his pie was worst of all from Fatty's point of view.

"Rotters!" he gasped. "Ruffians! Hooligans! Mucking up a fellow's pie! My hat! We'll smash 'em!"

"We'll jolly well give 'em toco when we find them out!" growled Figgins. "Why, this means a new outfit of furniture for the study. Hardly a leg left on any of the chairs."

"Look at the clock—smashed in pieces!" said Kerr.

"Look at my pie!"

"Hallo! What's this?" exclaimed Kerr suddenly.

The Scottish junior's keen eye was roving round the wrecked study in search of a clue to the perpetrators of the outrage. He stooped and picked up a handkerchief.

"Good!" exclaimed Figgins. "If that was dropped here there might be a fellow's initials on it——"

"Look!" said Kerr, pointing to the corner of the handkerchief.

"T.M."

"Tom Merry!" breathed Fatty Wynn.

The New House trio stared at the handkerchief. Evidently it had been dropped by the raggers; it was soaked with ink and sticky with jam. They knew those initials well—they had seen that monogram before, which was carefully worked into most of Tom Merry's things by

the loving hands of old Miss Priscilla Fawcett.

"That does it!" said Figgins, between his teeth. "I half expected to see those chaps in the gym—now I know why they weren't there! They were ragging our study."

"The rotters! My pie——"

"It's too thick!" said Kerr. "We've had rows enough with Tom Merry's gang, but we've always played the game on our side. This sort of thing isn't playing the game."

"No fear!"

"Tit for tat!" said Figgins. "We're not letting this keep! I'm going over to the School House now. You fellows coming?"

"You bet!"

Prep, with the study in that state, was out of the question. Prep could have been done in another study, certainly; but the chums of the New House were not thinking of prep now. They were thinking of vengeance. Any ordinary rag they could have taken good-humouredly, to be repaid in kind at a convenient time. But wrecking a fellow's room like this was not a matter to be taken with good humour. It was an outrage that had to be avenged, and Figgins & Co. did not intend to let the grass grow under their feet.

They hurried down the stairs and out into the quad, with set faces.

They fairly raced across the quadrangle. It was time for all juniors to be in their Houses; but Figgins & Co. did not think of that now. They intended to see the Terrible Three.

"Hallo! What do you New House bounders want!" asked Levison of the Fourth, meeting the trio as they came into the School House.

Figgins & Co. scudded up the staircase without stopping to answer,

leaving Levison staring after them.

"Bai Jove! New House boundahs!"

In the passage above, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass on the New House trio. Blake, Herries and Digby—not yet at prep—stared at them.

"Time you fags were in your House!" said Blake. "You'll have old Ratty on your track."

Figgins did not heed.

"Is Tom Merry in his study?" he asked.

"I think so," answered Blake. "Time we were in ours, you chaps, or we shan't get any prep done to-night. What's the trouble, Figgins? If you've come over here on the giddy warpath——"

Figgins & Co. ran by, heading for Study No. 10 in the Shell.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Those New House boundahs are lookin' wathah excited. I suppose they haven't come ovah for a House wow at this houah."

"Looks like it!" grinned Herries. "We didn't punch them hard enough in the gym; they want some more."

"Let's go and give them some more, as they've come over specially to ask for it!" suggested Dig.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Blake. "Listen to that!"

From the Shell passage came a terrific uproar!

Crash! Bump! Yell!

Study No. 6 stared at one another.

"Sounds like giddy war!" grinned Blake. "Let's get along and lend a boot to kick out those cheeky New House cads!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Blake & Co. headed for Tom Merry's study, towards which the terrific din was attracting a crowd of other fellows.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

SOMETHING LIKE A SHINDY!

TOM MERRY, Manners and Lowther were at prep, thinking of anything but New House raiders, when the door of Study No. 10 was hurled suddenly open and Figgins & Co. rushed in.

The three Shell fellows looked up in surprise. They were surprised to see fellows from the other House so late in the evening, and still more surprised by that unceremonious entrance. But they had no time to ask questions.

They had barely time to jump up from the table before the three invaders were upon them.

"Collar the cads!" roared Figgins.

"Down them!" panted Fatty Wynn.

"Pile in! Give the rotters jip!" roared Kerr.

Crash! Bump!

The Terrible Three of the Shell were at least a match for Figgins & Co. But the sudden hefty rush of the enemy fairly hurled them spinning.

The three of them went sprawling right and left, and Figgins & Co. went sprawling over them.

They were taken so utterly by surprise by this sudden and terrific attack that they hardly resisted for a minute or two.

Crash! Bump! Crash!

"Oh, my hat!"

"Gerroff!"

"What the jolly thump—— Yooop!"

"Give 'em jip!" roared Figgins.

"Bang their heads! Knock 'em out, and then we'll wreck the study!"

"Yes, rather!" panted Kerr.

"What's this game?" roared Tom Merry, struggling in Figgins' grasp. "My hat! I'll jolly well lick you! Lemme gerrup!"

Bang!

Tom's head smote the study carpet, Figgins having a grip on both his ears. There was a fearful yell from Tom.

"Yaroooooooooh!"

"Take that!" gasped Figgins.

"And that!"

Bang!

"Yow-ow-wooop!"

Tom Merry took them; he couldn't help it. But he twisted up on Figgins, got a grip, and whirled him over. It was Figgy's turn to bump on the floor, and the two juniors rolled over, struggling. Meantime, Lowther was wrestling furiously with Kerr, and Manners resisting breathlessly under the squashing weight of Fatty Wynn. Half a dozen dog-fights all at once could hardly have produced the terrific uproar that raged in Tom Merry's study in the Shell.

Shell fellows from the other studies crowded round the door. Talbot and Gore looked in from the next room; even Skimpole was drawn away from his astronomical stunts. Racke of the Shell was the next who came along, and he stared into the study at the fighting juniors, with a malicious grin on his face. Aubrey Racke, so far, was the only fellow who knew the cause of the commotion. Racke had expected it, and he had come along to enjoy it.

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Talbot of the Shell. "Separate them, you fellows!"

"Oh, let 'em have it out!" grinned Gore. "My hat! What a rumpus!"

"A termination of this most extraordinary ebullition appears to me to be eminently desirable," remarked Skimpole.

"New House cads!" exclaimed Kangaroo of the Shell. "Shall we lend you a hand, Tommy?"

"You keep off!" roared Figgins. "These cads have wrecked our study, and we're going to mop them up!"

"Bai Jove! They're goin' it!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, arriving breathless at the door of the study with his comrades.

"What-ho!" grinned Blake. "Go it, ye cripples!"

"You'll have the Housemaster up here at this rate!" shouted Glyn of the Shell. "Chuck it!"

Crash! Bump! Yell! Whoop!

The struggle in Study No. 10 was going strong! Furniture flew all over the room, right and left. Books and papers were scattered far and wide, and the dust rose from the carpet.

Seldom or never had so terrific a scrap been witnessed in a junior study. The crowd thickened at the door.

"What is it—a dog-fight?" drawled Cardew of the Fourth, coming along with Levison and Clive.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop it!" shouted Talbot. "You'll have Mr. Railton or the prefects here. Lend a hand, you chaps!"

"What-ho!" assented Blake. "Collar those New House cads, you fellows. They can't come kicking up a shindy in a respectable House."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Talbot led the rush into the study, and Blake & Co. and several more fellows followed him. The excited combatants were so mixed and mingled that it was not really easy to separate them. Utterly ignorant as they were of the cause of the fierce attack, Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther were wildly excited now and in a fighting mood, and they were giving Figgins & Co. as good as they handed out.

But the School House fellows grasped the fighting juniors on all sides—some of them receiving a punch or two in the process—and at last the Terrible Three were rounded up on one side of the study, and Figgins & Co., grasped by many hands and securely held, were prisoners on the other side.

The din of combat died away. Six panting juniors glared at one another and gasped for breath. Six noses streamed with crimson.

"Weally, Figgins——"

"You dummy!"

"If you chawactewise me as a dummay, Figgins, I shall give you a feahful thwashin' myself!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly.

"You footling chump——"

"Let us go!" bawled Fatty Wynn. "We're man to man, and those cads aren't going to sneak out of a hiding after what they've done!"

"Stand aside, you duffers!" howled Lowther. "I suppose we can lick



Bang! Tom's head smote the study carpet, Figgins having a grip on both his ears. "Yaroooooooooooooh!" yelled Tom. "Take that!" gasped Figgins. "And that!" Bang! "Yow-ow-whoop!"

"Now, what on earth is all this about?" exclaimed Talbot.

"Goodness knows!" panted Tom Merry. "Those New House hooligans rushed in here all of a sudden, and started. Let go! We're jolly well going to thrash them now we've begun!"

"Let them come on!" shouted Figgins. "Let go my arms, you School House cads! Let go, I say!"

these New House cads, can't we?"

"Hold on!" said Talbot. "You can't keep up this shindy. You'll have the Housemaster here. If you want to scrap, the gym's the proper place, with the gloves on."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Rot!" bawled Figgins. "We're going to lick them now, the rotters!"

"You're jolly well going to be kicked out of the House!" exclaimed

Blake indignantly. "What the thump do you mean by rushing into a School House study like a lot of hooligans?"

"Kick them out!"

"Kick those New House cads out!"

"Yah! Funks!" shouted Fatty Wynn. "If we'd caught you in our study you wouldn't have had a crowd of rotters to help you!"

"You fat idiot!" snapped Manners.

"Let me get at him!" shrieked Fatty Wynn, struggling; but Levison and Clive had his arms and they held on, grinning.

"But what is the wow about?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Before you kick the cheeky wottahs out, let them explain what they are makin' this feahful disturbance for. What have you done to the sillay asses, Tom Mewwy?"

"Nothing that I know of," said Tom. "I haven't the faintest idea why the silly idiots butted in here!"

"That's a lie!" roared Figgins.

"What?"

"You know what you've done, all right. And these chaps wouldn't back you up if they knew what you'd done, you rotter!"

"Bai Jove! What——"

Tom Merry controlled his wrath. He realised now that there was some mistake.

"You footling ass!" he said. "I've done nothing that I know of. But if I have done anything, give it a name!"

"Oh, cheese it!" snorted Figgins. "I dare say you're ashamed of it now, but I suppose you're not going to deny it?"

"Deny what?" roared Tom.

"Wrecking our study while we were in the gym!"

Tom stared at the New House junior captain blankly.

"Wrecking your study?" he repeated.

"Yes, you rotter!"

"You've been ragging in the New House, you fellows?" asked Blake. "Even if you have, that's no excuse for a shindy like this. There have been rags before, without all this fuss."

"It wasn't a rag!" hooted Figgins. "I tell you the place is wrecked—everything smashed up—even the furniture smashed——"

"And my pie——"

"Everything wrecked, and even our school books torn up!" said Kerr savagely. "That's not what I call a rag. I call it hooliganism."

Blake whistled.

"That's a bit over the limit, you chaps," he said.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You silly chump!" roared Tom. "We haven't done it! We haven't been in the New House at all."

Figgins gave a scornful laugh.

"Well, I was surprised at your acting so rottenly, but I never expected you to tell lies about it," he said.

"You silly chump!" exclaimed Tom, his cheeks crimson. "We haven't been in your rotten House, or your measly study. But we're ready to wipe up the floor with you. Get out of the way, you chaps!"

"Hold on," said Talbot quietly. "Don't be a fool, Figgins. If Tom says he hasn't been in your study, he hasn't been there."

Snort from Figgins.

"Then how does he account for that?" he exclaimed, holding out a pocket-handkerchief. "Whose is that?"

"Mine!" said Tom, looking at it.

"We found that in our study among the wreck," said Kerr. "It

was dropped there when the study was ragged."

"By the rotter who ragged it!" hooted Figgins. "Now will you say again that you haven't been in the New House this evening?"

Tom Merry stared blankly at the handkerchief.

"It's mine," he said. "I suppose I must have dropped it somewhere, as you seem to have picked it up. But I never dropped it in the New House—I haven't been in your House since the day I came over with you to root Racke out of Clampe's study."

"Oh, draw it mild!" sneered Fatty Wynn. "That won't wash."

"Weally, Wynn, if you doubt a School House man's word——"

"Dash it all, it's queer," said Kangaroo of the Shell. "How the thump did your hanky get there, if you haven't been there, Tom?"

Tom laughed contemptuously.

"Perhaps the fellows who wrecked the study left it there to make these silly fools think I had done it," he answered. "If Figgins really picked it up in his study that's the only way I can account for it. Certainly I haven't been in his study."

"Oh!" said Figgins.

"Gammon!" growled Fatty Wynn. But Kerr gave a nod.

"Our leg's been pulled," he said. "You can't blame us, Tom Merry, finding your hanky there—after a House raid. But——"

"You silly chump!" exclaimed Manners. "Are we the kind of fellows to do what you say has been done to your study?"

"Well, somebody's done it," growled Figgins. "If it wasn't this study, we want to know what School House rotter it was."

"Find out, and be blowed to you!" said Lowther, mopping his streaming nose. "Anybody but a born fool would ask questions before he started punching heads."

"Look here——"

"Oh, shut up. Get out of our study, and to-morrow we'll jolly well thrash you all round!" hooted Lowther.

"You're jolly well welcome to try," said Figgins. "I don't half believe that it wasn't you, either—the hanky was there—and it was dropped——"

"Chuck it!" said Talbot quietly. "Somebody has done this to make a row between you fellows. You ought to try to find out who it was instead of slanging one another."

"Oh, rot! It's too thick," snapped Figgins. "Want me to believe that some fellow ragged my study and left Tom Merry's hanky there to put it on him? It's too thick."

"That's how it stands," said Tom Merry. "Anybody who wanted one of my hankies could bag one—there's some here in a box in this study, for that matter. But you can jolly well believe what you like, Figgins. I'll make you swallow all you've said, and a little more."

"Bai Jove!"

It was a sudden startled ejaculation from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He stared round at the crowd at the door, and fixed his eyes upon the grinning face of Aubrey Racke, of the Shell.

"Wacke!" he exclaimed.

"Eh? What about Racke?"

"Wacke's the wottah!"

And before the startled Racke could back away Arthur Augustus made a jump at him, grasped him by the collar, and dragged him headlong into the study.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER

THANKS TO SKIMPOLE!

TOM MERRY & Co. stared.

Racke roared

The cad of the Shell came headlong into the room, overturned by the sudden grasp on his collar. He rolled on the carpet, and roared in wrath and astonishment.

"Wacke's the wottah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"What——"

"Gussy——"

"What the dickens——"

"I wepeat, that Wacke is the wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus excitedly. "Own up to it, Wacke!"

Aubrey Racke sat up quite dizzily.

"You silly owl!" he gasped.

"What the thump do you mean? I'll jolly well lick you——"

The juniors stared at D'Arcy. Blake & Co. wondered whether their noble chum had gone off his aristocratic rocker.

"Look here, Gussy——" began Blake.

"Pway do not intewwupt me, Blake! That feahful wottah Wacke has done this," said Arthur Augustus.

"Own up, you cad!"

Racke staggered to his feet.

He gave the swell of St. Jim's an evil look.

"You burbling dummy!" he hissed.

"I know nothing about it. What do you mean?"

Racke spoke boldly enough. He knew that he had not been seen entering Tom Merry's study to purloin the handkerchief. He knew that he had not been noticed creeping stealthily into the New House. He had finished his ruffianly work and cleared before Figgins & Co. had returned to their House. Even if he should be suspected, there was absolutely no jot or tittle of evidence to connect him with

the rag in Figgins' study. D'Arcy's accusation came like a thunderclap to him, but he was quite prepared to brazen it out.

Figgins & Co. had calmed down now. Kerr's keen Scottish brain had grasped the facts at once. When Tom Merry explained he knew that there had been a cunning scheme to set the two studies by the ears. Figgins and Fatty Wynn were still rather dubious but open to conviction, as it were.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy raised an accusing forefinger and pointed it at Racke's sullen, evil face.

"That's the wottah!" he said.

"Do you mean to say that Racke wrecked our study and left Tom Merry's handkerchief there to fool us?" demanded Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's a lie—a rotten lie!" snarled Racke.

"Bai Jove! If you venture to chawactewise my wemarks as lyin', you unspeakable wottah——"

"Go easy, Gussy!" said Blake. "If you know anything about it, cough it up instead of blowing off steam."

"Weally, Blake——"

"What do you know about it, Gussy?" demanded Tom Merry impatiently.

"That uttah wottah, Wacke, is the man," said D'Arcy. "I suppose he has done this in wevenge because you and Figgins wooted him out of Clampe's studay and put an end to his wotten games there."

"I dare say he would," said Tom, with a glance at Racke. "I've been nowhere near the New House. I never knew anything had happened till these fellows burst in like a lot of lunatics!"

"Well I'm dashed if I know how you know what happened in the New

House, Gussy," said Herries. "We left you in your study doing lines, and then you came down to the gym."

"Yaas ; but——"

"Have you been over to our House this evening?" asked Kerr.

"Not at all."

"You didn't follow Racke there, then?"

"Certainly not. I should not be

listen to that ass talking out of the back of his neck, I don't!"

"Stay where you are, Wacke——"

"Rats!"

Aubrey Racke sought to push out of the study. But three or four fellows blocked his way.

"Not yet, old bean," said Blake agreeably. "We'll have this out first. Gussy may be talking sense—he doesn't often, but he does at times."



"Wacke is the wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus excitedly. "Own up to it, Wacke!" Aubrey Racke sat up quite dizzily. "You silly owl!" he gasped.

likely to walk in the same diwection as that wottah if I could help it."

"Then what the thump are you talking about?" demanded Figgins.

"You can't know anything about what happened in our House if you haven't been there."

"Weally, Figgins——"

Aubrey Racke backed to the doorway.

"I'm getting out of this," he said.

"I'm fed-up! If you fellows like to

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Let me pass!" exclaimed Racke furiously. "I've told you I know nothing about the matter. If there's any bullying I shall go to my House-master, I can jolly well tell you!"

"Hold on, Racke," said Tom Merry quietly. "We've got to have this out. If you really know anything about it, D'Arcy——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Come to the point!" bawled Blake.

"I weally wish you would not wear at a fellow, Blake. I have mentioned a lot of times that I dislike bein' woreed at!"

"You—you——" gasped Blake.

"Pway lend me your yahs, deah boys, and I will explain," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Wacke says that he has not been in the New House this evenin'."

"I repeat it," growled Racke. "I'll sing it to a tune if you like!"

"He says that he has not been in Figgins' study——"

"And I haven't," said Racke. "If any fellow can say that he's seen me anywhere near the New House, or anywhere near Figgins' study, let him say so. I've been in my own House all the time."

"That settles the mattah, deah boys."

"How does it?" shrieked Blake.

"Wacke's denial that he has been in Figgay's studay is a vewy plain pwoof of what he did when he was there, you see."

"But was he there?" roared Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How do you know, ass?"

"I wefuse to be called an ass!"

"You—you image——"

"For goodness' sake explain, Gussy," said Talbot, laughing. "Where were you this evening? You've already said that you never went over to the New House."

"Yaas, wathah! I was doin' lines in my studay," explained D'Arcy. "Owin' to Lathom gettin' his wag out about my kickin' Twimble——"

"Yes, yes; but——"

"I kicked Twimble wathah hard, but he asked for it——"

"Never mind Trimble now," said

Tom Merry. "If you were in your study doing lines, how the thump can you know anything about what happened in Figgins' study on the other side of the quad?"

"You see, Skimpole came in——"

"Bother Skimpole!"

"Really, my dear Merry, is not that observation somewhat uncalled for, and indeed inconsiderate?" said Skimpole mildly, blinking into the study with his big spectacles. "You will acknowledge, my dear fellow——"

"Can it!" interrupted Tom impatiently. "Look here, Gussy——"

"Skimmay helped me with my impot, and I helped him with his telescope in return," said D'Arcy. "One good turn deserves anothah, you know. Then I came down to the gym. I was too late for the boxin'——"

"Never mind the boxing now. Is that chap ever coming to the point?" asked Blake in despair.

"Weally, Blake, I have come to the point!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. "I have told you how it happened now, and you know that Wacke was the wottah who wagged Figgay's studay in the New House."

The juniors stared at D'Arcy.

Apparently the swell of St. Jim's was satisfied that he had made the matter clear.

"You footling idiot!" said Racke.

"Weally, Wacke——"

"But what are you driving at?" roared Tom Merry. "You say you were doing lines in your study, and then fooling around with Skimmy's silly telescope in Skimmy's study——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then you were nowhere near Racke at all?"

"Not at all, deah boy. I object vewy much to bein' anywhere neah Wacke. I wegard him with disgust."

"You—you——" gasped Blake. "Are you going to tell us how you know that Racke was in Figgins' study—if you do know it?"

"I suppose I can believe my eyes, Blake?"

"Your eyes?" stuttered Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I saw him there."

"You saw Racke in my study?" yelled Figgins.

"Yaas!"

"When you hadn't left this House at all?"

"Exactly."

"Mad!" said Racke. "I'm not staying here to listen to a lunatic wanderin' in his mind!"

Blake grasped Arthur Augustus by the shoulder and shook him forcibly. There was a howl from Gussy.

"You uttah ass! You have made me dwop my eyeglass! Mind you don't twead on my eyeglass, you fellows——"

"Will you tell us what you mean?" shrieked Blake. "Are you trying to pull our leg, you chump?"

"I have told you, Blake."

"How could you have seen Racke in Figgins' study in the New House, you frabjous ass, when you were in this House?" raved Blake.

Arthur Augustus started.

"Bai Jove! Haven't I mentioned that I saw him thwough Skimmay's telescope?" he asked innocently.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Through Skimpole's telescope?" repeated Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! I ought to have mentioned that, first, of course," said Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to cackle at, deah boys. You see, Skimmay was fixing up his telescope to look ovah the

woof of the New House, and I was helpin' him. I was just lookin' thwough it while Skimmay fixed it. I saw Figgay's study window, just as you fellows did the othah night, you know, when Skimmay fancied that he had spotted the man in the moon——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see, the telescope was lookin' wight at Figgay's study window, and I saw Wacke come into Figgay's study, switch on the light and dwaw the blind," said Arthur Augustus. "Aftah the blind was dwawn I could not see any more, of course. But as Wacke has denied goin' into the New House at all——"

Aubrey Racke made a rush to escape.

He understood now, as all the fellows did. With all the care he had taken, with all his cunning caution, he had never dreamed of this—he had never given a thought to Skimpole's astronomical stunts, and assuredly never dreamed for a moment that he had been spotted from the telescope at Skimmy's study window.

But he understood now—and he rushed for the doorway. Half a dozen hands grasped him and dragged him back.

"We've got it at last!" said Blake. "Even Gussy comes to the point at last, if you let him run on long enough."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"So it was Racke!" said Tom Merry, with a grim look at the cad of the Shell.

"Racke!" said Figgins, with a deep breath. "This is the rotter's revenge, I suppose, for what he got the other day—setting us to punch one another for nothing."

"Setting you, you mean," grunted

Tom. "If you'd had the sense of a bunny-rabbit——"

"Look here——"

"Well, you look here!"

"Oh, don't begin again!" exclaimed Blake. "You've given Racke enough entertainment as it is, I should think."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, that's so," said Tom, with a laugh.

Figgins & Co. looked very contrite. Their leg had been pulled, and they were sorry; but their regret did not mend the damaged noses and other features of the Terrible Three. Neither did it mend their own.

"We—we're sorry, you chaps!" stammered Figgins.

"We were taken in," said Kerr. "We really ought to have known that you fellows wouldn't rag a man's study in that way. Sorry!"

"We take it back!" said Fatty Wynn. "After all, you've given us as much as we've given you."

"Let it go at that," said Tom Merry. "But as for Racke—Racke, you unspeakable toad——"

"Leave him to me!" said Figgins. "You fellows stand round and see fair play, and leave him to me."

"Done!"

Aubrey Racke during the next ten minutes had the time of his life. It was a fight with Figgins, or a ragging from all the fellows present; and Racke chose the lesser evil.

But by the time George Figgins had finished with him Racke was wondering dizzily whether it was, after all, the lesser evil of the two.

Seldom had a fellow been so thoroughly licked.

"We'll call in at Racke's study as we go!" said Figgins.

"Do!" grinned Tom Merry.

"I say, that's my study, too, you

know," said Crooke, in alarm. But Crooke was not heeded.

There were sounds of havoc in Racke's study when the New House trio got busy there. Probably Crooke's property suffered a good deal as well as Racke's. That could not be helped. Certainly by the time Figgins & Co. went back to their own House the study looked quite as dismantled as Figgy's. And Aubrey Racke, when he crawled dismally into his wrecked study, realised—as he had sometimes realised before—that the way of the transgressor was hard.

"It was Skimmay, weally, you know!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy told his chums.

And the fellows admitted that really it was Skimmy. But for Skimpole and his telescope Racke indubitably would have been successful in his cunning scheme and would have escaped scot-free.

Certainly Skimpole himself did not attach any great importance to the incident. He was still in hopes of discovering a new star or spotting the personal habits of the man in the moon. Possibly he might have done so but for a trifling shortage of cash when the instalment on the telescope was due to Messrs. Blankley.

In what Skimmy could only regard as a spirit of sordid greed Messrs. Blankley took away the telescope upon which the genius of the Shell had not paid the instalments; which put an end to the career of Skimpole as a star-gazer. No new star had been discovered, the habits of the man in the moon remained a mystery, but Skimpole returned to entomology and found solace therein.

THE END



A JOLLY CHRISTMAS YARN IN SHORT SPASMS

By PETER TODD (*of the Greyfriars Remove*)

THE FIRST CHAPTER THE ROAD TO CHUNKLEY'S

CHRISTMAS! That's a magic word to everyone, and we at Greyfriars are no exception. Christmas finds us all excited and keenly looking forward to the good things in store. Especially Bunter! When Bunter thinks of turkeys, mince pies, cakes, hams, etc., he wonders why we don't hold Christmas all the year round.

On the last half-holiday before we break up we nearly all visit Chunkley's Stores in Courtfield, where Christmas always sets in with unusual severity. They hold what they call a Stupefying Christmas Bazaar. There, surrounded with coloured lights, Christmas trees and giant crackers, you can buy

your presents from Father Christmas himself, complete with good quality sledge and real live reindeer!

There's only one drawback. Chunkley's prices make fellows turn faint. They don't faint, of course—because Chunkley's would charge a bob for a glass of water to revive them—but they feel like it. Still, at Christmas we all have plenty of tips from aunts and uncles, so we can afford to shop at Chunkley's—just for once!

On our last "halfer" we all made our way by bus, bike or Shanks's Pony to Courtfield. There was a light powdering of snow on the road and a slate-coloured sky overhead. Harry Wharton & Co., the Famous Five, made their way across Courtfield

Common by "leap-frogging" in high spirits. Billy Bunter toiled behind, trying to borrow fourpence for bus fare.

"I say, you fellows," he wailed, "I'm going to meet my Uncle George. He's in Courtfield this afternoon on business, and he wants to buy me a Christmas present. It's bound to be a whacking feed in Chunkley's tea lounge."

"Uncle George will need to be a millionaire to feed you in Chunkley's," snorted Johnny Bull.

"I believe he is," replied Bunter carelessly.

"Oh, my hat!"

"I haven't seen the old codger for years and years, because he's been living in Egypt, but all the family are millionaires, of course."

"Ha, ha! Of course!"

"Well, look here, you fellows! If you lend me fourpence for the bus, I'll invite you to my spread at Chunkley's. Uncle George is bound to do the thing handsomely, and you chaps can't afford to tea in Chunkley's. Only well-to-do people like Bunters can do that."

"Oh jiminy!"

"What do you say, old fellows?" asked Bunter.

"Rats!" replied the five with one voice.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Out of the way, you fags!" came the crisp commanding tone of Horace Coker, the fathead of the Fifth. He was striding by with his pals, Potter and Greene.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "Race you to Courtfield, Coker!"

Coker disdained to heed. He was deep in conversation with Potter, and treated mere Remove fags as the snow beneath his feet.

"Yes," he was saying, "I want

to buy a new football in the Sports Department——"

"Eh?" gasped Wharton. "Why do you want a football, Coker? Do you know somebody who plays the game?"

Potter and Greene suppressed a chuckle. Coker's idea was that he was the star footballer of Greyfriars. That idea was unique in the school. Everyone else regarded Coker's footer as the funniest thing out.

"You cheeky fag!" bawled Coker, stung to retort. "My hat! I—I'll——"

The Remove juniors passed on, grinning. Coker's eyes gleamed at them. There were drifts of snow in the ridges of Courtfield Common. Coker bent over and began to knead a large snowball.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Follow your leader!" he said.

He dashed up to Coker, put his hands on Coker's back and neatly leap-frogged him. One after the other, Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh followed. Coker was petrified. His face wore an extraordinary expression. Remove fags had actually dared to treat him as the "frog" in leap-frog. Coker wondered dizzily why the skies didn't fall.

But, though bad began, worse remained behind. Loder of the Sixth was striding along the Courtfield Road. Loder was an ill-natured fellow at the best of times, and he had an especial "down" on Coker, who had often made him look a funk—prefect though he was. He treated Coker to a heavy frown.

"Dash it all, Coker," he snapped, "haven't you any better sense than to play leap-frog in public with a gang of scrubby little fags? You, a Fifth Form man——"

"I—I—I——" Coker stuttered with fury, trying to say eleven things at once.

"That's enough!" replied Loder sharply. "Behave yourself in future. I shall keep an eye on you, Coker!"

Loder swung on his way. The Famous Five and Bunter had also vanished. Coker stood quite still, speechless with rage. The idea that he, Horace James Coker, the most Fifth Formy of all Fifth Formers, had condescended to play leap-frog with fags nearly drove Coker out of his mind.

For a long moment he stood there while rage deprived him of the power of movement. Then Skinner, Snoop, and Stott, the three black sheep of the Remove, came along.

"I hear Chunkley's have a sale in their Tobacco Department," Skinner was saying. "Cigarettes goin' cheap, you know. We might buy enough to last us over Christmas. Why, what—what—— Yaroooooh!"

Coker jumped at them like a tiger. Skinner & Co. had absolutely nothing whatever to do with Coker's misfortunes, but that didn't worry Coker. They were Remove fags, and that was good enough! He landed out fiercely, and the three gay dogs were distributed over the hard earth, roaring.

"There!" panted Coker, as he rolled them in the snow. "That's for belonging to the Remove. And if you don't like it, you can pass it on to Wharton's lot when you see them. Come on, Potter! Come on, Greene! Let's go and look for Loder!"

The three Fifth-Formers went on, leaving Skinner & Co. to sort themselves out dizzily and vow the most terrible vengeance. Fisher T. Fish,



Bob Cherry dashed up to Coker, put his hands on Coker's back, and neatly leap-frogged him.

the Transatlantic junior of the Remove, came jerking along in his hustling fashion. He grinned at Skinner & Co.

"Say, you guys look sorta used up!" he chuckled. "Been in a rookus with Coker? I'll tell a man, you came out at the little end. Hear me smile!"

Skinner and his pals exchanged glances. They couldn't pass Coker's gift on to the Famous Five, but Fishy was there, and Fishy was asking for it. They could pass it on to Fishy, and they did!

Fisher T. Fish stopped smiling as Skinner up-ended him, and Snoop and Stott crashed their boots on his bony form.

"Yarooooh! Thunder! Wake snakes!" howled Fishy, as he smote the County of Kent with a sickening thud. "Let up, you jays! I guess I'll make potato-scrappings of you—Whoop!"

"Now smile again, you bony freak!" growled Skinner. "Come on, you men!"

Skinner & Co. went on their way feeling a little better. They left Fisher T. Fish feeling a lot worse. But nobody really cares how Fishy feels, anyway.

Now, as it happened, the fellows who took part in this little scene on Courtfield Common were all actors in various dramas which were played in Chunkley's Stores that afternoon. So let's go into Chunkley's and see what happened to them.

And, first of all, we'll take the lift to the Sports Department.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

SPORTS DEPARTMENT

"**T**HERE they are!" breathed Horace James Coker, in accents of pure hatred.

Coker was looking over a large stock of footballs. Potter and Greene were waiting patiently for him to select the ball with which he would not play for Greyfriars or anyone else next term.

Potter and Greene, as a matter of fact, were not at all keen on shopping with Coker. Chunkley's was a select establishment, and Coker had been known to kick up shindies in such places, regardless of staring eyes.

But Potter and Greene bore it manfully. After his shopping expedition



"There!" panted Coker, as he rolled Skinner & Co. in the snow. "That's for belonging to the Remove!"

Coker was going to stand them tea in Chunkley's lounge, and Potter and Greene were deeply interested in that part of the proceedings.

They exchanged a resigned look as Harry Wharton & Co. trooped into the big Sports Department. Bob Cherry wanted to buy a pair of ice skates, and his chums were ready to help him to choose. Coker's eye glittered at

them. After the deep and inexpiable insult offered him on Courtfield Common, Coker was really ripe for anything.

"I—I say, Coker," murmured Potter, as the Famous Five went along to the other end of the department, "I say, don't start a row in here."

"No, for goodness' sake, Coker!" implored Greene. "Leave 'em till we get back to Greyfriars."

"So I can't play football, eh?" hissed Coker, glaring at Harry Wharton's back. "By Jove, I'll show that cheeky young sweep if I can play football. When I land this football on his ear, he'll think again!"

Watched in petrified amazement by his chums, Coker placed the football on the floor, ready for a free kick. The idea that anyone—even Coker—could kick footballs about Chunkley's Stores chamed Potter and Greene to the floor in horror. Too late, they awoke to movement. Before they

could interfere, Coker had landed a terrific kick on that football.

Plonk!

The football flew.

To Coker's astonishment, it did not fly at Harry Wharton. There was really no chance of that, because Coker was aiming at him. The ball never went where Coker aimed it.

Instead, it flew diagonally across the room and landed squarely on the head of a man who had just bustled out of the jewellery department.

"Whoooooop!" roared the man.

He sat down, dazed.

The Famous Five stared blankly at Coker, while Potter and Greene, gasping, slid out of the room and disappeared. Tea or no tea, Potter and Greene were through.

"You silly ass, Coker——"

"You shrieking dummy, Coker——"

"The fatheadedness of the ridiculous Coker is terrific——"

"What did you do it for?" howled Bob Cherry.

Coker was rooted to the floor in horror. Even Coker would not have kicked that football if he hadn't been quite, quite sure of landing it where he wanted it. He had been quite, quite sure—and this was the result.

"Oh, corks!" he gasped.

The manager rushed up to Coker, who stared

at him, now red-faced with dismay.

"My dear sir——" chattered the manager. "My dear sir, a thousand thanks!"

"Eh?" gurgled Coker.

"Such presence of mind!" beamed the manager. "Naturally our house-detectives cannot watch everyone in such a crowd as this. I suppose you spotted him putting those rings in his pocket, and immediately kicked a football at him to prevent him getting away with the plunder."

Coker gasped and gurgled.

"You have saved us from a heavy loss," went on the manager. "Pray allow me to present you with the football, free of charge. You deserve it for your great presence of mind."

He bustled away to escort the ring-remover to the arms of the police. Coker stared after him with an expression almost of stupefaction

on his face. While from the Famous Five came a hilarious yell:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER STATIONERY DEPARTMENT

FISHER T. FISH was hoarse with wrath and anxiety. He held a Christmas card in a trembling hand, and pointed a bony finger at a small pencilled price in one corner.

"Can't you read, doggone you?" he howled.



Plonk! The football flew. But it never went where Coker aimed it. Instead, it landed squarely on the head of a man who had just bustled out of the jewellery department.



"Pray allow me to present you with the football, free of charge," said the manager to Coker. "You deserve it for your great presence of mind."

"I guess it's marked here three-ha'pence, and you've charged me two-pence for it. You figure I'm gonna let you cinch that extra ha'penny? Not so's you'd notice it. I'll mention that I'm waiting right here for a ha'penny change. You hear me yawp?"

It was impossible to avoid hearing Fishy yawp. His agitated voice rang through the room and attracted the attention of a crowd of shoppers. Fishy cared nothing for that. He had been done—he, a spry galoot raised in Noo Yark, had been cheated out of a ha'penny. But if Chunkley's thought they were getting away with that, Fishy would like to be there to see them do it.

"The pencilled price is an error, sir," replied the assistant smoothly. "We have no cards at three-halfpence. Twopence is the cheapest."

"Come off the roof!" snapped Fishy. "Hyer it is, in black and white—three-ha'pence. I guess that

goes. Come across with that ha'penny and I'll scam."

The assistant bowed and went away. She did not go away to get Fishy's halfpenny. She went away because she had had enough of Fishy.

Fisher T. Fish waited with grim determination.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

TEA LOUNGE

"Oh, lor'!"

William George Bunter spoke those words from the bottom of his fat heart. He had reason to groan—lots of reason.

Uncle George, whom he had not seen since a child, proved to be a brown-skinned, wrinkled, crusty old gentleman, armed to the teeth with a thick rattan walking-stick. His long residence in Egypt had given Uncle George a liver. He glared at his nephew Billy in a very disturbing way.

"I desire to buy you a small Christmas gift, William," rapped Uncle George. "A very small Christmas gift. Nothing too expensive—I am not made of money. I suggest a book—a cheap book—of adventure."

Billy Bunter repressed a snort. He could not eat books of adventure. His rosy dreams of a grand spread in Chunkley's tea lounge fell to earth with a thud. He had pictured Uncle George as a jolly red-faced Uncle, bulging with banknotes. The grim reality almost overcame Bunter.

"Wh-what about a new bike, Uncle?" he ventured. "I could do with a new bike——"

"Nonsense!" yapped Uncle George. "I am not a millionaire. I saw in the window some fountain pens at two-and-sixpence each—quite good enough for school use. Would you like a fountain pen, William?"

Bunter wouldn't. He steered Uncle George past the fountain pens and landed him in the Camera Department. Chunkley's had a grand display of cameras, from mere toys at five guineas to cine-cameras at one hundred and fifty pounds. Bunter blinked at them. He did not want a camera, but he could sell such a thing to Fisher T. Fish for a tenth of its value.

"I—I say, Uncle—I'd rather like a camera——"

It was a tentative shot, but it told.

"Certainly, William, if you prefer it." Uncle George marched to the counter. "I wish to buy a camera. You have some small pin-hole cameras in the window at two-and-sixpence each. One of those will be suitable."

Evidently two-and-sixpence was Uncle George's top price.

"Beast!" hissed Bunter under his breath.

He accepted the camera with a grunt of thanks. Then he steered Uncle George into the tea lounge in a last despairing effort.

"Would—would you like a feed after your journey, uncle?" he ventured hopelessly.

Uncle George glanced at his watch.

"I cannot stop, William. I have an appointment with a lawyer at four-thirty. I will leave you here until I return——"

"Eh?"

"You may make a light meal while I am gone—a very light meal. A cup of tea and a mince pie should be ample. I will pay the bill when I come back."

"Oh, crikey!"

Leaving Bunter alone in Chunkley's lounge was like leaving a tiger in charge of an infants' school. The cup of tea and mince pie vanished almost

before Bunter knew they had arrived. Strictly speaking, Bunter had now only to wait for his uncle's return, but he considered that Uncle George could not object to just one more mince pie.

They were very nice mince pies. They were, in fact, delicious. Bunter could not quite say how it was he came to devour seven of them. The plain fact was that he did!

While thinking over this problem, he ordered some chocolate eclairs. He realised that he dared not run up a big bill for his uncle to meet, so he ordered some stuffed dates. He couldn't bear the thought of Uncle George getting busy with that walking-stick, so he ordered some Christmas cake.

When Bunter came to the surface again, he had accounted for not less than twenty-shillingsworth of food, and his appetite was as keen as ever.



"Can't you read, doggone you!" howled Fishy. "I guess this Christmas card's marked three-ha'pence, and you've charged me twopence for it!"

Twenty shillings! One pound! Bunter shuddered.

He eyed the good things on the counter with anguish, but he dared not go any farther. He had already gone too far.

"Oh, lor'!" groaned Bunter.

He sat shuddering, waiting for Uncle George.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

TOBACCO DEPARTMENT

"A TEN-SHILLING box of cigarettes, please."

Harold Skinner gave his order boldly. Chunkley's cigarettes were going at a bargain price—or what Chunkley's called a bargain price. Skinner, Snoop and Stott thought it a happy idea to take advantage of this fact to lay in their Christmas supply.

The assistant glanced inquiringly at Skinner.

"Are you over sixteen years of age?"

"Yes, all three of us."

This was deep of Skinner. Individually, none of them was sixteen, but collectively their ages certainly made a total of a lot more than sixteen. Snoop and Stott grinned as they heard their leader's reply.

The cigarettes were made into a parcel.

"Here, you fags!" Skinner & Co. turned to see Horace Coker come in. "Seen Potter and Greene anywhere?"

Coker was searching for his faithless chums, who had vanished since the football incident.

"No," growled Skinner, glaring at Coker vengefully.

Coker gave them a stern look.

"What are you in here for, you young sweeps?" he demanded. "Been buying cigarettes, eh?"

"Go and eat coke!" snarled Skinner.

That was enough for Coker. He charged across the room as the three Removites nipped out of the door. Coker hurtled after them.

Outside the door there was a grinding collision, as Coker met Loder of the Sixth amidships. Loder, as a matter of fact, was just dodging into the Tobacco Department to pick up some of that brilliant line of cigarettes himself. He sat down suddenly as Coker crashed.

"Yooooop!"

"Whooooop!"

"You—you dangerous idiot!" yelled Loder furiously. "You—hare-brained lunatic!"

"What did you get in the way for?" raved Coker.

Loder picked himself up, gasping, and gave Coker a fiendish glare.

"What are you doing in the Tobacco Department?" he rapped. "I warn you, Coker—come back! Coker!"

But Coker, after a fiery glare at Loder, had rushed away to find Skinner.

Loder was left gasping.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

TEA LOUNGE

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Bunter squeaked joyfully as Harry Wharton & Co. came into the tea lounge. The fat Owl of the Remove was racking his brains to find some way out of his terrible situation. He dared not let a bill of twenty shillings meet his Uncle George's eye.

Now he saw his way out. He would invite the Famous Five to a spread and then slide off, leaving them to pay the bill. Bunter had skill in such matters. He knew Wharton's lot would pay rather than face a row.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" boomed Bob

Cherry. "Going strong, old fat man?"

"Come and sit down, you chaps!" called Bunter cheerily. "Have tea with me. My treat, you know!"

"Can't afford it," replied Bob regretfully. "Only well-to-do people like Bunters can feed here."

"Ha, ha ha!"

"It's all right, you know," urged Bunter, fairly pulling Bob into a chair. "My Uncle George is paying the bill. He told me to invite any friends I liked."

"Where is your uncle, you fat spoofer?"

"Gone out to see some beastly lawyer. He's coming back to pay the bill. Sit down, old beans!"

Harry Wharton hesitated.

"Well, if you mean it, Bunter——"

"My dear chap, jolly glad to have you. That's all right."

"Well, then—thanks. My hat! Your Uncle George is a life-saver."

The Famous Five dumped a mound of parcels on the floor and waded in. Billy Bunter joined them. Since he was going to let them pay the bill, he saw no reason for not having a good feed.

Good things flowed to Bunter's table in a delicious stream. The bill went up by leaps and bounds, like a mountain goat. The Famous Five enjoyed that spread.

"I must say, this is corn in Egypt—seeing that we're all stony," grinned Frank Nugent.

Billy Bunter jumped—and choked.

"Groohooop!" he swallowed frantically. "S-s-stony! Did—did you say you were stony?"

"Busted to the wide!" sighed Bob Cherry. "We've spent all our tin on Christmas presents."

"The bustfulness is terrific," agreed Hurree Singh sadly. "The esteemed

money takes unto itself the wingfulness."

Bunter sat dumbfounded, glaring at the mound of parcels. It had not occurred to him that the Famous Five had spent all their money and were only passing through the tea lounge on their way out. Harry Wharton rose cheerily.

"Jolly decent of your Uncle George," he said. "Give him our thanks, old man—and tell him we'll give him a feed in the study if he likes to call at Greyfriars."

"Hear, hear!" agreed Johnny Bull.



"I cannot stop, William," said Uncle George. "I have an appointment with a lawyer at four-thirty. I will leave you here until I return. You may make a light meal while I'm gone."

The Famous Five moved away. Bunter said nothing. He couldn't. The power of speech was denied him. The idea that he had fed five fellows, as well as himself, at Uncle George's expense made the room swim before Bunter's eyes.

The position was growing desperate.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

STATIONERY DEPARTMENT

"Now then, what is the matter here?"

The manager had been sent for. He came bustling into the crowd around the stationery counter. Fisher T. Fish thrust a Christmas card under his nose.

"You see that card?" hooted Fishy.

"Certainly, sir. What is wrong with it?"

"See the price on it?" demanded Fishy. "Is that, or is that not, three-ha'pence? This dame allows that you ain't got cards hyer under twopence. I'm telling you, big boy, that this card sure is marked three-ha'pence, and



Good things flowed to Bunter's table in a delicious stream, and the bill went up by leaps and bounds. The Famous Five enjoyed that spread.

I'll mention I'm waiting for a ha'-penny change. Got that?"

"This is a twopenny card, sir."

"Can it!" howled Fishy. "Pack it up and sit on the lid! I'm waiting

right hyer till I get my just doos. Get that into your cabeza, will you?"

The manager bowed and went away. He also had had enough of Fishy.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

TEA LOUNGE

"Look here, we've got lots of money left. Let's have tea."

Harold Skinner was the speaker. Snoop and Stott looked doubtful.

"They charge you such a frightful lot in here," objected Snoop. "Let's go along to the Bunshop."

They were standing by a large palm-tree in Chunkley's tea lounge. A pair of big glasses gleamed round the palm-tree. Bunter had heard their words and they were music to his fat ears.

Bunter, in fact, was going to try it on again. If Skinner had lots of money he was the man to pay the bill.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo! There's a stray porpoise in here," remarked Skinner. "Get back to the Zoo Department before they miss you."

"Oh, really, Skinner! I say, you chaps, sit down! My treat!"

"Gammon!"

"Honour bright!" gasped Bunter eagerly. "I've had a whacking tip from my Uncle George—I told you I was meeting him. Sit down and have tea, old beans."

Skinner & Co. met each other's eyes. Everyone at Greyfriars had heard of Uncle George, the Egyptian millionaire—or so Bunter called him. It seemed a safe thing to Skinner.

"Let's," he said, and they sat down.

Bunter beamed. At last that troublesome matter of the bill would be settled. He would slide off in a

few moments and leave Skinner to pay. But first he took the chance to have a little more food.

The quartet, in happy spirits, wrought great havoc among Chunkley's delicacies, while the bill soared up like a rocket. But that happy meal was destined to have a sudden ending.

Coker of the Fifth strode into the tea lounge, still in search of Potter and Greene. His eye pierced through the room and rested on Skinner, Snoop and Stott. He strode across.

"So you're here, you cheeky young sweeps!" bawled Coker. "Well, I'm going to knock your heads together—see? That'll teach you to cheek a Fifth-form man."

"Look here—yarooooop!" yelled Skinner fiendishly, as Coker banged his head against Snoop's.

By way of rounding the thing off, Coker jammed Stott's head against Bunter's, and two more fearful yells rang through the lounge.

"Now," said Coker grimly, taking up Skinner's package, "I'm going to examine this."

"Leave that alone, you crass idiot!" howled Skinner.

Coker gave him a shove and he collapsed.

"I suspect you of buying cigarettes," he snapped, wrenching off the brown paper. "I intend to look into the matter."

"Can't you mind your own business?" grated Snoop. "You're not a prefect, you cad!"

Coker's brow darkened as he surveyed Skinner's cigarette bargain.

"Disgraceful!" he said. "My hat! You young sweeps want a jolly good thrashing. Well, I shall confiscate these cigarettes. I hope it'll teach you a lesson."

He put the package under his arm



Coker jammed Stott's head against Bunter's, and two fearful yells rang through the lounge.

and marched off. Skinner & Co. exchanged dazed looks.

"Ten bob's worth of cigarettes—and he pinches them!" raved Skinner. "He's not getting away with this. After him!"

Bunter jumped.

"I—I say, you fellows——"

"After him!" agreed Snoop, and the three rushed away, leaving Bunter quite pallid with anxiety.

Again his scheme had failed. Nine fellows had now fed at Uncle George's expense. At this rate, he would soon have stood treat to the entire school.

"Oh scissors!" moaned Bunter.

He almost collapsed into his chair.

THE NINTH CHAPTER

FRUIT DEPARTMENT

"COKER!" rapped Loder of the Sixth.

Loder was in the Fruit Department when Coker bustled in, still seeking Potter and Greene.



Skinner raised the orange and let fly. Squelch!
Right on the back of Coker's neck it burst.

"Don't bother!" yapped Coker peevishly. "Unless you've seen Potter and Greene. Have you?"

Loder's eyes gleamed at him.

"I spoke to you just now outside the Tobacco Department," he snapped. "I asked what you had been buying there. Are you going to answer me?"

"Oh, don't be a fool!" roared Coker, turning away.

Loder trembled with wrath. He would have loved to grasp Coker by the collar and force him to reply. Theoretically he was entitled to do so, as a prefect; but the trouble was that Coker might hit out. And no amount of punishment to Coker would mend Loder's broken nose.

Skinner peered round a mountain of ripe oranges. His eyes gleamed at Coker. Stealthily he took out sixpence and bought a couple of oranges from the assistant. Then, as Coker turned away from Loder, Skinner

raised an orange and let it fly. Squelch!

Right on the back of Coker's neck burst the orange.

"Bunk!" gasped Skinner. "Ha, ha, ha!"

The three young rascals, revenged at last, bunked.

Coker hardly knew what had happened. He felt something squash on the back of his neck and he clasped the place with both hands, letting out a yell of rage.

"Yaroooooh!"

Since Coker raised both hands to his neck, the package under his arm dropped to the floor. It dropped at Loder's feet and burst.

Loder had been grinning widely at the sight of an orange bursting on Coker's neck, but the grin faded when he saw a regular rain of cigarettes sprinkled over the floor from Coker's package. His eyes gleamed with triumph. Here was proof positive.

"Coker!" he gasped. "Cigarettes, by Jove! I knew it!"

"Who was it?" yelled Coker, as he clawed orange off his neck. "Who threw that orange? My hat! I—I'll——"

"Never mind the orange," grinned Loder. "I've got you on the hop! Look at those cigarettes! You can explain to the Head when you get back what you were doing with them, Coker."

And Loder marched away, leaving Coker to stutter and stutter with fury, as though he would never leave off stuttering.

Then Coker proceeded to wipe the remains of the orange from his neck.

It was really not a happy Christmas for the fool of the Fifth Form

THE TENTH CHAPTER

TEA LOUNGE.

"**A**ll, William! You may ask for the bill, my boy!"

Uncle George had returned.

Billy Bunter dared not look at him. The wretched Owl, slumped in his chair, yearned for the floor to open and swallow him.

Uncle George signed to the waiter, and the bill was produced. He glanced at it. Then he looked hard at it. Then he glared at it in utter stupefaction.

For two long minutes Uncle George's eyes were riveted to the bill as though it were the greatest natural curiosity in the world. Then he looked at Bunter.

"Thirteen pounds three shillings and tenpence!" breathed Uncle George.

Bunter shuddered. He tried to speak, but words failed him. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

"Two hundred and sixty-three shillings and tenpence—for tea!" breathed Uncle George. "William—is it—is it remotely possible that you have consumed this amount of provender at my expense? Is it within the remotest bounds of possibility that you have run up this enormous account for food? Answer me!" shrieked Uncle George.

Bunter tried to answer him, but his tongue wouldn't move. For ten seconds he gazed in horror at Uncle George. Then he spun round and fled for his life.

"Upon my word! William!"

But Bunter was not. He had stood not upon the order of his going, but had gone—like the wind!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

THE ROAD HOME

All good things come to an end. Through the darkness the school tramped back cheerily—or wearily—to call-over at Greyfriars.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Coker again!" chortled Bob Cherry gaily. "Merry Christmas, Coker! What about a game of leap-frog?"

Coker did not heed—did not even hear. He was treating Potter and Greene to words of burning eloquence.

"Me, you know!" he was roaring. "That rotten toad thinks I was buying cigarettes. Me, you know!"

"Too bad!" murmured Potter.

"I'm to be reported to the Head!" breathed Coker sulphurously. "Of course, I shall tell him I took them away from a fag—that's all right. But will all the fellows believe it?"

"Hardly," murmured Greene.

"If any chap mentions the words cigarettes to me," ground out Coker, "I—I'll scrag him!"

The three Fifth-formers faded away into the darkness of the Common. Harry Wharton & Co. grinned after them.



Roaring through the night like a Scotch express came Bunter, with Uncle George just behind, raining blows with a thick walking-stick on Bunter's ample frame.

"Poor old Coker!" chuckled Wharton. "I hear he made a dozen fearful shindies in Chunkley's this afternoon. Well, if a fellow will ask for it——" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Look out — here's Loder!" growled Johnny Bull. "The rotter looks pleased with himself. Let's dodge into the bushes and land a snowball on him!"

"Good egg!"

Which was duly done, and Loder, who had been smirking in a pleasant temper, went on his way scowling—in a very unpleasant temper indeed.

"Hallo, my esteemed Skinner!" greeted Hurree Singh, as the three black sheep passed. "Wherefore that wrinkled browfulness?"

Skinner slouched on without replying.

"I hear that brute Loder spotted the cigarettes," he was mumbling to Snoop. "That means Coker will be hauled on the carpet, and he'll have to say he took them from us. Ten to one we'll bag a licking from the Head."

Snoop and Stott nodded gloomily. Their only consolation was that, anyway, Coker had had the orange.

"Yarooooop! Whooooop! Moooh!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, startled.

Roaring through the night like a Scotch express came the fat figure of Billy Bunter. He was putting on a speed that was really amazing, and his yells echoed far and wide over Courtfield Common.

Just behind him raced the figure of Uncle George. A thick rattan walking-stick was raining blows on Bunter's

ample frame. Uncle George's stay in Egypt had evidently given him terrific energy, for he was racing like a greyhound and whacking like an automatic carpet-beater.

They vanished swiftly into the night, Bunter's ear-splitting yells growing fainter in the distance.

"Great pip!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Looks like trouble in the Bunter family circle. What's that fat frog been doing?"

"Whatever he's been doing, he's sorry for it now," chortled Johnny Bull.

In great spirits, the Remove chums went back to Greyfriars, and meeting Temple & Co., of the Upper Fourth, in Friardale Lane, a snow-fight was the order of the day. Then, loaded with parcels, they went into school, quite satisfied with their merry Christmas shopping expedition to Chunkley's.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER

CONCLUSION.

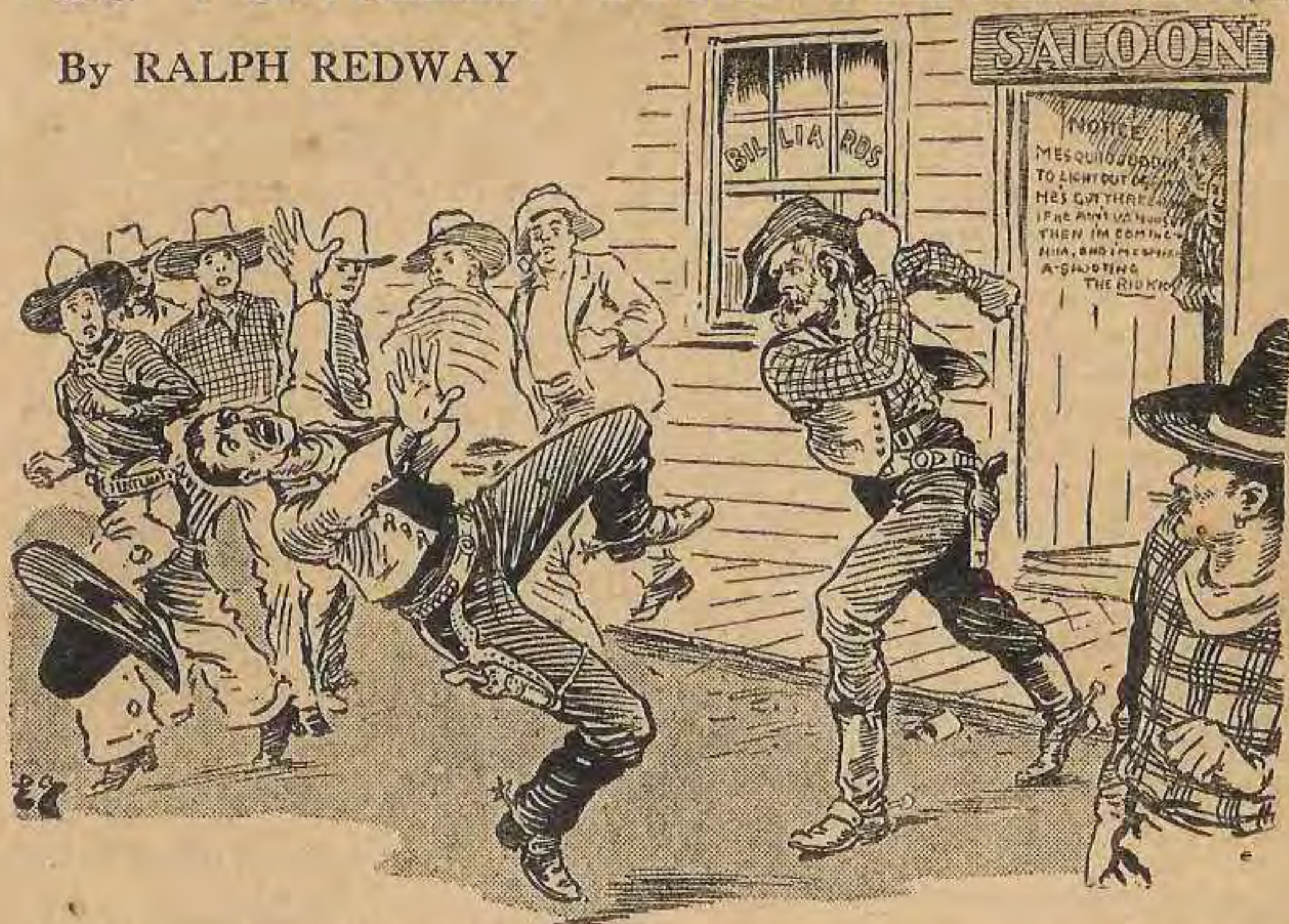
CHUNKLEY'S was dark and deserted. "The lights were fled, the garlands dead," as the poet puts it. The cheery shopping crowd had departed. The staff had gone home. One solitary light was left burning. One solitary assistant was still arguing with one solitary customer.

"I'm telling you for the fiftieth time," bawled Fisher T. Fish, "that I ain't going without my rightful doos. I allow I'm waiting for a ha'penny change. Aw, come on—a ha'penny won't break you! Gimme my change and let me scam!"

Fisher T. Fish was evidently going to spend Christmastime at Chunkley's!

The PUNCHER From PANHANDLE

By RALPH REDWAY



THE FIRST CHAPTER

THE GUNMAN FROM THE BRAZOS!

MESQUITE JUDD rode into the cow-town of Frio, he and his horse covered with dust from the trail. Men on the street of Frio stared at Mesquite as he rode by, his scarred face grim under his Stetson hat.

There were many in Frio who knew the gunman from the Brazos; none who knew any good of him. No man was his friend; many were his enemies. But if the Frio men stared they were careful not to give offence. Mesquite, who packed two guns, was a "killer" by

reputation, and not a man to seek trouble with.

Three or four men saluted him as he passed, and Mesquite acknowledged the salutes with a sardonic grin. He was well aware that they would rather have pulled a gun on him, had they dared. But pulling a gun on Mesquite Judd was one way of asking for sudden death. The gunman was hated and feared, but he could ride without fear through any cow-town in Texas.

Through the quiet street, thick with dust that blew in from the plains, Mesquite rode on his horse,

Mesquite Judd was dead sure he could rope in the Rio Kid and the one thousand dollars reward for the capture of the boy outlaw. But he reckoned without the puncher from Panhandle!

and stopped outside the sheriff's office on the plaza.

A little crowd was gathered there, staring at a bill posted on the wall. That bill announced the reward of a thousand dollars for the taking of the Rio Kid, dead or alive. It was signed by Jake Watson, the sheriff. Across a blank space was written another announcement in a bold, clear hand, evidently added overnight while the town of Frio was sleeping. It ran :

"Two thousand, spot cash, for the galoot who can do it !

"(Signed), THE RIO KID."

Mesquite grinned as he looked at it.

"I guess that kid's got some gall ! " he remarked. "This here town ain't got much sand to let a kid puncher twist its tail this-a-way."

Some of the crowd looked round angrily at that comment from a stranger. But the anger died out of their faces as they recognised Mesquite Judd.

"The Kid's sure got a heap of gall," said Poker Smith, of the Red Dog saloon. "I reckon he moseyed in hyer last night to stick that up. The sheriff will sure be mad when he sees it."

"A thousand dollars offered for that doggoned outlaw, and no galoot hyer with grit enough to rope him in ! " said Mesquite contemptuously.

"He sure ain't easy to rope in," answered Poker Smith mildly. "The sheriff and his posse was arter him up in the Huecas, but the Kid rung in a cold deck on them. It ain't so plumb easy, Judd."

"Not for this burg ! " jeered Mesquite.

"Mebbe you'd like to take a hand ! " said Poker Smith, as sarcastically as he dared.

"You've said it," answered Judd

coolly. "I guess that's why I'm hyer, feller."

There was a buzz in the Frio crowd as the gunman dismounted, hitched his pinto to the rack, and strode heavily into the sheriff's office. The news that Mesquite Judd, the "killer" from the Brazos, had come to town to "get" the Rio Kid rang through Frio like wildfire.

Sheriff Watson was there—with an arm in a sling, a gun on the desk before him. He turned a scowling face on the newcomer, and started as he recognised the gunman. His hand dropped on the gun on the desk.

"Forget it, sheriff," said Mesquite. "I sure ain't come hyer for gun-play, hombre."

"I reckon you've got gall to come hyer at all," snapped the sheriff. "Your sort ain't wanted in Frio, Mesquite Judd. I guess the sooner you hit the trail the better it will be for your health."

"I'm after the Kid."

"The Rio Kid ? "

"Sure ! "

Watson stared at him and withdrew his hand from his gun. His face was still scowling ; the scowl had seldom left it since the day the Rio Kid had come back to his own country. Bitter and deep was the humiliation of the Frio sheriff. The boy outlaw of the Rio Grande had defied him, defeated him, led him and his men into a trap in the sierra, contemptuously spared his life when it was his for the taking. There were murmurings in Frio and in the surrounding ranches. The Kid was too good for the sheriff, and with reckless defiance he still rode the trails untouched, and even ventured into the cow-town to carry his defiance to the sheriff's own door. The Frio sheriff's cup of bitterness was full to overflowing.

But he eyed the gunman doubtfully. Frio did not want a galoot of Mesquite Judd's calibre within its borders; and in other circumstances Watson would have warned him out of the town.

"What's your grouch agin' the Kid?" he asked, after a long pause.

Mesquite shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I guess I ain't got no kick coming, fur as the Kid's concerned. It's the reward I'm after. I heard about it down on the Brazos, and I reckon I've moseyed along to collect it. He's a Thousand-Dollar Kid now." The ruffian grinned. "That's my grouch."

There was another pause. The sheriff's whole nature was against having anything to do with the gunman, or speaking a civil word to him. But in the bitterness of defeat and

humiliation he put that aside. If Mesquite Judd could get the Kid, his visit was welcome.

"I reckon you've as much right to go after the Kid as any galoot in Texas!" the sheriff said at last.

"Sure!"

"The reward's there for the man that can get him," said Watson. "If you mean business, Mesquite Judd, I reckon you're free to camp down in Frio as long as you like. I guess I ain't picking faults in any galoot that trails the Rio Kid."

"That's hoss-sense," said Mesquite coolly. "The Kid seems to have got this whole country where he wants it. Down on the Brazos I reckon we'd have got him roped in and strung up afore he could say 'No sugar in mine.' You sure are peaceable galoots in this burg."

"Enough chin-wag," snapped the



Mesquite's hard, grim face grew mottled as he stared at the words chalked on the saloon door by the outlaw he was seeking.

sheriff. "I reckon you won't find it plumb easy if you go after the Kid. You're welcome to try. He's about as easy to find as a weasel, and as easy to catch if you find him. I reckon if you light on him it will be the last thing that will happen to you."

The gunman's eyes gleamed under his beetling brows, and his square jaw was thrust forward. His hand lingered over one of his low-slung guns. The sheriff stared at him steadily; he was not the man to be bulldozed in his own office by a gunman—even a killer of Mesquite's reputation. The threat in the ruffian's look had no effect on him.

"I guess I've pulled on a galoot for saying less than that, Jake Watson," said Mesquite at last.

"Forget it," snapped the sheriff. "Pull a gun here, Mesquite Judd, and you go into the calaboose so quick it will make your head swim. You ain't on the Brazos now."

Mesquite breathed hard.

"I ain't come here hunting for trouble," he said. "I'm after the Kid, and the reward. You put me wise where he was last seen, and I guess I'm hitting the trail to look for him."

"He was last seen up in the Huecas, twenty miles from here," said the sheriff. "He may be there or he may be at the street's end for all I know. He's got gall enough to ride into Frio in the daylight and shoot up the town. And if he does I reckon you won't stop him."

"You watch out and see!" snarled the gunman. "I've heered about that rookus in the Huecas—he got you and your men dead to rights, and sent you home afoot, with a bullet in your fin. There ain't a man in the Frio country can handle the Kid;

but I reckon I can work the raffle—I guess getting that kid puncher will be pie to me."

"Get on with it, then," said the sheriff grimly. "I'll sure be glad to hand over the reward if you tote the Rio Kid into town—dead or alive."

"Dead, I reckon," said the gunman coolly. "I ain't taking no chances, and when I get a bead on the Kid, it will be last sickness for him. Don't you figure on getting him alive to string up—you'll sure miss your guess."

"Dead or alive," repeated the sheriff.

The scowl on the Frio sheriff's face was less black when the Brazos gunman was gone.

His conscience troubled him a little for dealing with a man like the killer. But the Rio Kid had defied the law too long; he had defeated and humiliated the Frio sheriff too deeply. Any man that could get the Rio Kid was welcome to Jake Watson now.

And the sheriff stifled his conscience and waited eagerly for news.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

THE KID'S ANSWER!

ALL Frio watched Mesquite Judd during the next few days with breathless interest. The gunman loafed about town, chiefly at the Red Dog Saloon, where he had taken up his quarters. Every day he mounted his pinto horse and rode out on the trails; but he was generally seen at the Red Dog at night. His hard, bronzed face told nothing, and he was a man of few words. But day followed day and Mesquite had not succeeded in "getting" the Rio Kid. He was known to be as good a man on a trail as he was with a six-gun, but the elusive Kid left little trail to be followed. Indeed, many of the

citizens of Frio, and the punchers on the ranches, opined that if the Kid learned that the killer was on his trail, he would not avoid a meeting but would go out of his way to give Mesquite what he was asking for.

Desperate and dangerous as the gunman was, it was certain that the Rio Kid would not fear a meeting with him; likely enough that he might seek one. Frio was a rough town, and every man in Frio packed a gun; but Frio had its limit, and a gunman of Mesquite's reputation for ferocity was not liked or wanted there.

Had the sheriff given the word the Frio citizens would have gathered in force to run the killer from the Brazos out of town. But it was fairly well known that the sheriff was backing the gunman, or, at least, that he was willing to give him every chance to earn blood-money. And the Frio men were civil to a desperado whose guns had more than a dozen notches cut on them, every notch registering the death of a man.

Once the gunman was absent from town for three nights in succession, and all Frio waited breathlessly for news, many opining that Mesquite had found his man at last and that it was the Kid who had proved victor. But Mesquite rode back to Frio on the fourth day, grim and silent as ever, worn by hard trailing and evidently still unsuccessful.

Getting the Rio Kid was a tougher task than the gunman from the Brazos had figured. But he gave no sign of throwing in his hand. The "killer" could not afford to admit a defeat. He was there to rope in a thousand dollars for the Rio Kid, and he was there till he had done it.

The Double-Bar bunch, if when they rode into town they came on Mesquite, gave him grim looks. On

the Double-Bar Ranch the punchers remembered the Kid with an affectionate memory, and in the bunk-house there was a suggestion of riding into town in a body and stringing the Brazos gunman up to a branch.

But Old Man Dawney heard of it and intervened. In his own heart there was a soft corner for the Kid, but he would not have his bunch openly taking the side of an outlaw. Savage and ruthless desperado as Mesquite was, a reckless killer of men and a seeker of blood-money, he was standing for the law in his hunt for the Rio Kid. The reward of a thousand dollars stood officially offered for the boy outlaw, and it was open to any man in Texas to earn it if he could. But on the Double-Bar there was not a man who did not long to hear that the Brazos gunman had been found "shot up" on the trails.

And one afternoon as Bud Walsh, the foreman of the ranch, was riding an outlying range by the upper waters of the Rio Frio, thinking of the Kid and wondering how a galoot could get a word of warning to him, he sighted a rider in the post-oaks and waved his hat in greeting, and the Kid came galloping out of the scrub to meet him.

Handsome and sunburnt, cheery and fresh as ever, the Rio Kid sat the saddle of his grey mustang with the black muzzle. He grinned at the ranch foreman.

"You ain't pulling a gun, Bud?" he chuckled.

"I guess not," said the foreman.

"You ain't honing to handle a thousand dollars?" grinned the Kid.

"I guess there's a man in town honing for it," said Bud. "What are you doing here, Kid?"

"Looking at the old range," answered the Kid. "I was raised

hyer, and I reckon, if I ride ever so long a trail, I'll always come trailing back some time to the Double-Bar ranges. I reckon I was sure glad to see you from the post-oaks, Bud."

"I'm sure glad to see you, Kid," said the Double-Bar foreman. "I guess the best advice I can give you is to hit the trail out of the Frio country pronto."

"Sheriff Watson on the warpath again?" grinned the Kid.

"Nope. He's laid up for a piece, since you winged him in the Huecas. But there's a new man in town; you've heard of Mesquite Judd?"

"I sure have," said the Kid. "Seen him once down in the Brazos country. A bad man, Judd."

"He's after your scalp."

"Sho!" said the Kid.

"It's the reward he's honing after," said Bud. "Kid, he's a bad man, is Judd, and he's killed more galoots than he's got fingers and toes. I guess I ain't no slouch with a gun, but I look another way when I come on Judd in Frio. I don't want any trouble with him, Kid. That wolf will get you, soon or late, if you hang on in the Frio country. You sure want to hit the trail for New Mexico, or the Panhandle, till he gets tired and pulls out."

"What's his grouch against me?"

"Blood-money," said Bud briefly. The Kid's eyes gleamed.

"I guess I'll give him a chance to earn it," he said.

"Kid," said the foreman of the Double-Bar earnestly, "give it a miss. That galoot Judd is bad medicine. I guess you're a galoot to whip your weight in wildcats; but Mesquite Judd is a killer, and he's lightning on the draw."

"I ain't jest slow myself," grinned the Kid.

"He'll get you, Kid, if you hang on," said Bud. "I tell you, there's some tough galoots in Frio, but they speak soft when Mesquite is around. He's bad medicine."

The Kid smiled.

"I'll sure give him a chance," he said. "No man is going to hunt the Rio Kid and brag that I'm dodging him So-long, Bud! It won't do you no good if you're seen chewing the rag with an outlaw."

"So-long, Kid!"

The Rio Kid rode away and disappeared into the post-oaks. Bud Walsh rode on his way with a thoughtful brow. He had given the boy puncher a friendly warning, but he wondered whether he might not have done more harm than good. He guessed that the Kid was more likely to seek Mesquite Judd than to avoid him now that he knew that the gunman was hunting him.

In Frio that night some wakeful citizens heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs in the shadowy streets; but it was not till morning that the cow-town knew that the Rio Kid had come—and gone. On the door of the Red Dog Saloon, when Poker Smith opened it, a chalked inscription was to be read, and in half an hour all Frio had read it and commented on it, and when Mesquite Judd came to look at it a breathless crowd watched him.

"The Kid's been in town," said Poker Smith.

Mesquite's hard, grim face grew mottled as he stared at the words chalked on the door by the outlaw he was seeking.

"NOTICE.

"Mesquite Judd is warned to light out of Frio pronto. He's got three days. If he ain't vamoosed by then,



Crack! Swift as the gunman was, the old-timer was swifter. Two reports roared like one. The Stetson hat spun from the old-timer's head, but Mesquite Judd suddenly crumpled up.

I'm coming to see him, and I'm coming a-shooting.

"THE RIO KID."

Black as midnight grew the brow of the killer as he read that defiance. All eyes were on him; some of the crowd were grinning. But the grins died from their faces as Mesquite looked round. From face to face the gunman's cold, hard glance passed, and all eyes dropped before his. He was seeking one man who would venture to mock or to give offence; and if he had found one Mesquite's gun would have seen play in the street of Frio. But there was no man in the cow-town who cared to take up the unspoken challenge. Voices died away and there was a dead silence till the man from the Brazos spoke.

"You, Poker Smith, you reckon the Rio Kid put that up?" he asked.

"Sure," answered the saloon keeper.

"You reckon he was in town last night?"

"Sure."

"You reckon he'll keep his word?"

"The Kid ain't never broke his word, Mesquite."

The gunman knitted his brows.

"I reckon he'll break it this time," he said. "He don't dare to ride into Frio, except at night, sneaking in like a coyote in the dark. He don't dare to come a-shooting."

"To-day's Monday," said Poker Smith. "If you're here on Thursday, Mesquite, the Kid will come, and he will come a-shooting."

"You reckon so for sure?"

"Every galoot in Frio will tell you the same."

The gunman laughed grimly.

"I'll sure be at home when he calls," he said.

And he turned away. Later in the morning came Sheriff Watson, his arm still in a sling; and the sheriff read that chalked notice with bitter joy in his eyes. Mesquite might doubt, but the sheriff of Frio did not doubt; he knew that the Kid would keep his word if he had to ride through a hundred foes armed to the teeth. The sheriff, writhing under defeat and humiliation, saw light at last.

That day he was busy, and the following days. By Wednesday the sheriff's plans were laid and carried out. In the street of Frio armed men loafed and lounged, tried men that the sheriff could trust, men who were quick to shoot and ready to shoot. When Thursday dawned, the last day of grace for Mesquite, the sheriff and his men were watchful as lynxes.

All Frio believed that the Kid would be as good as his word; all Frio believed, knew, that he would come to seek the Brazos gunman as he had declared that he would. And all Frio knew that he could never get away alive. Whatever might be his luck in a shooting-play with the Brazos killer, he could not escape the sheriff. Once he was in the town he would be surrounded, shot down without mercy if he resisted arrest, and the long trail would be ended.

That day at early dawn men were riding into Frio from all sides. The news had spread far and wide—all along the Frio and the Pecos it was breathlessly discussed in ranch and bunk-house. Every puncher who could get away from the ranges rode into Frio that day.

The plaza swarmed with punchers

in Stetsons and chaps; the Red Dog saloon overflowed with a buzzing crowd. Every man who rode in was scanned by a hundred pairs of eyes lest he should be the Rio Kid.

At what hour the Kid would come no man knew or could guess, but that he would come all were certain. Among the crowd moved the sheriff's men, alert, watchful, hand near gun, watching for the handsome, reckless Kid.

At his office sat Sheriff Watson, grim, patient, relentless, with half a dozen of his men loafing on the benches outside ready for his call, ready for action at the first rumour that the Kid was in town or had been seen on the trails.

Outside the Red Dog saloon, cool, grim, silent, lounged Mesquite Judd. He had not gone—he had not thought of going. He was waiting for the Rio Kid to keep his word.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

THE OLD-TIMER!

THE old-timer who dismounted at the Red Dog in the hot afternoon, looked as if he had collected most of the dust on the prairie trail. His horse was a mustang, with white muzzle and white stockings; a handsome, sinewy animal. But the old-timer himself looked as if he had survived from the old days before the Mexican War. His face, brown as a berry, was thick with a grizzly beard and grey moustache; his Stetson hat was a dusty rag, and ragged grey locks escaped from under it. His buckskin clothes were old and worn, and covered with dust; his spurs were red with rust. He packed a gun; but if his gun was anything like the rest of him, it did not look like being of much service.

He hitched the white-muzzled

mustang to the rack, and stared at the buzzing crowd that swarmed outside the saloon. So many horses were hitched there that there was scarcely room for another. Horses were tethered everywhere in Frio that day; the cow-town looked as if half the population of the county had ridden in. And the old-timer stared in surprise under his shaggy grey eyebrows.

"Say, what's the rookus?" he inquired, addressing nobody in particular. "Is it a necktie party to-day, fellers?"

Some of the crowd grinned at him. Many an old-timer wandered into Frio at one time or another, but this specimen was the rustiest, dustiest specimen the Frio men had ever seen.

"Ain't seed the Kid on the trail, have you, old-timer?" asked two or three voices.

The old fellow blinked at them.

"What kid?"

"The Rio Kid, you durned old hobo," said Euchre Dick. "Ain't you heard that the Rio Kid is expected in town to-day?"

"Oh, that goldarned young firebug," said the old-timer. "Has the sheriff got him at last, then?"

"Nope!"

And as the old-timer seemed unaware of the thrilling happenings that impended, a dozen pilgrims obligingly gave him the news. The old-timer listened with interest.

"That Kid is sure some firebug," he said. "I reckon he will keep his word, you 'uns."

"That's what we all reckon."

"And the sheriff won't give him a chance to vamoose this time, I reckon," said Santa Fé Sam, of the Bar-io, "I'll tell a man. Jake Watson's got twenty men watching for him, and when the Kid moseys in, it will be him for the long jump."

"Sho!" said the old-timer. "That don't seem fair play to me, fellers, if he's coming in for gun-play with a galoot what's hunting him."

"You bet the sheriff ain't losing a chance like this," chuckled Euchre Dick. "The Kid's asking for it this time, and you can bet that he will get it right where he lives."

"And when is he a-coming?" asked the old-timer.

"Nobody knows—but he'll come."

"He'll sure come," said Santa Fé Sam. "The Kid's a galoot of his word. He warned Mesquite to quit, and Mesquite ain't quit. The Kid will come a-shooting before the day's out."

There was a roar down the street, an alarm that the Rio Kid was seen. There was a rush of the crowd. But it was a false alarm; the man riding in was only a puncher from the Cross-Bar Ranch. The old-timer stood leaning on the wall of the saloon, watching the excited crowd with interested eyes. His eyes turned from the buzzing throng to the hard-faced gunman who lounged near the door.

Mesquite Judd was there, and he was ready. His low-slung guns had been hitched forward, ready to his hands; his keen, deep-set eyes were alert.

If the Kid came—or when he came—it was doubtful whether he would get as far as gun-play with the man from the Brazos; for the sheriff's men had orders to seize him at sight, and to shoot him down without hesitation if he offered resistance. The instant the Kid was seen riding into Frio, guns would be levelled; and as nobody expected him to surrender, all Frio expected to see him fall riddled with bullets.

Mesquite Judd, threatened with the loss of the blood-money he sought if the Kid fell into the sheriff's hands

without his assistance, only hoped that he would be the man to pull trigger first on the boy outlaw.

The old-timer watched him quietly for a few minutes. The crowd came surging back to the Red Dog; the Kid was not seen yet. Many believed that he would not come till night had fallen; in the dark he would have more chance of getting away again—though the chance would be slight enough. The old-timer entered into the incessant talk that was going on in the crowd outside the saloon. Like most old-timers, he was talkative; and he confided to uninterested ears that his name was Buck Davis, and that he was called Panhandle Buck, because he had punched cows along the Panhandle in the days of his prime.

"How long ago was that, old-timer?" grinned Santa Fé Sam.

"I sort of disremember," said the dusty old puncher. "But it wasn't so long ago as you might calculate. I reckon I ain't so old as I look. But I can tell you 'uns one thing—I don't think any great shucks of this town, or of the galoots in it. You let a gunman like Mesquite Judd bulldoze you all he wants. I reckon if this was a white man's town that all-fired scallywag would be fired out of it so quick it would make his head swim."

There was a sudden hush. The taunt was irritating enough to the men of Frio; and it was uttered loudly in full hearing of Mesquite Judd, who was leaning on the wall of the saloon only a few yards from the old-timer as he spoke.

Mesquite looked round with a gleam in his deep-set eyes. But he gave a shrug of contempt as he saw who the speaker was. That grey-bearded puncher was not worth his powder and shot.

"You want to watch how you

shoot off your mouth hyer, you durned old fool!" said Santa Fé Sam. "That's Mesquite jest yonder, and if he got mad with you I reckon you'd never know what hit you!"

Panhandle Buck glanced round.

"Where's Mesquite?" he demanded, in a loud voice. "If that gunman has got all you galoots cold, he ain't got me cold, and don't you forget it! I'm spry an' ready to tell a hound like Mesquite Judd that I sure reckon he's a scallywag and a murderer, and if he don't like it I've got a gun hyer ready to back it up!"

"Oh, shucks!" gasped Euchre Dick.

The whole crowd gasped. For the moment even the Rio Kid was forgotten, and all attention was fixed on the dusty old cowpuncher who hurled that reckless defiance at the killer from the Brazos feared by every man in Frio.

Mesquite drew himself from the wall of the saloon. His dark, hard face was darker and more savage. He made a stride towards the old puncher.

"I guess I'm Mesquite Judd, you old rat of the desert!" he said grimly. "You got anything more to say?"

And the Frio crowd looked on, expecting to see the old-timer wilt and back away in fear from the anger he had roused. But the puncher from the Panhandle did not move.

"You Mesquite, are you?" he said. "You the killer that ought to have been strung up down on the Brazos? Yep! I got some more to say. I'll tell the world, if this town had any gall they'd take you and hang you on the nearest cotton-wood, for the murdering coyote that you are, Mesquite Judd."

The hand of the gunman moved to his gun. But instead of touching it he clenched his fist.

A moment more and the puncher

from the Panhandle would have been hurled into the middle of the street by a crashing blow.

But that blow was never delivered.

With an activity surprising in one who looked so old and grey, the Panhandle puncher side-stepped, closed in on the gunman, and struck. And there was a gasp from the Frio crowd as Mesquite Judd went staggering back, to fall at full length on the earth.

knocked down by the puncher from the Panhandle. He lay dazed; and the Frio crowd gazed on almost in terror. It was certain that there would be shooting now; and the old-timer would be filled with holes as soon as Mesquite got to his gun.

In the wild excitement of this new episode no one thought of the Rio Kid—the boy outlaw might have ridden into Frio unnoticed at that



Jake Watson stood rooted to the floor, staring at the words. "The Kid!" The sheriff of Frio found his voice. "Who gave you this note?"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

SHOT FOR SHOT!

"GEE-WHIZ!"

The whole crowd gasped; and as they gasped they backed rapidly out of the line of fire, for shooting was certain.

Mesquite Judd lay at full length—

moment. The man feared by all the cow-town, the man reputed a ruthless killer, the man who was never known to miss his aim, had been knocked down by the old puncher, and lay panting in the dust. The old puncher from the Panhandle had recklessly evoked the trouble that every man in

Frio had been careful to avoid. And he did not seem alarmed. He was standing at ease, his hand near his gun, watching the man from the Brazos like a cat, evidently ready for what would follow. Old-timer as he looked, there was more "sand" in him than in any man in Frio.

Mesquite staggered to his feet. The look in his deep-set eyes might have made any man tremble. The old-timer grinned at him.

"You Mesquite," he jeered. "They say the Rio Kid has warned you to vamoose the ranch, and you sure better hit the trail while you're healthy. If the boys hyer ain't got enough sand to handle you, I guess I'm the galoot to do it; and if you want gun-play, you doggoned gink, I'm your mutton, with the wool on!"

Mesquite gave him a murderous look.

"You're sure goin' to get gun-play old-timer, whether you want it or not," he grated between his teeth.

The breathless crowd surged farther back. Mesquite had not reached for a gun yet—but it was coming. He backed away a few paces, his eyes on the man from the Panhandle, watching him like a cat. The old-timer backed away in his turn. Neither had he reached for a gun; but under his shaggy brows his eyes were keenly alert.

There was a pause; and the silence that fell on the swarming crowd in the plaza of Frio was like death. Every man knew that when Mesquite Judd reached for a gun his movement would be like lightning, and that swift movement would be followed instantly by a rain of bullets, riddling the man who had recklessly defied him. The pause was counted by seconds, but the seconds seemed like hours to the crowd staring on with bated breath.

There was a sudden, tigerish move-

ment of the gunman; his gun was in his hand.

Crack!

Swift as he was, the old-timer was swifter. Before the gunman's hand came up to the level, a revolver appeared as if by magic in the old-timer's hand, and was turned instantly into a stream of fire and smoke.

The two reports roared like one; but one was a fraction of time the quicker.

The tattered Stetson spun from the old-timer's head and dropped behind him.

Mesquite Judd was seen to stagger. Then suddenly he crumpled up and rolled on the earth.

There was a breathless yell.

"Mesquite's got his!"

"Great snakes!"

The old-timer picked up his hat, and grinned at the bullet-hole in the tattered brim. Mesquite lay where he had fallen, his hand still grasping the Colt that he was powerless to use again. A surging, swarming crowd surrounded the old-timer—the dusty old puncher from the Panhandle, the only man ever known to beat Mesquite Judd to the draw.

"Gee-whiz!" Poker Smith glared breathlessly from the doorway of the Red Dog. "Mesquite's got his! Say, old-timer, I reckon you was some gunman in your time!"

"I reckon so!" assented the old-timer, with a grin. "I sure reckon I'm some gunman still, feller."

"Mesquite won't never get the Rio Kid now!" grinned Euchre Dick.

"He sure will not!" said the old-timer.

And at that mention of the Rio Kid the crowd remembered for what they had gathered there, and eyes were turned again on the street and the trail. The Brazos gunman, desperately wounded and almost unconscious, was

carried into his room in the Red Dog ; the old-timer slipped away quietly in the crowd.

Outside the sheriff's office the sheriff's waiting men stared at the old-timer, who came loping up on his mustang with the white muzzle and the white stockings. They grinned at the dusty old-timer ; but they grinned with respect—they had to respect the man who had faced the dreaded gunman from the Brazos, and shot him up.

" Say, fellers," drawled the old-timer, " is this here shebang the sheriff's office ? "

" You've said it, old 'un ! " answered Poker Pete.

" Sheriff at home ? "

" Yep."

" I kinder reckon I've got a note for him," said the old-timer, fumbling in his ragged shirt, and drawing out a folded paper. " There's news in that letter, feller, about the Rio Kid, that young firebug that Jake Watson is horing to get. You hand that note to the sheriff."

Poker Pete took the folded paper, and the old-timer rode swiftly out of the town, and, once on the open trail, spurred his mustang to a racing speed.

Sheriff Watson unfolded carelessly enough the paper that Poker Pete handed to him. But when he glanced at it a sudden change came over his face, and he gave a gasping cry. Only a few words were written on the paper :

" I've sure kept my word, sheriff ! You want to send for another gunman."

" THE RIO KID."

Jake Watson stood rooted to the floor, staring at the words. For the moment he seemed paralysed. Poker Peter looked at him in wonder.

" The Kid ! " The sheriff of Frio found his voice. " Who gave you this note ? Where is he ? After him——"

" I guess it was the old-timer that shot up Mesquite Judd——"

" It was the Kid ! " roared the sheriff, mad with fury. " Follow me ! Shoot him on sight ! "

He choked with rage as he rushed from the office into the street.

" The Kid ! "

The word passed from mouth to mouth. Up and down Frio men sought the old-timer—the grey-bearded puncher from the Panhandle—out on the prairie trails, horsemen swept at full gallop, gun in hand. Like wildfire the news ran and buzzed through Frio. The Rio Kid had kept his word ; he had come—and he had gone. But Frio had not known him when he came—they knew who the old-timer was only when he had gone.

There was mounting in haste in Frio, running and riding, wild spurring on all the trails that led from the town ; but at sundown weary horsemen came loping in, unsuccessful. The Rio Kid had kept his word, and that day he had ridden into Frio and faced his enemy there and beaten him ; but the boundless prairie had swallowed him up again, and the sheriff raged and raved in vain.

Afar in the trackless chaparral, the Rio Kid had stripped off the disguise that had hidden his well-known handsome face from hundreds of eyes that knew it well, and washed the paint from the legs and muzzle of the grey mustang. Out on the darkening plain he could hear the distant, echoing thunder of galloping horses ; and he laughed as he heard it. The reward was not yet earned for the Thousand-Dollar Kid !

THE END

INDEX

	PAGE
Billy Bunter's Burglar! Story by Frank Richards	13
Billy Bunter's Busy Day! Story by Frank Richards	91
Bunter's Love Lament. Poem by the Owl Himself.. .. .	138
Christmastide at Chunkley's. Story by Peter Todd	205
Day in the Life of Billy Bunter, A. Full-page cartoon	90
Determinist's Diary, The. Poem by Herbert Skimpole	89
Duffer's Diary, The. Poem by Peter Cuthbert Gunner	73
Greyfriars Fragments. Poems by Bob Cherry	76
Jimmy Silver Does the Trick! Story by Owen Conquest	139
Moat House Mystery, The. Story by Charles Hamilton	27
Modern British Army in Action, The :	
Armoured Cars	49
Field Artillery	61
Mechanised Cavalry	189
Royal Tank Corps	117
Searchlight Unit	175
Troop-carrying Plane	129
My Tour of Trouble. By the Editor	8
My Worst Moment :	
Gay Dog Locked Out, A. By Cyril Peele	159
Somebody's Aunt! By Monty Lowther	23
Walking the Plank! By Tom Brown	135
Notes for New Boys. Article by Peter Todd	25
Old Boy Remembers, An. Article	74
Plates in Colour :	
The Gunman's Challenge!	<i>Facing page 80</i>
The Spectre of the Moat House!	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Puncher from Panhandle, The. Story by Ralph Redway	219
Skimpole the Star-Gazer! Story by Martin Clifford	161
Slot-machine Education. Article by Monty Lowther	137
Snowbound! Story by Martin Clifford	77
Tale of a Topper. Poem by Monty Lowther	12
Who's Who at Greyfriars. Puzzle Poem	26