

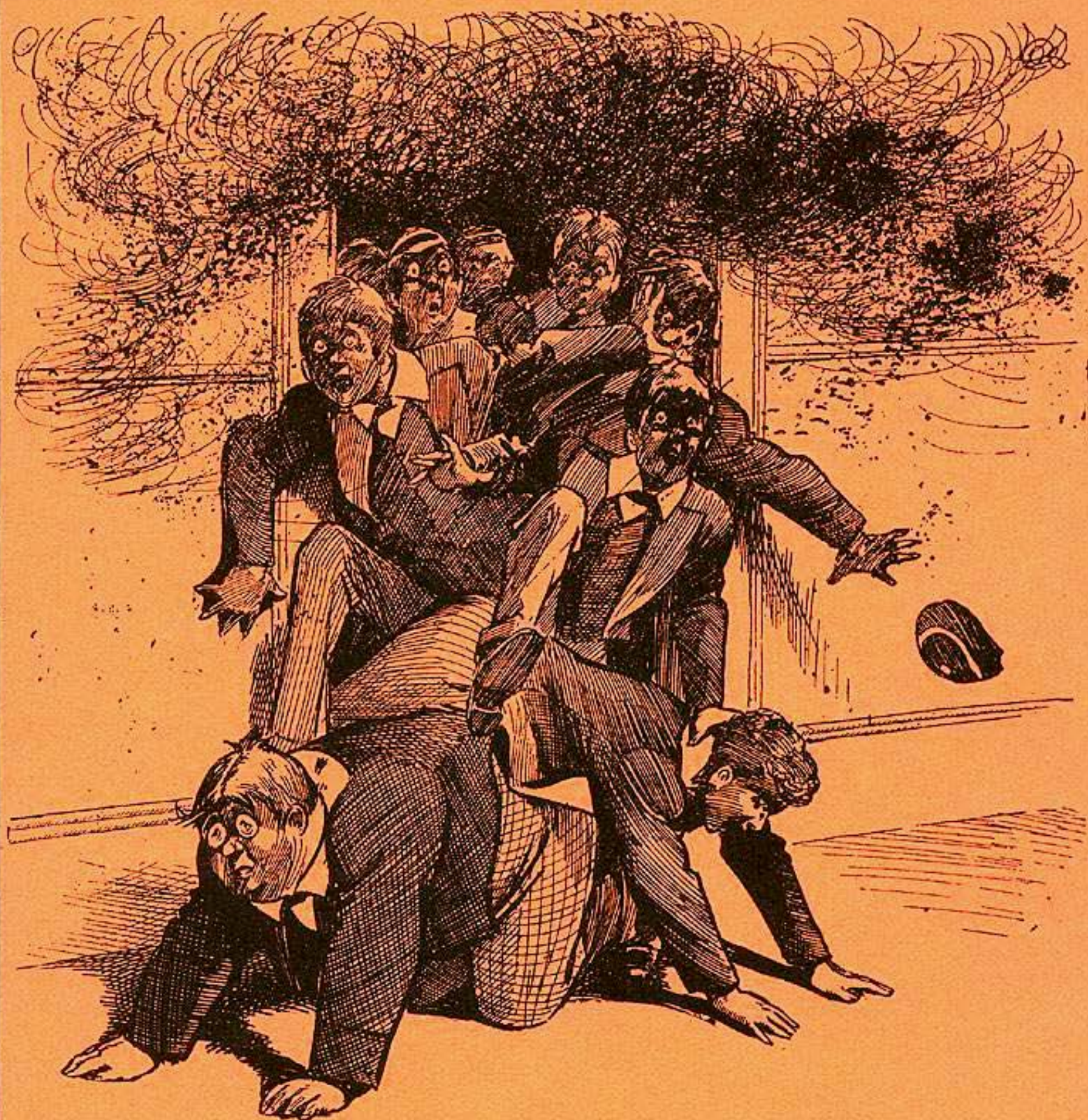
"HARRY WHARTON'S PERIL."



No. 126 |

Grand, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

| Vol. 4.



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Harry Wharton's Peril

**A Thrilling, Long, Complete
School Tale of
the Juniors of Greyfriars.**

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Man in the Hedge.

"**G**REAT Scott!" Harry Wharton uttered the exclamation suddenly, and let the paper fall from his hands. For a moment there was a change of colour in his cheek. Frank Nugent and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh lowered the glasses of ginger-beer they were just lifting, and stared at their chum in astonishment. Bob Cherry almost bolted a chunk of toffee, and began to choke. "Great Scott!" repeated Harry. And after a moment he added: "My only hat!" He picked up the newspaper again and stared at it. It was

an "Evening News," two days old by the time it found its way into the quiet corner of the country where Greyfriars School was situated.

The chums of the Remove at Greyfriars were sitting outside the village tuckshop, resting after a walk, and refreshing themselves with ginger-beer before tramping home to Greyfriars. The dusk was falling on the quiet old village, and the deep leafy lanes.

Harry Wharton had picked up the newspaper idly, and glanced at it as he sipped his ginger-beer. It had been left there by someone who had finished with it. Wharton was far from expecting to see anything in that particular copy of the "Evening News" to specially interest him.

But it was the unexpected that happened.

"By Jove!" he said, as he scanned the paragraph again.
 "I wonder if it's true!"
 "Groo—groo—groo!"
 "What's the matter, Bob?"
 "Groo! The t-t-toffee! I'm chok-chok-choking!"
 "Thump him on the back, Nugent!"
 "Certainly!" said Frank Nugent.

And he did.
 "Oh!" roared Bob Cherry. "Oh! Groo!"
 Thump, thump!
 "Yow! Leave off! Groo! It's all right now! Yah!"
 Thump, thump!
 "You ass! Chuck it!"
 "Better make sure," said Nugent, with friendly solicitude. "Another thump or two—"

"You frabjous ass! Stop it!"
 Bob Cherry seized a ginger-beer bottle, and Nugent ceased his friendly attentions. Bob gasped for breath, more breathless from the thumping than from the toffee.

"What's the news?" said Nugent, glancing at Harry.
 "You may as well tell us, if Bob's done. Are you done, Bob?"

"Groo! Yes, ass!"
 "Go on, Harry."
 "It's a paragraph in the 'Evening News'—two days old," said Harry Wharton, looking at the date on the paper. "It's about somebody we know."

"Oh! Any friend of yours arrested, or anything?" asked Bob Cherry.

Wharton laughed.
 "No. Do you remember the time we were carried away in the balloon, when Snoop cut the rope, and sent us adrift?"

"Not likely to forget," said Nugent, sipping his ginger-beer. "Nothing about the balloon there, surely!"

"You remember the chap who got into the balloon, and made us cross the Channel in it," went on Harry; "chap named Lagden—a forger, escaping from the police."

"Yes. He was taken, so it was all right. Wasn't he sent to Portland?"

"Yes."
 "Well, he's as safe as houses," said Bob Cherry.

"He's escaped?"
 "What!"

"That's what it says here," said Harry. "I'll read it out; there's only a line or two. 'Lagden, the notorious forger, who escaped from Portland yesterday, has not yet been recaptured. The police are on his track. He is supposed to have made for the North, and is being searched for closely in Somersetshire and North Devon. The arrest of the convict is hourly expected.'"

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "I knew he was a deep rotter. Fancy his getting away from Portland. I thought that was a thing that only happened in novels."

"But that paper's two days old," said Nugent. "He's been recaptured, I expect. They say it was hourly expected."

"They say so," agreed Wharton.

"And the police are on the track, too."

"The police are always on the track," Wharton remarked.

"I've noticed, though, that when public interest in a case has died out, it turns out that the police have lost the track."

Nugent grinned.
 "Yes, that's so. Another bottle of ginger-pop, Uncle Clegg."

"Yes, Master Nugent."

"Same here," said Bob Cherry. "What are you looking so serious and solemn about, Harry? You don't think we shall see anything of the Lagden chap, surely?"

Wharton knitted his brows.

"You remember what he said when the police took him away," he replied. "He put down his arrest to us, and he was right, too. He meant to get even, if he could; and he said he would. He was the kind of man to do it."

"But we're hundreds of miles away from Portland," said Bob Cherry. "If he's still free, he's got all his work cut out to keep free, without thinking of us."

"Yes, but—"

"And the paper says he's made for the north, not the east."

"They mayn't know where he is."

"True; but—"

"He's had time to get here, if he liked," said Harry.

"And this place is so far from the prison, that it would be a safe place for him to hide in. He might get a chance here of getting across the North Sea, too. And—"

Wharton paused.

The young captain of the Greyfriars Remove was far from being nervous, and he was not afraid of Lagden or anybody else; but he could not help feeling a shadow, as it were, fall upon him when he knew that the desperate man was free again.

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NEXT WEEK: "BOB CHERRY'S BENEFIT."

"You think he'll look for us," said Bob.
 "If he gets a chance, yes—for me, at least. He seemed to put it all down to me."

Bob grinned.

"Well, you were head-cook-and-bottlewasher in the whole business, you know."

"I'm not sorry for it," said Harry. "The man was an utter villain, and if I got a chance I'd help to get him seized now. At the same time, I think we ought to keep our eyes open. I know he's a man who'd stop at very little. I don't mean to say I think he'd risk his neck. I don't think so. But he'd do anything short of that to be revenged upon us, I'm quite certain."

"The certainfulness is terrific!" said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Wharton rose to his feet.

"Time we're off!" he remarked. "I'm glad I saw this paper. We can be on our guard now. I'll get another as soon as I can, and see if there's any news of him."

The juniors settled with Uncle Clegg, and walked out of the village on the road to Greyfriars.

They had left it a little later than they had intended, and the dusk was deepening quickly, and they had to walk very fast to get to the school before locking-up.

They were about half way down the lane, when Wharton suddenly stopped, and a wave of pallor swept over his cheek.

He was staring intently at a gap in the hedge.

"What's the matter?" cried Bob Cherry.

Wharton pointed.

From the shadow of the hedge, dimly seen in the dusk, a face was looking at the juniors—a face with clear-cut, keen features, glittering eyes—clean-shaven, and with close-cropped hair.

One look was enough for the Greyfriars juniors.

In a moment the face had vanished.

But, momentary as the glimpse of it had been, deep as the dusk was in the hedge, the juniors had recognised the features.

"Lagden!" muttered Nugent.

Wharton plunged into the gap.

But the man was gone.

A shadow seemed to flit for a moment in the deep dusk of the trees, and then it vanished. Wharton stopped, biting his lip. Pursuit was evidently useless.

The juniors stepped back into the lane. Their faces were serious enough now, and a little alarmed.

"It was Lagden!" muttered Bob Cherry.

Wharton nodded.

"Yes, he has not been recaptured, you see; and he is here!"

"Here—for us!"

"Why else?"

"You're right. My hat, it's a serious business!"

The four chums tramped on towards Greyfriars College.

They did not speak as they went, but they thought the more.

Lagden, the escaped convict, was lurking in the vicinity of the school, and that fact meant danger for Harry Wharton & Co.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter is Hospitable.

"I SAY, you fellows—"

Billy Bunter met the chums of the Remove as they came in. They were just in time before Gosling locked the gates.

Bunter blinked at the juniors through his big spectacles.

The fat junior was too short-sighted to notice that there was anything amiss. He trotted alongside the Famous Four as they crossed towards the School House.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, giving the Owl of the Remove a slap on the back that made him stagger.

"Is that you, Bunter?"

"Ow!"

"What's the matter?"

"Yow! You've nearly busted my shoulder-blade, you ass," said Bunter. "I—I'm feeling very faint."

"Lie down, and have a rest, then," said Bob kindly.

"We're going in to calling-over, but you can suit yourself."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Time we were in, too," said Harry. "Buck up!"

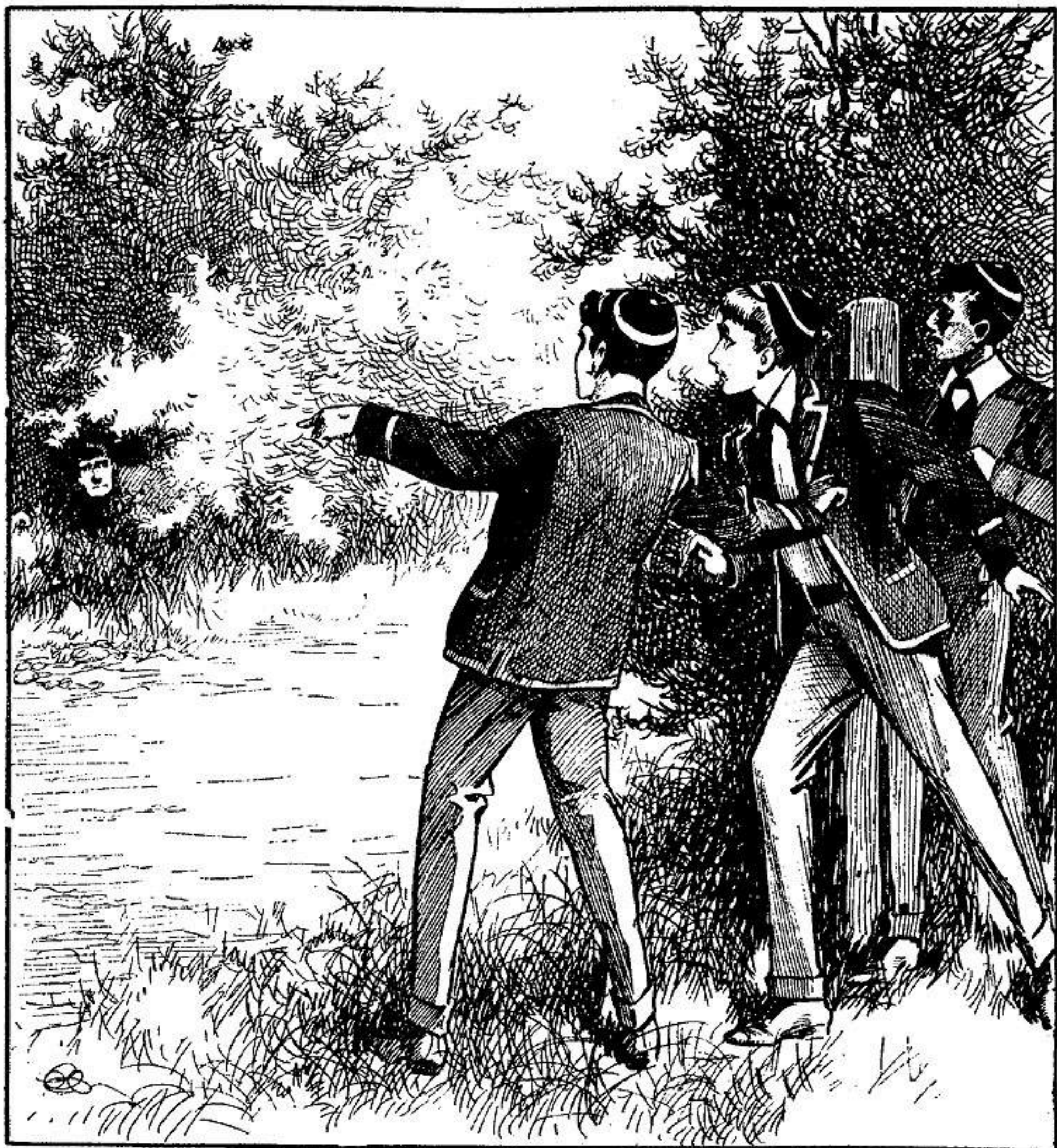
"I say, you fellows," said Bunter, keeping pace with the juniors with some difficulty, his fat little legs going like clock-work. "I thought you'd be hungry when you got in, so I've arranged to have some tea ready."

"Well, that's jolly thoughtful of you," said Nugent.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Oh, really, Nugent, you know I'm always thinking of others. It's worrying over other people that's making me thin."

A Splendid School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
 By FRANK RICHARDS.



"Look!" gasped Harry Wharton. From the shadows of the hedge, dimly seen in the dusk, a face was looking out at the juniors. It was Lagden, the escaped convict.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. I'm losing flesh, and it's a serious matter. I suppose you wouldn't like me to fade away under your eyes."
"I shouldn't mind."
"Look here, what about the tea? I suppose you're hungry."
"Pretty sharp set," agreed Nugent.
"The sharp-setfulness is terrific."
"Well, I—I wish you wouldn't hurry like that, it—"
"Calling-over, ass!"
"Yes, but—"
"Buck up!"

The juniors hurried into the hall. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, was calling over the names, and the chums were just in time. They answered "adsum" in their turn, and then they were free to go. Billy Bunter pulled at Harry

Wharton's sleeve as the captain of the Remove came out into the passage.

"I say, Wharton, that tea—"
"Well, I'm ready for it, for one," said Harry.
"What-ho!" remarked Nugent emphatically.
"Cherry had better come, too," said Bunter. "He's not in our study now, but I should like him to come. It will feel like old times to have Cherry to tea."

Bob Cherry stared blankly at the fat junior. He had never dreamed that Billy Bunter was capable of feeling either friendliness, or the influence of old associations.

"Hang it all, that's decent of you, Bunter!" he exclaimed. Bunter blinked at him.

"I mean to be decent," he remarked. "I've always liked you, Cherry. You've never done me justice, but I'm used to

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NEXT
WEEK:

"BOB CHERRY'S BENEFIT."

A Splendid School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS

that. Nobody at Greyfriars really understands a chap like me. Look here, are you coming to tea in No. 1 Study?"

"Yes, rather."

"What do you fellows think of tea and ginger-beer for the drinks, and ham and cold beef——"

"Ripping!"

"And poached eggs on toast, and sausages——"

"Splendid!"

"To be followed by jam roll and cream puffs."

"Gorgeous!"

"You like the idea?"

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"But where are you getting the tin?" demanded Wharton.

"I suppose you haven't been robbing a bank?"

"Oh, really——"

"Have you had a postal-order?" grinned Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was expecting a postal-order this morning," said Bunter, blinking at them. "There has been some delay in the post, though, and it hasn't arrived. It will be along this evening, I expect."

"Case of great expectations," Bob Cherry remarked.

"If we're not going to have the tea till the postal-order comes, we'd better get some bread and cheese," Nugent remarked.

"Oh, really——"

"Then it doesn't depend on the postal-order?"

"Certainly not."

Bunter walked on ahead and opened the door of the study. The chums of the Remove followed him in.

They looked round the study.

After Billy Bunter's hospitable words, they expected to find the table laid, and a feast all ready for the eating.

They were disappointed.

The table was adorned with books and papers, as usual, and there was no fire, and no kettle singing.

So far as the juniors could see, there was no sign of a feed.

They stared at Billy Bunter. The fat junior blinked at them.

"Well?" said three voices, in grim inquiry; and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh remarked, in his peculiar English, that the "wellfulness was terrific."

"Isn't it ready, Bunter?"

"Where's the tea?"

"I haven't got it yet," said Bunter.

"Then you're going to?"

"I hope so."

"Then buck up."

"We're hungry."

"The hunger is terrific."

"You see, you fellows——"

"Produce the feed, you fat fraud!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Yes, of course; but——"

"Well, where is it?"

"You—you see," stammered Bunter, "owing to the delay in getting my postal-order, I—I shall have to ask you chaps to advance me the cash. It will be only for a few hours, as I shall settle up as soon as the post is in."

The juniors glared at him.

"It's simply a temporary loan," Bunter hastened to explain.

"There are lots of fellows who would advance it to me, but I prefer to ask my own personal friends."

"You fraud!"

"You fat sweep!"

"Oh, really, you fellows——"

"Then there's no feed!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Not yet. You see——"

Harry Wharton burst into a laugh.

"What asses we were to be taken in by Bunter!" he exclaimed. "As if he'd stand anybody a feed! Let's go down to Mrs. Mimble's and have some bread and cheese. That's all the funds will run to at present."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Rats!"

The juniors tramped downstairs again, and made their way across the Close to the tuckshop kept by Mrs. Mimble, the gardener's wife. Billy Bunter followed them, toddling along with his little fat legs.

The fat junior looked deeply injured.

If Bunter believed in the postal-order which never came, he was the only fellow at Greyfriars who did.

Mrs. Mimble served out bread and cheese, and Billy Bunter calmly helped himself, without waiting for the formality of an invitation. He also allowed himself the consolation of grumbling at the fare.

"I suppose you mean to finish up with tarts, Wharton?" he remarked.

"No, I don't."

"I don't see how I can feed on this stuff. You know I've got a delicate constitution, and I can really only keep going at

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all by taking plenty of nourishment," said Bunter. "You'll be sorry some day, when I fall down and expire before your eyes."

"Sorry you didn't do it sooner, you mean," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I'm in a very weak condition now, and I shouldn't be surprised if I died in my bed one night," said Bunter pathetically.

Bob shook his head.

"No such luck," he remarked.

And Billy Bunter, after that, bolted bread and cheese in silence. He felt that his pathos was simply wasted on fellows like Bob Cherry.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Physical Exercise.

HARRY WHARTON made his way to Mr. Quelch's study as soon as he had finished his bread and cheese. He felt that it ought to be known that the escaped convict Lagden had been seen in the neighbourhood, and the Remove-master would know what steps to take in the matter. He tapped at Mr. Quelch's door, and the Form-master gave him a cordial nod as he entered.

"I wanted to see you, Wharton," he remarked. "I had something to say to you. You remember the convict Lagden, who was arrested partly through you?"

"Yes, sir," said Harry, with a little start.

"He is at liberty now. He has been three days free, and the police do not seem to have any immediate prospect of recapturing him. It is extremely unlikely that he will come in this direction, but knowing the malice he appeared to feel towards you, from what you have told me of your adventure, I think you should be on your guard—at least, until the police have found him."

"Thank you, sir. I came to speak to you about that man."

"Indeed!"

"I saw in a paper to-day that he was free, sir, and as we came back from Friardale we saw him in the lane."

Mr. Quelch started.

"You saw him—Lagden?"

"Yes, sir. That is what I came to tell you. I suppose the police should know, so that they can look for him here?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Quelch. "If he is here, that is a valuable clue for the police. But are you certain, Wharton?"

"Quite certain, sir."

"You say you had just been reading about his escape in the paper?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did the thought strike you that he might come here?"

"Yes, I confess it did."

"Ah! Then is it not possible that you were deceived, Wharton? It is an important statement to make to the police, and you must be quite sure you were right."

"I am quite sure, sir. It was dusk in the lane, and I only saw him for a moment, but I am quite sure it was Lagden."

"Were you alone?"

"No, three others were with me, sir, and they all knew the man."

"Then I suppose it is correct. Thank you for telling me this, Wharton. I will telephone to the police-station in Friardale at once, and they will communicate with the authorities."

"Very well, sir."

"And remember my warning, Wharton. If it is certain that he is in this neighbourhood, it is more than ever necessary for you to take care. You will not go out of the school alone until we hear that this man is recaptured."

"Very well, sir." And Wharton quitted the study.

Mr. Quelch went to the Head's study to use the telephone, and in a few minutes the local police-station in Friardale was made aware that Lagden the forger was in the neighbourhood, and very shortly afterwards it was known at Scotland Yard, in London.

Harry Wharton did not give the matter much thought. Villain as Lagden certainly was, and revengeful as he was, Wharton did not believe that he would run great risks for the sake of his revenge. His chief object must be to obtain a disguise and money to effect his escape, and he was not likely to run extra risks in seeking out the Remove of Greyfriars.

And Wharton, as a matter of fact, had other matters to think about now. Funds were low in No. 1 Study, and it was yet early in the week. There were no remittances to be expected until Saturday. Wharton sometimes had tips from his uncle, but Colonel Wharton was now in Switzerland with his sister, and that source of supply was temporarily cut off. Even Hurree Singh, who was usually rolling in money, was a victim of the general dearth. As Harry had a great objection to borrowing money outside the study, the chums of Study No. 1 had fallen upon days of scarcity.

Nugent and Hurree Singh were in the study, beginning their

prep., when Harry Wharton joined them. Billy Bunter sat in the armchair, looking very discontented.

"It's all right," said Harry. "Quelch is telephoning the police. Lagden will be looked for. I don't think we need bother our heads about him." And he sat down at the table.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Cheese it! Why don't you do your prep.?" demanded Nugent. "You'll get a ragging from Quelch, as usual, to-morrow morning."

"I'm too hungry."

"Poof!"

"I haven't strength enough. If you chaps won't stand me anything, I shall have to look elsewhere," said Bunter, with some dignity.

"Do," said Nugent, with a yawn.

"Don't be an ass, Billy," said Wharton. "We're down on the rocks ourselves."

"You could wire to your uncle for some money," said Billy Bunter, as if struck by a sudden inspiration. "He's still in Lausanne, and he—"

"I could, but I'm not going to."

"He could send you a cheque, you know, as he can't get English postal-orders over there, and—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Yes, I'm likely to wire to my uncle for a cheque because you're hungry, Billy," he remarked. "Very likely—I don't think."

"I'm getting into a very low state. You wouldn't like me to have a serious illness, I suppose?"

"Rats!" said Nugent, rising from the table. "What you really need is plenty of exercise! If I were to chase you round and round the table with a ruler—"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"I'm going to try it, anyway."

"Oh—"

"Jump up!"

"I—I'm too weak!" moaned Billy Bunter. "I couldn't move from this chair if a tiger were to come into the study. I'm in a state of fearful and awful exhaustion owing to want of proper nourishment."

"Get up!"

"Impossible! I feel that I should faint if I were to move."

Nugent picked up the ruler, and made a pass at Bunter as if he were fencing. The fat junior yelled and squirmed out of the armchair just in time.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton. "You can move, you see."

"Ow! Oh, really—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow! Leave off! Groo!" gasped Billy Bunter, as Nugent lunged at him, catching him upon his plump ribs.

"Yow! Yoop!"

"My dear chap, you need exercise. I'm going to exercise you. Now, run for it!"

"Yow—ow— I c-c-can't Yow!"

Bunter said he couldn't, but he did. He ran round the table as Nugent lunged at him with the ruler, and he ran as if he were on the cinder-path. Bunter really had a very good turn of speed when he needed it. He needed it now. Nugent was lunging mercilessly, and the ruler was hard and heavy.

Bunter yelled wildly as he ran.

"Yow! Ow! Stop! Yowp! Groo! Yah! Oh!"

Wharton and Hurree Singh stood aside at the wall to allow room for Bunter's exercise. Nugent, laughing almost too much to run, chased him round the table again and again. Whenever he was close enough he rammed the hard ruler upon Bunter's ribs.

"Yaroooh! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter made a sudden rush for the door, threw it open, and tumbled headlong into the passage. A roar of laughter followed him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come back!" roared Nugent.

Bunter sat on the linoleum and blinked.

"Yah! Yow! I won't!"

"You haven't finished your exercise."

"Yah!"

"All right. I'll come out."

Nugent ran into the passage. In a second Bunter was on his feet, and going down the passage like the wind.

Nugent stopped, and burst into a roar of laughter. Billy Bunter's wild footsteps died away down the stairs.

Nugent turned back into the study, gasping with laughter. The three chums settled down to their preparation. They were not interrupted again by Billy Bunter.

EVERY
TUESDAY,

The "Magnet"
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ONE
PENNY.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Gentleman from Scotland Yard.

THE next morning, when the Remove came downstairs, Harry Wharton was called into Mr. Quelch's study, and he found a stout, red-faced gentleman there, whose sharp features and keen twinkling eyes hinted at once what he was. Harry was not surprised when Mr. Quelch announced that he was Inspector Dix, of Scotland Yard, and that he had come down specially to Greyfriars to hear what Harry had to say on the subject of the escaped convict.

The Scotland Yard inspector gave Harry one keen and searching glance, and in that glance satisfied himself that the lad was not of the kind to romance, or to allow his nerves to get the better of him. After that one glance, Mr. Dix was ready to take Wharton's statement seriously.

"It seems that you have seen Lagden, the man who broke out of Portland three or four days ago?" the inspector remarked.

"Yes, sir."

"Describe to me exactly where and how."

Wharton did so, succinctly enough. The inspector listened intently, and made a note or two.

"Three other boys were with you?" he asked

"Yes, sir."

"Their names?"

"Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh."

"Can I see them?" said the inspector, with a glance at Mr. Quelch.

"Certainly."

A bag was sent for the three Removites at once. They came in, and the inspector looked them over.

"You all know the man Lagden by sight?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"You are certain it was he you saw in the lane last evening?"

"Quite, sir."

"Very good. This is most valuable information, as the authorities have not been searching in this direction at all," said Mr. Dix. "I do not think he will remain free very long now. Thank you very much."

And the boys retired.

"You place reliance upon them?" asked Mr. Quelch. "You do not think it was a trick of the imagination, owing to a state of alarm?"

Mr. Dix shook his head.

"No. One might have mistaken a tramp for the man, in the dusk—but hardly four," he said. "Besides, the convict has not been seen anywhere, and it seems certain that he struck off in a new direction, though what direction the police have so far not been able to discover. I have no doubt that he is here with the intention of escaping across the narrow seas, perhaps by stealing a fishing-craft. But I think we shall soon have him by the heels."

And the inspector retired, looking very satisfied.

That an escaped convict was supposed to be lurking in the neighbourhood of Greyfriars was soon common property in the school, and it excited a great deal of interest among the boys.

The Famous Four, as fellows who had seen the man, and who were supposed to be the particular objects of his dislike, were much in request.

Some of the fellows proposed to get up a searching expedition in the afternoon, as it happened to be Wednesday, and a half-holiday.

This idea, however, was soon nipped in the bud.

Before morning school an announcement was made by the Head, to the effect that the boys were not to enter the woods until further notice. Friardale Wood and the Priory Wood being placed out of bounds.

There were some blank faces among the Greyfriars fellows after that.

Some of the boys grumbled.

But grumbling or not, there was no disregarding the Head's express order, and as it was given really in their own interests, most of the fellows took it cheerfully, or as cheerfully as they could.

"After all," Mark Linloy remarked, "it wouldn't be all fun to meet a desperate criminal in the wood. It might be serious."

"The seriousness might be terrific," Hurree Singh observed. "Besides, we are not policeful bobbies, and why should we trackfully hunt for the esteemed beast?"

"Just so," agreed Wharton.

Bulstrode growled.

"It would have been fun," he said. "And I'm not afraid of the giddy convict, for one."

Linloy turned red.

"I'm not afraid of him," he said. "But it's no business of ours."

ANSWERS

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NEXT WEEK: "BOB CHERRY'S BENEFIT."

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"It's rotten to put the woods out of bounds," said Bulstrode. "And I've a jolly good mind to go all the same." To which no one replied. Bulstrode was free to go if he liked, and take a licking for it if he was discovered; but it was not likely that he would.

Harry Wharton & Co. went in to morning lessons, thinking less of the escaped convict than of their own financial state.

It was a half-holiday that afternoon, and they were almost "stony."

Todd nudged Wharton in the second lesson.

Wharton glanced at him.

Todd—Alonzo Todd—was a new boy, and he was generally called the Duffer, on account of the extraordinary facility with which he got into the most absurd scrapes, and failed to get out of them.

How a fellow entered a room without knocking anything over, or left it without having trodden on a cat, stamped on somebody's favourite corn, or put his elbow through a pane of glass, was a great mystery to Alonzo Todd.

There was hardly a fellow in the Remove passage who had not suffered from his terrible clumsiness.

But at the same time he was so innocent and good-natured, that the fellows could not help liking him.

"Wharton! I say, Wharton!" he whispered.

"Hush!" murmured Wharton.

Mr. Quelch was looking round from the blackboard. Fellows often spoke in whispers in class, of course, without harm coming of it. But the Duffer's whispers were like stage whispers, and generally carried far, especially if there was a special reason why they shouldn't be overheard.

"Eh?" said Todd. "I want to speak to you. I've got something on after lessons. Will you come to my study?"

"Yes; all right."

"I'm making toffee, you know," said Todd. "I've got a new recipe, and I think it will be a ripping success. It only wants baking now, and I'm going to do it in the frying-pan. The toffee ought to be eaten while it is hot."

"Good! Hush!"

"Eh?"

"Quelch is looking."

"Wharton."

"Yes, sir."

"You were talking to Todd?"

"Yes, sir."

"Take fifty lines!" said Mr. Quelch. "Todd!"

"Eh?"

"You were talking to Wharton. Take fifty lines!"

"Oh!"

And Mr. Quelch turned to the blackboard again. Todd blinked at Wharton.

"I'm so sorry," he murmured.

"All right. Cheese it!"

"Yea, but I'm so sorry."

"Todd, you are talking again! Take a hundred lines!"

"Oh!"

And Alonzo Todd relapsed into silence at last.

When morning school was dismissed, Todd put his arm through Wharton's as they left the Form-room.

"Coming up now?" he asked.

"All right," said Wharton. "The lines will do after tea."

And he went with the new fellow, several others joining them en route. Wharton was evidently not the only fellow who had been invited to the toffee-making. Bob Cherry and Nugent joined them, and Mark Linley and Tom Brown, and then Bulstrode and Skinner. They passed Hazeldene in the passage, and Todd tapped him on the arm.

"Come on!" he said.

Hazeldene shook his head.

"Can't! I'm going over to Cliff House on my bike, to tell them about the convict. The girls will have to keep off the grass till he's captured."

"You'll miss the toffee."

"Keep some for me."

"Oh, certainly!"

Stott and Ogilvy and Morgan joined the party as they went up to Todd's study. The room was pretty full when all the juniors were in it, and the door was left open for coolness. It was a warm summer's afternoon.

There was a fire in the grate, and Todd proceeded to stir it and mend it, and then he put the frying-pan on.

"It won't take long," he remarked. "You fellows hungry?"

"I am," said Billy Bunter, looking into the study. "Somebody says there's a feed going on here. Were you looking for me, Todd?"

"No."

"Oh, I thought I heard you calling me!"

"No; I wasn't calling you," said Todd innocently. "But come in. We're going to have toffee."

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"BOB CHERRY'S BENEFIT."

"Good!" said Billy Bunter, with much satisfaction. "I'm fond of toffee. Where is it?"

"I'm making it."

"You'd better let me make it," said Bunter persuasively. "I'm rather a dab at making toffee."

"I'm making it from a new recipe," said Todd, shaking his head. "It's all right. It won't be long. You fellows sit down."

And Todd turned to the fire and the frying-pan again.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Todd Makes Toffee.

TODD had hospitably asked the fellows to sit down, but he had forgotten to specify exactly what they were to sit upon. The fame of the toffee-making had evidently gone abroad, and most of the fellows in the Remove naturally liked toffee, especially when they could get it for nothing. Several more had arrived, and squeezed themselves into the study. To judge by the supplies Todd had on his table, there was likely to be enough toffee for all, if it was successfully manufactured. But there was hardly sufficient accommodation in the study for a dozen sturdy fellows.

"Do sit down!" said Todd, without looking round.

Wharton laughed, and sat on the table. The three chairs the study boasted were already occupied, and so was the window-sill. Ogilvy sat on the coal-locker, and Billy Bunter on the fender. One or two sat on the floor, and the rest stood about or leaned up against the bookcase or the door-posts.

It was very warm in the study.

The glow of the fire, as Todd stirred it, made the room warmer.

"My only hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "This is worth the toffee—by the time we get it."

"I say, you fellows, would you like to fan me with—with a book?" said Billy Bunter, who never could get the idea out of his head that the rest of the human race existed for the sole purpose of increasing his personal comfort. "It's awfully hot."

"Yes; I don't think."

"Get away from the fire if you're hot," said Harry.

"Well, I'm sitting down, you know."

"Well, get up."

"I'm hardly strong enough for exertion," said Bunter. "Dinner won't be ready for some time yet, and I'm afraid I sha'n't be able to go down to it, unless Todd's toffee revives me a bit. I'm in a rather low state now."

"Rats!"

"Oh, really—Ow—yow—yarrooh!"

Bunter jumped up from the fender like a jack-in-the-box. He yelled furiously, and danced on one leg, clasping the other in both hands with an agonised expression.

"Great Scott!"

"What's the matter?"

"Off your rocker?"

"Yow!"

"What is it?"

"Yarrooh!"

"My hat! Isn't it too hot for dancing?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Yowp! I'm burned! That idiot splashed me with some of his horrid toffee! Yow! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm burned! Yow!"

Todd blinked round, with a very red face, from the fire.

"Were you splashed, Bunter? I'm so sorry."

"Yow! You're a dangerous lunatic!" roared Bunter.

"What's the good of your being so sorry? I'm burnt!"

"So sorry. Keep a bit further away."

"I jolly well will!" growled Bunter, calming down a little and rubbing his leg. "Of all the dangerous idiots—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!"

"Never mind; we can," said Bob Cherry. And he roared again. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter snorted. The comic side of the matter was not apparent to him, but that was only to be expected.

Todd went on cheerfully with his cooking. A puzzled look was growing on his face, and a smell of burning gradually permeated the study.

"You're burning it, you ass!" said Bulstrode.

Todd mopped his perspiring brow.

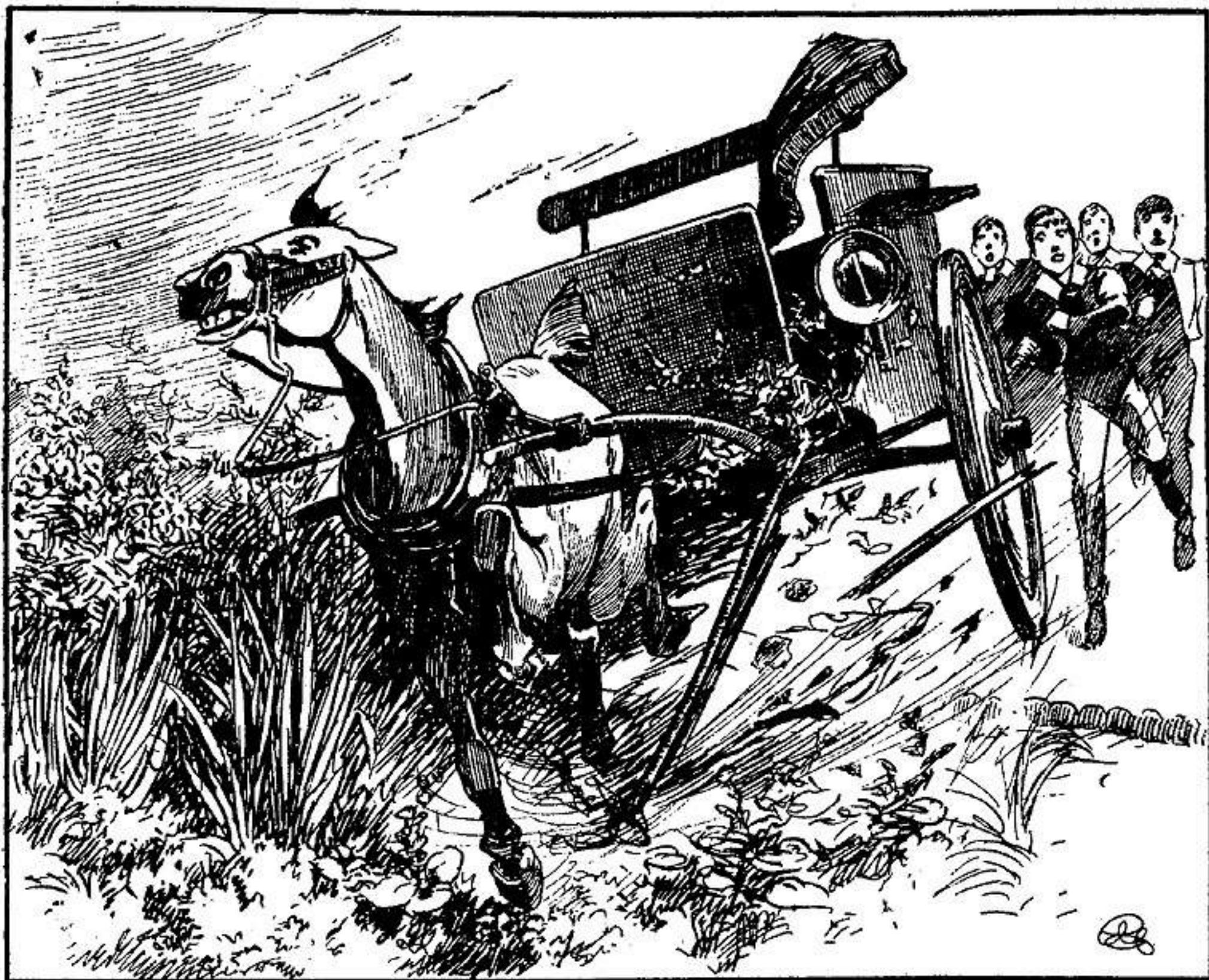
"It's a bit too thick," he remarked.

"Shove some more butter in."

"Yes; that's a good idea."

Todd dropped a pat of butter into the frying-pan.

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"There he goes, on the flower beds." "Stop him! Shoo!" Shouting excitedly, the juniors chased the unfortunate runaway across the Head's garden.

It sizzled and melted, and little splashes of it went over into the fire, and caused the fire to sizzle and sputter, too.

The heat in the study was now terrific, as Hurree Jamset Rain Singh would have put it.

One or two of the juniors quietly slipped out. Others fanned themselves. Harry Wharton & Co. were too polite to withdraw, and they stood it well.

The butter sizzled in the frying-pan to a merry tune.

"How long, Toddy?" asked Nugent at last.

"I don't know exactly how long it takes," said Todd doubtfully. "It doesn't say in the recipe. But—"

"Look out!"

"Oh!"

Todd looked back quickly at the frying-pan. The butter was flowing over the side, and flaring in the fire. The new boy was so startled by the sight that he jerked the frying-pan in his hurry to set it right.

Then came the catastrophe.

There was a wave of melted butter over the side of the pan, and the fire roared up like a furnace.

Todd staggered back from the burst of flame. The frying-pan slipped from his hand, and was overturned in the fire.

Another terrific flare burst out, and roared up the chimney.

"Oh dear!" gasped Todd.

"My hat!"

The room was thick with smoke and blacks and smell. There was a sullen roar in the chimney which showed that it was on fire.

That chimney had long needed sweeping.

"M-m-my word!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I—I'm s-suffocating!"

"The chimney's on fire!"

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"Great pip!"

"Look out!" roared Wharton.

It was too late.

Down the chimney came a rush of soot. It rolled thickly into the fire, half extinguishing it, and flooded the study. It rolled in masses into the grate and on the hearthrug, and flooded the room in clouds and waves.

The juniors choked and gasped and spluttered.

"Ow!"

"Groo!"

"Yow!"

"Oh!"

"Atchoo—atchoo!"

There was a wild stampede for the passage.

"Oh dear!" said Todd. "I'm so sorry!"

Covered with soot from head to foot, and black as a family of chimney-sweeps, the juniors poured out of the study into the passage, followed by a volume of smoke and soot.

Choking, gasping, spluttering, they streamed out, Todd the last, looking dismayed, and blacker than the rest.

There was a startled exclamation in the passage.

"Good heavens! What has happened? Who—who are you?"

It was Mr. Quelch.

For the moment the Remove-master did not recognise his own pupils. He gazed in horror and amazement at the crowd of blackened juniors.

"Ow!" spluttered Wharton. "If you please, sir, we—"

"W-w-Wharton!"

"Yes, sir. Groo! Atchoo! I'm Wharton!"

"Bless my soul!"

"Atchoo—atchoo!"

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"How did you come into this state?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "What has happened?"

"We—atchoo—I—atchoo!"

"Atchoo—atchoo!" said the rest, sneezing violently. Eyes and noses and mouths were full of soot.

"Choo—choo—atchoo!"

The ghost of a smile glided over Mr. Quelch's face.

"You had better go and get yourselves cleaned!" he exclaimed. "Dear me, the chimney is on fire! How very careless!"

And Mr. Quelch hurried away to fetch Gosling to the rescue of the chimney. The juniors stampeded for the bath-rooms.

"I'm so sorry!" gasped Todd.

"Aes!"

"Fathead!"

"Chump!"

"But I'm sorry! I—I— Oh, oh!"

The sooty and indignant juniors seized the Duffer, and rolled him on the floor and bumped him there. Then they left him, rolling dazedly in seas of soot and wondering what had happened, while they went to clean themselves down—a long, long task. And when it was finished, there were few of them who did not retain in their hair, or ears, or somewhere, some trace of the soot.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Todd Tries to be Useful.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry made that familiar remark.

The chums of the Remove, looking newly swept and garnished, had emerged from the bath-rooms, and they had gone out into the Close, with the intention of going down to the cricket-ground.

A trap had driven in at the gateway, and was coming up the drive towards the Head's house, and the juniors looked towards it at once.

Visitors to Greyfriars always had a certain amount of interest for the juniors.

They were generally, of course, friends or relations of some of the pupils and often parents who came to see about having their sons installed in the school, and so heralded the arrival of new boys.

A gentleman of stout figure, with white beard, whiskers, and moustache, sat in the open trap.

He was very well dressed, and wore a shiny silk hat, which glittered in the bright sun, and carried a gold-headed cane.

His aspect was decidedly benevolent, and some of the juniors remarked, as he drove up, that they wouldn't mind having him for an uncle or a grandfather, and that he looked as if he could be "touched" for almost any amount in tips.

The trap stopped outside the Head's door.

The old gentleman alighted.

He made a sign to Harry Wharton, who approached the new-comer, taking off his cap politely. He rather liked the look of the stranger.

The gentleman, who wore a large pair of gold-rimmed glasses, looked at Harry Wharton through them, with a glance of singular keenness.

"Ah! Is this Greyfriars?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Harry.

"Thank you. I have come to see Dr. Locke about my son. Is this his residence?"

"This is the Head's house, sir."

"Thank you. Kindly wait," said the gentleman, addressing the driver. "I hope Dr. Locke is at home, my lad."

"Yes, sir."

"Very good."

The new-comer ascended the steps of the Head's house, and rang the bell. He gave Wharton a nod as the door was opened, and he passed in.

Harry Wharton rejoined his chums. The trap driver descended from his seat, and stood by his horse to wait.

"Know who he is?" asked Bob Cherry.

Harry shook his head.

"No; never seen him before. Governor of one of the chaps, perhaps, but from what he said, I think he's come to see about a new boy coming here."

"Getting fed up with new boys," said Nugent. "There was Vernon-Smith, though he's luckily on a holiday now, and then we've Todd. Todd is quite enough new boy to last us the rest of the term."

The juniors grinned. Alonzo Todd had certainly made his presence felt at Greyfriars. His chimney, still smoking, was evidence of his prowess.

Bob Cherry tapped the driver on the shoulder. The trap driver was well known to the Greyfriars fellows.

"Who is that chap, William?" asked Bob.

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The driver shook his head.

"Dunno, sir. Nice old gent, sir. Told me he was going to send his son to Greyfriars, sir, and asked me if the boys were nice."

"Ha, ha! Of course you said they were?"

"Of course, sir. I said they was all real gentlemen, sir, especially Master Wharton and his friends, who never forget that a man had a mouth on him on a warm afternoon."

Harry Wharton laughed, and slipped a sixpence into William's hand.

"Thank you kindly, sir."

"Talkative old gent, eh?" said Nugent.

"Yes, sir. Kind of simple, I think. He came by the train from the junction, and I s'pose he came from London."

"Know his name?"

"No, sir."

The juniors strolled away. William glanced at the sixpence in his palm, and then looked in the direction of the tuckshop beyond the elms. At the tuckshop the liquid refreshment to be obtained was supposed to be only in the nature of ginger-beer or lemonade; but William was an old acquaintance of Mrs. Mumble's, and he knew that he could persuade that good lady to add something from a certain black bottle, which would give an additional flavour to the ginger-beer. Only William did not care to leave his horse. William's horse was restive.

Alonzo Todd strolled out of the house. He stopped to glance at the waiting trap, and William glanced at him. He touched his hat to Todd, who, always polite, raised his cap in return.

"Warm afternoon, sir," said William.

"Very warm, indeed," said Todd. "I find the heat somewhat oppressive."

"Makes a man thirsty, sir."

"I have no doubt that the warmth of the weather would produce that effect upon a man engaged in out-of-door occupations," assented Todd.

William stared a little. Todd might have been dining off a dictionary, to judge by the way he expressed himself. That was his way. However, that was no business of William's.

"I want to go and get some lemonade, sir," he remarked.

"I should certainly advise you to do so," said Todd.

"Lemonade is far more refreshing than intoxicating drinks, and will do you less harm."

William grinned.

"Thank you kindly, sir. I wonder if you would mind lookin' arter my 'orse for a few minutes, while I went for the—the lemonade?"

"With pleasure," said Todd. "My uncle Benjamin always impressed upon me to perform any little services I could for others."

And he took the driver's place at the head of the horse.

"You'll keep him quiet, sir," said William. "He's rather restive, and the flies do make him wild."

"I will be exceedingly careful."

William walked away, and disappeared through the elms, and in a minute more was negotiating with Mrs. Mumble for liquid refreshment from the black bottle.

Alonzo Todd stood at the horse's head.

Todd meant to do exactly as he had told William, and look after the horse carefully. But the horse was not in a mood to be looked after. Perhaps he realised that he was in charge of a Duffer; horses often realise things their masters do not suspect. Perhaps the mere absence of William made him cheeky. At all events, he began to walk away.

Todd was nearly pushed over by the shaft as the horse moved. He recovered himself, and ran to the horse's head to seize the bit. That, however, the animal was by no means disposed to let him do.

He threw his head up, and Todd missed it and staggered away, and the animal made a sharp turn, and dragged the trap away.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Todd.

He ran after the horse, who was breaking into a trot now, and making for the gates.

He waved his hand wildly to the juniors in the distance.

"Stop him!"

"Stop the horse!"

"Look out there!"

The hunter's instinct is easy to rouse. In a couple of minutes, twenty or thirty boys were rushing to overtake or intercept the runaway, shouting and waving their hands. The result may be easily imagined. The animal had been only mischievous at first, but he was thoroughly frightened now, and he reared and plunged about to escape from his many pursuers.

A dozen juniors gathered in the drive to stop him, and the frightened horse turned abruptly aside, and went trampling over the grass, dragging the trap after him.

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"My only hat!" exclaimed Temple, of the Upper Fourth.
 "Look at that!"
 "Phew!" said Fry. "There'll be a row."
 "There he goes—on the flower beds!"
 "Stop him!"
 "Shoo!"

Shouting and waving, the boys chased the unfortunate runaway. The noise brought William out of Mrs. Mumble's little parlour, and he gave a jump as he saw his horse and trap careering at top speed about the Close. The trap was rocking from side to side like a small craft in a storm as the runaway dragged it onwards.

"Stop 'im!" roared William.
 But it was not so easy to stop him.
 William rushed in pursuit.
 "Stop! Whoa, old hoss! You beast! Stop! Hallo!"
 The animal heard his master's voice, and perhaps feared it. He swung round again, and the trap went clattering off towards the gates. William put on a desperate spurt to cut the runaway off. So did Alonzo Todd. Todd collided with William, and the two rolled on the ground together.

"Oh dear!" gasped Todd.
 William struggled up.
 "You hass!" he roared.
 "Really, my good man—"
 "You hass! Why did you let 'im go?" roared William.
 "My good fellow, I'm so sorry—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "It was Todd, of course; and he's so sorry, as usual—"

"My Uncle Benjamin says—"
 William did not wait to hear what Uncle Benjamin had said. He tore desperately after the trap. The horse was passing through the gateway now at a wild gallop, the empty trap jumping and swaying behind him.

After him went William at top speed.
 Horse and trap and William, running wildly, disappeared from the view of the Greyfriars fellows. They rushed to the gates. A cloud of dust was vanishing down the long white road.

"Oh dear!" said Todd. "I—I only meant to make myself useful, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "My uncle Benjamin says that a boy ought always to try to make himself useful."

"Your Uncle Benjamin has a lot to answer for if he started you making yourself useful," grinned Bob Cherry. And the juniors roared.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Visitor.

"MR.—ER—NOBLE," said Dr. Locke, the Head of Greyfriars, glancing at the card in his hand, and then at his visitor.

The white-whiskered gentleman bowed.

"Yes, sir."
 "Pray be seated," said the Head.
 The white-whiskered gentleman carefully deposited his silk hat upon a chair, and stood his gold-headed cane beside it, and then sat down on another chair, and fanned himself.

"It is very warm," he remarked.
 "Very warm, indeed," said the Head. "That is—er—really only to be expected at this time of the year. I—I do not think you had an appointment with me, Mr.—er—Noble."

"No, sir," said Mr. Noble. "But I have the prospectus of Greyfriars College here."

He groped in his coat pocket, and produced a kind of pamphlet.

The Head looked at it.
 "This is the prospectus you supply to the educational agents, my dear sir," said Mr. Noble. "I have a son who is now of an age to be placed at a public school, and the recommendations of Greyfriars are very strong indeed."

"You are very good."
 "Not at all. I may add that I am particular—very particular—as to the school in which I place my son, I owe that, sir, as a duty to his dead mother."

"Quite so," said the Head, under the impression that his visitor was a decidedly fussy old gentleman, but, humouring him, as he had had to humour many a parent in his time. "Quite so. Have you brought the boy with you?"

Mr. Noble shook his head.
 "No, sir. Before bringing Oswald—my boy's name is Oswald—I wished to see the school myself, and ascertain something of what it is like."

"Yes?"
 "My boy has been educated hitherto at home, but he is quite prepared to go into your Lower Fourth Form, so his tutor assures me," said Mr. Noble. "I trust that you have a vacancy for a new pupil in the Lower Fourth Form."

"I could take several new boys into the Remove—the

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Lower Fourth here," said the Head. "There is no difficulty about that."

"Very good! Now, sir, this pamphlet states that the parents of scholars and prospective scholars are welcome to make every investigation at Greyfriars before a boy is sent here."

"That is quite correct."

"And in the event of parents coming from a great distance for that purpose, they could be accommodated for a night at the school."

"Certainly!" said the Head.

"I have come from a great distance, sir," said Mr. Noble. "I have made the journey from Newcastle-on-Tyne. I dare say you know Newcastle-on-Tyne, sir—a very fine city."

"I have unfortunately never been there," said the Head; "but I have heard that it is a very fine city indeed. I understand that you wish to put up here this night, Mr. Noble?"

"If I may, sir. If it will put you to any inconvenience, however, I will retire to the inn at the village."

"Not at all," said the Head. "I will give instructions to the housekeeper. I may mention that the parents of new pupils here are expected to give the usual references."

"Naturally," said Mr. Noble. "I shall be pleased to do so, to any extent. By the way, you have a boy here who is the son of a very old friend of mine."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, a youth named Wharton—Harry Wharton."

"The head boy of the Remove," said Dr. Locke. "He will be in the same Form as your son, if the latter comes to Greyfriars."

"Dear me! How very fortunate!" said Mr. Noble. "My old friend, Colonel Wharton, is in Switzerland at present, but I particularly wish to meet his boy. I have never seen the lad, having never visited the south since Colonel Wharton came home from India, but I am very anxious to see him."

"You shall certainly see him," said the Head.

"That is my purpose in staying here for a day," said Mr. Noble. "My boy Oswald is somewhat delicate—not at all what the boys would call a slacker, you know, but a little delicate. I should like to see the boys of the Form he is to go into. I think that Wharton may prove to be a friend to him, if only because I am his uncle's old friend."

"Very probable," said the Head. "Shall I ring for Wharton to be sent here, and I will explain to him."

"If you would be so kind."

The Head rang.

Trotter, the page, was sent to find Harry Wharton. He found Harry at the gate, looking after the cloud of dust which remained to indicate that William and his horse had gone that way. Harry came at once to the Head's study, wondering what was wanted.

The doctor glanced at him as he came in, looking very ruddy after his recent chase of the runaway horse.

The white-whiskered gentleman regarded him with a smile. "Ah! I have already spoken to this lad!" he exclaimed.

"Is this Wharton?"

"Yes, Mr. Noble."

"My name is Wharton," said Harry.

Mr. Noble held out his hand.

"I am glad to meet you," he said. "Shake hands with me, my boy—shake hands. I am sure you will be kind to Oswald."

Wharton shook hands, looking very much puzzled. Dr. Locke hastened to explain.

"This gentleman is Mr. Noble, a friend of your uncle's, Wharton," he said. "His son is to come to Greyfriars, and will probably be in the Lower Fourth. Mr. Noble hopes that you will take an interest in his son."

"Exactly!" said Mr. Noble, nodding.

"Certainly, sir!" said Harry.

"Oswald is a delicate lad," said Mr. Noble. "He is not at all effeminate, but is not physically strong. In case of rough usage, he might suffer very much. That is why I am anxious about him. I know that even in the best regulated schools there is sometimes bullying of the smaller boys."

Wharton thought of Bulstrode, and admitted to himself that the gentleman's misgivings were not without grounds. Mr. Noble might be odd and fussy, but he was certainly a careful parent.

"I understand, sir," he said. "I will keep an eye on him, sir, and do my best to look after him."

"Thank you very much! I am sure you are a good lad," said Mr. Noble. "Dr. Locke, I am particularly desirous of seeing something of Greyfriars. Perhaps you would not object to my old friend's nephew showing me round the school."

Dr. Locke, who had been glancing several times towards his desk, jumped at the suggestion almost openly.

"An excellent idea, Mr. Noble!" he said. "Excellent! I am sure Wharton would be only too pleased."

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Wharton thought of the cricket practice, and his heart sank, but he could do nothing but politely assent.

Dr. Locke was only too glad to get rid of his talkative and tiresome visitor, and the chance of planting him, so to speak, upon Wharton, was too good to be lost.

"Pray make a thorough examination of the place, my dear sir," he said, as he bowed his visitor out of the study. "Wharton will show you everything—everything. We dine here at half-past seven. Of course, you will dine with me."

"You are very good, sir."

"Not at all. Half-past seven."

And with that hint that he did not expect to see Mr. Noble again before half-past seven, the Head of Greyfriars returned to his desk, and resumed his interrupted work, and Mr. Noble walked away with Harry Wharton.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Noble Stands Treat.

NUGENT and the rest were waiting for Harry Wharton. The Remove chums intended to put in some practice at the nets that fine, sunny afternoon, and they did not want to begin without the junior cricket captain.

They stared a little when they saw him issue from the Head's house in company with Mr. Noble.

That gentleman looked at the group of juniors through his gold-rimmed glasses.

"Your young friends, I suppose?" he remarked.

"Yes, sir."

Harry made a hopeless grimace to the juniors with one side of his face, keeping up a polite grin on the other, rather a difficult feat.

He meant to intimate that he was booked for the afternoon, and that it couldn't be helped. Mr. Noble did not appear to observe anything.

"Your young friends," he repeated. "I should like to be introduced to them. I hope all your friends will be friends of Oswald's."

"I hope so, sir."

Harry signed to his chums to come up, and they were duly presented to Mr. Noble.

The white-whiskered gentleman shook hands with them in turn.

"I am very pleased to meet you!" he exclaimed. "I have a son coming to Greyfriars, who will be in your Form, and I hope you will be kind to him."

Bob Cherry suppressed a grin.

"Certainly, sir!" he said.

"The kindness will be terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"We'll do our best, sir," said Nugent. "Would you—er—would you care to come and see the practice—cricket practice, sir?"

It was a well-meant attempt to rescue Harry, but it failed.

"Thank you!" said Mr. Noble. "But my young friend, the nephew of my old friend, Colonel Wharton, is going to show me round Greyfriars. Perhaps you lads would like to come, and we will have some—er—ginger-pop to start with."

The chums brightened up.

It was hot, and they were dry, and ginger-pop seemed a really good idea, especially to fellows who were in a state of stoniness.

"Thank you, sir," said Nugent. "This way to the tuckshop."

Mr. Noble smiled benevolently.

"Lead on!" he exclaimed.

And the party marched off in the direction of Mrs. Minble's establishment. Mr. Noble cast a glance round in search of the trap.

"I gave my driver instructions to wait for me," he remarked.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"He's gone, sir," he said. "His horse ran away."

"Dear me!"

"He'll be back presently, sir, I expect."

"I really hope so, as I have not paid him yet," said Mr. Noble. "I shall not, however, require the trap, as I am staying at Greyfriars to-night. Ah, here is the tuckshop, I suppose."

"This is it, sir."

Billy Bunter was standing outside the tuckshop, looking discontented as usual. His fat face lightened as the chums came up with the white-whiskered gentleman. He caught Wharton by the sleeve.

"Is that a relation of yours, Wharton?" he asked.

"No, Billy, a friend of my uncle's."

"I suppose he's going to stand something, as you're coming here."

Wharton laughed.

"Yes, ginger-pop."

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"I'm awfully dry," said Bunter pathetically.

"Come in, then."

Bunter did not need asking twice. He was one of the first to range up to the little counter, and call for ginger-pop. Mrs. Minble assumed a most agreeable smile. It was not an uncommon thing for juniors to be treated to ginger-pop and confectionery by indulgent relatives when they visited the school, and Mr. Noble looked as if he was good for a really extensive treat.

"Ginger-pop, please!" said Mr. Noble, with a smile to the good dame. "As much as the young gentlemen like."

"Hear, hear!" shouted the juniors.

"I say, you fellows, this is ripping," said Bunter. "I say, sir, some of the fellows are hungry. Wharton looks nearly famished."

"Nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Wharton. "It's not half an hour since dinner."

"So does Bob Cherry," said Bunter.

"No, I don't."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Pray order what you like," said Mr. Noble, laying a sovereign on the counter. "Pray give the youngsters all they like, my good lady."

"Certainly, sir," said Mrs. Minble.

The juniors exchanged glances of satisfaction.

This was the kind of visitor to be popular at Greyfriars.

Wharton could not help being pleased.

His uncle's friend was a fussy old gentleman, perhaps, but he seemed to be of the right sort, and he was certainly a great acquisition at a time when funds were low.

Cakes and jam-tarts and oranges were disappearing at an alarming rate.

Ginger-pop popped incessantly.

The news that a feast was on spread, as such news will spread, and fellows dropped into the tuckshop in a casual sort of way, till it was very crowded.

Mr. Noble welcomed all comers.

Mrs. Minble cast an expressive glance at the sovereign as she picked it up. Mr. Noble understood, and with a smile he laid another on the counter.

"My only hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Your friend's rolling in tin, Harry."

Harry laughed.

"Looks like it," he agreed.

"Please fill your glasses, all of you," said Mr. Noble hospitably.

"Fill up, kids."

"This is good!"

"Walk up, Bunter; no limit."

"Oh, really, Brown!"

"Go it, Toddy!"

"Really," said Alonzo Todd. "I consider this exceedingly kind of Mr. Noble. I think it is very thoughtful and considerate. My Uncle Benjamin says—"

"Never mind your Uncle Benjamin," said Bob Cherry. "There's your ginger-pop. Can you open it?"

"Oh, yes, easily."

"Don't get the cork in your eye, or the ginger-pop down your neck."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Todd smiled, and opened the ginger-beer. The chums of the Remove crowded back from him—they knew the Duffer of Greyfriars! Mr. Noble did not know him, and he received the cork in his eye; and his glasses went to the floor, and a flood of ginger-beer stained his waistcoat.

Mr. Noble uttered an exclamation.

It was not precisely the sort of exclamation one would have expected from such a very benevolent-looking old gentleman.

"You fool!"

That was what Mr. Noble said.

The juniors stared.

That extremely impolite expression, uttered in a loud and angry tone, seemed to show that there was another side to Mr. Noble's benevolent nature—a side he had not hitherto revealed.

Todd was all contrition at once.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" he stammered.

Mr. Noble recovered himself.

The angry words having once escaped him, his benevolence returned instantly, and he was smiling kindly again.

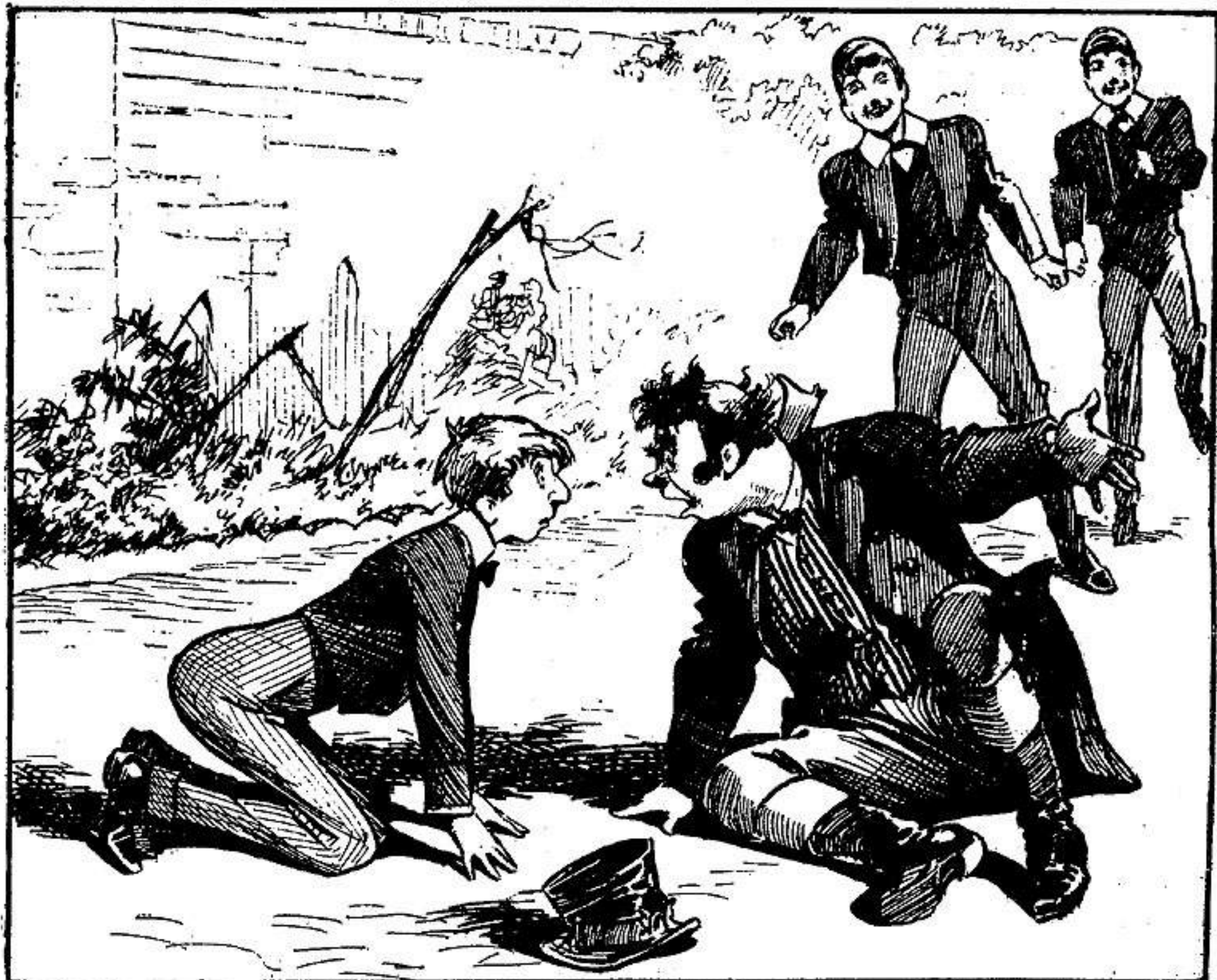
"It is nothing," he said. "But please do not tread on my glasses."

Wharton dragged Todd back just in time. The Duffer was about to plant his foot on the glasses.

Harry picked them up and handed them to Mr. Noble. The old gentleman adjusted them on his nose.

"I'm so sorry," said Todd.

"It is really nothing," said Mr. Noble, mopping his waistcoat with his handkerchief, and smiling kindly; "nothing at all."



"My good fellow, I am so sorry. My Uncle Benjamin says——" began Todd. "You hass!" roared William. "Why did you let that there 'oss go?"

"He is a clumsy ass, sir!" said Wharton. "It's very good of you to take it like this! Kick him out!"

"Really——" began Todd.

"Kick him out!"

"Outside!"

And the Duffer was hustled out of the tuckshop. The juniors did not intend Mr. Noble to run any more risks. Mr. Noble was the kind of old gentleman who deserved to be encouraged.

Mr. Noble mopped his waistcoat, and smiled as serenely as ever. The treat went on, and a third sovereign was laid on the counter.

By the time the juniors crowded out of the tuckshop, Mr. Noble was the most popular man who had ever set foot in the school, and Harry Wharton & Co. were more than willing to devote the greater part of the afternoon to showing him over Greyfriars.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Searching for Lagden.

MR. NOBLE paused as he left the tuckshop with the chums of the Remove, and glanced towards a massive, well-set figure that was crossing from the gates towards the Head's house. The juniors followed his glance, and recognised Inspector Dix, of Scotland Yard. In spite of the professional impassiveness of the inspector's face, Wharton thought he could detect a trace of suppressed excitement there.

"One of your masters, I suppose?" Mr. Noble remarked.

Wharton smiled.

"No, sir, that is a Scotland Yard detective."

"Dear me!"

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"He is down here to look for the escaped convict, Lagden," explained Nugent.

Mr. Noble looked blank.

"Haven't you heard of it, sir?" said Nugent. "It's in all the papers."

"Ah, I seldom read the papers! I hope you are not in the habit of reading the newspapers, my boys. They are not the best sort of reading for young people."

"Oh, no, sir!" said Harry. "We happened to see about the convict's escape in a paper, that's all. But we knew it, anyway—we saw him in the lane here."

"A convict! A murderer, perhaps?"

"Oh, no! I believe he's too deep, if not too good, to do anything of that sort," said Harry. "He committed a forgery, and was sent to penal servitude; but he was an awful rascal in other ways, too, so I heard."

"But how did you come to know him, Harry?" exclaimed the old gentleman. "Surely your uncle has never allowed you to mix with the criminal classes in any way!"

Harry grinned.

"Hardly, sir! I knew him because he got into a balloon that went adrift with us in it, and made us cross the Channel in it to escape the police."

"Good heavens! What a desperate character!"

"He was taken, though, and sent to Portland; only he's escaped."

"And he is in this neighbourhood?"

"Yes, sir; we saw him."

"Ah! And let the police know, I suppose?"

"Yes, Mr. Noble. Inspector Dix came down this morning to see about it, and as he's still down here, I suppose he's looking for Lagden."

"I hope he will find him," said the old gentleman nervously. "I—I feel very much disturbed. I hardly think I can let

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Oswald come to the school while such a desperate character is lurking in the vicinity."

The juniors smiled at one another.

"Oh, it's all right here, sir!" said Bob Cherry. "He wouldn't dare to come near the school, of course."

"I suppose not."

"I shouldn't wonder if the inspector is coming to tell the Head that the villain's been captured," said Harry. "He looks as if something had happened."

"I wonder if he would tell us," said Mr. Noble. "I think I will speak to him."

"I don't see why he shouldn't, sir."

Mr. Noble hurried to intercept the inspector as he crossed towards the Head's house. The juniors followed him, and they stopped Mr. Dix within a few paces of the door.

Mr. Noble raised his shining silk topper politely.

"Inspector Dix, I believe," he remarked.

The inspector bowed.

"Yes, sir."

"I have just learned from these lads who you are," explained Mr. Noble. "I have never had the pleasure of seeing you before, though, of course, I have heard of you."

The inspector smiled complacently. That "of course" pleased him. Inspector Dix liked to think that people had heard of him "of course."

"You are very good, sir."

"I understand that you are in search of a desperate wretch who has escaped from prison, sir," said Mr. Noble. "Now, I have a son whom I am about to place at this school. I feel very nervous about his coming here while that criminal is at large. You will understand my feelings."

The inspector concealed a yawn.

"Well, sir, there is certainly no danger here. The convict's object must be to escape, not to enter a school like this."

"Then you have not captured him?" exclaimed Mr. Noble, in a tone of keen disappointment.

"Not yet, sir."

"But you are on the track?"

"Ahem!" said the inspector.

"Excuse me," said Mr. Noble. "I know I should not ask to be admitted to your secrets, sir. But I am very anxious."

The inspector smiled.

"Well, I may say that I expect to lay hands upon him very shortly, sir," he said. "That is all I can say at present."

"Thank you so much. I shall wait with great eagerness. Has anything been heard of the villain lately?"

"A great deal," said the inspector. "It will all be in the evening papers, so I have no objection to telling you now. Lagden is certainly in the neighbourhood, and he means to make his escape in disguise if he can."

"Dear me!"

"Last night a costumier's shop in Mountford was broken into, and a large variety of clothes and various kinds of disguises abstracted," said the inspector. "If Lagden was not known to be in this neighbourhood, the burglary would not have been connected with him; but owing to this young gentleman having seen him, it is quite clear."

"Naturally."

A man was robbed and left senseless last night, too, near the village of Pegg," said the inspector. "From his description of his assailant, there is no doubt that it was Lagden. He had a large sum stolen in gold, as well as some papers."

"Good heavens!"

"By Jove!" said Harry Wharton. "Lagden is getting down to business! I hope you will have him soon, sir!"

The inspector nodded.

"I think I shall, Master Wharton. He will not find it easy to get away. The only thing is, to find his hiding-place, and that is only a question of time—perhaps of hours."

"Phew!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "He might be hiding in the old priory, or in the secret passage underneath!"

The inspector smiled, and went up the steps of the Head's house. He was admitted, leaving the juniors looking very serious over the information he had given them.

Dr. Locke greeted the inspector courteously.

"Have they found him?" was his first question.

"No, sir. He is in hiding in the neighbourhood, probably in disguise." And the inspector explained what he knew.

The Head looked grave.

"Is he the kind of man to be able to make use of the disguises he seems to have obtained?" he asked.

"Undoubtedly. He was an actor at one time in his career, and it would be perfectly easy for him," said Mr. Dix. "I don't think he would succeed in pulling the wool over my eyes, however, if I came in personal contact with him."

"I am sure not, Mr. Dix."

"He is hiding in the neighbourhood," went on the inspector. "I understand that there are ruins with secret passages, and so forth, on the Greyfriars land. Have you any objection to a thorough search being made?"

"I shall be only too glad."

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"Then perhaps you can give me the assistance of someone who is well acquainted with the place, and can act as guide?"

"Certainly." The Head reflected for a moment. "Harry Wharton, I believe, knows the secret passages as well as anybody. I know he has explored them—I am sure, too, that he would be glad to lend you any aid in his power."

"Thank you," said the inspector.

"I will send for him."

"Not at all. I will not encroach on your time. I have just left him outside, and I will speak to him myself."

"Very good."

The inspector left the house.

Harry Wharton & Co. were showing the ruined tower of Greyfriars to Mr. Noble, and explaining its great age and the legends connected with it, when Mr. Dix came up.

The inspector explained what he wanted.

"You will come?" he said.

"With pleasure, sir, if Mr. Noble will excuse me," said Harry. "I was going to show him round Greyfriars this afternoon."

"We'll take care of Mr. Noble," said Nugent.

"Will you excuse me, Mr. Noble?"

The old gentleman smiled.

"Certainly, Wharton. Go with the inspector by all means—and I only hope you will be instrumental in capturing the villain."

And Harry Wharton walked away with the inspector.

During the next two hours Harry was guiding Mr. Dix and a couple of constables through the underground passages which connected Greyfriars with the ruined priory in the woods. The deep, dark recesses were carefully searched, but there was no trace of the convict there. Mr. Dix was driven to the conclusion that Lagden was not in those haunts.

"We shall have to look for him by the seashore," he remarked. "He's lurking there, most likely, in the caves, waiting for a chance to steal a craft and escape. Only, I don't see what he is doing for food. But that's where we must look."

And Mr. Dix and the constables left, and Harry Wharton walked back to Greyfriars in time for tea.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Duffer Is Sorry.

HARRY WHARTON looked round for his chums, and Mr. Noble as he came in at the gates of Greyfriars, but he did not see them. He saw William and his trap on the drive, however, and guessed that the driver had come back for his fare. William was looking decidedly cross, and he was bestowing a far from amiable look upon the Duffer, who had come up to express his regret once more. Harry Wharton stopped to speak to the driver.

"Had a long run?" he asked.

"Oh, don't mention it, Master Wharton," said William pathetically. "That there 'orse took me two mile past Friar-dale before I caught him."

"My hat! What a trot on a hot afternoon."

"Yes, and all because I trusted to this young gent to 'old him," said William, with a far from grateful glance at Todd.

"I'm so sorry," said Todd.

"I desay you are, sir; but that didn't catch my 'orse," said William. "Is the old gentleman gone yet, Master Wharton?"

"No. He's staying the night at Greyfriars."

"Oh! Then I want my fare!"

"I'll tell him you're here," said Wharton, and he went into the house.

William grunted.

"I think I've hearned that fare," he remarked.

"I'm sure you have," agreed Todd.

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"I've run all through Friardale and two mile past."
 "How troublesome."
 "Which my throat is now as dry as a lime-kiln," said William suggestively.

Todd looked very sympathetic.
 "Doubtless you swallowed a considerable quantity of dust," he said. "Did you run with your mouth open? You probably did, and that would account for the dust lodging in your throat, which would naturally make it feel very dry."

"It would be all right if I had something to drink," said William, coming out a little more into the open, as it were.

"Quite so," said Todd. "There is a fountain yonder, as you will observe if you turn your head. I will mind your horse while you go—"

William snorted.
 "You've minded my 'orse once too often already, sir, thanking you kindly all the same," he said.

"I'm so sorry. But if you like I will get a mug and fetch you some of the water here," said Alonzo.

William, who would rather have gone thirsty for weeks than have drunk cold water, gave Todd a very expressive look. He wondered whether the junior was pulling his leg; but Todd's face was quite solemn.

"Shall I fetch you some?" he asked. "My Uncle Benjamin says that pure water from the spring is the very best of all liquid refreshment."

"No, thanky," said William gruffly; "I won't trouble you."

"It will be no trouble."
 William murmured something.

"I should really recommend some cold water for a dry throat," said Todd kindly. "You might also gargle it with glycerine when you get home."

William said something inarticulate.

"If you have no glycerine, I will get you some," said Todd. "My Uncle Benjamin gave me a bottle of glycerine."

"N-n-no, thanky!" grunted William.

"I am afraid I can suggest nothing else," said Todd sadly. "I am so sorry your throat is dry."

And he walked away, leaving William looking after him with an expression that can only be described as a glare.

Mr. Noble came down with Harry Wharton, and paid the driver, giving him a liberal tip, which was somewhat of a consolation to William for his run. He would be enabled to wet his dry throat quite liberally at the Cross Keys when he went back.

"I suppose my bag is still in the trap?" said Mr. Noble.

"Here it is, sir."

William handed out a locked bag, and Harry Wharton held out his hand to take it, with the intention of politely carrying it for the elderly gentleman.

Mr. Noble made a hasty movement, and took it himself.

"Let me carry it, sir," said Harry.

"Not at all, my lad," said Mr. Noble. "It is not heavy. Good-afternoon, driver!"

"Good-afternoon, sir!"

And William drove away. Mr. Noble carried his bag into the house, and Trotter came up to take it from him. Mr. Noble hesitated for one imperceptible moment, and then gave the bag into Trotter's hands.

"Take it to my room," he said.

"Yea, sir."

"You will have tea with us, Mr. Noble?" asked Harry, without thinking for the moment what an extremely meagre tea was likely to be provided by No. 1 Study, in the present state of the study funds.

"In your study, do you mean, Harry?"

"Yes, sir. We always have tea in the study."

"Are you allowed to receive visitors there?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Then I shall be very pleased," said Mr. Noble. "When shall I come?"

"Will half-past five suit you, sir?"

"Excellently, I will come, then."

And Mr. Noble followed Trotter, the page, to his room.

Wharton glanced after him. As a friend of his uncle, the colonel, Mr. Noble was entitled to every respect and attention, and Wharton was glad of a chance of showing his uncle that he was grateful for many favours received, by looking after a friend of his.

But that invitation to tea had certainly been a little reckless.

Wharton's face was grave as he took his way to No. 1.

Nugent, Hurree Singh, and Billy Bunter were there, waiting for Wharton to come in. There was no fire as yet, and the table was bare.

"How did you get on with him?" asked Harry.

"Oh, quite all right," said Frank Nugent. "He's a decent old boy. We've shown him up and down over Greyfriars. He's been a boy himself."

Harry laughed.

"Yes, I suppose so. Why specially, though?"

"Why, he asked us if we ever broke bounds, and made us

show him the place where we climb the school wall," grinned Nugent. "Of course, he's going to keep it dark."

"By Jove, I hope he will, too!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"But what are we going to have for tea?"

"Well, we've got to settle that, too," said Harry. "I've asked Mr. Noble to tea, and he's coming at half-past five."

The others stared at him.

"You've asked him to tea?" ejaculated Nugent.

"Yes."

"Got any tin?"

"Come into a fortune?" asked Billy Bunter sarcastically.

"The remittancefulness has doubtless arrivefully reached our worthy chum," remarked Hurree Singh.

Wharton shook his head.

"Nothing?" howled Nugent.

"Sorry—no."

"Then, you frabjous ass, why have you asked Noble to tea?"

"Well, I had to show him some attention as a friend of my uncle's," said Wharton uneasily. "My uncle has treated me so jolly well that I'm bound to play up on an occasion like this."

"Yes. But—"

"It's unfortunate that it should happen when we're stony," said Harry. "I admit that it slipped my memory for a moment when I asked him. But I should have been bound to ask him, anyway. It was only decent."

"But what's he to eat?" howled Nugent. "You can't ask a chap to tea on a quarter of a stale loaf and three sardines; and that's all we've got left."

"We haven't," said Bunter.

"Eh?"

"I finished the sardines some time ago."

"You—you porpoise! Not that it matters much. Mr. Noble wouldn't make much of a feed on three sardines."

"The feedfulness would not be terrific."

"We shall have to borrow some tin, that's all," said Harry.

"You get the fire going, Billy, and the kettle boiling, and we'll raise the wind somehow."

"Oh, all right!" said Bunter. "Don't forget to get some cream-puffs. I'm very fond of cream-puffs. And mind Mrs. Mimble doesn't give you stale ones. I—"

But the chums of the Remove were gone.

The first person they met in the passage was Alonzo Todd.

Wharton remembered that Todd was generally flush of money, and he buttonholed the Duffer of Greyfriars at once.

"Todd! Toddy!"

The Duffer turned round with his usual agreeable smile.

There wasn't a more agreeable fellow at Greyfriars than Alonzo Todd, when he wasn't treading on corns, knocking over vases and inkpots, or smashing crockery.

"We're stony," said Wharton concisely. "We want to raise some tin—pay it back on Saturday, honour bright. Can you lend me ten bob?"

"I'm so glad you came to me," said Todd. "I had a remittance from my Uncle Benjamin this morning, and it was for fifteen shillings."

"Good!"

"I could easily spare the whole amount, if you liked," said Todd. "I don't need it till Saturday, and I haven't cashed the postal-order yet."

"Sure you won't want it?"

"Oh, yes! I have some change."

"Well, in that case, I'll have it," said Harry. "Fifteen bob will stand a feed that will impress the guest, and we'll let you have it back on Saturday between us. Mrs. Mimble will cash the postal-order."

"Very well."

"Hand it over, then."

Todd fumbled in his pockets.

The chums of the Remove looked very relieved. Their borrowing expedition had been successful at the very start, and all was plain sailing now.

They watched Todd go carefully through his jacket pockets. The postal-order was not there.

Then he went through his waistcoat with equal care.

The juniors watched him, their glances growing anxious.

Todd was not like Billy Bunter. His postal-orders were not figments of the imagination. If he said he had a postal-order, he had it. But—

Where was it?

The waistcoat was drawn blank, so to speak; and Todd went through his trousers pockets. They equally failed to yield a postal-order.

The Duffer looked dismayed.

"You've lost it!" exclaimed Harry.

"I—I hope not."

"My hat! How like him!" murmured Nugent.

"The likefulness is terrific."

Todd went through his pockets again, but with the same result. The postal-order was not to be found.

"I'm so sorry!" he said. "I must have dropped it somewhere."

Wharton grunted.

"I might have guessed that!" he remarked. "You never have anything, I believe, without losing it. Never mind."

"I'm so sorry—"

"Oh, it's all right! Come on, you chaps! We shall have to look further."

The juniors went on down the passage, leaving Todd looking very disturbed. Todd hated to be disobliging, and he felt that he had failed his friends in the hour of need. Harry was turning over in his mind whom he should apply to next, and he decided upon Bob Cherry, in Study No. 13, at the end of the Remove passage. The juniors had almost reached Study No. 13 when there came a pitter of rapid footsteps behind them.

They stopped, and looked back.

Alonzo Todd was tearing after them.

Wharton's face brightened.

"He's found it, I suppose!" he remarked.

The new boy came panting up.

"Found it?" asked Nugent.

"Eh?"

"Found the postal-order?"

"Oh, no!" gasped Todd. "I—I ran after you to tell you that I'm so sorry—really, very sorry, indeed!"

"You—you champion ass!" said Harry Wharton.

And they walked on indignantly, leaving the Duffer pink with exertion and panting for breath.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Kind Offer.

BOB CHERRY turned a flushed face from the fire-grate as the chums of Study No. 1 came in. Mark Linley was at work at the table, and little Wun Lung, the Chinese, was curled up in the armchair. There was a strong smell of cooking fish in the study. Round the fire-grate the smell was stronger, and there was a sort of smelly haze. It was explained by the fact that Bob Cherry was cooking three herrings in a frying-pan, and burning them considerably in the process.

He grinned with a ruddy face at the new-comers.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he gasped. "Don't say you've come to tea! We've got three herrings. Of course, you're welcome to come if you like, but three herrings wouldn't go very far among six."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We haven't come to tea," he said. "We're standing a tea to a guest in our own study—Mr. Noble. We're short of tin."

Bob Cherry whistled.

"And you've come here for some?"

"That's it. Lend us ten bob."

"Wish I could."

"Five, then."

"I haven't fivepence," said Bob Cherry. "It was a toss up between having tea in Hall and having these herrings here. I got the herrings cheap from young Gatty of the Second. He thought they were rather wanky, and let me have 'em for a cake of milk chocolate."

Nugent sniffed.

"I rather think young Gatty was right about the herrings," he remarked.

"Oh, no, they were just—just ripe, that's all," said Bob.

"They only wanted a little extra cooking."

"You're giving 'em that."

"Yes; they'll be well done."

"Look out! They're catching alight!"

Bob hurriedly turned back to the frying-pan. It was flaring up, and a denser haze settled upon the study. Bob shook the frying-pan in the air, and blew into it, and the herrings were extinguished at last. They had suffered considerably, however, and Bob was very careful as he replaced the pan on the fire.

"Can't cook and talk at the same time, you know," he remarked, panting. "It's a case of don't speak to the man at the wheel, you know. Still, it's all right. These herrings will be jolly well done."

"My word! They will!"

"Sorry I can't lend you any tin, old chap! I would like a shot if I had any! You got any tin, Marky?"

Mark Linley smiled. He never had any money.

"Sorry!" he said. "I have sixpence, if that's any use."

"We won't rob you!" said Harry, laughing. "What about you, Wun Lung? You're generally rolling in filthy lucre."

Wun Lung looked rueful.

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"Me buyee new tyle fol bikee," he said. "Payee allee cashee. No mole cashee till Saturday. What you tinkee?"

"You reckless young waster! Fancy wasting money on new tyres for a bike when we were just coming along to borrow!" exclaimed Nugent.

Wun Lung grinned.

"Mo solly!"

Bob Cherry looked thoughtful.

"Look here!" he exclaimed. "I'll tell you what—you can have the herrings!"

And he took the pan off the fire.

"Eh—what?"

"You can have 'em! They'll be something to start the feed with, anyway!" said Bob generously.

"The—the herrings?"

"Yes! I'll lend you a plate to carry them on."

Harry Wharton looked at the three blackened objects lying in the burnt butter in the frying-pan, and tried not to grin.

"Oh, no!" he exclaimed. "We wouldn't rob you like that, Bob!"

"It's all right!" said Bob. "We'll have tea in Hall. You don't mind, do you, Marky?"

Mark Linley looked at the herrings, and said very cordially that he didn't mind in the least. Wun Lung made the same statement, with every appearance of sincerity.

"Here you are!" said Bob. "I'm only sorry there's no more!"

Wharton shook his head.

He would not have taken those herrings if they had been gilt-edged and studded with diamonds.

"No, thanks, Bob!" he said heroically. "It would be rotten to rob you like that! We'll manage somehow."

"Oh, rats! Take 'em!"

"No, no! Look here! We'll go a bit further, and if we can't possibly manage, we—we'll come back for the herrings. You're awfully good!"

And the chums of Study No. 1 hurried out of the study before Bob Cherry could reply.

"Narrow escape!" murmured Nugent. "Bob thinks he can cook, you know! Ha, ha, ha!"

"The ha-ha-hafulness is terrific!"

Wharton grinned. They beat a hurried retreat from the scented vicinity of Study No. 13, and paused in the doorway of their own study to consider.

"What the dickens are we to do?" exclaimed Wharton.

"The time's getting on, too!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, don't bother, Bunter!"

The fat junior blinked at them.

"Have you got any tin?"

"Not yet."

"Can you get any?"

"Doesn't look like it, so far," said Wharton ruefully.

Bunter thrust a fat hand into his pocket.

"Very well, then," he said. "We shall have to use my postal-order, that's all!"

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Postal Order.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. stared blankly at Billy Bunter.

The fat junior spoke perfectly serious.

Had Bunter said: "We shall have to go down to the bank and cash a cheque for a thousand pounds!" the juniors could hardly have been more astonished.

Bunter certainly was always expecting a postal-order, in the same way that many good people expect the millennium. But the postal-order, like the millennium, failed to arrive. Bunter's postal-order had become a standing joke at Greyfriars.

But the unexpected had happened.

Billy Bunter groped in his pocket, and drew out a postal-order.

As the Owl of the Remove held it in his fat hand, the others could see the figure in the corner—fifteen shillings!

"Fifteen bob!" exclaimed Nugent.

"My hat!"

"The esteemed Bunter is the friend in need," said the Nabob of Bhanipur. "I did not expectfully look for postal-orders from the honourable Bunter, but, as your poet Shakespeare remarks, 'There are more things in the heaven and the earth than are dreamt of in your trigonometry!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think Shakespeare said philosophy," grinned Nugent. "Never mind that, though. Is that really a postal-order, Tabby, or is it a vision?"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Fifteen bob?"

"Yes."

"And it's come?"



"I say, you fellows, would you like to fan me with a book or something," said Billy Bunter, who was seated on the fender. "It's awfully hot, you know."

"Looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Hand it over!" said Frank. "Let's get down to the tuckshop and cash it. This is corn in Egypt in a lean year, and no mistake!"

Bunter's fat fingers tightened on the postal-order.

"I'll cash it," he said.

"It's all right! Mrs. Mimble will cash it for us."

"Perhaps I'd better do it, though."

"Well, come on, then!"

And Nugent linked arms with the fat junior and hurried him downstairs, followed by Hurree Jamset Ram Singh and Harry Wharton.

Bunter was glowing with importance.

Several fellows whom the juniors met looked at them with curiosity, and Nugent explained the wonderful thing that had happened.

"Bunter's got his postal-order!"

"Oh, rats!" said Bulstrode. "Draw it mild!"

"Fact!"

"Rubbish!"

"Show it him, Billy!"

Bunter waved the postal-order in the air. His fat hand covered up most of it, but it could be seen that it was a genuine postal-order, and for the imposing sum of fifteen shillings.

"My hat!" said Hazeldene. "Then Bunter really has some relations—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Hazeldene—"

"And he's got a real live postal-order!" exclaimed Ogilvy.

"What ass was it said that the age of miracles was past?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wonders will never cease!" grinned Bulstrode. "Bunter

ought to give the finishing touch to the miracle by paying up some of his little accounts with that postal-order."

"Oh, really—"

"Good egg!" chorused half a dozen fellows to whom Bunter owed money. "Pay up!"

"I'm sincerely sorry, you fellows, but—"

"Cash up!"

"Pay out!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "I think we have first claim. Bunter owes our study more than the rest of you put together. We're borrowing this postal-order, and you can go for Bunter when we pay him back on Saturday."

"Well, that's fair," agreed Ogilvy.

"Faith, and ye're right," said Micky Desmond. "But, sure, I think the postal-order oughtn't to be cashed at all; it ought to be framed and hung up in the common-room."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or put under a glass case."

And amid such remarks as these, and loud laughter, Bunter was hurried off to the tuckshop, with the precious order still in his hand.

Alonso Todd was in the doorway of the tuckshop.

"I'm so sorry, you chaps," he said. "I've been trying to get Mrs. Mimble to let me have some tommy on tick, you know, but she won't. I've told her I've lost a postal-order, and it's certain to turn up, but she isn't taking any."

"She's heard a lot about postal-orders from Billy Bunter," said Harry Wharton, with a laugh. "But it's all right now."

"You've raised the wind?"

"Yes; Bunter's had a postal-order."

"How good!"

"It's for fifteen bob, so it will see us through."

"How odd! That was just the amount of the one I lost. I am so glad that you will be all right," said Todd.

Bunter walked up to the counter.

"Please cash this postal-order for me, Mrs. Mimbble," he said, showing the figure.

Mrs. Mimbble was all smiles.

"Certainly, Master Bunter," she said.

"Fifteen shillings, please."

Mrs. Mimbble counted out fifteen shillings.

Bunter gathered it up in his fat hand, and the good dame took the postal-order. The next moment she uttered an exclamation.

"Is this your postal-order, Master Bunter?"

"No; it's yours now."

"I mean, was it yours?" said Mrs. Mimbble, with asperity.

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimbble—"

"Did Todd give it to you?"

"Todd?"

"Todd!" exclaimed Harry Wharton & Co., with one breath; and Alonso, hearing his name, looked round.

Mrs. Mimbble frowned darkly.

"This postal-order is payable to Alonso Todd!" she said.

"What!"

"I say, you fellows—"

Harry Wharton sprang to the counter.

He took the postal-order from Mrs. Mimbble's hand, and looked at it.

The name was written there plainly enough.

Alonso Todd.

Billy Bunter made a strategic movement towards the doorway, his fat face wearing a very alarmed expression.

Nugent caught him by the shoulder, and swung him back into the shop.

"Stay here!" he said.

"I—I'm in rather a hurry, you know," stammered Bunter. "I remember now I had something to say to Ogilvy—"

"You can say it presently. Stay here."

"But—"

"Shut up!"

"Look at this postal-order, Todd," said Harry Wharton.

"Is it yours?"

The new boy obeyed.

"It certainly looks like mine," he said. "The name is mine, and the amount is the same."

"Then it is yours."

"I suppose so."

"Take it, Bunter!"

"Ye-es."

"Where did you get Todd's postal-order from?" demanded Harry Wharton sternly.

The fat junior cast a helpless glance round, seeking a way of escape. But the chums of No. 1 Study were blocking the way, and there was no escape for the Owl of the Remove.

"Well?" said Harry Wharton grimly.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Supplies.

BILLY BUNTER blinked at the juniors, and blinked at the door, and then blinked at Harry Wharton once more.

"You—you see—" he began haltingly.

"Well?"

"It—it wasn't Todd's postal-order—"

"Why, it has Todd's name on it!"

"No; that's a mistake. You—you see, I—I was expecting a postal-order—"

"Bosh!"

"Oh, really, Wharton, you must remember my mentioning that I was expecting a postal-order," said Billy Bunter, in a tone of remonstrance. "I mentioned it to Nugent, too."

Nugent grinned.

"I believe you did," he said. "I believe you've mentioned it on and off for several terms now."

"Well, I was expecting a postal-order, and I had a letter, but—"

"Well?"

"But there was no postal-order in it—or, at least, I thought there wasn't. But when I picked that postal-order up in the Close, I knew, of course, that it must have fallen out of the envelope when I opened it, without my noticing it."

"You picked it up?"

"Yes."

"Just after you opened the letter?"

"Well, the same day."

"You fat fraud! You knew jolly well it wasn't your

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postal-order!" exclaimed Wharton wrathfully. "You knew you hadn't one."

"Oh, really, I was expecting a postal-order, for about—about fifteen shillings, in that very letter, and—and so I knew it must be mine, especially as it had my name on it—"

"Your name!" roared Nugent.

"Yes; W. G. Bunter."

"What! The name's Todd—Alonso Todd!"

"Well, you see, I—I'm a little short-sighted, and I may have mistaken the name, but—but it looked to me more like W. G. Bunter."

"Well, of all the frauds, that fat porpoise takes the cake!" said Nugent. "He'll be telling a fairy tale like this to a judge some day, but it won't prevent his being sent to hard labour."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

Wharton shook the fat junior by the shoulder.

"Look here, Bunter, do you know that this is stealing? 'Findings, keepings' is another word for stealing."

"Oh, really—"

"If you had cashed this order you might have been sent to prison."

"Well, that is a rotten thing to say, Wharton, to a chap who's trying to help you," said Bunter indignantly. "Ow! Don't shake me like that! You might make my glasses fall off, and if they get broken you'll have to pay for them, so there."

"You young ass—"

"I was trying to do you a favour, and willing to lend you all my postal-order—"

"It wasn't your postal-order; it was Todd's."

"Oh, really—"

"Look at the name, you owl!"

Bunter blinked at the name on the postal-order.

"Well, now you draw my attention to it, it does look something like Todd," he admitted. "But you know I'm a little short-sighted."

"None so blind as those who won't see!" grunted Nugent.

"Oh, really—"

"It's no good talking to him," said Wharton. "I believe he's too stupid to know when he's being dishonest."

"Look here, Wharton, I don't think you ought to slang me just because I tried to help you. Next time you want to stand a feed when you're stony, blessed if I don't leave you to raise the wind yourself."

"Shut up! Todd, that's your postal-order—"

"I'll lend it to you with pleasure," said Todd. "If Mrs. Mimbble will give me a pen, I'll fill in my name to it."

"Thanks awfully." You shall have it back on Saturday."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter. We shall have to buck up now, you chaps."

And Mrs. Mimbble, having cashed the postal-order for Todd, Wharton gave orders for comestibles up to the amount of fifteen shillings. That was quite enough to stand Mr. Noble a really first-class feed.

"I say, we must ask Todd," Nugent whispered to Harry, when the orders were given. "Can't get out of it, when he's been so decent."

Wharton nodded.

"I was just thinking so, Frank. But—"

"But he's bound to cause trouble."

"Exactly."

"I'll keep an eye on him, and restrain him," grinned Nugent. "We'll keep him as far from Mr. Noble as we can, and I won't let him make himself useful."

"All right, then, if you watch him."

And the chums of the Remove carried off their purchases to the School House, and Harry beckoned to Todd to come with them. The new boy came genially enough.

"Will you come to tea with us?" Harry asked.

"I should be very pleased, Wharton."

"Come on, then."

"Certainly. You have some cooking to do, I suppose?" said Todd. "I hope you will let me make myself useful."

"Oh, no, couldn't think of—of letting you work," said Wharton hastily.

"But I'd rather," said Todd. "My Uncle Benjamin says that a chap should always make himself useful, especially when on a visit."

"Yes; but—but it's all right. We can manage."

"I'd rather work," said Todd. "I hate idling about while other fellows are working. Better give me something to do."

Wharton groaned inwardly. There was no denying the Duffer, without speaking in the plainest of plain English; which would have been ungrateful considering how generously he had come to the rescue when in a sore strait.

But Wharton felt grim forebodings at the idea of the Duffer of Greyfriars making himself useful in No. 1 Study.

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By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Returned With Thanks.

THE chums of the Remove lost no time in getting the study ready for the reception of Mr. Noble. There was not much time to spare, but they made the most of it. The fire was already lighted, and the kettle singing. The table was laid in a very short time, and the provisions unpacked.

"We shall want some extra chairs," said Nugent.

"Shall I fetch some?" said the Duffer eagerly.

"Good!" said Harry. He felt that even Todd could not be very dangerous in that occupation. "Get some from along the passage; tell the fellows we want them."

"Certainly!"

And Todd went and looked for the chairs.

It was common enough at Greyfriars—especially among the junior studies—for chairs and crockery and cutlery to be borrowed on occasions when visitors came.

Fellows were generally willing enough to lend, and there were few so grumpy as to make a fuss at their things being borrowed, even without their permission being asked if they were not there.

But if there was one fellow who was not likely to be pleased at lending his property to No. 1 Study, it was Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove; and Todd, of course, was certain to go first to the study of that particular junior.

Bulstrode's study was next door to Harry Wharton's, and Todd tapped at the door first, and receiving no answer, opened it.

The study was empty.

The fire was burning, however, and the table laid, so it was probable that Bulstrode had only gone to fetch some fellow in to tea with him.

That was nothing to Todd.

He picked up a couple of chairs, and carrying one in each hand, he sallied out, and bore his prizes into No. 1.

"Good!" said Harry. "Shove them here."

"Shall I poach the eggs?" asked Todd.

Wharton remembered how he had made the toffee.

"No thanks," he said hastily. "Bunter can do that all right."

"I'll make the tea."

"Oh, no, I—I want specially to make the tea myself."

"Shall I—"

"Look here, go and borrow some cups," said Harry.

"You can do that all right."

"Certainly! How many?"

"Oh, a couple—and saucers."

"Very well."

And the Duffer left the study again and went into Bulstrode's. Bulstrode had returned by this time, with Skinner.

The bully of the Remove was looking round his room with a puzzled expression.

"Where are the chairs?" he exclaimed. "There were two more chairs here. Somebody's been and collared the chairs!"

"Curious!" said Skinner.

"I'd make him look curious, if I knew who it was!" said Bulstrode, wrathfully. "Hallo! What do you want, Todd?"

"I want a couple of cups and saucers, please."

"Eh?"

"I want a couple of cups and saucers."

"You mean a couple of thick ears, I suppose?" said Bulstrode gruffly.

"Really, Bulstrode—"

"Perhaps you've collared my chairs?" said the Remove bully savagely.

Todd nodded.

"Yes, I have borrowed a couple of chairs," he said. "I want a couple of cups and saucers now, and—"

"Well, of all the cheek!" said Skinner.

"I suppose you don't mind?" said Todd. "There's a feed in Wharton's study, and—"

"Wharton's study?"

"Yes."

"And you're raiding my blessed teacups and chairs for a feed in Wharton's study, and he hasn't even asked me!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "Bring those chairs back!"

"Impossible! You see—"

"You cheeky ass!"

"Really—"

"Collar him, Skinner!"

The two Removites seized Todd in a moment. The new boy began to struggle. Duffer he certainly was; but he was not a weakling, and the two juniors had all they could do to hold him.

"Twist his arm!" said Bulstrode. "That'll keep him quiet!"

"Oh!" yelled Todd.

"Stop wriggling, then!"

"Yow!"

"Now bring him along to Wharton's study," said Bulstrode, with a grin. "We'll return him with thanks."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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ONE
PENNY.

They carried the Duffer into the passage by the shoulders and ankles, the new boy wriggling unavailingly in their grasp.

In a few seconds they were at the open doorway of No. 1.

"Now then," said Bulstrode. "One—two—three!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go!"

And Todd was slung into the study.

He reeled and staggered towards the table, and Wharton gave a shout of warning:

"Look out!"

But it was useless.

The junior crashed upon the table, and caught at it wildly for support, and went to the floor clinging to the tablecloth.

The tablecloth followed him down, with a cascade of crockery and eatables.

There was a yell of dismay from the juniors.

"Look!"

"Oh!"

"My hat!"

Todd rolled on the floor in tablecloth, teacups, saucers, sugar, and jam, and bread, and butter. The wreck was terrible.

Bulstrode burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Skinner.

"Returned with thanks!" gasped Bulstrode. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you cads!" shouted Wharton. "Go for 'em!"

The chums of No. 1 rushed at Bulstrode and Skinner.

The latter beat a retreat to the next study hurriedly enough.

But Wharton, Nugent, and Hurree Singh were close upon their heels, breathing vengeance.

Bulstrode slammed the door.

"The key—quick!" he gasped, putting his foot against the door.

Skinner grasped at the key.

But before he could turn it in the lock the door was burst open from the outside.

It flew wide, and Bulstrode went staggering back, and Skinner dodged round the table as Harry Wharton & Co. rushed wrathfully in.

"Collar them!" roared Wharton.

Bulstrode put up his fists at once. Bulstrode had heaps of pluck. Skinner preferred to dodge round the table.

But Bulstrode was swept off his feet in a moment.

Wharton and Nugent grasped him, and swept him into the air, and plumped him down bodily upon the laid tea-table.

There was a terrific crash of crockery.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, meanwhile, collared Skinner, and downed him on the hearthrug, and sat on his chest.

"Oh!" roared Bulstrode. "Leggo! Yow! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Remove retreated from the study.

They left Bulstrode rolling on the table among the smashed tea things, and he rolled off and fell amid a shower of broken crockery upon Skinner, who was still gasping on the rug.

"Oh!" roared Skinner.

"Ow!"

"You ass!"

"You chump!"

Harry Wharton and his chums rushed back to their study. They wanted to get it tidy before Mr. Noble came, if possible.

The Duffer was sitting dazedly amid the wreck he had made of the tea and the tea things.

He blinked dazedly at the chums.

"I—I'm so sorry!" he gasped.

"Oh, get up!"

There was a voice at the door.

"Ahem! Is this No. 1 Study?"

Mr. Noble stood at the door, looking in upon the scene with considerable astonishment.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Guest of No. 1.

HARRY WHARTON turned crimson.

The guest had arrived, and at the most inopportune moment.

A smile flickered over the white-whiskered face.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Noble.

Wharton looked at him in great confusion.

"Come in, sir!" he exclaimed.

"Ahem! Have I arrived too—too early?"

"Not at all, sir."

"The not-at-all-fulness is terrific!"

"The—the fact is, there has been a slight accident, sir," said Harry. "It will be all right in a few minutes. Will you sit down?"

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By FRANK RICHARDS.

"Perhaps I—"

"Please come in, sir. Tea's nearly ready."

"The eggs are done," said Billy Bunter.

"Good!"

"Please take the arm-chair, Mr. Noble."

"Very well. Thank you!"

The tea table was restored to rights as soon as possible.

Milk had been spilled in floods on the cloth, and jam was jammed and marmalade was marmaladed everywhere. But that could not be helped. The table was restored to order. Todd, in his eagerness to be useful, ladled out fresh jam into the sugar-basin, and put a new supply of sugar in the jam-dish, and filled the marmalade-dish with radishes, and, indeed, distinguished himself in many ways.

Mr. Noble sat in the arm-chair, apparently oblivious to what was going on round him, and occupied in the view from the study window.

The white-whiskered, white-bearded face looked more benevolent than ever now. Mr. Noble smiled a little. As soon as the table was in order again, Wharton called his attention to the fact.

"Ready, sir!"

Mr. Noble looked round from the window.

"Quite ready, sir!" said Billy Bunter. "You'll find the eggs a treat, sir!"

"I am sure I shall," said Mr. Noble.

And he took a chair at the table.

Wharton had placed the Duffer as far as possible from the guest of the study, in dread of new mishaps.

When Todd offered to pour out tea, he was promptly negatived. He wanted to pass the teacups, but that, also, was effected without his assistance. The juniors were beginning to know the Duffer too well.

Mr. Noble was in a talkative humour.

He related several incidents in connection with Oswald, who was to come into the Lower Fourth at Greyfriars, and told some stories of his own early days at school.

He related some circumstances of his friendship with Colonel Wharton, too, in India, which were interesting to Harry, who had never heard the Colonel speak of Mr. Noble, though he had been raking his memory in trying to recall the name.

Mr. Noble grew quite jovial over tea.

He ate well, and drank four cups of tea, and asked for his cup to be filled a fifth time. He praised Billy Bunter's cooking, much to the satisfaction of the fat junior.

The tea-party were fully enjoying themselves when the door opened, and Bulstrode and Skinner looked in.

Bulstrode was looking warlike, and Skinner was hanging back a little, evidently only having come at all because he did not care to refuse Bulstrode.

The chums of the Remove grinned at them. Bulstrode was a little taken back at seeing Mr. Noble in the study.

"Oh, so you've got a visitor," he said.

"Yes," said Harry. "Mr. Noble."

Bulstrode hesitated.

He had come to make a row, but he did not care to do so with a guest in the study, and that guest a middle-aged gentleman. Apart from the incivility of such a proceeding, there was the danger of being reported to the Head by Mr. Noble.

"I'll look in again," he said.

"Right you are!" said Harry, laughing.

And Bulstrode went out and shut the door.

"I hope I am not interfering with any business, Harry," said Mr. Noble.

Wharton laughed.

"Oh, no, sir. Bulstrode came here for a row, that's all."

"I see."

"You've really saved us from having trouble."

Mr. Noble smiled.

"Then I'm glad I was here."

"I say, you fellows," remarked Billy Bunter, "we've run out of cream-puffs."

"Never mind."

"But Mr. Noble is very fond of cream-puffs."

"Not at all," said Mr. Noble.

"Oh, really, sir."

"Shut up, Bunter."

"That's all very well, Nugent, but I'm not going to neglect a guest," said Bunter firmly. "You can't expect it. Mr. Noble would like some more cream-puffs, and I don't mind taking the trouble to go down to the tuckshop and get them."

"Cheese it!"

"Look here—"

Nugent stamped on Billy Bunter's foot. The fact that the study funds had been expended to the last penny was nothing to the fat junior. It was his experience that he generally got what he wanted if he worried long enough. This time

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he got what he didn't want. Nugent's stamp on his foot made him jump and yell.

"Yah! Yaroooh!"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Noble, in astonishment.

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing," said Nugent hastily. "It's all right!"

"The all-rightfulness is terrific!"

"Is it all right?" yelled Bunter. "Yow! Some idiot has stamped—"

"Pass the butter, Bunter."

"On my foot—"

"Radishes this way!"

"And it hurts. Ow! Look here, Nugent—"

"Shut up!"

"I won't! I'm hurt! Yow! I—"

Nugent stamped on the other foot.

Billy Bunter gave a bound.

"Yaroooh!"

The table rocked as he caught against it in jumping up.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Todd, grasping at the table to steady it. Of course, in doing so, he plunged one fist against the milk jug and the other against the teapot.

Both went flying.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh received the milk-jug in his chest, and Mr. Noble was the recipient of the teapot on his knees.

He jumped up with a roar.

The tea was streaming over his trousers, and his face was red with pain.

"Oh!" he roared. "Oh, oh!"

Wharton jumped up.

"You ass, Todd!"

"I'm so sorry—"

"Sorry, sir," said Wharton, mopping at Mr. Noble's knees with his handkerchief. "That dangerous ass is always doing something of this sort."

"Oh!"

"So sorry, you know—"

Mr. Noble calmed himself with an effort.

"I—I think I will go to my room, and—and change," he said. "Excuse me, please!"

And he hurriedly left the study.

The chums of the Remove looked dismayed.

It was a most unpleasant and unexpected ending to that cosy little tea in No. 1 Study. Todd looked guilty.

"I'm so sorry!" he repeated.

"Oh, you can't help it," said Nugent. "You're born like it, I suppose."

"It was all Bunter's fault," said Harry.

"The faultfulness of the honourable Bunter was terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur, mopping the milk off his waistcoat.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Yes, it was Bunter! All through that fat porpoise wanting to gorge more cream-puffs, after bolting nearly all we had."

"Oh, really, Nugent!"

"Throw him out!"

"Oh! I—I haven't finished tea, and—"

"Outside!"

Three feet helped Billy Bunter into the passage. He sat on the linoleum, and blinked at the juniors, and the study door was slammed in his face.

"We shall have to make it up to Mr. Noble, somehow," said Harry. "He's been awfully decent, and he's a friend of my uncle's too."

"I'm so sorry," said Todd. "I think I ought to go to Mr. Noble and apologise. It was really quite clumsy of me, you know."

"Go hon!"

And Alonzo left the study.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

An Amazing Discovery.

TODD inquired of Trotter the way to Mr. Noble's room, and tapped on the door. He wanted to see Mr. Noble badly, and apologise for his clumsiness. As he would have explained, his Uncle Benjamin had always told him to apologise after giving offence, intentional or unintentional. And Alonzo was bent upon carrying out the excellent instructions of Uncle Benjamin.

Tap!

"Who is there?"

"It is I, Alonzo Todd," replied the junior.

"What do you want?"

"I want to speak to you, if I may."

"Well, well, I will see you another time."

"Very well, sir."

Todd walked away, but he did not go far. He waited on

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the landing at the bend of the staircase to catch Mr. Noble when he came down.

It was some time before the visitor at Greyfriars left his room.

Todd filled in the time by reading a book, which he produced from his pocket. He became deeply interested in the book, and forgot Mr. Noble.

He was reminded of that gentleman at last by a step on the stairs.

He glanced up.

The white whiskered gentleman had passed him, and was about to descend the lower stairs as Todd caught sight of him.

The Duffer of Greyfriars started hurriedly forward.

He ran quickly towards Mr. Todd—so quickly that his foot slipped on the smooth linoleum on the landing, and he slid forward at express speed.

Before he could stop himself, he had crashed right into Mr. Noble.

"Oh!" gasped that gentleman.

Todd threw his arms blindly round Mr. Noble to save himself. Mr. Noble grasped wildly at the banister, and missed.

With a gasp and a loud sound of bumping, they rolled down the stairs together.

"Great Scott! What's that?" exclaimed Nugent, who was coming down the upper stairs with his chums.

"The Duffer again!"

"And Mr. Noble!"

"The chump! He's at it again!"

"The chumpfulness is terrific."

The juniors raced down the stairs.

The other fellows were out of doors after tea, and the staircase was deserted, save by Harry Wharton & Co. and the Duffer and his victim.

Before Harry and the rest were half-way down, Mr. Noble and Alonzo Todd had reached the mat at the bottom.

There they sprawled, gasping.

The Duffer sat up dazedly.

"Oh!" he gasped. "I'm so sorry!"

Mr. Noble did not reply.

He lay gasping, with all the breath knocked out of his body.

Wharton reached him in a few seconds.

"Let me help you, sir!" he exclaimed.

The next moment he started back with a sharp cry.

For after that roll down the stairs in the excited embrace of the Duffer, a remarkable change had come over Mr. Noble's appearance.

The white beard which gave him such a benevolent look was twisted to one side, and drawn up under his left ear.

His white whiskers, also, were very much disarranged.

The discovery burst upon Harry like a thunderclap.

The white whiskers and beard were false.

Mr. Noble was in disguise.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Harry, utterly taken aback.

"My only hat!"

"The only hatfulness is terrific."

The astonished exclamations of the juniors recalled Mr. Noble to himself.

He sprang up wildly.

"What does this mean?" cried Harry.

Mr. Noble's hand flew up to his face.

The next moment he was tearing upstairs at top speed, and he disappeared round the bend of the staircase, and a few seconds later the juniors heard a door slam above. Then a key turned in a lock.

The disguised visitor to Greyfriars had locked himself in his room.

Harry Wharton & Co. stood utterly astounded.

The Duffer had been too dazed to notice the remarkable change in Mr. Noble, but it had been seen by Wharton, Nugent, Hurree Singh, and Billy Bunter.

They were utterly amazed.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Nugent, at last. "What on earth does it mean?"

"He was wearing false whiskers," said Harry.

"And beard, too."

"I say, you fellows, he was in disguise!" exclaimed Billy Bunter, as if that fact had just dawned upon him for the first time.

"Go hon!" said Nugent.

"There's something fishy here," said Harry, knitting his brows. "A man may wear false hair, I suppose, but false whiskers and beard mean—"

"That he's up to some game."

"Exactly."

"Mr. Noble isn't as old as he makes out," said Nugent. "He was clean shaven under that lot of false hair on his chivvy."

"So I noticed."

"And I don't believe he's even middle-aged."

"He ran upstairs like a young man, anyway."

"What does it mean?"

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"Blessed if I know."

"I say, you fellows, the chaps will be interested in this," exclaimed Billy Bunter.

Wharton grasped the fat junior by the shoulder.

"Stop here, Bunter."

"Eh?"

"I don't know whether we ought to give Mr. Noble away. He's been very decent to us. I think we ought to give him a chance to explain."

"Oh, yes!" said Alonzo Todd. "My uncle Benjamin says that you should always give a man a chance to explain."

"I say, you know—"

"Shut up, Bunter! It looks to me as if Mr. Noble is an impostor of some sort, but we ought to give him a chance. Let's go and see him."

"Good!"

"I—I don't think I'll come," said Todd, "I—I don't think he'll be pleased to see me."

"Ha, ha! Very likely not!"

"Keep it dark, Toddy, till we tell you, then."

"Right-ho! Mum's the word."

Harry Wharton & Co. went upstairs. Harry's face was very serious. He felt that the fact that Mr. Noble was in disguise would require a lot of explaining. But it was only fair to give the man a chance. He had certainly treated the juniors very decently while he had been at Greyfriars.

Wharton tapped at the door.

There was a movement in the room, and a faint click. The juniors started as they heard it, and the colour wavered in their cheeks for a moment.

"Did you hear that?" whispered Nugent.

"Yes."

"It sounded like—like—"

"Like a pistol."

"So it seemed to my esteemed self," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Wharton's face set resolutely.

"I don't care; I'm going to have an explanation."

He knocked a second time at the door.

"Who is there?"

It was Mr. Noble's voice.

"We want to see you, sir—particularly. Can we come in?"

"Certainly."

The key clicked in the lock, and the door swung open. Mr. Noble, with his whiskers and beard nicely arranged again, and looking as calm and benevolent as ever, stood smiling at the chums of the Remove.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprising Confession.

"COME in!" said Mr. Noble cheerily.

Harry Wharton gazed at him.

So calm, so kind, so unconcerned the old gentleman seemed, that Wharton thought for a moment that he must have been dreaming, when he imagined that he saw that venerable white hair out of its place, and recognised a younger face under the disguise.

All seemed as it should be now.

It was hard to believe that Mr. Noble was not a gentleman of advanced years, and the most benevolent nature.

His perfect coolness took the juniors aback.

"Come in!" he repeated, with a smile.

The juniors entered the room.

Mr. Noble closed the door, and then stood looking at the four boys, with the same quiet smile on his features, and a glimmer of amusement in his eyes.

"Well?" he said.

"We—we came to speak to you, sir," stammered Wharton, hardly knowing what to say. "We—we saw what happened when you fell downstairs, sir."

"You mean, you discovered the fact that I was in disguise?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what do you think about it?"

Wharton was nonplussed.

He had not expected to be received in this way, as if the whole incident were a humorous one, and of no importance.

"I—I don't know what to make of it," he said. "I want you to explain."

"Before you mention it to the doctor, I suppose you mean?"

"Yes. Unless you explain how it is, I think I ought to tell the Head, or my Form-master," said Wharton.

"Quite so. However, it is easy to explain, if I can trust to your discretion," said Mr. Noble, with a keen glance at the juniors.

"Oh!"

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"Can I trust you?"

Wharton coloured.

"I hope so, sir. If it is a secret that it is proper for us to keep, you can certainly trust us with it."

"The trustfulness is terrific."

"I really have no choice in the matter," said Mr. Noble musingly; "but I am sure you will keep the secret—at least, I hope so; as the results to you may be very serious if you do not."

"To me!"

"Yes. Your personal safety depends upon my being here."

Wharton started.

"Mine!" he exclaimed.

"Exactly."

"But—but how?" said Harry, utterly amazed.

"You do not understand?" asked Mr. Noble, with a smile.

"Not in the least."

"Blessed if I do, either," said Nugent. "I suppose you're not rotting?"

"My dear lads, I am speaking quite seriously. Have you forgotten that a dangerous criminal, with a special grudge against you, is lurking in the vicinity of this school?"

The juniors made a movement. Certainly they had forgotten the existence of Lagden, the convict, for the time.

"You are speaking of Lagden?" asked Harry.

"Yes."

"But what has he to do with it?"

"Much. Not to beat about the bush any further, I may as well explain at once that I am a detective, and in disguise," said Mr. Noble.

Wharton caught his breath.

"A detective!"

"Yes," said Mr. Noble, smiling, "a detective. I was despatched here to keep watch in this place, as soon as your story of having seen the convict was known. You see, this man Lagden is known to be a desperate character. Why do you think he has headed in this direction, so far from his prison, and where there is no greater chance of escaping from the country than if he had made for the coast of Hampshire?"

"He may want to get across the North Sea."

"Yes, but I suspect that his object first was to revenge himself upon the boy who was chiefly instrumental in causing his arrest in the first place."

"Upon me!"

"Exactly. Under the belief that Lagden would haunt the vicinity of Greyfriars, I was sent here, for a double purpose—to keep guard over your safety, and to watch for a chance of getting on the track of the convict."

"I see."

"I could not come here as a detective, without giving the whole thing away—my object, of course, is to entrap the man if I can," explained Mr. Noble. "I should not be surprised if he attempted to enter Greyfriars to-night, and if he did, he would find me on the watch. I need not say that I am not so old as I look. I adopted this disguise as the most useful, and least likely to excite suspicion. As a matter of fact, my name is not Noble, and I have no son coming to Greyfriars."

"Then—then you are not a friend of my uncle's!" exclaimed Wharton.

The man laughed.

"I have never seen your uncle. But I happened to know his name, and to hear that he was in Switzerland just now, so I used that knowledge for my purpose."

Wharton was silent.

Some degree of deception, he knew, must be allowed to a detective in the exercise of his calling, but this jarred upon his nerves.

"Then the Head does not know?" he asked.

"No. I am acting, of course, under orders. It was considered best to take no one into our confidence. Of course, the matter will be fully explained to Dr. Locke before I leave Greyfriars."

"And Inspector Dix—"

"He is here quite independently of me, and does not know me in this disguise—though he would recognise me quickly enough in my own person," said Mr. Noble, laughing.

The juniors were silent.

"Well?" said Mr. Noble, at last.

"I don't like it," said Wharton.

"What is it you don't like?"

"This deception."

"But there was no alternative."

"You ought to tell the Head, anyway," said Harry, frowning.

Mr. Noble shrugged his shoulders.

"It is better for Dr. Locke to know nothing. He is not a cautious man, and he might give away the whole matter. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—126.

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Besides, it is only for a short time. Lagden cannot evade the police for long."

"I hope not, but—"

"Well, what is it? Speak out plainly, Wharton."

"I don't see how I can keep your secret, unless you explain to the Head," said Harry firmly. "I don't think I have a right to help you to deceive him."

Mr. Noble knitted his brows.

"If that is the condition you make for keeping silence, I will do as you desire," he said.

"Then that is settled."

"Very well, I will explain to Dr. Locke at dinner; I dine with him," said Mr. Noble. "What else can I do?"

"That's all. Only I don't think it's really necessary for you to be here at all, and that's the fact," said Harry frankly. "It's absurd to suppose that the convict would dare to enter Greyfriars."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"It seems to me rot to think he would," said Nugent.

"The rotfulness seems to be terrific to my worthy self," observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of the head.

Mr. Noble laughed.

"Well, I must carry out my instructions," he remarked.

"However, I will explain to the Head, as you insist upon it, Wharton."

"Very well, sir."

And the juniors left the room. Their faces were very grave as they walked away. Harry frowned.

"It's a queer business," said Nugent.

"Jolly queer," said Harry, knitting his brows. "I don't half like it. I almost wish I hadn't agreed to keep the secret. But if he explains to the Head, I suppose it will be all right. One thing's certain; I'm not going to have any more to do with him."

"Same here."

"The sameness is terrific."

"I say, you fellows—" began Bunter.

Then he paused.

"Well?" said Harry.

"Oh, nothing!"

"Eh?"

"It's all right. I—I forgot what I was going to say."

Wharton glanced curiously at the fat junior. Bunter turned away, as if to avoid further questioning, and was making off, when Harry grasped him by the shoulder.

"Wait a minute, Billy. We've agreed to keep the secret, you know."

"I know."

"Mind, not a word."

"Of course not," said Bunter indignantly. "I really hope that you don't think I should be capable of giving it away, Wharton?"

Harry regarded him distrustfully.

"Well, you'd better not," he said. "If the secret gets out, we shall know it was you gave it away, and you'll smart for it."

"Oh, really—"

"That's enough. Mind what I say, that's all."

Bunter blinked after the juniors as they walked away. A grin dawned on his fat face, and he returned to the stairs to keep a watch for Mr. Noble when he should emerge from his room.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

"One Good Turn Deserves Another!"

MR. NOBLE came out of his room about ten minutes later, and almost ran into the fat junior as he came quickly towards the stairs. Billy Bunter's ample form blocked his path.

"Let me pass, please," said Mr. Noble, looking surprised.

"I say, sir—"

"I am to dine with the doctor," said Mr. Noble. "Please do not detain me."

"I won't detain you more than a minute, sir," said Bunter suavely. "It's important, sir—really important."

"What do you mean?"

"It's about what you told us just now."

Mr. Noble looked at him fixedly.

"Well, what about that?"

"I understand that you want it kept a strict secret?"

"For the present, yes."

"Of course, I'm only too pleased to keep it a secret," said Bunter effusively. "I'd do more than that for a fellow I like, and I respect you very much, Mr. Noble. I think you're awfully clever, and all that."

"Thank you."

"But, if you don't mind my speaking about my private affairs, I'm in a rather curious position," said Bunter. "The

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fact is, I was expecting a postal-order by the first post this morning, and it hasn't come."

"Indeed!"

"That's how it is, sir. You see, there are sometimes delays in the post—the authorities are awfully careless—and my remittances don't come along in time. This postal-order is a case in point. It ought to have been here by the first delivery this morning. There have been two posts since then, and it hasn't come yet."

"I am afraid I cannot spare more time——"

"Wait a minute, sir. My postal-order having failed to come, I'm in rather a hole. I suppose you wouldn't think, to look at me, that I'm short of money, but I assure you that I'm quite stony."

"Really?"

"Yes, sir. The worst of it is, that I've got a delicate constitution that can only be kept going by taking plenty of nourishment."

Mr. Noble made a movement to pass. Bunter's ample figure rolled into the way.

"Excuse me, sir——"

"Nonsense! I——"

"But it's important, sir. I am going to keep your secret because I—I like you, you know. But don't you think, sir, that 'one good turn deserves another'?"

Mr. Noble looked at him grimly.

"How much do you want?" he asked.

"Oh, really, sir——"

"How much—quick!"

"Well, that's a very rotten way of putting it, and I'd rather keep the matter on a perfectly friendly footing," said Bunter. "But I really think that you might make me a small loan—say ten shillings—to be repaid the moment my postal-order comes."

Mr. Noble felt in his pocket, and extracted half-a-sovereign, which he pressed into the willing hand of Billy Bunter.

"And now you will hold your tongue?" he asked.

"Oh, really, that's a very brutal way of putting it, sir! Of course, I should have kept the secret in the most honourable way, whether you had made me this small loan or not—in fact, I am quite willing to return it to you, if you prefer not to lend it," said Bunter, jamming the half-sovereign into his trousers pocket.

"You are a business youth," said Mr. Noble. "You ought to get on. You will be a great man in the City some day, if you are not sent to prison or hanged." And he walked on. Bunter blinked at him.

"Cheeky rotter," he muttered. "Fancy a detective having the cheek to say things like that to me—all over a rotten small loan, too. I ought to have had a sovereign."

Bunter took the piece of gold from his pocket and blinked at it, examining it lovingly. It was a real half-sovereign, and the fat junior was in funds.

Visions of Mrs. Mimble's tuckshop, and a gorgeous feed therein, floated before the mind of the fat junior.

His fat face assumed an expression of pleased anticipation.

"Well, after all, this is ripping!" he murmured. "You can get a lot for ten bob. I won't tell the other fellows—they would only want to know where I got the money, and would say a lot of rotten things about it, just as if I had forced Mr. Noble to give it to me, instead of his giving it of his own free will. I—— Oh!"

A slap on the shoulder made Bunter stagger, and he reeled along the landing, and the coin slipped from his fingers.

Clink, clink, clink! The half-sovereign was gone downstairs.

"Oh!" roared Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"What were you muttering about?" demanded Bob Cherry, who had administered that vigorous greeting to the Owl of the Remove. "Off your rocker?"

"Ow!"

"Or learning up a part for the Dramatic Society?" asked Bob. "What do you mean by mooning on the stairs, muttering to yourself?"

"Yow! My half-sovereign!"

"Eh?"

"You've made me drop my half-sovereign!"

"Your what?"

"My half-sovereign!" roared Bunter. "It's rolled downstairs now, and I shouldn't wonder if it was lost!"

Bob Cherry burst into a roar.

Bunter was such a pronounced fibber that nobody ever believed what he said, unless there was corroborative evidence, and his statement that he had a half-sovereign seemed to Bob Cherry a wilder invention than usual.

Bob knew that all the fellows in No. 1 Study, including Bunter, had been stony-broke that afternoon, so his disbelief was natural enough.

Bunter blinked at him furiously.

"I've lost my half-sovereign!" he bawled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. Help me look for it. You know I'm a little short-sighted."

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"Ha, ha! Don't be an ass!" roared Bob. "Do you think you are going to take me in with a flimsy yarn like that?"

"You made me drop a half-sovereign——"

"Ha, ha! Whose was it, then?" exclaimed Bob, laughing. "It wasn't yours, that's a cert!"

"It was mine!"

"Your postal-order come?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"N-n-no; it—it was lent to me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here——"

"Oh, come off, Bunter! You don't expect me to swallow that, surely!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, impatiently. "If you must lie, why don't you lie a little better?"

"My half-sovereign——"

"Oh, cheese it!"

Bob Cherry walked away. Bunter yelled after him:

"Bob Cherry! Look here! Help me look for my half-sovereign! I——"

Bob turned round.

"Look here, you young ass, if you had ten bob, where did you get it?" he asked.

"A—a friend lent it to me," stammered Bunter.

"Oh, tell that to the marines!"

And Bob Cherry walked off, whistling. He did not believe in the existence of the half-sovereign, and there was no help to be had from him.

Bunter, with a wrathful snort, began to search for the lost coin.

He might have searched for the proverbial needle in a haystack.

Bunter was short-sighted, and he might have blinked along the staircase and the passage for a week without getting on the track of the missing coin.

It had rolled into some obscure corner, or down some crack in the flooring, and Bunter blinked for a quarter of an hour in every direction without discovering a sign of it.

Hot and perspiring and extremely bad-tempered, the fat junior gave it up at last.

"Beast!" he murmured, thinking of Bob Cherry. "It's gone! What the dickens am I to do? I'm fearfully hungry, and I must have something to keep up my strength!"

It was not very long since Bunter had travelled through a most substantial tea, but that was nothing to Bunter. The half-sovereign had made him mentally revel in feeds, and he could not forget those delightful visions of cakes and pies.

There was only one thing to be done! Mr. Noble must be explained to, and induced to stand another half-sovereign.

That was the only resource.

After all, he had plenty of money, and one good turn deserved another.

Billy Bunter rolled away in search of Mr. Noble. He met Trotter in the passage, and asked him if he had seen the guest of Greyfriars.

Trotter nodded.

"Yes, Master Bunter."

"Where is he? I want to see him—it's most important."

Trotter grinned.

"He's dining with the 'Ead, sir, and Mrs. Locke."

"Oh!"

Bunter grunted discontentedly. Even his nerve was not equal to penetrating to the dining-room in the Head's house, and tackling Mr. Noble in the presence of Dr. and Mrs. Locke.

He could only wait.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

On the Track of the Convict.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were in No. 1 Study, doing their preparation, when Billy Bunter wandered aimlessly in. The fat junior stood and blinked at the chums. Harry made room for him at the table.

"Better get your prep. done, Bunter," he remarked.

"Oh, blow the prep.!" said Billy.

"You remember what Mr. Quelch said to you this morning?"

"No, I don't," said Bunter peevishly. "I say, you fellows, have you had any luck? I mean, have you got any tin?"

"No."

"Look here, I've lost a half-sovereign!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"I can get another shortly," said Bunter, unheeding. "I want you to lend me a few bob till I get it."

"Rats!"

"Oh, really——"

"This is a variation of the postal-order fairy tale," grinned Nugent. "But we haven't any tin; Bunter; and if we had, we wouldn't part. So shut up!"

Bunter grunted.

"I think you're a set of mean rotters!" he said. "I say, do you know how long the Head usually is over his dinner?"

The juniors stared at him.

"I've never noticed," said Harry. "What on earth does it matter?"

"Oh, nothing!"

Bunter drifted out of the study again. Nugent tapped his forehead significantly, to hint his belief that the fat junior was not quite right in his head, and the chums fell to their prep. again.

Bunter went down the passage, and looked into Bulstrode's study. Bulstrode, Hazeldene, and Tom Brown, were there, busy with their preparation.

"I say, you fellows—" remarked Bunter.

Bulstrode looked up. He was not in the best of tempers. He did not waste words on the fat junior. He picked up a cushion and hurled it with a deadly aim. Never did a cricket ball fly more unerringly to a wicket.

"Oh!" roared Bunter, as the cushion smote him on the chest.

He was bowled over at once, and sat down in the passage with a bump that made his bones ache.

A yell of laughter followed the cushion from the study.

Bunter picked himself up and limped away.

He gave up the idea of borrowing anything of Bulstrode on the strength of his coming supplies from Mr. Noble.

He wandered to the Close, and looked in at the window of the tuckshop under the elms, and feasted his eyes upon the forbidden delicacies. The massive, well-set figure of Inspector Dix caught his eye, crossing from the gates. The inspector was walking towards the Head's house. Bunter blinked at him, and blinked at two stalwart forms in uniform that lingered near the gates of the school.

A new idea worked in Bunter's mind.

Inspector Dix, as a detective, was doubtless a colleague of Mr. Noble's, who was a detective too, and it might be possible to extract something from him, as he had extracted it from Mr. Noble.

Bunter was thinking over the idea when the burly form of the inspector disappeared into the Head's house.

Inspector Dix was looking his usual calm, cool self, but there was a gleam in his eye which told of suppressed excitement. He was admitted to the dining-room at once, where the Head and Mr. Noble sat over their cigars. Mrs. Locke had retired, and the two old gentlemen were alone.

The Head glanced inquiringly at the inspector.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you once more, sir," said Mr. Dix. "But it's necessary, as you will see when I have explained."

"Pray take a seat," said the Head courteously.

"Thank you, sir."

The Head pushed the cigar-box towards the inspector. Mr. Dix, somewhat flattered, selected a cigar, and Mr. Noble politely handed him a light.

"The fact is, sir"—Mr. Dix glanced at Mr. Noble, and mentally decided that it did not matter if he spoke before that simple, kindly-looking old gentleman—"the fact is, sir, we are on the track of the convict at last."

"I am glad to hear it."

"And I," exclaimed Mr. Noble, with great interest. "I have just been explaining to Dr. Locke, inspector, that I cannot reconcile myself to allowing my boy Oswald to come to Greyfriars until the criminal has been captured."

"We expect to capture him soon, sir," said Mr. Dix. "But I have come here to tell you, Dr. Locke, that the man has been traced in this direction."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. There are a dozen prison warders in the district now, and more than a couple of dozen mounted police searching the countryside," said the inspector. "Besides that, most of the villagers and the coastfolk are keeping a look-out, as there is a substantial reward offered. The fellow has got into a hot corner by coming here, now that we know he is here."

"Then the capture cannot be long delayed," Mr. Noble remarked.

"I think not," said the inspector. "He cannot escape, that is certain; and it is pretty clear that he has found some hiding-place, and is lying low in it. The countryside has been hunted through, and we cannot find him. But what clues we have lead in this direction. Now, I have already, with Wharton's assistance, searched the ruins attached to Greyfriars and found no trace of him there. But I am convinced that the man is not very far away from this school."

The Head started.

"That is serious, inspector."

"Yes. I will give you my reasons. You are aware that the man burgled a costumier's shop and escaped in possession of a bag containing a large variety of disguises. He is thus certainly in disguise. We know that, also, because his clothes have been found, crammed away out of sight under the

flooring of an old barn. In that barn last night he changed his clothes and disguised himself, I am certain of that."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Noble.

"That barn is less than ten minutes walk from the school," said Mr. Dix. "I have carefully hunted for traces, and there are indications which prove to me that the man when he left the barn headed in the direction of the junction."

"But that is the opposite direction from Greyfriars," said the Head.

"Exactly. But we know that he is not in the town. He has been too carefully searched for there," said Inspector Dix. "But at the junction station a man arrived last night, as I have learned from the porters, turning up there just before dawn. He was a man with a brown beard and a bag in his hand, and he took the first train to London."

"To London?"

"Yes. But he did not arrive at London. There has been careful inquiry all along the line, and the line was being watched at that very time. The man left the train at the first town, and his description corresponds with that of a man who bought a silk hat there early this morning."

"Dear me!"

"He also, I believe, made a change in his disguise," said the inspector. "For although it appears certain that he returned to the station and took a train back to the junction, at the junction all trace of him is lost."

"But you think he came in this direction?"

"Yes. He knew he was watched for, and dared not make for London. My theory is, that he knew of some hiding-place in this quarter, and made for it when he found that escape in that direction was impossible. Now, this whole vicinity has been searched and searched again, with no result. I cannot help thinking that there may be some obscure corner in the ruins of Greyfriars where the man may be hiding. There may be some part of the subterranean passages unknown to you."

"But surely not known to this man Lagden, who I understand is a stranger in this vicinity?"

"That I cannot tell. He may have been born here, for anything I know to the contrary. He may have a friend in the neighbourhood. A false beard, of a brown colour, was picked up on the line between the junction and Friardale, by a plate-layer. It had been flung from the train, and had lodged in a bush. I have since searched all the carriages that were in the train it must have been flung from. I found a collar crumpled under a seat, in one carriage, evidently discarded by someone there. If the convict in disguise arrived at Friardale to-day, he has not departed the same way; there have been no up passengers. The man is in this neighbourhood, and the ruins here are the only possible refuge I can think of where he may be hiding. I want to make a second and more systematic search."

"By all means," said the Head. "Do everything you think fit. I give you every authority. If the man is near here, I shall feel very uneasy till he is captured."

"Thank you very much."

"I will give instructions," said the Head, and he rang for Gosling, the porter, and explained to him what the inspector wanted.

Gosling departed to get lanterns for the search, and the inspector, thanking the Head warmly, took his leave.

The Head smiled slightly when Mr. Dix was gone.

Mr. Noble's face reflected his smile.

"You think our friend is acting on rather shadowy clues, sir?" Mr. Noble remarked.

"I must say, yes," replied the Head. "It is very clever; but—but I really think it more probable that the convict has escaped, and that Mr. Dix is following up a very forlorn hope in searching the vicinity of Greyfriars. However, I wish him every success."

"Quite so—quite so," said Mr. Noble.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Inspector Dix Learns Something!

INSPECTOR DIX wore a wrinkle of deep thought upon his brow as he emerged from the Head's house. The inspector hoped that he was on the right track; but it was rather a hope he felt than a belief. His clues were shadowy, vague. He had worked hard all day, and made others work hard, but he had to confess that the escaped convict so far had baffled him.

If his present search turned out to be unsuccessful, there was nothing for him to do but to leave a watch upon Greyfriars, and search further afield for the elusive fugitive. The inspector was in an excited and not wholly happy frame of mind. He was so deeply occupied in his thoughts that he walked into Billy Bunter, who was waiting for him outside the Head's house, and stopped with a sharp ejaculation.

"I'm sincerely sorry, sir," said Bunter. "I—I wanted to speak to you."

"Well?" said the inspector curtly.

"Is Mr. Noble still with the Head, sir?"

"Mr. Noble! The old gentleman! Yes."

"Is he coming out soon?"

"I really do not know," said Mr. Dix, in surprise.

"Please don't waste my time. I'm busy."

"Just a minute, sir. It's rather important."

The inspector, who was turning away, stopped again. It occurred to him that Bunter might have seen something of the convict. The inspector was thinking of nothing but the convict, and he could imagine nothing of importance unconnected with the escape of Lagden. Bunter, for his part, was thinking of the jam-tarts in Mrs. Mumble's little window.

"Well, what is it, my lad?" said the inspector, more patiently. "Have you anything to tell me?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"Mr. Noble was kind enough to lend me a half-sovereign, on account of a postal-order I'm expecting this evening," explained Bunter. "He thought that one good turn deserved another, you know. I've lost it!"

"Come, come! What has all that to do with me?"

"Why, I—I thought you might like to lend me a half-sovereign."

"Eh?"

"As Mr. Noble is a friend of yours."

"What nonsense are you talking?" said Mr. Dix, half-annoyed and half-amused. "I do not know Mr. Noble."

Bunter grinned.

"That's all you know, sir."

"What on earth do you mean?" demanded the inspector, beginning to suspect that Bunter was weak in his head. "I do not understand you in the least."

"Well, you see, I undertook not to say anything," said Bunter; "or, rather, Wharton undertook for me—I didn't promise anything. But, of course, I'm not going to give him away; only, as you are another detective, I suppose it doesn't matter."

The inspector started.

"Another detective!" he ejaculated.

"You are a detective, ain't you?" said Bunter.

"Yes, certainly; but Mr. Noble——"

"Oh, I'm not going to say anything!"

"I think you must be mad!" said Mr. Dix brusquely.

"What do you mean by implying that Mr. Noble is a detective? I suppose this is what you call a jape, and you are trying to take a rise out of me."

"Oh, no, sir! I really wouldn't think of such a thing. As I've lost the half-sovereign, I thought you might lend me another one, and settle it with Mr. Noble."

"Why on earth should I?"

"Well, I'm going to keep his secret, of course——"

"Whose secret?"

"Mr. Noble's."

"Oh, he has a secret, has he?" said the inspector, with a smile. He was curious now, and he meant to draw the junior on.

"Yes, rather!" said Bunter, blinking at the inspector.

"Of course, when he explained that he was a detective, we knew it was all right."

"Indeed!"

The inspector was really interested now. Bunter was speaking seriously, and it was clear that he was telling the truth. The inspector wondered why a respectable old gentleman like Mr. Noble should have pretended to be a detective, and he meant to find out.

"Oh, yes!" said Bunter. "Of course, it would have made anybody suspicious when it turned out that he was in disguise, but as a detective——"

The inspector jumped clear of the ground in his surprise.

"Disguise!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, sir!"

"Who is in disguise?"

"Oh, really, I'm not going to tell you——"

"Look here, my lad," said the inspector, "you want half-a-sovereign?"

"Yes," said Bunter. "You see, Mr. Noble gave me one, and I lost it, owing to Bob Cherry's silly tricks. As a colleague of his, I think you might——"

"Exactly," said the inspector, trying to suppress his excitement. "As a colleague of his, I will hand you the half-sovereign—only I must know all about the matter first. You may confide in me, as—as another detective, and as a friend of Mr. Noble's."

"Just what I thought," said Bunter fatuously. "Of course, I shall return the half-sovereign directly when my postal-order comes——"

"Never mind that now——"

"But I want to make it quite clear, sir. I shouldn't like you to imagine that I would take a money present from anyone. I hope I'm independent."

The inspector choked back an emphatic word.

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ONE
PENNY.

"Yes, yes, exactly," he said. He extracted a piece of gold from his waistcoat-pocket, and held it so that Bunter could see it in the light from a window. The fat junior's round eyes glistened behind his spectacles. The inspector saw them glisten, and he was sure of Bunter then.

"Thank you, sir!" said Bunter, holding out a fat hand.

"You can explain to Mr. Noble, and——"

"Wait a minute," said Mr. Dix. "You say that Mr. Noble is in disguise?"

"Oh, yes! I suppose it's all right to tell you?"

"Of course! But how do you know?"

"The Duffer—Todd—rolled him downstairs, you know," said Bunter, with a chuckle. "His beard and whiskers came off."

Mr. Dix jumped again.

"You are certain of that, my lad?"

"I saw it."

"Did anybody else see it?"

"Yes; Wharton and Nugent and Inky."

"Did Mr. Noble make any explanation of the circumstance?"

"Yes; he told us all about it then—he had to!" grinned Bunter. "Why, we should have thought he was a burglar or something if he hadn't explained."

"And what did he explain?"

"Oh, he let us into the secret then—about his being a detective, and coming here to search for the convict, and see that the villain didn't get at Harry Wharton. You know, it was partly through Wharton that Lagden was captured in the first place, though as a matter of fact it was chiefly through me. But they never do me justice——"

Mr. Dix's hand fell heavily upon the fat junior's shoulder.

"You're telling me the truth?" he said.

Bunter jumped.

"Of course I am!" he exclaimed, startled by the inspector's deep, stern tones. "I hope you don't think I could possibly prevaricate. It's a thing I've never done, and I often get disliked because I'm so truthful."

The inspector reflected for a moment.

"Do you know who Mr. Noble is supposed to be?" he asked.

Bunter grinned.

"He's supposed to be a chap coming here to see the school before he sends his son into the Lower Fourth," he replied.

"Is he staying at Greyfriars?"

"Yes; to-night, anyway, and to-morrow."

"Then he has a room here?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where it is?"

"Certainly," said Bunter, in wonder. "Do you want to go there?"

"Yes. Take me there, and this half-sovereign is yours."

"Come on!" said Bunter, with alacrity.

The inspector gave a low whistle, and the two constables he had left at the gate joined him in the Close. Mr. Dix spoke to them in a low voice, words which Bunter could not hear, and then followed the fat junior. The two policemen, with astonishment in their faces, stood close by the door of the Head's house, while the inspector followed Bunter into the School House and up the stairs.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER

Lagden at Last!

HARRY WHARTON came out of No. 1 Study as Bunter led the way upstairs, followed by the inspector. Billy Bunter caught his eye, and looked a little nervous. The fat junior knew well enough that he had done wrong, though he did not choose to admit it even to himself. He gave Wharton a feeble grin.

Harry nodded to Mr. Dix.

"Found the convict yet, sir?" he asked.

"No," said the inspector. "I hope to lay hands on him soon."

Wharton smiled. He did not expect the inspector to admit when he was beaten. He glanced after the burly gentleman from Scotland Yard, and saw him follow Bunter to the door of Mr. Noble's room on the upper passage. There Mr. Dix handed over the half-sovereign, and the fat junior scuttled downstairs with it. Mr. Dix tried the door of the room, and found it locked. That did not delay Mr. Dix very long, however. In a few seconds the lock clicked open, and he went in and closed the door.

Wharton's face flushed.

This proceeding on Mr. Dix's part was so cool that Wharton could only stare. Mr. Dix had used a skeleton key to enter the room of a complete stranger. He certainly had no right to do anything of the sort in Greyfriars.

Wharton intercepted Bunter as he came down.

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The Owl of the Remove tried to dodge, and when he found that to be impossible, he forced a feeble grin.

"Coming to the tuckshop, Wharton?" he asked affably.

"No," said Harry shortly. "Did the inspector give you money?"

"Oh, no!"

"Bunter! I saw him!"

"You saw him make me a small loan, perhaps," said Bunter, with dignity. "It's all right; I've explained to him about my postal-order being delayed, and he's lent me this until the post gets in."

"You young ass——"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

Wharton grasped Bunter by the shoulder and shook him angrily.

"Look here, what has he given you money for?" he exclaimed.

"He hasn't. He's lent me ten bob——"

"Bunter——"

"Don't shake me like that! It ruins my digestion! And—and you might make my glasses fall off, and——"

"Look here——"

"And if they get broken you'll have to pay for them!"

Wharton released the fat junior. Bunter gladly scuttled away; and inside a minute he was in Mrs. Mimble's shop, and had forgotten the existence of the inspector and of Mr. Noble. The half-sovereign flowed away at record speed. Meanwhile, Harry Wharton ran up to the next landing, and strode in at the door of Mr. Noble's room.

Inspector or no inspector, Mr. Dix had no right to invade a private apartment in that way, and Wharton did not mean to see it done.

He started as he saw how the inspector was engaged.

Mr. Dix had Mr. Noble's bag upon the table, and had just forced the lock. It snapped, and the bag flew open, as Wharton entered.

The inspector jumped, and his fists clenched hard, as Harry came in. He broke into a slight laugh as he saw it was only the junior.

"What are you doing here?" exclaimed Harry.

Mr. Dix gave him a quick look.

"Close the door," he said crisply.

"But——"

"Do as I tell you."

Wharton did not stir.

"You must explain first what you are doing in Mr. Noble's room, opening his bag," he said. "This may be detective business, but it can't be allowed here. You'd better get out of the room at once, and I shall certainly tell Mr. Noble what I have seen."

The inspector smiled.

"Close the door," he said. "I will explain."

Wharton hesitated a moment, and then closed the door.

Mr. Dix opened the bag wide, and turned out the contents upon the table.

Wharton stared at them.

There were clothes of various sorts, tightly packed; and there were disguises, wigs, boards, moustaches, and grease paints in great variety.

The inspector chuckled.

"Pretty property for a harmless old gentleman to be carrying around with him when he visits a school," he remarked.

Wharton smiled.

"If you knew the facts you would not be so surprised," he said.

"I do know the facts—more than you do, lad. Mr. Noble has told you that he is a detective?"

"Ah! Bunter has told you."

"Yes."

"The young rascal! It was a secret. I'll lick him!" exclaimed Harry angrily. "I promised Mr. Noble that nothing should be said, so long as he explained to the Head——"

"He has not done so."

"How do you know?"

"Because I have just smoked a cigar with them, and the Head is still under the impression that his visitor is Mr. Noble, a gentleman seeking a suitable school for his son."

Wharton's brows contracted.

"Then he has broken faith with me?"

"Naturally."

"But——"

"You see, the Head would not be likely to believe him so easily as you lads," explained Mr. Dix, with a smile. "As a matter of fact, he is no more a detective than you are!"

Wharton started again.

"Not a detective."

"Certainly not."

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"But—but he is in disguise."

"Detectives disguise themselves in story-books," smiled the inspector. "In real life there is very little of that, my lad. Probably your knowledge of detectives is gained chiefly from story-books. He was trading on that; he is a cunning rascal; it was the most plausible explanation he could think of, when you discovered that he was in disguise; and it shows that he was quick-witted."

"Then—then he is an impostor?"

"Certainly!"

"Who is he, then?"

The inspector chuckled.

"You will see, soon, I think."

Wharton's brain was in a whirl. He could not but believe the inspector. But who and what, then, was the disguised visitor to Greyfriars? A criminal! It seemed impossible. What did it all mean?"

Mr. Dix made a sudden movement of listening.

There was a sound of footsteps on the stairs.

The inspector's face changed at once. The smile vanished; his features hardened till they seemed moulded in iron, and a glint of steel was in his eyes.

He made a sign to Wharton to be silent.

"He is coming," he muttered, below his breath.

"Mr. Noble?"

"Yes."

"But——"

"Silence!"

The inspector stepped towards the door.

He stood close beside the doorway, so that the door, in opening, would conceal him; evidently with the intention of taking the new-comer by surprise.

Wharton stood spellbound.

There was a command now in the inspector's manner; and he was there to represent the law. Wharton felt that he must not oppose him.

The footsteps came up to the door.

A hand touched it—the door swung open. Then there was a startled exclamation. The man who opened the door remembered that he had left it locked, and it was not locked now.

The white-whiskered face looked into the room with startled eyes. The inspector sprang into view.

"Convict Lagden, I arrest you——"

He did not finish.

Mr. Noble's hand came out of his breast, and there was a flash and a report. But even as the trigger was pulled, Harry Wharton, who had been standing almost stunned with surprise, acted quickly. He hurled himself blindly forward, and both his fists struck the disguised convict, and the revolver sagged from the straight line as it exploded.

The inspector hurled himself upon the man the next moment. The bullet had missed him by an inch, and crashed through a window.

The next instant the revolver was wrenched from the convict's hand.

THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

Captured.

THERE was a wild trampling of feet in the doorway of the room, as the burly inspector grappled with the equally powerful convict. The revolver was on the floor, and Mr. Noble's white beard and whiskers and wig followed it there in the struggle. The close-cropped head of the convict, the clear-cut features of Lagden, were revealed. There could be no further doubt as to who "Mr. Noble" was.

Wharton would have helped the inspector, but the wild plunging of the struggling figures made it impossible for him to help. He kicked the revolver to the end of the room, out of the possible reach of the convict.

There was a wild rush of footsteps on the stairs.

The two policemen were tearing up as fast as they could come.

They had kept "Mr. Noble" in sight when he emerged from the Head's house, as the inspector had instructed them in his whispered words which Bunter did not hear.

They were not far behind him now.

Lagden heard them coming, and made a superhuman effort.

He wrenched himself away from the inspector, and leaped free for a moment. But the two constables were on the landing now.

They rushed straight at him.

The convict paused a single second to draw a breath. Then his hand was on the banisters, and he swung himself over to the stairs below.

It was a formidable fall; the stairs were fifteen feet beneath the bend of the staircase.

But the convict had the luck of desperation

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He alighted on his feet like a cat, and rolled down the stairs, and then was up and running in a moment.

The inspector gave a wild shout.

"After him!"

The policemen clattered down the stairs in hot haste.

After them went the inspector, gasping for breath, but as keen as a bloodhound. Harry Wharton ran to the window.

He saw the convict burst from the house, and dart through the radius of light from the windows, and disappear into the gloom of the Close.

His brain was in a whirl.

Criminal as Lagden was, his determination and his pluck were great, and Harry found himself half wishing that he would get clear.

The chase died away across the Close.

The whole school was alarmed and excited now, and Harry, as he came downstairs, was plied with questions, and his answers excited immense surprise. The discovery that the kind, benevolent Mr. Noble was the convict in disguise was enough to stagger Greyfriars.

The first impression was that Wharton was "rotting"; but the scattered fragments of the convict's disguise confirmed his statement.

"The convict!" said Bob Cherry. "Well, my hat! Such a nice-looking old chap!"

"It's amazing," said Nugent, and the Nabob of Bhanipur remarked that the amazefulness was terrific.

Wharton's face was grave.

"A narrow escape for some of us," he said. "The chap came here to hide, but—My hat! He was with us in the study, and we had tea with him—Lagden! I wonder what he was thinking of all the time."

"If we had known—"

"He must have meant mischief," said Bob Cherry. "The curious thing to me is, that he didn't find an opportunity of doing any while he was here."

Wharton nodded.

What might have happened if Lagden had passed that night under the roof of Greyfriars? And yet Wharton had a curious feeling that Lagden's geniality in No. 1 Study had not been all and wholly assumed.

There was a roar of voices in the Close.

The juniors hurried to the door.

Back from the gloom came a swaying group—the inspector and his two constables, and in their grasp a tattered and panting figure. The gates had been locked, and Lagden had been run down in the Close.

The convict was captured.

He was brought into the hall. The handcuffs were clinking on his wrists now, and he was a helpless prisoner.

He was weak and panting with exhaustion.

"Got him," said the inspector, with a gasp.

Harry Wharton dragged forward a stool, and the convict sank upon it. He was gasping and gasping, and his heart could almost be heard to beat.

He gave Wharton a curious look as he sat down. The two policemen stood with their hands upon his shoulders. They did not mean to run any further risks with him.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed the Head, aghast, coming upon the scene.

"It means that we've got the convict, sir," said Inspector Dix. "With your permission, we'll keep him here till we've had a rest, and we'll borrow a vehicle to take him to Friardale."

"Certainly," said the Head. "I will order the trap at once. But—but how did he get here? Where was he?"

"You knew him as Mr. Noble, sir."

"What!"

"Mr. Noble was Lagden in disguise."

The Head passed his hand dazedly over his forehead.

"Extraordinary!" he exclaimed.

"But we've got him," said the inspector, with much satisfaction.

The Head moved away, looking dazed. He had never had quite so great a surprise in his life.

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ONE
PENNY.

"Give me something to drink," muttered Lagden hoarsely. "I'm parched."

Wharton glanced at the inspector, who nodded. Harry brought a glass of water, and the convict drank.

"Thank you!" he said.

The crowd thickened; the hall was crammed with curious fellows. The policemen never let go their grip upon the convict.

Lagden fixed his eyes upon Harry Wharton.

"I have not done what I came here to do, Harry Wharton," he said. "I came here for a safe hiding-place, and to—"

He paused.

Harry met his gaze calmly.

"And to revenge yourself upon me, I suppose?" he said.

"Exactly!"

Wharton's glance remained quite steady.

"Then I have had a narrow escape," he said.

"Not through my arrest," said Lagden. "I had given up the idea before I was found out. It may surprise you. But after I had broken bread with you in your study, I gave up the thought of injuring you in any way. Perhaps you do not believe me."

"I do believe you," said Harry quietly, "and I'm glad of it."

The inspector rose to his feet as the sound of wheels was heard outside. Gosling had come round with the trap.

"Come," said Mr. Dix.

Lagden rose between the two policemen, and followed them quietly.

The juniors crowded to the door to see him go.

He mounted into the trap between the two constables, and the handcuffs clinked as he did so. The inspector sat close to him, and Gosling drove away.

The trap disappeared.

"My only hat!" said Bob Cherry, with a deep breath. "I think that takes the cake, kids. It beats cock-fighting."

"I say, you fellows—" Billy Bunter was swelling with so much importance that there really seemed to be some danger of his waistcoat-buttons giving way under the strain.

"I say, you fellows, this is one to me, if you like!"

"Eh?"

"Look here, I suppose you're not going to try and make out that I wasn't the chap who did it this time?" exclaimed Bunter warmly.

"You!"

"Yes, I," said Bunter. "I bowled him out, and put the inspector on to it, and I can jolly well tell you, I ought to have the reward, and—"

"Rats!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"As a matter of fact, it was Todd who bowled him out, and that was an accident," said Harry Wharton. "He might have been here still, and as safe as houses, but for the Duffer of Greyfriars."

"Good old Duffer," said Bob Cherry, giving Alonzo Todd a slap on the back that made him stagger.

"Ow!"

"Oh, I say, you fellows, it was I who—"

"Then you're entitled to a slap on the back!" exclaimed Bob Cherry heartily. "Here you are, Bunter—"

"Ow!"

"And here's another!"

"Yow! Yaroo!"

"And another—"

But Billy Bunter did not wait for that one!

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co. next Tuesday, entitled: "BOB CHERRY'S BENEFIT," by Frank Richards. Please order your copy of THE MAGNET Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

A REMINDER!

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NEXT
WEEK:

"BOB CHERRY'S BENEFIT."

A Splendid School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS

STANLEY DARE

The Boy Detective



INTRODUCTION.

An undergraduate named Douglas Clayton, of St. Martin's College, Cambridge, is accused of the murder of a fellow-undergraduate, and Stanley Dare, assisted by Professor MacAndrew, takes up his case. The young detective persuades Blount, a friend of the accused man, to allow him to sleep on the sofa in his rooms, which are immediately below those which Latimer, the murdered man, had occupied. Motionless, but wakeful and alert, Dare remains on the couch till the hour of midnight strikes.

(Now go on with the Story).

A Clue—The Professor's Discovery—The Underground Monastery—A Living Tomb.

Blount was fast asleep in the bed-room, but Dare slipped from the couch and dressed himself noiselessly. Then he stood near the centre of the room, with his head raised in an attitude of strained attention.

The faint sound of a footfall could be heard overhead in Latimer's rooms. It was very faint, but it was unmistakable.

"A superstitious person might feel inclined to think that the room was haunted," muttered Dare. "It is curious that anyone should be in the room, as Paget left the key in my charge for to-night. Whoever it is appears to be looking for something that he has lost, judging by the way he moves about the room. I shall have to go and investigate."

Taking a short, heavy life-preserver from his portmanteau, he slipped it into his coat pocket. Then, quitting the room, he ascended the staircase to the passage above. All was in darkness, for now both sets of rooms on that landing were untenanted, for Clayton could not be released on bail.

Dare softly ran his hand over Latimer's door. There was a key in the lock. He opened the door noiselessly, but as he did so a shadowy figure sprang out at him, gripped him by the throat, and hurled him forcibly backwards.

He slipped and fell, and by the time he had regained his feet the figure had vanished as silently as a phantom. He made no attempt to follow, as he was not sufficiently acquainted with the by-ways of the college.

Instead, he entered the room and made another search of it with the aid of a portable electric lamp which he carried. The discovery which he made was a strange one. A corner of the carpet had been turned back, and a piece of the boarding lifted. It had been replaced hurriedly. Dare lifted it again. There was the ordinary space beneath between the rafters, but if anything had been concealed there it had been taken away.

Who was the mysterious searcher in the murdered man's rooms, and for what was he searching? It seemed probable that whatever it was had either been hidden beneath the floorboards, in which case the searcher would appear to have regained possession of it, or else the board had been loosened with the intention of hiding something there, with the possibility that the searcher had been disappointed.

Dare had to admit to himself that it was a puzzle, whichever way he looked at it, the more so as in the dark he had failed to recognise the man who had rushed from the room.

The event added fresh complications to an already complicated case, but Stanley Dare thought that for the present he would say nothing about the matter to anybody. As he had not been able to recognise the man who came from the room, it was equally certain that the man could not have recognised him. And this fact gave to him a slight advantage.

Two days later a new student appeared at St. Martin's. It was rumoured through the college that he was a Canadian, and that he had already spent a couple of terms at the University of Toronto. His name was Stanley.

Somewhat to the surprise of all who were not actually in the know, he elected to "keep" in the rooms which were formerly occupied by Latimer.

"What about a gyp to look after you?" said Blount.

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NEXT WEEK.

"BOB CHERRY'S BENEFIT."

"Will you share mine, or will you have Sennitt, who used to be Latimer's man?"

Dare thought for a minute, then he answered slowly:

"I will have Sennitt. I am inclined to think that he will exactly suit me."

"Anything the matter with your finger Sennitt?" asked the young detective of his gyp, as the latter was preparing his tea.

"I cut it a few days ago, sir," replied Sennitt, regarding the middle finger of his right hand as though it was not actually his own property. "So I wear this finger-stall to keep the dirt out of the cut."

"Let me have a look at it," said Dare. "I have an excellent ointment that I think will heal it up."

"Thank you very much, sir," answered Sennitt; "but I have had it seen to, and it is getting on all right, there is no further need to interfere with it."

"Just as you please," returned Dare.

It was the young detective's first day in college as "Stanley, the undergrad from Canada," and already he had had some calls from fellow-students, which he would have to return in due course. Fortunately, he had been out to Toronto once, so he was not likely to be caught napping.

He took quite an unusual interest in Sennitt, his gyp, although he took care that that model servant should not be aware of the fact.

The man was a weird-looking individual, with lank, black hair and pale face, that looked as bloodless sometimes as the face of a corpse. This was always the case when he was excited. He was a man who was very secretive, but this hardly accounted for the unnecessary lie which he had told over so simple a matter as the wearing of a finger-stall. He had just stated that he had only worn it for a few days on account of a cut finger, whereas Dare had heard it laughingly mentioned by Paget and Blount that the gyp had never been without the finger-stall since they had known him, and he had been a college servant for some months.

It seemed strange that he should have told a falsehood over such a matter, and his refusal to allow Dare to examine the supposed cut seemed to show that he had a special reason for hiding the finger.

As the young detective made it a rule to investigate everything to which a suspicion of mystery attached, if it had even only a remote bearing on the case, he determined at the first opportunity to examine the hidden middle finger of this silent and reserved manservant.

The evening was passed by Dare in much the same manner as it would have been by any other freshly-arrived student. He was supposed to have brought letters of introduction to Blount and Paget, and they introduced him to other fellows. Graham, at their special request, was taken into the secret of his identity, but Dare had to be careful to act the part of the "freshman" to the life.

Consequently, he had not an opportunity that evening of seeing the professor, or of being alone with anyone of the three undergrads, who were Clayton's particular chums, as quite a number of men of his college called on him, some of them out of mere curiosity to see the "new fellow who didn't mind occupying Latimer's rooms."

But when they were all gone, and he was once more left alone, he set to work again to examine the loose board in the flooring and the space between the joists.

There were marks in the dust and broken cobwebs of a

A Splendid School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

package of some description having been placed there recently—a box, to judge by the sharp outline of the marks.

With an ivory foot-rule which he possessed, he measured them. The length of the oblong mark was seven inches; its width, four and a half inches. That would be about the size of an ordinary small cashbox. The other marks were indistinct, probably hand or finger-prints.

Dare rose to his feet, replaced the loose board, and pulled the carpet back into its place. There was a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes as he sat down in a chair by the open window to think the matter out.

"Latimer kept his money in an ordinary japanned cash-box," he said to himself; "and though I have not been able to get the exact measurements, I believe it was about seven or eight inches in length, and between four and five in breadth—quite a common size. The cashbox was taken with the money and the ring inside it. Evidently it was hidden under the floor. Now, would Clayton have known of such a hiding-place in the rooms of a man with whom he was not on friendly terms? Hardly probable. And supposing he was aware of it, would he have hidden the money there after taking it from the drawer, when he had only to cross the passage to get to his own room? Not to be supposed for an instant. Therefore, Clayton did not commit the theft, which is tantamount to saying he did not commit the murder. I very nearly surprised the thief that first night I slept in the college. He had come for the stolen property, and he must have had it in his possession when he rushed from the room."

He proceeded to undress himself—a rather long operation in this instance, as he paused every now and then to pace up and down the room while he tried to solve the knotty problem of the double crime. Suddenly he gave vent to a sharp exclamation.

"I have it!" he cried. "What a fool I was not to have thought of that before! I know who the thief is, but as I have no proofs at present that will satisfy a court of law, I must keep my knowledge to myself. But it does not follow that the thief was also the murderer. There was some connection between the crimes, but I must not lose sight of the possibility that they were not of necessity committed by the same man."

Having finished his reasoning and his undressing at the same time, he jumped into bed and slept the refreshing sleep which comes to those who are healthy in mind and body.

On the following morning, after chapel, he heard some startling news. The strong-room of the college had been broken into, and gold and silver plate of considerable value—five or six thousand pounds' worth—had been stolen!

Of course, nothing else was talked about that day in the whole University, and coming as it did on top of the recent tragedy, it gave St. Martin's a somewhat unenviable notoriety.

Dr. Golightly, the master, had a long interview with Stanley Dare, and he induced the young detective to devote such time as he could spare from his other case to the investigation of this fresh crime. Dare was the more willing to accede to this request, as he believed that the robbery of the college plate had some mysterious connection with the murder of Latimer and the first theft.

When the interview was over, MacAndrew had some news of quite a different character for Dare.

"Laddie," he said, "I've made a discovery."

"What is it, professor?" asked Dare.

"Ye ken that I'm interested in the auld portion of this college—the crypts and such-like. There's an auld crypt just near tae the chapel. I was in it the morn by myself. By chance I pressed ma hand against a stane in one corner. It slid back, and a flight of steps was revealed, leading tae another crypt. Ye'll be liking to examine it, maybe?"

"At any other time, MacAndrew, I should have been delighted," replied Dare. "But I have so much in hand now—"

"I ken that weel," interrupted the professor. "But listen, noo. No one in the college kens of this lower crypt—that is, none of the dons, or tutors, or students—but for a' that there are the plain marks of fresh footprints on the steps. Will you come and have a look at it noo?"

"Lead the way," said Dare briefly.

The crypt by the chapel needs no description. There are many similar ones to be seen below ancient cathedrals, or ruined abbeys. MacAndrew walked over to the right-hand corner, and pressed one of the square blocks of stone, which outwardly did not differ in appearance from any of the others.

It slid from its place, and there was the flight of steps, as the professor had described. Dare at once examined the footprints.

"Thin-soled boots, with pointed toes," he pronounced. "The wearer a man of light build. Come, the tenant of this crypt is modern in his footgear, so he will be up to date in other respects. He may even be armed with a revolver. Have you got yours handy, professor?"

"I didna bring it."

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NEXT WEEK: "BOB CHERRY'S BENEFIT."

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ONE
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"That's a pity, but it can't be helped now. Close the aperture, and we'll explore this place."

The stone swung back into its position, and Dare switched on his portable electric lamp. The lower crypt to which they descended was of small dimensions, but beyond it they came upon a remarkable structure—nothing more or less than a monastery in a complete state of preservation.

There were the cloisters, the cells—which had been the sleeping-rooms of the monks—the altar, the refectory, and all the other apartments and attachments of a religious house of that description, in as good condition as they had been in the far-off days when monasteries were common in England.

It was a marvellous experience to stand in those ancient cloisters of a monastery which, probably in some period of religious persecution, had been built underground, but the young detective did not spend any time in examining the building for its own sake. There were footprints here, on the stone flags—recent footprints of muddy boots—and not of one man, but of several men. Dare called MacAndrew's attention to them.

"It was raining this morning," he said, "so the persons who made these footprints must have come down quite recently—and they did not come by way of the chapel crypt, or they would have been observed. There must be another entrance outside the college grounds."

"Will the college plate that was stolen be hidden down here, think ye?" whispered MacAndrew.

"Hush!"

Dare switched out his light. He believed he had heard the sound of footsteps, stealthy as those of a beast of prey, but no one was visible.

"Did ye hear anything?" whispered MacAndrew, after a pause.

The reply of the young detective began and ended in a choking gasp. He had been seized by half a dozen hands, which stretched like the tentacles of some fearsome monster out of the darkness. An awful grip was on his throat that completely paralysed him. He heard a wild struggle going on close at hand, and the professor's voice, in the broadest Scotch, which he always used in moments of intense excitement:

"Hoot, ye loons! I'll gie ye sic a whang wi' me— Ah, would ye! Take that!"

A man fell heavily, with a howl of pain. Then followed the sound of scurrying feet, and after that another fall. Then all sounds became merged in a drumming in his ears, and Stanley Dare sank down in a state of insensibility.

He recovered consciousness in the midst of a darkness so profound that it seemed to press upon him like a solid thing, choking the breath from his body. He stretched out his right hand—it touched a clammy wall. In front of him, and behind him, it was the same.

He had been huddled up on the floor of this cell, or whatever it was, which could not have been more than five feet square at the outside. Painfully he rose to his feet, but his head struck against the roof before he was upright.

He knelt down, and, remembering that he had slipped his electric lamp into his pocket just before he was attacked by the mysterious denizens of the monastery, he felt to see if it was still there. It was, and it was still in working order. The next instant his terrible prison was flooded with light. It was a stone chamber, something after the style of the old-time torture-chambers known as the Little Ease.

It was so small that it was impossible for him to lie at full length on the floor, or to stand upright. He could kneel, or sit down—that was all. The walls were foul and slimy, and there was no ventilation. It was a tomb, in which he had been buried alive, for he could not believe that the miscreants who had placed him there had any intention of releasing him. He was to be left to die a slow, agonising death.

At the thought, a mad frenzy seized him, and all his quiet courage and self-control deserted him for a few insane minutes. He shouted for help; he dashed his hands against the wall; he called down vengeance on the heads of his unknown and mysterious foes. The paroxysm left him exhausted and very much ashamed of himself for having given way to it. He was becoming faint again. In the close, foul atmosphere, it was impossible to breathe. He sank down upon the slimy floor, and again became insensible.

The Mark of the Gang—At Bay—A Startling Surprise.

When he recovered consciousness for the second time, Stanley Dare was very much astonished to find that he was no longer in the torture cell, but was in the refectory of the underground monastery, which was now lit by hanging

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lanterns, and which was tenanted by about half a dozen masked men.

At the further end of the chamber Professor MacAndrew was seated, with his hands fastened behind his back. Dare's limbs were free, he being in such a weak state that the denizens of the old monastery evidently did not consider there was anything to fear from him.

But he was fast regaining his strength in the purer atmosphere, though he took care to "play possum," and not let this be observed. A sharp glance of warning and reassurance from the professor caused him to be more than ever on the alert. No other method of communication was possible between the two, but the young detective felt convinced that MacAndrew's fertile brain had already evolved a plan of escape from their very perilous position.

For the fraction of a second the professor's eyes rested on a cardboard box that was on a table near the centre of the room, and Dare guessed that in some way this innocent-looking box was to aid them in their escape.

A door at the upper end of the refectory creaked open, and another masked man entered. As he made his way towards his companions, he held up the middle finger of his right hand. Dare noticed a peculiar mark on the inner side, between the first and second joint—a tiny diamond, enclosing a cross.

He afterwards noticed that the other men had each a similar mark on the right-hand middle finger. These men formed some criminal gang then, and the tattooed sign was the mark by which they could recognise each other when masked or disguised.

"Bring that youth forward," said one of the men, who appeared to be in authority.

Dare staggered to his feet, and then swayed to and fro, as though he was too weak to stand. This, however, was only a bit of acting; for, except that his throat was sore where it had been so fiercely gripped, there was little now the matter with him, thanks to his perfect physical condition.

Deceived by his well-feigned appearance of weakness, two of the men gripped hold of him, one on each side, and dragged him along the floor to where the leader of the gang was standing.

"Seems about done up," observed one of the fellows. "Why didn't you leave him down below? He was unconscious, and he'd have passed in his cheeks before he came to again. There ain't no sense in torturing a chap what has only tumbled into our secret meeting-place by mistake."

"I know what I'm about," snapped the leader, "and don't want to be preached to!"

"All right, Jim Bargrave; keep your hair on."

"No names!" hissed the man addressed as Bargrave. "You know the rule! No names are to be mentioned when strangers are present!"

"I understood you were going to settle these chaps," returned the other, getting savage in his turn; "and dead men tell no tales. They've found out our secret, so they'd be a danger to us if we set 'em at liberty. Self-preservation bein' the first law of natur', these two unfortunites has got to go under. But there ain't no call to torture them. If they've got to go, let 'em go in an easy and painless fashion."

"Your everlasting tongue will get you into trouble yet!" snarled Bargrave.

Professor MacAndrew interposed at that moment.

"Ye were gaeing to put some questions tae us," he said, "which, if we answered tae your satisfaction, would gain us our leeberty. Weel, we're ready tae answer them."

"You would have to promise on your oath never to divulge anything that you see or hear in this place, before we set you free," said Bargrave.

"We would dae that," replied MacAndrew. "Life is sweet; and, after all, your business is no concern of ours."

Several members of the gang raised their voices in protest at such leniency, but Jim Bargrave quieted them with a significant look. Dare read the meaning of that look instantly. Whatever information it was that this miscreant hoped to extract

from them, it was very certain he had not the slightest intention of keeping his word and setting them at liberty.

That the professor was also aware of this was equally certain, but it flashed through Stanley Dare's mind that the wily Scotsman was simply playing up to gain as much time as possible, in order to carry out a plan that had matured in his brain.

"I agree with my friend!" gasped our hero, who was playing his part of the weak and almost fainting man to the life. "For the sake of—our liberty—we will give you any information—in our power!"

"And young Stanley, as I hinted tae ye before," added MacAndrew, "can gie ye some information that may be valuable."

"You are Stanley, the undergraduate from Toronto College, I think?" said Bargrave to our hero. "And you are now keeping in the rooms that were Latimer's?"

"Yes," replied Dare, rather surprised that this man, who was apparently only the leader of a gang of thieves, should be so well posted. At the same time, he was relieved to find that they supposed him to be Stanley the undergraduate, and did not suspect that he was Stanley Dare, the detective.

"You have only been up a few days?" pursued Jim Bargrave.

"That is all."

"Ah! Now, the information I require is this——"

What information he required was never to be made known, for a startling interruption occurred at this moment. Professor MacAndrew leaped to his feet with his hands free. The rope that had bound his wrists, and which he had managed very cleverly to loosen, went flying across the hall, and struck one of the men a stinging blow on the mouth.

Stanley Dare, seeing that it was time to act, although not knowing exactly what was to follow, roused himself to sudden vigour, and with one swinging right-hander, stretched the nearest of his astonished guards on the floor.

Almost at the same instant a strange thing happened. With mingled cries of rage and terror the masked men rushed for the door. Dare glanced at the professor. He had snatched up the cardboard box, and, having torn off the lid, had extracted a small glass ball, about the size of a tennis ball, filled with a blue-tinted liquid. He held it poised ready to throw.

"If we've got to die," he shouted, "ye'll hae to die wi' us, ye villains! I'll gie ye two meenutes to clear out!"

The man who had been called Jim Bargrave had slipped and fallen in his haste, and his mask had come off. He did not attempt to replace it, and Dare, on seeing his face, uttered a cry of amazement. It was the face of Clarence Latimer, the murdered undergraduate!

Dare had seen several photographs of Latimer, and had also seen the murdered man after the post-mortem examination. Who could this man be who so exactly resembled him? And if this miscreant, known to his associates as Bargrave, was really Latimer, and had been leading a double life, who was the man that had been murdered?

Here was a fresh problem to be solved, but one which could not be considered any further then. They were not out of their difficulties yet, and might still have to fight for their lives.

There was a small unglazed window close by the door, through which the members of the gang had rushed. The last man, a red-bearded ruffian, turned, and, thrusting a

revolver through the window, took steady aim at the professor.

Dare shouted a warning cry, but MacAndrew was not to be caught napping. With all his strength he hurled the glass ball through the door just as the fellow pressed the trigger.

The deadly missile was shattered against the stonework, and the report of the revolver was drowned in the crash of a tremendous explosion.

The whole of that end of the refectory was wrapped for an instant in brilliant flame.

(Another instalment of this detective story next Tuesday.)

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