"BOB CHERRY'S BENEFIT."

A LITTLE 'DIFFERENCE' AMONGST THE REMOVITES!

A Complete School-Story Book, attractive to All Readers.

The Editor will be obliged if you will hand this book, when finished with, to a friend.

Bob Cherry's Benefit

A Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of HARRY WHARTON & CO.

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
The Scorchers.

"FOUR miles to Friardale!"

Harry Wharton slackened the pace of his bicycle as he passed the milestone, to read the barely readable inscription; and then pedalled on fast to overtake Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Singh, who had not slackened.

The sun was setting, and the four chums of Greyfriars were returning to the school from a long ride, which the fine summer evening had tempted them to prolong later than they had intended.

Bob Cherry glanced round at Harry as he came scorching up.

"Well?"

"Four miles," said Harry.

"Four miles to Friardale—and another quarter to Greyfriars," said Frank Nugent. "We shall have to scorch to get in before calling-over."

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

"Put your beef into it," said Harry Wharton concisely.

And the four juniors, keeping level in the white road, scorched on.

They pretty well filled up the country road as they sped on abreast; but it was a lonely road, and growing lonelier with the approach of nightfall, and they were not likely to meet anybody.

It might have been serious for their machines, if not for them, if they had run into a market cart on turning a corner; but as Bob Cherry remarked, it was worth some risk to get in before the school gates were closed, and avoid being called over the coals by their Form-master.

Whiz-z-z!

Buzz! Ting-ting!

They rang loudly at every corner, as they swept round in line. A thick cloud of dust trailed behind them down the long white road.

Harry Wharton & Co. were in training for the junior cycle races that were shortly coming off at Greyfriars, and certainly their present speed indicated that they were in very good form.

There seemed little to choose between them as they pedalled on, with legs that seemed to go like clockwork, tirelessly, and steady breathing, and steady eyes.

A mile swept by under the racing wheels, and another milestone flashed past.

Then Bob Cherry broke the silence with a chuckle.

"We've done that mile quickly," he remarked.

"Yes, rather!"

"We shall do it."

"I think so," said Wharton.

"The thinkfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, releasing one hand to wipe an obstinate fly from his nose. "We shall arrivefully reach the school in good time, if there are no esteemed collisions on the road."

"My hat! I hope there won't be, while we're going at this rate," said Nugent. "Hallo! What was that?"

"What was what?"

"That row?" said Nugent, free-wheeling, and rising a little in his saddle to look round him through the flying dust. "Sounded like a bull bellowing."

Wharton laughed.

"So it was, Frank! He's in a field near here, I suppose."

A sharp bend of the road was before the juniors.

From the gathering dusk ahead came the deep, echoing sound once more.

It was the bellow of a bull, and to judge by the sound, the animal was in no good temper. Wharton uttered an exclamation.

"That must be Killick's black bull!" he exclaimed. "I've heard about him; he got out into the road one day last week, and gored a dog belonging to the landlord of the Cross Keys."

"Phew! He's a dangerous beast!" said Bob Cherry, rather anxiously. "I jolly well hope he isn't out in the road again——"

"Oh, they'll take care he doesn't get loose again He—— My hat!"

The words died on Wharton's lips.

The juniors had swept round the bend in the white road.

Ahead of them, in the centre of the road, with bloodshot eyes and lashing tail, stood the animal Wharton had been speaking of.

It was an enormous black bull.

A broken gap in the hedge, and deep hoof-marks in the mud of the half-dried ditch, showed where the huge animal had made his escape from the field adjoining the road.

When that ditch was flowing with water, it was a sufficient safeguard; but the summer heats had dried it, and the bull had plunged through and reached the road.

There he stood trumpeting, about as dangerous a beast as it could have been possible to meet with on a lonely road.

For a second the juniors felt their heads swim.

They were rushing down directly upon the black bull, and the brute, evidently alarmed and irritated by the loud ringing of the bells as they turned the corner, was already glaring at them savagely.

It was evident at a glance that the bull was in a fighting mood, and only waiting for some victim upon whom to wreak his wrath.

Had the chums halted, or hesitated, the result would have been serious.

Fortunately, they kept their presence of mind.

"Right on!" shouted Harry Wharton.

And the cyclists rushed right on.

Wharton and Nugent swept to the left of the bull, and Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh to the right, and they were past him before the animal fully realised that they were there.

Right on—and then they pedalled harder than ever, a loud roar from the rear telling them that they were pursued.

Thud! Thud! echoed the heavy hoofs in the dust.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "That was a close shave!"

"He's after us," said Wharton, between his teeth. "Ride like the dickens!"

"What-ho!"

The Greyfriars juniors bent over their handle-bars.

They had been scorching before, but now they scorched in deadly earnest.

The wheels fairly flew.

Thud, thud!

Harry Wharton cast a glance over his shoulder.

He caught a glimpse of a tossing black head, of a pair of flaming eyes, and jaws that were flecked with foam.

The cycles were fairly flying; but it seemed to Harry that that fearful vision was only a few yards in the rear.

A shudder ran through him as he drove on his pedals harder than ever.

"Harder!" he muttered. "The brute's keeping pace!"

"Go it!"

Whiz!

Buzz—ting-ting-ting!

But the bull, thoroughly excited now, was coming on like the wind. The juniors leant over the bars and scorched.

Bang!

It was a sudden report, and it sounded like a rifle-shot in the ears of the startled juniors.

But it was not a rifle-shot—it was the bang of a tyre as it burst; and Harry Wharton's machine began to drag.

His face changed colour.

"My hat! My tyre's gone!"

Wharton almost groaned.

He dropped behind; the others, sweeping on at top speed, were unable to stop themselves at the same time, and they were carried on resistlessly.

The bursting of the tyre was the unexpected—and it happened.

The machine dragged heavily, though still rushing on; but in a few seconds Harry Wharton was twenty yards behind his comrades.

Then they realised that he was behind, and they jammed on the brakes.

Bull or no bull, they did not mean to desert a comrade.

Bob Cherry swung his bike round clear, almost in its own length; but the other two were unlucky.

Nugent's front wheel crashed into Hurree Singh's machine, and Nugent and the Indian went to the ground together, with a clatter of falling bikes.

Bob, unheeding, rode back towards Harry Wharton.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

In Deadly Peril.

HARRY WHARTON had leaped from his machine.

He sprang into the road, and looked back with starting eyes at the bull. The huge animal was coming on at a furious rush, his wicked eyes gleaming.

Harry made a wild spring aside as the bull charged, and the heavy animal rushed past him like the wind.

But the bull turned in a second, and came charging back, with head lowered and threatening horns, and foam dropping from his mouth into the dust of the road.

In another moment Harry would have been tossed on the horns, for there was no time to escape.

But in that terrible moment Bob Cherry came sweeping by.

The cyclist swept between Harry and the bull, coming along the bull's flank from behind, and his shoulder bumped heavily behind the animal's ear, forcing him to swerve from his course, and sending him charging blindly past Harry.

Unable to stop himself in time, the bull rushed on, and plunged knee-deep in the thick mud of the ditch, and scrambled floundering there, bellowing with rage.

"Quick!" yelled Bob. "Into the hedge!"

The shock against the bull had hurled the junior from his machine, but he was on his feet again in an instant.

He grasped Harry by the arm and dragged him across the road.

But Wharton had all his wits about him, in spite of the fearful danger he had barely escaped.

The two juniors rushed into the hedge.

A bellow told them that the bull was out of the ditch again, and charging after them. They scrambled wildly through the hedge, and clambered up the nearest tree.

On the lowest branch they stopped, clinging breathlessly, while the almost frantic animal raged below.

Harry Wharton cast a quick glance down the road towards Nugent and Hurree Singh. He was afraid they would come riding back into danger, needless now.

The two juniors had picked up their machines, when Harry waved his hand and shouted from the tree.

"Buzz off!" he shouted. "We're all right. Get clear, and fetch help."

Nugent shouted back, and then the two jumped on their machines and rode away.

But the bull had not looked towards them.

Deprived of his victims, he was wreaking his rage upon the two bicycles left in the road. Wharton and Bob Cherry had no time to even think of their machines.

The bull charged down upon them, tossed them to right and left, and trampled on them with blind rage.

Bob Cherry gasped.

"My hat! Look at the jiggers, Harry!"

Wharton nodded breathlessly.

"Yes—can't be helped."

"The beast is smashing them to rags."

"Nice, isn't it?" groaned Bob Cherry. "I can see myself riding in the cycle races on this jigger."

"Looks like it."

"I s'pose we're lucky to escape with whole skins," said Bob ruefully; "but hang it all—— Oh, look at the brute!"

The bull had Bob Cherry's bike on its horns now, and was prancing round with it.

He dashed it into the road again, and trampled on it.

Bob's face was a study.

His people were not rich, and that was his new bicycle—which it had been rather a strain to get purchased that season.

It was a hopeless wreck now.

It was quite clear that by the time the bull had done with it, the remains would be only fit for the scrap-heap.

Bob was, as he had said, lucky to get clear with a whole skin; but he was not thinking of his skin now, but of his unfortunate bicycle.

"The beast!" he growled. "Farmer Killick ought to be made to pay for that! It's all his fault, letting his beastly bull get loose."

"You ought to have a claim on him," agreed Wharton. "But I say, Bob——"

"Eh?"

"It was awfully plucky of you to come back like that."

"Rats!"

"I should have been gored if you hadn't," said Harry. "As it was, it was touch and go."

"Close shave for both of us," said Bob cheerfully.

"You saved my life, I believe, Bob."

"Sorry," said Bob; "I mean, that's all right. I suppose you would have come back for me, wouldn't you?"

Harry laughed.

"Yes; I hope so, Bob."

"Then it's all right," said Bob Cherry. "Look here, if you start making me out a giddy, heroic rescuer, I'll punch your head. I couldn't stand it. Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here they come!"

Nugent and Hurree Singh were coming back along the lane, with three or four farmer's men, armed with sticks and pitchforks, to deal with the bull.

The animal left off his destructive work upon the bicycles, and looked towards the coming crowd, and then rushed off down the road.

The farmer's men dashed in pursuit, and bull and pursuers vanished from sight.

Wharton and Bob Cherry jumped down from the tree.

"My hat!" gasped Nugent. "I'm glad you're safe! I thought both of you were gone."

"I fancied that the gonefulness was terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, his dusky face full of emotion.

"We're all right," said Bob. "But the jiggers——"

"Phew!"

"They do look wrecks, and no mistake!"

The juniors picked up the bicycles.

The destructive wrath of Achilles, of which the old poet sings, was nothing to the destructive wrath of Farmer Killick's bull.

The machines were in rags and tatters.

The tyres were almost in threads, everything breakable was broken, and everything twistable was twisted.

The bikes might have been worth a few shillings as old metal, but it was pretty clear that they had no other value.

The juniors stared at them in dismay.

"Nice, isn't it?" groaned Bob Cherry, with a comical grimace. "I can see myself riding in the cycle races on this jigger."

"It's rough," said Harry. "But Mr. Killick ought to settle for them."

"We'll see him about it to-morrow," said Frank Nugent. "He's a poor man, though, and I don't believe he could if he wanted to."

The juniors resumed their homeward way.

Harry and Bob carried what was left of their machines, for they were too far gone to be wheeled; but the weight was too trying, and the wrecks were soon abandoned by the roadside.

"We'll get William to fetch them in in his trap," said Harry. "We can leave word with him as we go through Friardale."

"Good!" said Bob Cherry. "If any blessed tramp comes along and steals them, he's welcome. I make him a free gift of mine."

The juniors tramped on to Greyfriars, Nugent and Hurree Singh wheeling their machines.

The night had fallen when they tramped through Friardale. The gates of Greyfriars had long been locked when they arrived there. Wharton looked at his watch in the light over the gate.

"Just an hour late for calling-over," he remarked.

"Great Scott!"

Wharton rang the bell.

Gosling opened the gate, and there was a grin on the hard features of Gosling. One might have suspected that Gosling was rather pleased than otherwise to see the juniors late.

"Which you've come in," he remarked.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Harry.

"Wot I says is this 'ere, there'll be a row," said Gosling. "Mr. Quelch he says to me, says he, 'Them young rascals is late for calling-over,' he says——"

The juniors burst into a chuckle.

They could hardly imagine Mr. Quelch, the quiet and stately master of the Remove, using the words Gosling so glibly put into his mouth.

Gosling frowned. He meant to impress the juniors with a sense of their danger, and their laughter disconcerted him.

"'Send 'em in to me when they come in,' he says," went on the school porter. "'Report 'em at once,' he says."

"We'll report ourselves," said Harry.

"Which Mr. Quelch is gone hout," said Gosling. "He says to me, says he, 'I can't wait 'ere no longer for them young himps,' he says."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wot I says is this 'ere, you'll soon be larfin' t'other side of your mouth," said the porter frowningly. "I've got to report yer when Mr. Quelch comes in."

"Report away."

"Wot am I to tell him?" demanded Gosling.

Wharton reflected.

"Tell him it's a fine evening, and we've had a nice ride," he said. "Tell him, too, that the sooner Greyfriars gets a new porter, and the old grumpy one is kicked out, the better we shall all like it."

The juniors roared.

Gosling frowned darkly.

"Wot I says is this 'ere," he remarked. "You'll be in trouble soon, so you can larf as much as you like now. You're a hower late."

"Just a hower," agreed Bob Cherry.

"We've been detained," explained Wharton. "We had to leave two of the bikes behind, and walk the distance—the last two or three miles."

"Ho!" said Gosling.

"It was all the fault of the bull."

"The what?"

"The bull."

"You've been to the Bull!" exclaimed Gosling, aghast.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors could not help laughing.

The Bull was the name of a public-house on the river, the lowest and most disreputable den in the county, frequented by bad characters of the "baddest" description. Gosling's mistake was comical. Any Greyfriars fellow who had been to the Bull was certain of instant expulsion from the school if he were discovered.

"My word!" said Gosling, glaring at the grinning juniors. "Fine goings hon, I must say! So that's wot's made you late. You've been to the Bull."

"No, you ass——"

"You can't get hout of it now, Master Wharton. You've admitted it."

Harry laughed.

"As a matter of fact, the bull came to us; we didn't go to the bull," he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gosling stared. He could not make head or tail of Wharton's statement.

"You've been drinking," he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"'Ave you been drinking?" demanded Gosling, with a magisterial air.

"Certainly!"

"You 'ave?"

"Yes; we all had a drink in the village," said Harry coolly; not choosing to add that the drink was of water, and taken at the village fountain.

Gosling grinned.

"I'll report yer," he said.

"Report away!"

"Wot I says is this 'ere——"

But the juniors did not wait to hear what Gosling said. They walked on, leaving the ill-natured porter to close the gates, and chuckle to himself over their coming punishment.

Gosling was generally on bad terms with the juniors. He was a decidedly bad-tempered man, and his addiction to gin-and-water did not improve his temper. To have caught Harry Wharton & Co. in such a delinquency was a delight to Gosling, and he anticipated the return of Mr. Quelch with great glee.

The juniors chuckled as they went on. It was in a spirit of mischief that Harry had "pulled the leg" of the crusty porter. He wondered whether Gosling would really report all he had said to Mr. Quelch.

The juniors laughed again at the thought.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Somewhat Mysterious.

HARRY WHARTON and Bob Cherry entered the schoolhouse. Nugent and the nabob had gone to put their bicycles away in the shed. A fat junior was waiting in the hall, and he came up to Wharton with an aggrieved expression as the latter entered.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo, Billy! Anything for supper?"

Billy Bunter blinked at them.

"No, and I haven't had tea," he said. "You're jolly late. What on earth do you mean by being so late when you knew I was waiting for you to come in, to have my tea?"

"My dear chap, you shouldn't have waited," said Wharton. "We never expected you to—and didn't want you to, as a matter of fact."

"I thought I'd better wait," said Bunter, blinking at Harry through his big spectacles. "You see, there's such a thing as politeness. Besides, I hadn't anything for tea till you came in."

"Ha, ha! That was the cause of the politeness," grinned Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I suppose we're going to have tea now," said Bunter anxiously. "I've filled in the time by having tea in Hall; but, of course, that was only a snack. I'm willing to go to the tuckshop if you like, and fetch anything."

Wharton smiled as he groped in his pocket. Billy Bunter was the laziest junior at Greyfriars, but he would have gone to the tuckshop for anybody. Harry tossed him a two-shilling piece.

"Buck up!" he said. "I'm hungry."

"What-ho!"

And Billy Bunter scudded off.

"You'll have tea with us, Bob?" said Harry.

"Right you are," said Bob Cherry. "There's nothing going in my study, I believe; and I'm as hungry as a hunter. But——"

"But what?"

"I'm thinking about that blessed bike," said Bob ruefully. "I must have a bike this season, you know. You were riding your second best, and you've got your new one left; but I——"

Wharton's face became very serious.

"Look here, Bob, you smashed up your bike saving me, and—and——"

Bob Cherry made a gesture.

"Don't be an ass, Harry."

"But look here, if I told my uncle he would buy you a new bike like a shot!" exclaimed Wharton.

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"Then don't you jolly well tell him!" he exclaimed.

"But——"

"Look here, Harry, if you don't want to quarrel with me, you'll let the matter rest where it is," said Bob Cherry. "I shall have to manage somehow."

"What about your people?"

Bob made a grimace.

"My people aren't so rich as yours," he said. "My dad forked out a cheque for fourteen pounds for that blessed bike this spring, and I couldn't in decency ask him to fork out another. I know he couldn't spare the money. I sha'n't say a word about it to them at home."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"I suppose I shall have to patch up the old jigger somehow."

"It's rotten, Bob."

"The bike? Yes, it did look rather rotten."

"I mean the position. I feel as if I'm responsible for your bike getting smashed up, and you ought to let me——"

"Well, I won't," said Bob, almost brusquely.

"Look here——"

"Rats! Don't say a word more on that subject, Harry," said Bob Cherry, turning red. "Look here, we'll go and interview Killick to-morrow, and see what can be got out of him. He's responsible, anyway."

"Good! And if he's no go——"

"Then we'll see."

Bob Cherry whistled as he walked away. But his cheerfulness was mostly assumed. Bob seldom allowed anything to damp his spirits. But the destruction of his bicycle was a heavy blow to him. He was an enthusiastic cyclist; and the worst of it was, that he had sold his old machine when the new one was bought, so there was no possibility of making that do for one more season.

Nugent and Hurree Singh came in, and the chums of No. 1 Study proceeded to that famous apartment, and started the fire, and had the kettle boiling by the time Billy Bunter came in with the provisions.

Bob Cherry joined them there, and the five juniors were soon enjoying their tea with a decidedly keen appetite.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the study door opened, and Bulstrode, of the Remove, looked in. "What do you want?"

"Only a look at you," said Bulstrode.

"No extra charge," said Nugent.

Bulstrode scanned the juniors, somewhat to their astonishment.

"So you've got over it," he remarked.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"You've got over it."

"Got over what?"

Bulstrode chuckled.

"There'll be a row," he remarked. And before the chums of the Remove could question him further, he went out and closed the door.

"What on earth was he driving at?" exclaimed Wharton, puzzled.

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"Blessed if I can make it out," he said. "Hallo, hallo, hallo—here's Skinner! What do you want, Skinner?"

Skinner grinned into the study.

"You're in for it," he remarked.

"What?"

"What blessed asses you are," said Skinner. "Fancy playing the giddy goat like that! I wonder you hadn't sense enough to keep it dark."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm sorry for you when Quelch comes in."

And Skinner closed the door.

The chums of the Remove looked at one another in amazement. What Bulstrode and Skinner had been driving at they had not the faintest idea. Billy Bunter broke the silence.

"Pass the jam, Wharton."

Wharton passed the jam.

"And the butter."

"Oh, shut up, Bunter," said Nugent. "Hang it all! What are those duffers driving at?"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's another."

The door opened, and Alonzo Todd, the new boy in the Remove, who was generally alluded to as the Duffer, looked in, with an expression of great concern on his face.

"I'm so sorry," he said.

"What are you sorry about?" demanded Wharton.

Todd blinked at him.

"About you! I'm so sorry—so very sorry! It was very imprudent of you. My Uncle Benjamin always says——"

"Oh, blow your Uncle Benjamin," exclaimed Wharton crossly. "I don't know what you're driving at, and I think you're a silly ass."

"Really——"

"Oh, buzz off!"

Todd closed the door. The juniors looked exasperated. The matter was beginning to get on their nerves, and they could not understand it in the least. Wharton had already forgotten his carelessly-spoken words to Gosling, and he did not dream of connecting them with this curious demonstration on the part of his Form-fellows.

"I think they must be off their rockers," exclaimed Nugent. "Or else it's a jape, and they're rotting us."

"That's what it is," said Harry frowning. "It's a game to rot us. The next chap who comes into this study will catch it."

There was a sound of footsteps in the passage. They were approaching the door of No. 1 Study. Wharton's face set grimly.

He picked up a cushion.

He had not the slightest doubt that it was another of the "rotters." He held the cushion ready to hurl. A surprise waited for the new-comer when he entered the study.

There was a tap at the door and it opened.

Whiz!

The cushion swept through the air.

Biff!

It caught the new-comer fairly on the chest, and spun him back from the doorway, and he crashed against the opposite wall of the passage. There was a howl of astonishment and rage.

"Ciel! Mon Dieu! I am keel——"

Wharton sprang up in dismay. It was Monsieur Charpentier, the French master, whom he had received so unceremoniously.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Warm Reception.

"CIEL! Ger-r-r-r-r-r!"

"My only hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "We've done it now."

"The donefulness is terrific."

Wharton ran to the door.

The cushion lay in the doorway. Monsieur Charpentier was spreadeagled against the opposite wall, his arms outspread, gasping for breath.

He blinked dazedly at Wharton.

"Oh! I am stun—I am keel!" he gasped.

"Oh, sir! I—I didn't know it was you."

"I enterr at ze porte—at ze door," said Monsieur Charpentier. "Zen I am struck viz ze fearful blow. I am hurl away."

"Oh, sir!"

"I am stun viz ze awful shock."

"I—I——"

"Somevun trow ze cushion at me," said Monsieur Charpentier. "Somevun trow it, and I am struck viz ze fearful shock."

"I'm sorry, sir. I——"

"I zink zat it vas you who trow ze cushion, Wharton."

"I'm sorry, sir. I—I didn't see you——"

"I enter ze study——"

"I thought it was one of the fellows, sir," said Wharton. "They've been japing us, and I thought it was another of them. I'm more sorry than I can say, sir."

The little Frenchman had partially recovered his breath by this time.

He jerked himself away from the wall, and stood perpendicular again, and gasped. He shook his finger warningly at Wharton.

"I zink zat you be more careful, Wharton," he said. "I know zat you tell me ze troot, else I sends you to ze Head for ze cane. I zink ze next time you trow ze cushion, you look out first, and see zat it is not ze master."

Wharton breathed more freely.

"Yes, sir, I'll be more careful," he said.

"I come to ze study to speak viz you," said Monsieur Charpentier. "I hear ze zing zat cause me great surprise. I come to ask if it be so."

"Indeed, sir."

"I zink zat I—I see you presently, mon garcon," gasped the little French master. And he walked away, still gasping for breath.

Monsieur Charpentier had been knocked quite out of time by the cushion, and it was not surprising, for it had been hurled with all the force of Wharton's arm, and with a very good aim.

Harry stepped back into the study.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "We're well out of that. Little Mossoo is a brick to take it like that, kids."

"Yes, rather."

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"But what did he want?" asked Nugent.

Wharton shook his head.

"I don't know. He's going to see us again presently. He says he's heard something that surprised him, and he came to see us about it."

"What the dickens was it, then?"

"Give it up—something or other, I suppose," said Harry carelessly. "Perhaps about our getting our bikes smashed. Let's finish tea."

Billy Bunter had not left off. The others resumed. There were footsteps in the passage again.

Wharton looked exasperated.

"Blessed if I don't think those rotters are coming again," he exclaimed. "What the dickens is the little game?"

"Go for them when——"

"Here, careful!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "It may be Quelch this time, and he wouldn't take it quite so calmly as Mossoo, I think."

"Ha, ha! No."

"See who it is before you go for them, I say."

"The esteemed wisdom of our worthy friend Cherry is great," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Wharton stepped to the door, and threw it open just as the footsteps reached it. The ruddy face of Micky Desmond looked in.

"Faith, and ye're here!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, we're here," said Wharton grimly. "What do you want?"

"Faith! I want to see ye. You don't look so bad, nayther," said Micky Desmond, glancing at Wharton's face.

"You ass! Why should I look bad?"

"Well, after what you've been up to, you know."

"What?"

"Why didn't ye keep it dark? Arrah! Leggo!"

Wharton and Bob Cherry had seized him.

They whirled the Irish junior round, and swept him off his feet, and bumped him forcibly on the floor of the study.

Micky Desmond roared.

"Arrah! Howly Mother av Moses! Phwat are ye up to? Stop!"

"Bump him!"

"Hurroo! Arrah! Ow!"

Bump!

Then the Irish junior was rolled into the passage, and left gasping on the linoleum, and the door was slammed upon him.

The chums of the Remove, breathing rather hard, but feeling greatly relieved, resumed their seats at the tea-table.

"That's one for us," Bob Cherry remarked. "I don't think they'll come japing us any more after this."

And Bob was right.

There were no more visitors to the study while the Famous Four were having their tea, and they finished the meal in peace.

"The silly asses!" said Harry. "What an idiotic jape! I wonder who started it?"

"Some sillier ass than the others," said Bob Cherry, rising from the table. "You fellows coming down?"

"Yes."

And the Famous Four left the study to descend to the junior common-room. Billy Bunter did not leave the table. There was some jam, and a few biscuits; and Billy Bunter seldom left a table while anything to eat remained upon it.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Something Like a Row.

"HERE they are!"

"Oh, rather!"

"Here comes the giddy celebraters!"

"This way to view Lothario & Co.!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Upper Fourth, were in the passage, and thus they greeted the chums of the Remove as they came downstairs.

Harry Wharton looked at the Fourth-Formers in surprise.

Upper and Lower Fourth at Greyfriars were generally on fighting terms, and the fellows seldom met without mutual badinage and chipping; but Wharton could not guess in the least what Temple & Co. were driving at now.

A roar of laughter followed the words of the Fourth-Formers.

Wharton reddened.

"What are you getting at?" he exclaimed. "Are you keeping up that silly jape, you duffers?"

"Ha, ha! Look at the giddy celebraters!"

"They can walk straight."

"They're holding each other up," said Fry.

The chums of the Remove, as it happened, were walking with their arms linked. Fry's words caused a fresh roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites looked amazed.

"Look here——" began Wharton wrathfully.

"Oh, go and lie down!"

"That's what you want."

"Oh, rather!"

"Give 'em socks!" muttered Bob Cherry.

"What-ho!"

The four Removites charged, and Temple, Dabney & Co. went staggering. The Famous Four marched on in triumph to the common-room, leaving the Upper Fourth-Formers sprawling on the floor of the passage.

A general grin greeted Harry Wharton & Co. as they entered the junior common-room.

The room was pretty full.

All the fellows there, Removites or Upper Fourth, or fags of the Infants' Forms, grinned at the Famous Four as they came in.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Hazeldene. "I hear you've been keeping it up."

"Eh?"

"Had a high old time?" asked Ogilvy.

"What!"

"How did you get home?"

"Oh, they carried one another home!" said Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nugent minor, of the Second Form, shook his finger seriously in the face of his major, with an admonishing wag of the head.

"Look here, Frank, I can't have this," he said.

Frank Nugent stared at his younger brother.

"What's that?" he ejaculated.

"I can't have this. You're my major, and I can't have you disgracing the family in this way," said Dicky Nugent.

"You young ass!"

"You ought to be more careful. If you must play the giddy goat, you ought to have sense enough to keep it dark," said the fag.

"What do you mean?"

"You know jolly well what I mean. I'm shocked at you!"

"What?"

"S-h-o-c-k-e-d—shocked!" said Nugent minor.

"Look here, you young cub——"

"You needn't try to pass it off by bullying," said Dicky with a grin, "I won't have it! I'm shocked at you—in fact disgusted!"

"So are we all," said Trevor—"disgusted!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We never thought it of you!"

"Never!"

"Well, hardly ever!"

"Look here," exclaimed Harry Wharton, utterly exasperated, "I don't know what you're rotting about, but I'm getting fed up with it. Chuck it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've had enough of it."

"Quite enough," said Bob Cherry. "The next chap who begins rotting will get a dot on the nose, and sharp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should recommend you to turn over a new leaf," said Skinner. "My dear young friends, you are started upon a bad path. Can you not see yourselves, in the future, shunned by all who know you? Can you not see yourselves reeling with tottering steps to a drunkard's grave? Oh, my friends——"

Skinner got no further with his impromptu oration.

The exasperated four rushed upon him, and he was swept off his feet, and bumped on the floor, with a bump that shook all the breath out of his body.

"Groo!" he gasped. "Rescue!"

A crowd of juniors rushed to his aid.

Harry Wharton & Co. were dragged off Skinner.

There was a scene of wild confusion in the common-room.

The Famous Four were hitting out now. Their blood was up, and they meant business. They regarded the whole matter as a stupendous jape, and they had had enough of it.

"Secondly and ninthly, my dear friends," said Skinner, in an unctuous voice, "beware in time! Firstly, I would warn you of the evil of your course——" "Lemme get at him!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Give 'em socks!" roared Bob Cherry.

But the four juniors were swept back by the crowd, and Skinner staggered to his feet. He jumped on a chair, gasping, and resumed his oration, while a crowd of fellows kept the exasperated four away from him.

"My dear friends," said Skinner, in an unctuous voice, "beware in time! Firstly, I would warn you of the evil of your course——"

"Lemme get at him!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shove them back."

"Go it, Skinny!"

"Secondly and ninthly," said Skinner, "reflect upon the horrors of the delirium tremens which you are laying up for your old age."

"Lemme——"

"Go it, Skinny! Pile it on!"

"Thirdly and seventhly, and to conclude, remember what is due to the school you belong to, and the Form you are disgracing——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Pile it on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And in conclusion, my dear friends, let me warn you all to take example by these youthful reprobates," said Skinner, "and I cannot allow this opportunity to pass without warning you all that—— Yow!"

Harry Wharton & Co., with a desperate effort, broke through the fellows who were holding them back.

The next moment the orator went whirling, chair and all.

"Ow!" gurgled Skinner. "Help!"

His friends rushed to his aid.

There was a wild and whirling struggle.

The juniors were wildly mixed up, most of them hitting out, and hardly knowing or caring where the pommelling fell.

There was a roar of voices, a trampling of feet.

"Go it!"

"Give 'em socks!"

"Ow!"

"Yah!"

Harry Wharton & Co. went down under a dozen sprawling forms.

The juniors scrambled over them, gasping and shouting. The Famous Four still resisted gallantly. In the midst of the whirling combat, a form in cap and gown appeared in the open doorway, and a stern voice broke through the din.

"Boys!"

The conflict ceased at once.

The juniors, gasping and dishevelled and dismayed, separated, and stood looking at the figure in the doorway.

"Quelch!" muttered Skinner.

And a grim silence fell upon the Remove as they met the stern eyes of their Form-master.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Called Over the Coals.

MR. QUELCH looked in grimly upon the disorderly scene.

Mr. Quelch was accustomed to unruliness in his Form; and the junior common-room was frequently the scene of trouble.

But he had seldom seen it quite in this state before.

"Boys!"

The Form-master's deep tones rang into a silent room now.

The juniors stood dumbfounded.

A caning to every member of the Form, or a month's gating, would not have surprised them. They stood awaiting their fate.

Mr. Quelch's stern eyes turned upon Harry Wharton.

The young captain of the Remove certainly looked a most disreputable sight, and his appearance justified Mr. Quelch's dark frown

His collar was torn out, his waistcoat deprived of all its buttons, and his jacket ripped up the back. His trousers were baggy and dusty, his face dusty, too, and his hair like a mop, and there was a smear of crimson on his nose.

Wharton was conscious that he looked like a hooligan after a particularly rough night out. That consciousness made him colour very much under the searching gaze of Mr. Quelch.

But Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh were not in a much better state. They had all been through the mill.

"Wharton! Cherry! Nugent! Hurree Singh!" The names fell crisply from Mr. Quelch. "Follow me to my study."

"Yes, sir."

The Famous Four moved towards the doorway. Mr. Quelch turned and strode away with rustling gown.

The four juniors followed him out.

The rest of the crowd stared at one another in great surprise.

Was their transgression to pass unpunished? Was Mr. Quelch going to pass over the riot as if nothing had happened.

It did not seem possible.

Yet that was what it looked like. He had said no word to the rioters—not even about an imposition.

No caning, no gating, no impot! Truly, wonders would never cease! The juniors could not understand it. But so it was.

"He knows Wharton's to blame for the whole row," said Skinner. "He's going to take it out of them."

"Most likely," agreed Bulstrode.

"Serve 'em right!" said Snoop.

"Oh, rats!" exclaimed Ogilvy warmly. "We started the row by ragging them. If they get it hot, I think we ought to get it too."

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, you can if you like," he said. "I'm staying here."

Harry Wharton and his chums followed Mr. Quelch.

They were dismayed, and surprised too. They had evidently been picked out for punishment, but why they did not know.

"It's rotten!" murmured Bob Cherry. "It wasn't our fault; we didn't ask to be ragged by those blessed asses."

Wharton's face brightened.

"Perhaps we're only going to be jawed for missing call-over," he remarked. "Quelch was bound to see us about that."

"But will he pass over that awful row in the common-room? They must have heard the kick-up in every corner of the school."

"Well, we shall soon see."

Mr. Quelch, without turning his head once, strode to his study, and the juniors followed him in. Then the Form-master turned upon them sternly.

"Well?" he said, his searching gaze resting upon their faces.

They were silent.

"Have you anything to say?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"About what, sir?" asked Harry Wharton quietly. "We were very sorry to miss calling over, but we were delayed ——"

"Gosling has made his report to me."

"About the row in the common-room, sir, we——"

"I am not speaking of that," said Mr. Quelch. "That might have been expected, considering the condition in which you seem to have returned to Greyfriars."

Wharton jumped

"The—the what, sir?"

"I confess, Wharton, that I can hardly understand it of you," said the Remove-master. "It was a great surprise and a great shock to me. But your confession to Gosling was explicit, and he has repeated it to me, as was his duty."

"I—I do not understand, sir. We were an hour late for calling over, but that was due to an accident——"

"Ah!" said Mr. Quelch ironically. "You were detained?"

"Yes, sir."

"By an accident?"

"Yes, sir."

"Gosling has reported to me that you came home in a condition the worse for drink," said Mr. Quelch, in measured tones. "He says that you confessed to having been delayed at the Bull, and to have taken drink in Friardale on your way back."

The juniors stared for a moment.

Then, unable to resist the absurdity of the whole matter, they burst into a roar of laughter.

It was not very respectful to Mr. Quelch, but they could not help it.

The idea of the school porter having been so completely taken in by Wharton's careless joke, and having reported it in all seriousness to the Form-master, was too ludicrous.

Even Mr. Quelch's surprised and angry face could not check the laughter.

The juniors roared.

"Ha, ha ha!"

"Boys——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wharton—Cherry——"

"Oh, my hat!" roared Bob Cherry. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This unseemly merriment——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"E-e-excuse us, sir!" gasped Harry Wharton, with tears in his eyes. "We—we can't help it, sir. Oh, dear! Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter, Wharton. If Gosling's words were correct, you will all four be expelled from the school."

"It's a mistake, sir. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Indeed! Then you did not make this confession to Gosling?"

"Yes, sir, but—but—— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gosling!" called out Mr. Quelch.

The school porter, who had been waiting to give his evidence, stepped into the room. There was a sour grin on his face. Gosling was there to give incriminating evidence, and his expression showed that the task was far from uncongenial.

But the juniors were not scared.

The look of half-concealed triumph on Gosling's ill-favoured face only struck them as additionally comical under the circumstances. In spite of themselves they burst into a laugh again.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"Silence!" he exclaimed.

And the juniors tried to control their merriment, but their eyes were wet with tears of mirth.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
A Slight Mistake.

GOSLING looked nonplussed as he saw the suppressed merriment of the victims he had come there to denounce, and consign to severe punishment. He could not understand it in the least. He concluded that it was merely an attempt to brazen the matter out, and he smiled sourly at the thought.

Mr. Quelch looked at him.

"Gosling, repeat your statement in the presence of Wharton."

"Suttingly, sir."

"And lose no time," said Mr. Quelch, whose brow was less stern now. He could see that the mirth of the juniors was genuine, and he began to think that the porter had made some egregious blunder.

"Werry well, sir. The young gentlemen kim in a hower late, sir, and they was very merry——"

"Come to the point."

"I asks them where they had been, sir, or words to that effect, and Master Wharton he tells me straight that they had been delayed at the Bull."

"You are sure of that?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"What else?"

"He said they had had a drink in Friardale as they came through."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"If you please, sir——" began Harry.

Mr. Quelch made a gesture.

"Let Gosling finish first, please, Wharton."

"Very well, sir."

"You told me, Gosling, that the boys were in a certain state."

"So they was, sir."

"You are sure of that?"

"They didn't know wot they was saying, sir. Master Wharton he says that he hadn't been to the Bull, but that the Bull had come to him, sir, and that showed that the stuff 'ad got into 'is 'ead, sir."

"That will do, Gosling."

"Yes, sir, and wot I says is this 'ere——"

"That will do. Now, Wharton, answer me very carefully. Had you been drinking strong liquor before you returned to Greyfriars?"

"Certainly not, sir!" said Harry indignantly.

"You were not in an excited or confused state from that cause?"

"Of course not!"

"You did not tell Gosling that you had been drinking in the village?"

"Yes, sir, I did tell him that."

Mr. Quelch raised his eyebrows.

"And why, if it was not the case?"

"It was the case, sir. We stopped at the fountain in Friardale as we came through the village, and drank," said Harry demurely. "We were thirsty after a long tramp along a dusty road, sir."

"Then it—it was water you drank?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Quelch appeared to be swallowing something with difficulty.

"Why did you not tell Gosling so?"

"He didn't ask me, sir."

"Your words were calculated to make a wrong impression upon him."

"That was his fault, sir. He had the cheek to question me, a thing he had no right to do; and he was impertinent enough to suspect that I had been drinking. I didn't think he was worth explaining to.'

Gosling glared.

"Wot I says is this 'ere——" he began.

"That is enough, Gosling. You appear to have made an utterly absurd mistake," said Mr. Quelch severely.

"Wot about the Bull?" demanded Gosling. "They admitted they had been to the Bull."

"I said the bull came to us," grinned Wharton. "The truth is, sir, we were late because Farmer Killick's black bull got out of his field, and attacked us in the road. He smashed up my bike and Cherry's, and we had to walk home. That's why we got in an hour late."

"Then—then the Bull was not the public-house of that name, but the black bull—an animal belonging to Mr. Killick!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir."

Gosling's jaw dropped. His face was a study.

"You certainly gave Gosling a wrong impression, Wharton."

"Well, I told him I never went to the bull, but that the bull came to us, sir," said Wharton. "That was plain enough, if he had had intelligence enough to understand."

"Wot I says is——"

"Enough, Gosling. You have made a ridiculous blunder, and uttered what is really a slander upon Wharton's character."

"Oh!"

"And the worst of it is, that you have been silly enough to tell the story to others, before reporting it to me, and it is all over the school," said Mr. Quelch sternly.

A light dawned upon Harry Wharton.

"My hat!" he exclaimed involuntarily. "Then that's why those duffers came to our study—that's why Mossoo came——"

"That's why they were ragging us——"

"The asses!"

"It was all Gosling's fault."

"Wot I says is this 'ere," murmured Gosling feebly. "I says——"

Mr. Quelch turned upon him sharply.

"You have acted stupidly, and done enough mischief," he exclaimed. "You should have known better, Gosling. I hope you did not blunder from a desire to catch these boys in the wrong, and report them."

Gosling gasped.

"You may go," snapped Mr. Quelch.

And the school porter went dazedly from the room. His anticipated triumph had shrivelled away. Gosling had never felt smaller in his life than he did as he sneaked away from Mr. Quelch's study.

The Remove-master fixed his eyes upon the juniors. His anger was all gone now. He was trying not to smile, but he could not quite succeed.

"Gosling has acted most absurdly," he said. "I am afraid, however, that this is what you boys call a jape, and that you intended him to deceive himself."

Wharton did not reply.

"As you have so good a reason to give for missing call-over, I shall inflict no punishment," said Mr. Quelch. "You may go."

"Thank you, sir!"

The juniors left the study, and returned to the common-room. A crowd of juniors, anxious to know the verdict, surrounded them immediately.

"Licked?" asked Bulstrode.

Wharton shook his head.

"Did you soap over old Quelch?" asked Skinner.

"No, we didn't," said Harry. "We told him the truth."

"The truth! My hat!"

"And you weren't licked?"

"You told him you came home from the Bull tipsy——"

"You utter asses! It was a jape on Gosling!" said Wharton. And he explained. The story of Gosling's report to the Remove-master made the juniors roar.

"Well, I thought there was something curious about it all the time," said Ogilvy.

"So did I," said Hazeldene. "In fact, I knew it was all rot."

"Yes, I thought so when I heard Gossy telling Carne," said Stott. "I said so to you, Skinner."

"That you jolly well didn't!" said Skinner.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Of course, you all knew it was rot, but you didn't know you knew," he remarked sarcastically. "Anyway, you all know now, and you may as well own up that you've acted the giddy ox!"

And he walked out of the room.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Past Mending.

CLINK! Clink! Clink!

The sound caught Harry Wharton's ears as he walked towards the bicycle shed after morning school the next day.

He had been inquiring for Bob Cherry, to come to the cricket practice, and had learned that Bob had been seen going to the bike shed. He followed him there, and the clink-clink as he approached showed that Bob was hard at work.

Harry looked in at the open door of the shed.

Bob Cherry was there.

He was in his shirt-sleeves, with the sleeves rolled up, and an apron tied round him. His hands were decidedly dirty, and his face was not clean. He had the broken bicycle on the floor in the middle of the shed, and seemed to be wrestling with the ruins.

William had brought the wrecked bicycles into Greyfriars that morning. Wharton's machine lay in a heap in the corner of the shed, near his handsome new "jigger." But Bob Cherry had no second machine, and no prospects of having one.

Bob looked up from his arduous labours.

"Mending it?" asked Harry.

Bob grunted. The perspiration was streaming down his face.

"Trying to," he said. "It's not easy."

Harry could hardly help smiling as he gazed at the heap of wreckage. He did not think it was possible to mend that bicycle.

"No, it doesn't look easy," he agreed.

"Well, I'm going to have a try," said Bob. "You never know what you can do till you try, you know."

"No, that's true enough."

Clink! Clink!

"I shall have to get it to pieces first, and then mend the blessed pieces," said Bob. "The worst of it is that every piece is either broken or twisted."

"I came to tell you we were going to the nets."

"Oh, I've no time for cricket now! The cycle race comes off on Saturday afternoon."

Wharton whistled.

"Do you think you can mend that jigger enough to join in the race?" he asked.

"I'm going to try."

"But——"

"Nothing else to be done. You buzz off and play cricket. I'll make some sort of a hand of it," said Bob, clinking away.

Harry shook his head.

"I'll help you," he said.

"You'll miss the cricket."

"Blow the cricket!"

"Oh, all right! I'll be glad of some help."

Wharton slipped off his jacket and wired in. A voice was soon heard calling from the distance. It was Nugent's voice.

"Wharton! Where the dickens are you? We want you to bat."

"Here I am."

Frank Nugent looked into the bike shed. He stared as he saw the two juniors squatting among the oily and dirty fragments of the bike.

"What are you up to?" he exclaimed. "Playing with a scrap-heap?"

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Then what are you doing?"

"Mending Bob's bicycle."

"Mending it!" ejaculated Nugent.

It certainly seemed a very bold statement. The juniors were surrounded by scattered fragments of the machine—torn and ripped tyres, twisted pedals, bent frame, and broken wheel and shattered spokes. There was plenty of wreckage, but little sign of mending.

"You call that mending?" said Nugent. "Better chuck it up, and come to the cricket."

"Rats!"

"But look here——"

"You look here!" said Wharton. "Shove that bat away, and come and lend a hand."

"Can't do much good."

"Nothing like trying," said Bob.

Nugent grinned.

"Oh, all right!"

He rolled up his sleeves and started in. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked in a few minutes later, evidently in search of Nugent and Wharton.

"Ah, my worthy chums, I have foundfully discovered you," he remarked.

"Here we are," said Wharton cheerfully.

"You look busyful."

"We are busy."

"The esteemed cricketers are waiting——"

"Let 'em wait!"

The nabob nodded.

"Very well, my worthy chums. I do not keenfully desire to play the esteemed cricket, and if you will instruct me in the rules I will play the game with you that you are now playfully engaged in. What is it called?"

"Eh?"

"I presumefully guess that it is a kind of puzzle," said the nabob blandly. "If you will acquaint me with the rules I will play with you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You inky ass!" roared Bob Cherry. "We're mending a bike."

"Oh!"

"Come and land a hand instead of jawing."

"The lendfulness of the esteemed hand is terrific!" said the Nabob of Bhanipur cheerfully. "The pleasedfulness of my worthy self is great!"

He lent a hand.

The four juniors between them soon had the ruins of the bicycle separated.

But how to repair them and fix them together again was another matter.

Anyone looking in at the four grimy juniors as they laboured among the fragments might really have thought that they were engaged upon some new variety of puzzle game.

But they did not give in.

So long as Bob Cherry thought there was a chance of repairing and refitting the bike his chums were willing to stand by him loyally, and help him to the fullest extent of their power.

So long as the general opinion was against him, Bob Cherry had maintained the possibility of repairing the machine, but as soon as his chums left off doubting, and wired in to help him, he seemed to turn it over in his mind, and to grow discouraged.

He would not give in, however.

"After all, I can use up a pair of old tyres," he remarked. "That will be all right. The old ones I have are pretty well punctured, but they're better than these."

"Quite so," agreed Harry.

"Then I can use Nugent's spare pedals——"

"Of course you can!" said Nugent instantly.

"And Inky has two lamps, so I can have one of them——"

"With all my honourable heartfulness!" purred the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"I can join up the middle bar here, I think," said Bob. "The question is, whether it would be safe to ride a race on afterwards."

"Well, you can but try," said Wharton seriously.

"The crank will come straight in time if I hammer it enough," went on Bob hopefully.

"No doubt."

Bob gazed at the wreck. The task seemed more and more hopeless as the juniors proceeded with it. Indeed, anyone less sanguine than Bob Cherry would never have entertained the idea of patching up that dilapidated jigger.

"Looks like a long job," said Bob at last.

"Yes, it does."

"I don't want to make you fellows slave at it like this."

"Oh, that's nothing! We'll stick to you!"

"The stickfulness is terrific!"

"Yes, but——"

Billy Bunter blinked into the bicycle shed. He grinned at the sight of the wrecked bicycle.

"I say, you fellows, the dinner bell's gone," he remarked.

"Oh, buzz off!" said Bob Cherry, rather ungratefully.

But Billy Bunter did not need to be told. He was not likely to be late for dinner.

Bob rose to his feet

"Better chuck it now," he remarked.

"We'll have another go after dinner," said Harry.

"Ye-e-es!"

And the juniors washed and scrubbed themselves, and hurried in to dinner. Bob Cherry looked very thoughtful during the meal. When the juniors came out afterwards Harry Wharton tapped him on the shoulder.

"Coming to have another go at the bike?" he asked.

Bob Cherry hesitated.

"Well, I think we—we'd better give it a rest," he said.

Wharton smiled.

"It's no good, Bob."

"I'm afraid it isn't," confessed Bob Cherry. "If I made it stand up again, I couldn't ride on it, I suppose!"

And what was left of Bob Cherry's bike was relegated to the scrap-heap.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Really Valuable Suggestion.

HARRY WHARTON came into No. 1 Study with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and a frown of deep thought on his face. Nugent was sitting on the window-ledge reading the latest number of "Pluck," but he looked up from his book as Harry came in.

"Well?" he said. "You've been down to Killick's with Bob?"

Wharton nodded.

"Any good?"

"No."

"Look here, he's responsible legally!" said Nugent warmly. "He ought to have taken better care of his blessed bull. It's the second time the brute has been out of the field, too."

"He says he's awfully sorry, and he's offered two pounds," said Harry.

Nugent sniffed.

"Two pounds!"

"Yes."

"Not much good. You haven't accepted?"

"Yes, we have."

"Well, you must be an ass!" said Frank cheerfully.

Harry Wharton laughed as he sat down.

"What was to be done?" he said. "The fact is, Killick is a poor man, and we couldn't have got the proper compensation—he hasn't the money. He's been a careless duffer, I know; but you can't get blood out of a stone, you know. And Bob didn't want to be hard, either; you know Bob. So he accepted the two sovs., and there's an end, as far as Killick is concerned."

"Two sovs., and a heap of scrap-iron," said Nugent. "Lot of good for riding in a cycle race on Saturday."

"My uncle would see the loss made good, if Bob'd let me ask him," said Harry. "Bob saved my life."

"But he won't hear of it."

"No. We shall have to think of something else. Bob's got to have a bike, and the wind's got to be raised somehow."

"I say, you fellows——"

Billy Bunter's fat face loomed in at the doorway. Wharton made an irritable gesture.

"Oh, get out, Bunter!" he exclaimed. "Don't bother!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Buzz off!"

"But I've got something important to tell you," said Bunter, coming into the study. He had a newspaper folded in his fat hand. "You were talking about Bob Cherry's getting a new bike——"

"Yes, yes; don't worry!"

"Well, I can show you how to manage it."

"Stuff!"

"Look here, I've got a jolly good suggestion to make, and if you don't want to hear it, you needn't!" said Bunter angrily. "I don't care, I'm sure. I only want to help Bob out of the difficulty, because he's a fellow I like."

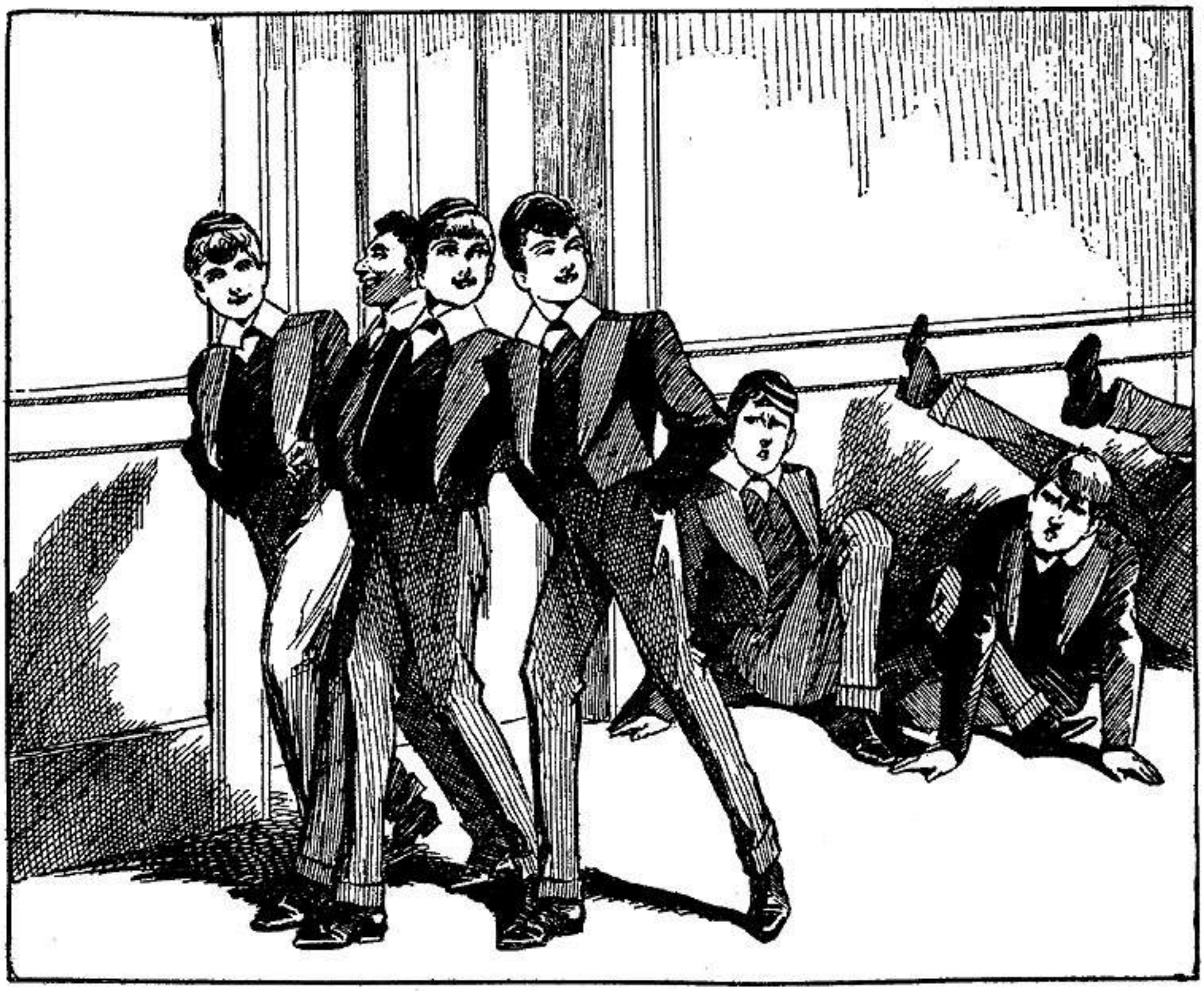
"Let him babble!" said Nugent. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, you know."

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"Go ahead."

"Well, you see, I suppose you'll stand me something decent for tea, if I get you out of a fix like this," said Bunter. "I'm awfully hungry. I haven't had anything to eat since dinner, and I'm getting into a rather low state."

"Oh, cheese it! If you can make a suggestion with any



The Famous Four marched on in triumph to the common-room, leaving the Upper Fourth fellows sprawling on the floor. "Ow-w-w!" gasped Temple.

sense in it, we'll feed you up to the chin," said Wharton. "But you can't."

"That's a bargain."

"Yes, porpoise."

"Well, look here," said Bunter, opening the paper at a marked paragraph, and blinking over it through his big spectacles. "Look at this."

"What on earth is it?"

"It's a chap who's giving away bicycles for advertisement purposes," said Bunter. "He's giving away twelve first-class machines. I don't see why Bob Cherry shouldn't have one of them."

"Ass!"

"Oh, really, Wharton, I don't think you ought to call me names, when I'm trying to help you. Twelve first-class machines——"

"How do you know they're first-class?" grinned Nugent.

"It says so here."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. I suppose a cycle manufacturer ought to know whether his own machines are first-class or not. It's a well-known firm—I've never heard of them before, but it says here that they're famous—the Spoofnoodle Cycle Co. You have to guess three riddles, you know, and send in the answers, and twelve first-class cycles are given away to twelve winners."

"Any conditions?"

"Yes, you have to comply with their conditions."

"What are they?"

Bunter blinked at the paragraph again.

"It doesn't say, but I suppose it means that you have to guess the riddles."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The riddles are quite simple—to a chap like me. I dare say you fellows would find them difficult, but I mean to help you out in every way," said Bunter. "I've already worked out the riddles."

"What a giddy genius!"

"Well, it was rather clever; I did them jolly quickly," said Bunter modestly. "But I always was rather a dab at guessing riddles. The first is a word of four letters—Y-X-R-X. You have to put in two letters in the place of the X's and make the name of a town in the North of England."

"Go hon!"

"Now, guess that if you can," said Bunter.

Nugent put on an expression of great reflection.

"Newcastle-on-Tyne?" he suggested.

"Wrong!"

"Manchester?"

"No."

"Liverpool?"

"Wrong again?"

Wharton chuckled. Billy Bunter could not see in the least that Frank was elaborately "rotting" him.

Nugent rubbed his nose.

"Well, I have to give the thing up, I suppose," he said. "What's the answer?"

"York!" said Billy Bunter.

Nugent started.

"Dear me! Wonderful! What's the next riddle?"

"D-X-B-X-I-X," said Bunter. "Fill in the X's with letters, the same as before, and make a city in Ireland."

Nugent seemed to make a great mental effort.

"Limerick?" he asked.

"Oh, no!"

"Cork?"

"No."

"Belfast?"

"Ha, ha! No. It's Dublin!"

"By Jove, so it is!" said Nugent, with an air of great astonishment. "How do you do these things, Bunter?"

"Oh, I'm rather a dab at guessing riddles!" said Bunter, with considerable self-satisfaction. "The third one is C-X-R-X-I-X-F. Fill in the letters and make a great seaport in Wales."

"Llandudno?" suggested Nugent.

"Oh, really——"

"Snowdon?"

"Of course not."

"Bristol?"

"That's not in Wales, ass!"

"Dear me! What's the answer, then?"

"Cardiff!"

Nugent jumped up, and gave the fat junior a slap on the shoulder that made him stagger.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "Amazing! How do you do it?"

"Ow!"

"Marvellous! Ripping! A miracle!"

"Yarooh! You ass! You've kn-n-nocked all the wind out of me!" gasped Bunter.

"I was only showing my admiration."

Bunter panted.

"Well, chuck it, you ass! Look here, I suppose you can see that I've got the answers right, can't you?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Nugent gravely.

"Well, then, Bob Cherry can send them in—I give 'em to him for nothing—and he can have one of the twelve first-class bikes," said Bunter. "I've put you up to a good thing. What do you think?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can't see anything to cackle at. I'll have that feed now, Wharton."

"Eh? What feed?"

"Oh, really, you know, you're going to stand me a feed for showing you a way out of the difficulty about Cherry's bike."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton.

Bunter blinked at him. He did not seem to understand in the least the cause of Harry Wharton's merriment.

"Now, look here, Wharton——"

"You young ass!" said Wharton, still chuckling. "Do you think anybody ever gets those blessed prize bikes, or that they'd be any good if they were got?"

"It says plainly——"

"I don't care what it says. If you read the advertisement over again, you'll see that you have to comply with conditions not stated there."

"But——"

"And by the time you get those bikes, Bunter, you'll have paid for 'em—twice over perhaps. And they won't be any good to ride on, anyway, in all probability."

"Oh, yes, they're first-class!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheerful ass!" said Nugent. "Do you think cycle manufacturers give away first-class bikes, and live on the loss?"

"It's for the sake of the advertisement, you know."

"That's a dodge, ass!"

"Oh, really——"

"My dear Bunty, you are a champion chump, and you will never be anything else," said Harry Wharton. "Go and burn that newspaper, and don't jaw."

"What about the feed?"

"There isn't any feed."

"After I've made the suggestion, and guessed the riddles for you!" exclaimed Billy Bunter indignantly. "Oh, really, Wharton, I think you might play the game, you know!"

"Ass!"

"Besides, I'm hungry——"

"Well, it's just time for tea in Hall," said Wharton, pushing the fat junior out of the study. "Buzz off! You make me tired!"

"Oh, really——"

The study door slammed.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Todd only Wants to be Obliging.

THE chums of the Remove discussed the matter long, but no light was shed on the subject by the discussion. Billy Bunter's valuable suggestion was not adopted; but no better one seemed to be forthcoming. Mr. Killick's two pounds was all they had towards the price of the new bicycle, and at least eight more would be wanted. Where the eight could come from was a mystery. The idea of a whip-round among the juniors could not be entertained, for Bob would not have accepted a subscription. What the juniors really wanted was a rain of sovereigns to fall, like the manna upon the Israelites of old; and that, as Nugent remarked, was extremely unlikely to happen.

The juniors went down to tea in Hall that evening. When they came out after tea, Wingate of the Sixth stopped Wharton in the Hall. The big, rugged captain of Greyfriars was to start the juniors in the cycle race on Saturday, and the lads were very proud of having secured the captain of the school for their starter.

"I hear you had an adventure yesterday with Killick's bull, Wharton," the Greyfriars captain remarked. "Your bike was smashed up."

"Yes, my second bike," said Harry. "Bob's was done for, too."

"Got any damages?"

"Mr. Killick's handed out two pounds. Bob's accepted it."

"H'm! Is Cherry in the race on Saturday?"

"He should have been, but unless he gets another bike, I don't know what he'll do," said Harry ruefully. "He says he can't ask his people for it. The worst of it is, he got his jigger smashed up in helping me. I should have been gored if Bob hadn't come to the rescue. He lost his bike through that."

"Tell me just how it happened."

Wharton explained.

The captain of Greyfriars listened attentively.

"It was jolly plucky of Cherry," he said.

"Yes, wasn't it? My uncle would buy him a new bike for it, like a shot, only Bob won't let me ask him."

Wingate smiled.

"I understand Cherry's feelings in the matter," he remarked; "but it's hard that he should lose his machine, and drop out of the cycle race, all because he ran a lot of risk to help a chum."

"Beastly hard," said Wharton.

"If you can't think of anything better, I'll lend him my machine on Saturday," said Wingate. "The frame's too high for him, but he's exceptionally long-legged for a junior, and if the saddle's put down he can ride it. It will be better than nothing if he still wants to ride in the junior race."

"I say, you're awfully good, Wingate."

"Not at all."

And Wingate walked away. Wharton joined Bob immediately, and told him what the captain of Greyfriars had said.

Bob's face brightened a little.

"It's jolly good of Wingate," he said. "Precious few of the Sixth would lend their bikes to a junior. It's a good machine, too. Of course, it's not the build to suit me; but I think I could put up a pretty good show on it."

"You'll try?"

"Yes, rather!"

"I wish we could think of some way of raising the wind," said Harry. "The only suggestion so far has come from Bunter, and it's no good. We only want another eight pounds."

Bob laughed.

"Might as well want eighty, or eight hundred," he said.

"Yes, it looks like it."

Hazeldene was wheeling his bicycle down towards the gates. Harry Wharton glanced at him, and stopped him to speak.

"Going over to Cliff House?" he asked.

Hazeldene nodded.

"Yes, to see Marjorie; but I've got a message from Mrs. Locke to Miss Primrose. Coming out on your jigger?"

"Yes, I might as well."
"I'll wait for you here."
Harry turned to Bob Cherry
"I'm going to see Marjorie," he said. "I'll ask her——"
"Ask her what?"
"Advice! You know she can often see a way out of things when we can't," said Harry. "I shouldn't wonder if she could make some suggestion."
Bob grinned ruefully.
"Marjorie's an awfully clever girl," he remarked, "but she can't suggest any way of getting a ten-guinea bike for two pounds."
"Well, we'll see."
Harry Wharton had great faith in the judgment of Marjorie Hazeldene. His girl chum had a clear and sensible head, and she often seemed to see a point that was obscure to the juniors with her quick feminine intuition. And Harry had no prejudice against getting counsel from a girl, if the counsel was likely to help him.
He hurried away to the cycle shed to fetch his bicycle.
Hazeldene filled in the time by riding up and down, and turning round in circles. He was a good cyclist, very quick and clever with his machine, though possessing hardly enough staying-power to be of much use in a race.
"Dear me," said Alonzo Todd, coming out as Hazeldene was performing his evolutions. "Dear me! Has Hazeldene lost control of his bike, Cherry?"
Bob Cherry chuckled.
"No, ass; he's doing that for fun."
"Dear me!"
The Duffer of Greyfriars looked on in great admiration. He could seldom get on a bike himself without falling off, or running into somebody. Hazeldene dropped his handkerchief to the ground, and circled round it on the bike, attempting to pick it up as he passed. It was not an easy trick, for a little over-balancing would have made the bicycle curl up with its rider on the ground. Hazeldene passed it several times, failing to catch it, but each time he came circling back, and leaned down and snatched at the handkerchief again. The juniors watched his evolutions with interest.
The Duffer of Greyfriars looked concerned.
Todd was a most obliging fellow, and he was always wanting to make himself useful to others. It was a lesson which had been inculcated into his mind by his uncle Benjamin, a worthy gentleman for whose precepts Alonzo had a great respect. Todd watched Hazeldene trying to pick up the handkerchief for some time.
"Dear me," he said, "I really think I will get his handkerchief for him. He will never be able to pick it up without dismounting."
Bob Cherry grinned.
"Let it alone," he said.
"But he does not want to dismount, and it would be only obliging to pick up his handkerchief," said Todd.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Really, my dear fellow——"
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.
Todd looked at him, and then ran down the steps, and ran towards Hazeldene. The cyclist did not look at him. He was catching at the handkerchief again. He missed it once more, and passed it, and then circled round on the bike again. Todd reached the fallen handkerchief just as the cyclist dashed up once more.
"It's all right!" he exclaimed. "I'll pick it up for you—— Ow!"
Crash!
He rolled on the ground with the cycle sprawling over him, and Hazeldene sprawling over the cycle.
"Oh!" roared Hazeldene.
"Yarooh!"
"Ow!"
"Dear me!"
"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.
"Help!" murmured the Duffer feebly. "Ow! I am hurt! Yow! Help!"
Bob Cherry rushed up to lend a hand. He dragged Hazeldene off, and Nugent lifted up the bicycle. The front wheel was buckled, and the left crank bent. Hazeldene hopped on one foot, and gasped.
"Hurt?" asked Bob.
"Ow! My ankle! Yow!"
"I'm sorry," murmured the Duffer, sitting up. "I only meant to be obliging. I'm so sorry."
"You frabjous ass!" yelled Hazeldene. "What did you get into the way for?"
"I wanted to be useful——"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
The Duffer blinked round in amazement. He could see nothing to laugh at. But the Greyfriars fellows could. When Alonzo Todd wanted to be useful, something was bound to happen. They roared!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
Very Useful.

HARRY WHARTON wheeled up his bicycle, and looked at the scene in surprise. The Duffer staggered to his feet with a helping hand from Hurree Singh. Hazeldene was leaning on Bob Cherry's shoulder, with one ankle clasped in his left hand. Nugent held up the crippled bike.
"What on earth's the matter?" asked Harry Wharton.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Toddy's been making himself useful."
"Good old Duffer!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I'm so sorry," said Todd, "I saw Hazeldene trying to pick up his handkerchief from his bike, you know, and I ran in to pick it up for him. I'm sure I only meant to be obliging."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh, take him away and suffocate him!" growled Hazeldene. "I was doing a cycle trick, and the dangerous lunatic ran into me and knocked me over."
Harry Wharton grinned.
"Same old Duffer!" he exclaimed. "Haven't I warned you never to make yourself useful to anybody, Toddy?"
"But my uncle Benjamin says——"
"Oh, if you're going to dig up Uncle Benjamin, I'm done!" said Harry, laughing. "Are you coming, Hazel?"
Hazeldene grunted.
"I can't! My ankle's hurt, and the bike's buckled up. I'll make that chump mend it. Will you take Mrs. Locke's note over?"
"Certainly."
Hazeldene handed over the letter and Wharton slipped it into his pocket. He mounted his machine and rode out of the gates of Greyfriars. Hazeldene rubbed his aching ankle, and at last set his foot on the ground. A stream of apologies was flowing from the lips of the Duffer. He was evidently sorry for the catastrophe.
"That's all very well," growled Hazeldene. "I know you're an ass, and can't help it; but that won't mend my machine, or make my ankle leave off aching."
"I'm so sorry——"
"You're going to be something else besides sorry; you're going to be useful," said Hazeldene. "You're going to mend that machine, and you're going to rub my ankle with Elliman's—or else you're going to have a licking."
The Duffer looked at him with mild reproach.
"I'm sure I shall be only too glad to do anything I can, Hazeldene," he exclaimed. "I will do anything you wish."
"That's all right, then. Carry that bike back to the shed. There are the tools there."
"Very well."
The Duffer shouldered the bike, putting the bar over his shoulder and his arm through, and carried it off. The front rim was too much buckled for it to be wheeled. He led the way to the bicycle shed, and Hazeldene limped after him. The juniors, scenting fun, followed. Hazeldene might make the Duffer repair his machine—and certainly Todd was only too ready to make himself useful—but Bob Cherry had a strong suspicion that the last state of that bike would be worse than its first.
There was a bottle of embrocation in the bike shed, and Hazeldene told the Duffer to reach it down, and sat down himself upon a bench, and bared his ankle. He turned his sock down over his boot ready for the rubbing. There was a blue bruise already forming on the ankle.
The Duffer blinked up at the shelf.
"Is that the bottle?" he asked.
"There are two of them there," growled Hazeldene. "Either will do."
"Very good."
The Duffer reached down one of the bottles. It slipped from his hand, crashed on the floor, and broke into twenty pieces. The embrocation ran in a stream along the floor.
"You ass!" roared Hazeldene.
"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Bob Cherry.
"Oh, shut up!"
"Ha, ha, ha! It's funny!"
"Well, that was your bottle," said Hazeldene. "Reach down mine, will you, Ogilvy? Don't let that idiot touch it."
"My bottle!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, ceasing to laugh. "Why, you chump——"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Look here, this is more than a joke," said Bob Cherry wrathfully. "Embrocation costs money, and——"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
Ogilvy reached down the other bottle, and handed it to the Duffer, who received it carefully.
He regarded it with some doubt.

"What am I to do with this?" he asked.

"Drink it," suggested Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me," said Todd. "Surely——"

"My only hat!" gasped Bulstrode. "I really believe the chump would drink it. It's for rubbing on contusions, you cheerful ass."

"Oh, I see!"

"Put a little on my ankle, and rub," said Hazeldene. "Rub gently and thoroughly till I tell you to stop!"

"Certainly."

Todd knelt before Hazeldene as he sat on the bench. Instead of taking a little of the embrocation in his palm, he poured some from the bottle upon Hazel's ankle. The fluid came out with a rush, and in a moment Hazeldene's sock and boot were full of it.

He sprang up with a yell.

"Oh, you ass!"

"I'm so sorry——"

"Yah! Chump! Yah!"

Hazeldene dragged at his boot to get it off. Todd sprawled backwards, and the bottle flew from his hand, and what was left of the contents streamed out on the floor. The Duffer rose dazedly.

"Dear me!" he murmured.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hazeldene dragged his boot and sock off, and mopped his foot on a pocket-handkerchief. He glared at the Duffer with an almost homicidal expression.

"Shall I rub it for you?" asked Todd innocently.

"No," yelled Hazeldene. "Keep off! I shall have to go and wash it off, you chump. You can take the front wheel off my bike while I'm gone, but don't start mending it till I get back, or—or you'll want mending yourself."

"Certainly!"

And Hazeldene hopped out of the shed on one foot, supported by a couple of grinning juniors.

The Duffer remained with the bicycle, and a group of fellows stood grinning and looking on. They did not offer him a word of advice; they were curious to see what he would do. The Duffer was industrious enough. Whatever faults he had, laziness was not one of them. He started on the bicycle.

That he did not know much about bicycles was clear. The way he wrenched and pulled at that unfortunate machine would have made a mechanic weep. The front wheel certainly came off, just as Todd wanted it to. One of the forks came off, too, with a snap, and most of the spokes were out of the wheel by the time Todd had finished, and there were six or seven gashes in the tyre, and the rim was in a state of great crinkledness. Bulstrode asked the Duffer if he were trying to get the rim into the pattern of the Greek key—a question which only made the Duffer stare, but made the others yell.

"There, it's off at last!" gasped the Duffer.

"And you'd better be off, too," grinned Bulstrode. "When Hazeldene sees that, I think there will be assault and battery, if not homicide."

"Justifiable homicide," grinned Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hazeldene entered the shed.

"Got that wheel off yet? M-m-m-my only hat!"

Hazeldene stared at the ruined wheel, and then at the perspiring Duffer. He was speechless for a full minute.

"Yes, I've done it," said Todd. "I'm ready to begin mending now. I want to do all the work, if you'll let me, as I caused the accident; besides, I want to make myself useful. My Uncle Benjamin says——"

Then Hazeldene found his voice.

"You—you—you've done that!" he panted.

"Yes; you asked me to, you know."

"You—you——"

Words failed Hazeldene. But action supplied their place.

He rushed at the Duffer, hitting out wildly. Todd caught one in the eye, and another on the nose, with great astonishment, and sat down violently on the bicycle. There was an ominous, clanking crash.

"Oh, dear!"

Hazeldene, blind with rage, danced round the Duffer, hitting out wildly. Todd scrambled to his feet, only to be knocked down again. He jumped up, and made a wild break for the door.

The yelling juniors opened to let him pass. He whisked out at top speed, and Hazeldene dashed after him in hot pursuit.

Away went the Duffer in frantic flight, and after him went the infuriated Hazeldene, and the juniors followed, shrieking with laughter.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Marjorie's Idea.

"MARJORIE!"

Harry Wharton jumped off his bicycle at the garden-gate of Cliff House. Marjorie was standing at the gate, looking out towards the wide bay, glowing in the sunset. She looked up and smiled brightly at the sight of the Greyfriars junior.

Wharton raised his cap, and leaned his machine against the fence.

"I came over to see you," he said. "I have a note for Miss Primrose, but that can wait."

Marjorie smiled.

"Perhaps you had better take in the note first," she suggested. "I will wait here for you, if you wish to speak to me."

"Very well."

And Wharton went up the garden-path, and July delivered his note into the hands of the principal of Cliff House; and returned to the garden gate, to find Marjorie waiting for him there.

"Well?" said Marjorie.

Wharton hesitated a moment.

"I dare say you'll think me an ass for coming," he remarked. "The fact is, something's happened, and I wonder if you could make any suggestion."

The girl laughed merrily.

"Well, first of all, tell me what has happened," she replied.

Wharton related the incident of the black bull.

"It was very brave of Bob," was Marjorie's first remark.

"Yes, rather! He's a giddy hero, though he'd punch anybody's head who said so," laughed Wharton. "But the question is, what's to be done? Bob won't hear of my speaking to my uncle about it, and he would rage if we started a subscription. We've got only two pounds from Killick. Bicycles don't grow on bushes, and sovereigns can't be gathered like blackberries. Of course, I suppose there's nothing that can be done, really—but we did want to set old Bob up with a bike again."

"It is very hard on him."

"Yes, rotten hard; especially as his jigger needn't have been hurt if he hadn't come scorching back to help me. It was just like Bob."

Marjorie wrinkled her pretty white forehead in a little thoughtful frown.

"How much money do you want to raise?" she asked.

"About another eight pounds."

"And Bob won't accept a subscription?"

"He would cut up rusty if we suggested it."

"His father——"

"Bob won't tell him about it. Mr. Cherry bought him that bike this year, and Bob thinks he couldn't spare the tin for another. It's very thoughtful of Bob, and all that; only where is the new bike to come from?"

Marjorie looked very thoughtful.

It was indeed a problem.

Wharton, looking at her face, laughed a little ruefully.

"Of course, there's no way out of it," he said. "I was a duffer to come and bother you."

Marjorie shook her head.

"I'm glad you came."

"It's no good thinking of it—it's a hopeless case. Eight pounds won't drop down out of the sky," said Harry.

Marjorie did not speak.

"Wingate's offered to lend his bike to Bob for the race on Saturday," said Harry. "It isn't exactly suited to Bob, but he'll have a chance. There are four of us riding, against four of the Upper Fourth, you know, and there's a brand-new Silver King for the prize. We want to keep it in the Remove, you know; we don't care much which chap it comes to, so long as it doesn't go out of the Form. But as a matter of fact, Bob was our strong man for the race."

Marjorie nodded.

The wrinkle in her forehead had deepened, and she was evidently thinking the matter out very earnestly.

Wharton watched her face.

He wondered whether the girl, with her quick feminine wit, could really hit upon some scheme for raising the required sum of money, without any danger of setting the sensitive Bob's independence up in arms.

Marjorie's frown relaxed at last.

"I think it can be done," she said.

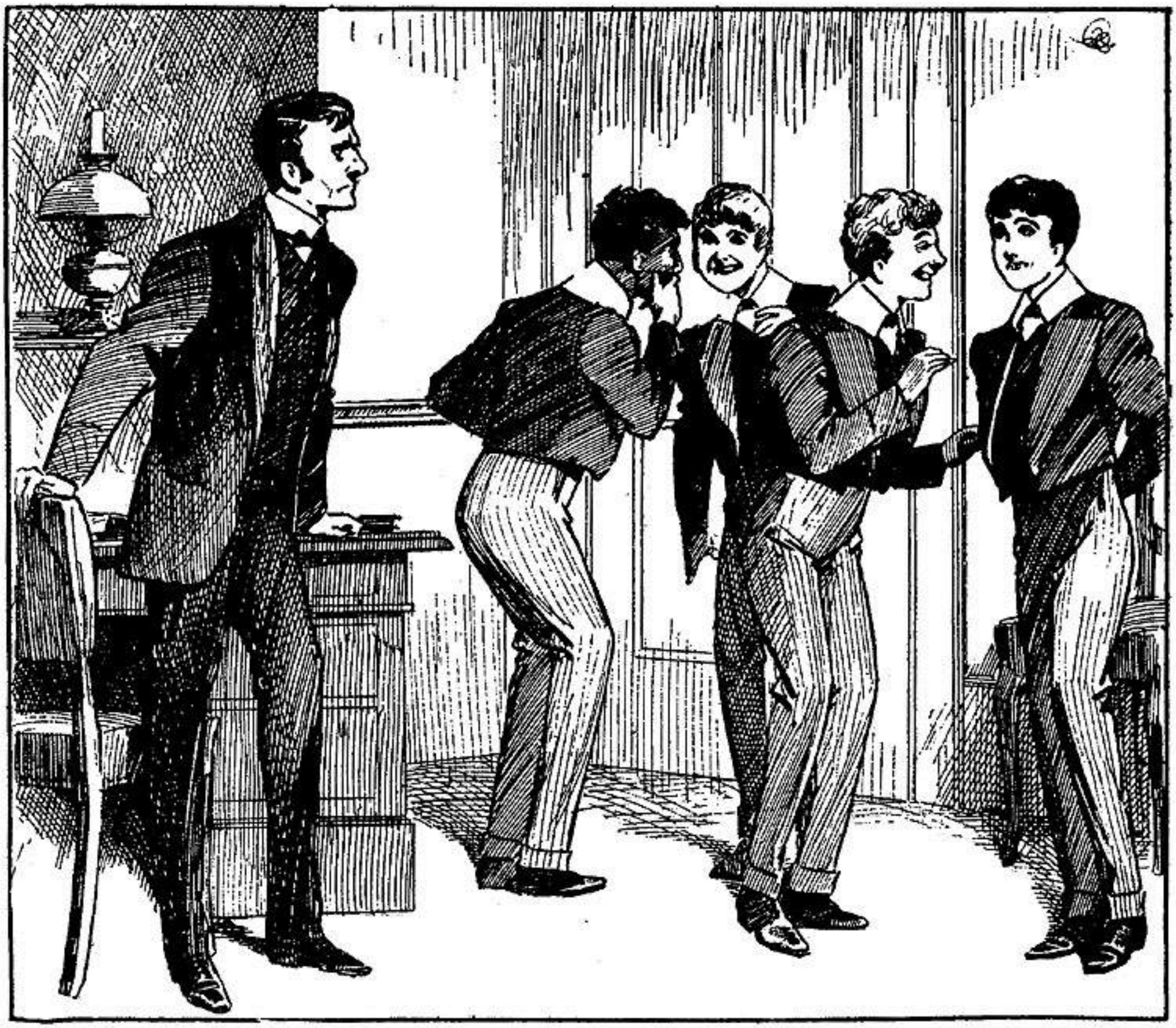
"Really?"

"Yes."

"What's the idea?"

"You know what they do when a workman is injured sometimes, or a professional footballer," said Marjorie. "His comrades raise money for him by a——"

"A friendly lead?" said Harry, smiling



"Excuse us sir!" gasped Harry Wharton. "We can't help it, sir! Oh, dear! Ha, ha, ha!"
"It is no laughing matter, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch.

"A benefit."

"Ah!"

"Professional cricketers, too, take their benefits, and actors," said Marjorie. "There is nothing to object to in a benefit."

"A benefit!" repeated Harry.

"Yes; a show or performance of some sort, the proceeds to be devoted to a certain object—in this case, to purchasing a new bicycle for Bob Cherry."

"My hat!"

Marjorie smiled.

"What do you think of the idea?"

"Why, it's ripping!" exclaimed Harry enthusiastically. "What an ass I was not to think of it myself!"

"Well, I have thought of it," said Marjorie, laughing. "I should think it could be done. You have only to give a show of some kind—whether a cricket match, or a theatrical performance—and charge for admission, the gate to go to the benefit fund."

"Ripping!"

"The question is, whether you could raise so much money——"

"Oh, I think so! All the fellows would come. Bob's very popular, you know, and besides, they all know he got his jigger smashed in saving me from the bull!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"They'll simply flock to the show."

"Then it will be all right."

"I say, Marjorie, it's awfully ripping of you to think of such a dodge!" exclaimed Harry. "I believe that this will get us out of the fix. I'll see the fellows about it, and we'll settle the details. It will have to be a performance of some sort—either theatrical, or in the variety line."

"Yes, that is a good idea. The boys can go to a cricket match whenever they like for nothing," assented Marjorie.

"And you and Clara will come and help us give it?" said Harry.

"Certainly, if it's arranged for a time when Miss Primrose will give us permission."

"Good!"

"I must go in now," said Marjorie, holding out her hand. "I hope it will be a great success, Harry."

"Oh, it will be if you help," said Harry, taking her hand.

And Marjorie smiled, and ran up the garden path. Wharton jumped on his machine, and was scorching back to Greyfriars the next minute. He was full of the new idea, and he covered the distance between Cliff House and Greyfriars in record time.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Wharton Puts up a Notice.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry made that remark as Harry Wharton came scorching in at the gates of Greyfriars.

Bob was looking out into the road, and Wharton had come in sight in the lane, and the next moment was flashing past him into the Close.

"Harry!"

Harry Wharton did not stop.

He whizzed on up the drive, and Bob turned round from the gates, and looked after him in astonishment.

Harry raced up to the house, and jumped off his machine, and leaned it against the wall. Then he ran into the house, and up to No. 1 Study.

Nugent and Hurree Singh and Billy Bunter were there. Bunter was explaining that he was hungry, owing to the absurd inadequacy of tea in Hall. Nugent was advising him, as a remedy, to go and eat coke.

Wharton hurled open the door, and burst into the study like a hurricane.

He collided with Billy Bunter, and sent the fat junior sprawling on the hearthrug, and saved himself by grasping at the table.

Then he stood panting.

Nugent and Hurree Singh stared at him in surprise. Bunter groaned on the floor, but no one ever took any notice of Bunter's groaning.

"What's the matter?" demanded Nugent. "Anything happened?"

Wharton gasped for breath. His face was crimson, and streaming with perspiration.

"Is it a fire?"

"No-o."

"An accident?"

"No."

"Then what's the matter? Are you off your rocker?"

"The off-fulness of the honourable rocker is terrific."

"I've seen Marjorie."

"Well, I've seen her, at times, without any result like this," said Frank. "If it gets into your head in this way, I shall have to prescribe very rare visits to Cliff House, and——"

"Don't rot, you ass. She's got an idea."

"Only one?" asked Frank imperturbably.

"Ass!"

"Ow!" groaned Bunter. "Would you fellows mind helping me to the arm-chair? My leg is sprained, and the—the muscles of my right ribs twisted."

"Poor chap," said Nugent. "Do you suffer?"

"Ye-e-es, awfully."

"Well, do it quietly, there's a good chap."

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"You know, it's awfully noble to suffer in silence," said Nugent. "That's what the pale-faced heroes of the Little-Georgie books do, when they have pneumonia and consumption, and die to slow music."

"Look here——"

"Besides, I shall kick you if you kick up that row."

"I'm in awful pain——"

"Cheese it, and get up."

"I can't get up. I've got an awful pain in the backbone, too, and a shooting agony in my stomach. That is partly due to want of nourishment. If I had something to eat immediately, I think—— Ow!"

Nugent kicked the fat junior gently in the ribs. The kicks were not hard, and Bunter was too fat to be hurt much by them; but he roared like a bull, and scrambled up.

"Why, I thought you couldn't get up!" exclaimed Nugent in astonishment.

"Ow! Beast!"

"Kick him, Inky——"

"Certainfully."

"It does him good. Now, both together——"

But Bunter was already sprinting down the passage.

"Now, then," grinned Nugent. "What about Marjorie's idea? Whose is it, and what is it like?"

"Don't be an ass," said Harry laughing. "It's about Bob. I knew—at least I thought—that Marjorie would be able to help us. She's suggested a benefit."

"A which?"

"A benefit performance of some sort, proceeds to get Bob a new bike."

"My word!"

"Don't you think it's a jolly good idea?" demanded Harry warmly.

"Ripping," said Frank.

"The rippingfulness is terrific."

"We'll give a show of some sort," went on Harry. "A Shakespearian performance would be a good caper. We charge for admission—seats at sixpence, shilling and half-a-crown—a few special reserved seats at five bob."

"Phew!"

"Chaps can pay according to their means. We can raise eight pounds that way, see, and that's all we want. Marjorie and Clara will help us with the performance."

Nugent whistled.

"It's a jolly good idea," he said. "I never thought of a benefit. But I don't know about charging for admission to a Shakespearian entertainment. Is it fair to ask chaps to pay to see Shakespeare?"

"Why, you ass——"

"It's hard enough to get an audience, too, when they don't pay," said Nugent very doubtfully. "How are you going to get an audience to pay, when you can't get them to come in on the nod?"

Wharton grinned.

"Well, there's something in that," he admitted. "Perhaps Shakespeare will be a bit above their heads, too."

"What about a variety show?" said Nugent. "Fellows always like that—and if there are bungles, they can be put down to the comic element. You can break down in a comic song, and it's all the funnier."

"Something in that."

"I could do a song and dance, too," said Nugent modestly. "And Bob could put in a clog dance. Can a chap perform at his own benefit?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, put Bob in for a clog dance. Inky can sing a song——"

"The singfulness of my honourable self would be terrific."

"I've no doubt it would," agreed Nugent. "We can pick out some nice appropriate song, such as 'She's Black, but That's no Matter,' or 'They Call me Snowball——'"

The nabob grinned good-humouredly.

"I could give a recitation," he remarked. "There is a first-class and venerable recitation called 'The Boy stood on the Burnful Deck.'"

"Good! Venerable, anyway."

"I have recitefully given that on other occasions," remarked Hurree Singh. "Shall I show my worthy chums how it goes?"

"Ahem——"

"The boy stood on the burnful deck,
Whence all had togetherfully fled,
The flames that licked the captain's neck——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent. "The flames that lit the battle's wreck, you ass."

"Is that correctful?" asked the nabob dubiously.

"Yes, rather."

"Very well," resumed the nabob.

"The flames that lit the battle's wreck, you ass,
Shone round him——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wharton. "Yes, Inky can give a recitation—it will go like wildfire. It had better be a tragic one; we want to make 'em laugh."

"The willingfulness of my esteemed and venerable self is terrific."

"Good! We shall have plenty of items," grinned Nugent. "We can put on Temple with his violin for the last item, to make the audience get out."

"Good!"

"What about Bob, though? He's so blessed touchy. Suppose he doesn't approve of a benefit performance?"

"I don't care whether he does or not; we're going to give it. I'll put up the notice in the hall at once," said Harry. "Bob can say what he likes, but he can't prevent us from giving the benefit, and he can't refuse the bike when it's bought."

"That's so."

"The so-fulness is great."

Wharton sat down at the table, and drew pen and ink towards him. He sketched out a notice on a sheet of foolscap, and the chums read it over with approval. Then they went downstairs, and it was pinned up in the hall.

The sight of Harry Wharton pinning up a notice on the board attracted a considerable amount of attention. The fellows strolled up to read it, under the impression that it had something to do with the junior cricket fixtures.

Wharton pinned the paper up, then strode away, leaving the Removites to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the notice, so to speak, at their leisure.

An interested and excited group grew before the notice board, and caught the eye of Bob Cherry when he came in.

A general exclamation went up at once at the sight of the sturdy Removite.

"Here he is!"

"Here's Cherry!"

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.
Bob Cherry Is a Little too Hasty.

BOB CHERRY looked surprised as his own name was called out, and the crowd of juniors looked round at him. He stopped.

"What's up?" he asked.

"This giddy notice," grinned Bulstrode.

"Oh, a new notice."

"Yes, and about you."

"About me!" exclaimed Bob in astonishment.

"Didn't you know?"

"Know! Of course not. Are you rotting?

"Look for yourself."

The juniors made way for Bob Cherry, who looked thoroughly mystified as he came up to the notice-board. His expression changed as he read the notice. It ran as follows:

"NOTICE!

"A performance will be given by a Select Company of the Remove Players to-morrow, Wednesday, for the benefit of Robert Cherry, Esq.

"Owing to trouble with a Bull, the said Bob Cherry has lost his Bike, and is barred from the cycle race on Saturday.

"The Remove Players have decided to give a Benefit Performance to raise a new bike for Bob Cherry, Esq.

"A variety entertainment will be given, in a first-class manner, quite worthy of the best traditions of the Greyfriars Remove.

"Prices of Admission: 5s., 2s. 6d., 1s., and 6d.

"Roll up in your thousands!

"Signed,

"H. WHARTON,

"For the Committee."

Bob Cherry stared blankly at the notice.

"Is that a jape?" he asked. "Did you shove that rubbish up there, Bulstrode?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No! Don't you know the writing?"

"It looks like Wharton's."

"It is Wharton's, my son."

Bob Cherry turned red.

"What rot!" he exclaimed. "I'm jolly well not going to have any blessed benefit."

"I think it's a jolly good idea," said Ogilvy. "We want you in the race on Saturday, to make sure of getting the prize for the Remove."

"Faith, and ye're right!" said Desmond.

"Yes, but——"

"It's a good dodge," said Bulstrode, with unusual amiability. "After all, Cherry got his bike smashed in saving Wharton's life."

"He's a giddy hero!" said Elliott.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Bob, crimson. "Where's Wharton?"

"In the common-room."

Bob Cherry strode away towards the junior common-room. The juniors, anticipating fun, followed him there in a crowd.

Wharton, Nugent, and Hurree Singh were at a table in the junior room. They were drawing up a preliminary list of possible artistes for the entertainment on the morrow, and putting down the items.

"You'll have to put in two songs, Harry," said Nugent. "You can do the Toreador song from 'Carmen'—that always goes down—and then you can take half of the duet, 'Tell Me What is Love,' with Marjorie. You sing that well."

"Oh, all right!"

"As for Bob—— Hallo, here he is!"

Bob Cherry came up with a crimson face, and a crowd of grinning juniors at his heels. Wharton nodded to him genially.

"Seen the notice?" he asked.

He knew very well from Bob's look that he had seen the notice. Bob nodded shortly.

"Yes, I have!" he said. "What does the silly rot mean?"

"The what?"

"The silly rot!"

"Lemme see," said Nugent. "Could we get up a Chesterfield character for Bob? He's so polite and gracious that it would suit him down to the ground!"

"Look here!" said Bob warmly. "I'm not going to have any rotten benefit! Do you think I'm going to let other chaps buy me a bike?"

"You see——"

"I see this is all rot! That benefit's off!"

"Rats!"

"I tell you I won't have it!" roared Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton smiled serenely.

"You've got no voice in the matter, my son!" he remarked.

"Eh?" spluttered Bob. "N-no voice in the matter? No voice in my own benefit?"

"It isn't your benefit till we give it!" said Harry calmly.

"Look here——"

"We're going to give it!"

"You're not!" roared Bob.

"Your mistake—we are! The Remove Players have decided——"

"Bosh!"

"It will be a ripping entertainment, and I've no doubt the whole school will roll up as one man——"

"You ass! I won't have it!"

"Yes, you will! You see, we want you in the race on Saturday, and you're going to have a new bike by then."

"I tell you——"

"It doesn't really concern you at all—it concerns the Remove!"

"The Remove can go and eat coke!" said Bob Cherry. "I tell you——"

"You needn't trouble to tell me anything!" said Harry. "It won't make any difference. We're going to raise eight pounds, and any surplus will be devoted to the sports fund. I feel sure we shall get in nine or ten pounds."

"But——"

"You will have a brand-new jigger——"

"I won't!" roared Bob.

"Yes, you will, and we'll get the Head to present it to you, with a speech suitable for the occasion," said Harry.

"You—you——"

"And if you don't behave yourself," said Harry severely, "we'll get a paragraph in the Friardale paper, headed Heroic Conduct of a Public Schoolboy! Youth of fifteen Risks His Life to Rescue His Comrade!'"

Bob gasped.

"You—you wouldn't dare!" he yelled. "I'd never speak to you again if you made me look such a silly ass! You—you chump!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I won't have this rotten benefit! What silly, frabjous cuckoo first thought of the idea?" demanded Bob heatedly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who was it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tell me who it was, and I'll wipe up the floor with the frabjous duffer!"

"Oh, dear!" shrieked Nugent. "Don't, Bob! My ribs won't stand any more! Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob glared at him.

"Who was it, then?" he demanded. "What's the name of the silly burbler?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tell me who it was!" exclaimed Bob, seizing the gasping Nugent by the shoulder and shaking him. "Now, then!"

"Ow! Oh! Leggo! Lemme laugh!"

Bob shook him again. Nugent appeared to be on the verge of apoplexy.

"Who was it?"

"It was—was—— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well?"

"Marjorie!"

"What?"

"Marjorie!"

"Eh?"

"Marjorie, you ass!"

Bob Cherry let go Nugent's shoulder. The juniors shrieked at the expression on his face. He remembered the complimentary names he had applied to the originator of the idea of the benefit, and he wished the floor would open and swallow him up.

"Marjorie!" he stammered, at last.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh!" stuttered Bob. "I—I didn't know!"

"What a pity Marjorie isn't here!" gurgled Tom Brown. "Lemme see, you're going to wipe up the floor with her, and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Was it really Marjorie?" asked Bob Cherry, with an appealing glance at Wharton. "It was Marjorie—honour?"

"Honour bright!" said Harry, laughing.

"Oh, well, if it's Marjorie's idea, it's all right, and I don't mind!" mumbled Bob. "Of—of course, when I come to think of it, it's a really good idea! And—and——"

A fresh roar of laughter interrupted him, and Bob Cherry, with a face the hue of a beetroot, strode from the room, leaving the juniors shrieking.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Ticket Merchants.

BOB CHERRY'S benefit had been settled and decided upon without Bob being consulted in the matter, but he did not raise any further objection after discovering that Marjorie was the originator of the idea. If Marjorie thought it was all right, it was all right—that was Bob's view of the matter, and it was a sensible view, too. The arrangements for the benefit went on uninterruptedly.

The idea caught on with the Greyfriars fellows, too.

All the school knew the story by this time—how Bob had risked life and limb to save his chum, and most of the fellows were of opinion that the benefit was a first-rate "wheeze," and meant to "roll up" on Wednesday to its support.

Harry Wharton & Co. were busy for the remainder of that evening.

They had to make up the list of artistes, and decide upon the items. They had to settle where the entertainment was to be given, and that necessitated consulting the powers. As they hoped to have nearly all the school at the show, nothing short of the school Hall would provide the necessary accommodation, and Harry felt a little diffident about asking for the use of the Hall for a variety show. But Nugent made a brilliant suggestion which solved the difficulty.

"Why not have it al fresco?" he asked.

"Al which?"

"Al fresco—in the open air, you know!"

"By jove! That's a good idea! The weather's been ripping, and it's certain to be a fine day to-morrow, I think," said Harry. "It's a jolly good idea. We can arrange the seats in the form of an amphitheatre."

"That's the idea!"

"The goodfulness of the wheezy idea is terrific!" exclaimed the Nabob of Bhanipur. "We should have to give the show in the daylight then."

"Well, it's a half-holiday to-morrow afternoon."

"Good!" exclaimed Harry. "We'll have the show immediately after tea. It can be arranged to last from tea-time to dusk."

"That's right!"

"We can beg or borrow seats and forms enough for the whole school, and plant 'em on the lawn. We shall have some idea of the number of the audience, too, from the number of tickets sold."

"Of course!"

"We ought to get most of the tickets off to-night," Harry remarked. "As they'll be reserved seats, we can sell them in advance, and number the seats afterwards. We can make the tickets ourselves—just strips of cardboard will do."

"Let's begin at once."

And they began.

Temple of the Upper Fourth, who dabbled in art, was raided for a large sheet of cardboard, which he had intended to spoil with a pen-and-ink sketch, but which the Removites now put to a better use.

It was carried down to the junior common-room, marked off into small squares, and cut into pieces with the scissors.

The fragments were numbered and priced.

The number of tickets was very large, and if the committee succeeded in selling them all there was no doubt that the price of a new bicycle would be easily raised, if not the price of half a dozen bicycles.

"Now we've got to canvass for subscribers," said Harry, when the tickets were finished. "Everybody's got to buy a ticket. I think we ought to begin with the Head, as it will look well to put up on the notice 'Under the Direct Patronage of Dr. Locke.' Besides, the Head will most likely take a five-bob seat."

"He's bound to!"

"This way, then!"

And the three chums marched off at once to the Head's study. They found Dr. Locke there, chatting with Mr. Quelch.

"Come in!" said the Head. "What is it, Wharton?"

"If you please, sir, we should like your support."

Dr. Locke stared.

"You would like what?"

"Your support, sir. You may have heard, sir, about Bob Cherry's jigger—ahem, bicycle—being smashed in——"

"Ah, yes, I have been told about that," said the Head. "It was very brave of Cherry."

"It was ripping, sir! He's lost his bike through it, and for some reason he can't ask his people about getting him another, so we're getting up a benefit entertainment to stand him a new machine. Don't you think it's a good idea, sir?"

"Quite a good idea."

"Thank you, sir. Then if you wouldn't mind supporting us——"

"With all my heart," said Dr. Locke. "I am more than willing to give the matter my hearty moral support."

Wharton coughed.

"You may certainly use my name," said the Head.

"Thank you, sir. But——"

"I wish you every success."

"Yes, sir; but—but perhaps you would care to take a ticket, sir?"

"Oh!" said the Head.

"We have them at various prices, from a bob—a shilling to five shillings, sir. If you liked to take a five-shilling one, it would be setting a good example to the others."

The Head smiled.

"I will take a five-shilling one, Wharton."

"Here you are, sir! Perhaps Mr. Quelch would like a half-crown one?"

The Remove-master laughed.

"You may give me a five-shilling one, Wharton."

"Oh, thanks, sir!" Wharton laid the tickets on the desk. "I hope you will turn up at the entertainment. It will be pretty good."

"Ahem! We will see."

"Well, the seats will be reserved, sir, in any case."

And Wharton took his leave with his chums, with ten shillings already in his pocket as the first proceeds of the sale of tickets. He entered the amount in a memorandum-book, being always very careful in money matters.

"That's a jolly good beginning," Nugent remarked.

"The goodfulness is great."

"I don't see why all the masters shouldn't take five bob seats," said Wharton. "They ought to support us on an occasion like this; we put up with them patiently enough all through the term."

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"Let's try Capper next."

Mr. Capper was master of the Upper Fourth. The juniors ran him to earth in his study, and Mr. Capper looked at them in some surprise. He did not know what three fellows of the Lower Fourth could want with him. But he was soon enlightened.

"I dare say you've seen the notice in the hall, sir?" said Harry.

Mr. Capper smiled.

"Yes, I have seen it, Wharton. You are getting up a benefit entertainment on behalf of Robert Cherry, I think."

"Just so, sir. Would you care to have a ticket?"

"This is very thoughtful of you, Wharton. I am not sure whether I shall be able to come to the entertainment, but I think it is very courteous of you to issue complimentary tickets to the masters. You may leave it here."

Wharton's face was a study for a moment.

He laid the ticket on the desk without a word.

Mr. Capper had jumped to the conclusion that complimentary tickets were being issued to the masters; that they were to go in "on the nod," to put it slangily. Wharton did not like to undeceive him.

"Thank you!" said Mr. Capper. "This is really kind, Wharton, and I shall certainly come to the entertainment if I can find time."

The juniors thanked him, and quitted the study

In the passage they looked at one another.

"Well, my hat!" said Nugent.

"The hatfulness is terrific.

Wharton made a grimace.

"Can't be helped," he said. "Capper's drawn blank, but the others will pay. Come on; let's see how Prouty pans out."

They looked for Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth. Mr. Prout was a great sportsman, and the juniors discovered him in his study cleaning a rook rifle. Mr. Prout looked at them genially as they obeyed his invitation to "come in."

"Well, my boys, and what can I do for you?" he asked, in his hearty way. Mr. Prout had a hearty manner, which he cultivated under the belief that it was sporty. He also had the reputation of being close with his money.

"If you please, sir, we're getting up a benefit show——"

"Oh, yes, I have seen the notice in the hall," said Mr. Prout, with a grin. "I'm sure I wish you every success. I regard it as an excellent idea."

"Thank you, sir. Perhaps you would like——"

Mr. Prout shook his head.

"Ah, no! I am afraid I could not help you with the entertainment," he remarked. "That is quite out of my line. If it were a shooting competition, or anything of that sort ——"

"I didn't mean——"

"Or if it were a lecture on the subject of hunting, or about big game in any part of the globe, I could assist you," said Mr. Prout genially. "But under the circumstances——"

"What I meant is——"

"When I was in the Rockies in 1902," said Mr. Prout, "I was asked to give a lecture on shooting big game in a mining-camp——"

"Do they shoot big game in mining-camps, sir?" asked Nugent innocently.

"Ahem! I mean I was asked to give a lecture in a mining-camp about shooting big game. I gave it. It was a great success——"

"It must have been, sir. But what we really want is——"

"The audience were delighted. They cheered to the echo. I gave them some exhibitions of shooting with revolver and rifle. That was when I was in the Rockies, in nineteen-two."

"We have some tickets——"

"Speaking of tickets reminds me of a shooting competition in South Africa," said Mr. Prout genially. "They threw tram tickets into the air, for me to bring down with my rifle."

"Yes, sir. We have tickets from one shilling to five shillings——"

"I was very successful. Most of the tram tickets when picked up afterwards, showed bullet-holes," said Mr. Prout.

"How wonderful, sir! If you would care to take a ticket ——"

"Oh, nothing of that sort could be done here, my lads. I wish your show every success."

The juniors exchanged a glance.

"Thank you, sir," said Harry, and they left the study.

Wharton closed the door.

"Blessed spoofer!" murmured Nugent. "He knew what we wanted all the time, and he wouldn't let us come to the point."

Wharton grinned.

"I think you're right, Frank. Still, you can't get tin out of a chap who doesn't mean to part, so it's no good wasting time. Let's look in at the Sixth."

"Good!"

And the juniors made their way to the Sixth Form studies.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Nothing for Nothing.

WINGATE, the captain of Greyfriars, was the first senior tackled by the ticket merchants. Wingate had seen the notice in the hall, and he seemed prepared for the visit. There was a half-crown lying on his table.

"We've called——" began Wharton

Wingate grinned.

"Exactly. Lay it on the table."

"Eh?"

"And take the half-crown."

"But——"

"Good-evening!"

The juniors stared, and then grinned. Wingate was busy. Wharton laid down a two-and-six ticket, and picked up the half-crown.

"Thanks!" he said.

"Don't mention it."

"But——"

"Shut the door after you."

The juniors grinned, and departed.

"Short and sweet," remarked Nugent. "Never mind; we've sold the ticket. That makes a total of twelve-and-six so far."

"We ought to raise two or three pounds in this passage," Wharton remarked.

They tapped at the study doors in succession. Most of the Sixth were in their studies at that hour, and so the ticket merchants found them at home. Courtney and North both took half-crown seats, and Walker took a shilling one. Loder and Carne and Ionides were all in the study belonging to the latter when the juniors knocked at the door. They stared at Harry Wharton & Co.

"What the dickens do you want?" asked Ionides.

"We're giving a benefit entertainment," explained Harry Wharton. "We thought you fellows might like to come."

Ionides sneered.

"Nonsense!"

"Bosh!" said Carne.

"Rats!" remarked Loder.

"How nice and polite they are in the Sixth!" Nugent remarked, addressing space. "How proud their paters must be of their nice manners—I don't think!"

"The don't-thinkfulness is terrific!"

"Oh, get out!" said Loder.

"Then you won't come?"

"No, you young ass!"

"Oh, come on!" said Nugent. "They wouldn't pay for the tickets, anyway."

"But suppose you were asked to do a turn on the stage, Ionides?" suggested Harry Wharton. "What would you say?"

"Nonsense!"

"You could do a part rippingly," urged Wharton. "We'd put your name down on the bill as the Missing Link!"

"What!"

"You could appear as a living proof of the truth of evolution, or something of that sort."

"You young cub!" cried Ionides, rising.

"And Carne could do a turn, too," went on Wharton, retreating to the door as he spoke. "He could give a one-man sketch, entitled 'The Pub Haunter;' or, 'The Road to Ruin.'"

Carne jumped up with a crimson face.

His little ways were only too well known to the juniors, and Harry Wharton's words touched him on a tender spot.

"You young cad!" he roared. "Get out!"

"Give him a licking," said Loder.

"By George——"

"There's a part for Loder, too," went on Wharton, in the doorway now. "He could come on in the character of Champagne Charley, the Gin Crawler."

Loder made a rush for the juniors.

Wharton slammed the door, and the juniors dashed down the passage. They had turned the corner before Loder was out of the study.

At a safe distance they stopped to laugh.

"Well, I think we gave them plenty of change," said Nugent. "We'd better leave the rest of the Sixth for a bit, though, and go for the Fifth. We don't want to run into Loder."

"Yes, rather!"

And the juniors tried their luck in the Fifth Form passage.

"Oh, yes, we'll give you youngsters a lift," said Blundell, the captain of the Fifth, in a patronising tone. "Eh, Bland?"

"Certainly," said Bland.

"I suppose what you want is the moral support of the Upper Forms," went on Blundell. "Well, we'll come. I suppose it will be a rotten show, but we feel that we ought to stand it for the good of the cause."

"Exactly!" said Bland.

"You can rely on us, Wharton."

"Good," said Wharton. "Are you taking five bob seats?"

"Eh?"

"We have some at half-a-crown."

"Oh!"

"Or single bobs."

"My dear chap——"

"Which do you prefer?"

"Oh, don't be an ass! Of course, if we support the show by our presence, we shall have to have good seats, and free of course."

"We're selling these tickets, not giving them away."

"Nonsense!"

"We should like you to come——"

"That's all right; we'll come. We feel that we ought to support the Remove in this. We approve of Cherry."

"We'll tell him so and make him happy," said Nugent.

"Well, are you taking five bobbers or half-a-crown?" asked Wharton.

"Neither."

"Single bobs?"

"We're not paying."

"Now, look here——"

Blundell waved his hand

"That's settled, Wharton. Good-evening!"

Wharton glowered at the Fifth-Formers.

"You're coming?" he said.

"Certainly."

"You're paying?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then you're jolly well not coming, that's all."

"Eh?"

"We're not admitting anybody on the nod," said Harry coolly. "If you don't pay, you don't come. You can pay at the gate if you like, though."

And the Removites quitted the study. Blundell made some uncomplimentary remarks to them as they went out, and Wharton slammed the door.

The other Fifth-Formers, however, panned out better than the leaders. A good number of tickets were sold; mostly shilling ones; but as Wharton remarked, many a mickle would make a muckle.

"And now for the Remove!" said Harry Wharton.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Going Strong.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. expected to reap the largest harvest in the Remove. That Form naturally ought to have rallied most enthusiastically round one of its own members who had performed a heroic deed. And, indeed, the intentions of the Removites were excellent; it was funds that were wanting to enable them to back up old Cherry as they would have wished. Every fellow would gladly have taken a five-shilling seat, but it was necessary to pay for them, and that was where the Remove were stumped. Such sale as there was, was pretty certain to be in shilling seats; and Harry Wharton began to turn over in his mind the advisability of issuing sixpenny ones, and even threepenny. For, as Nugent pointed out, all was grist that came to the mill, and it would not benefit the fund in any way for fellows to remain aloof because they couldn't afford a shilling.

Billy Bunter, as it happened, was the first Removite to negotiate for the purchase of a ticket. Wharton tapped

him on the shoulder in the passage as he returned from the Fifth-Form quarters.

"You will want to come, Bunter, I suppose?" he remarked.

Bunter blinked at him.

"I shall be among the artistes, Wharton."

"You'll be—where?"

"On the stage, of course."

Wharton shook his head.

"Can't be did, Billy. We're not issuing any platform tickets."

"Oh, I say——"

"None of the audience will be permitted on the stage."

"But I sha'n't be in the audience," howled Billy Bunter, "I'm going to act."

"You're going to which?"

"Act!"

"Act the giddy goat, do you mean?" asked Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"No room for porpoises in the company," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "There's nothing you could do, Billy."

"I could do a song and dance."

"What would you sing with?"

"My voice, of course."

"But you haven't a voice."

"Oh, really——"

"And then the dance," said Nugent, with a solemn shake of the head. "If Bunter danced, it might lead to an earthquake, or something of that sort."

"Look here——"

"Do you want a ticket, Billy?"

"No, I don't! I'm going to do a ventriloquial turn."

"Oh, ventriloquism is dead and buried in these days!" said Nugent. "You'd better go in as extra audience."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Take a five-bobber, Bunter."

"Well, I don't mind taking some seats to help on the movement," said Bunter, in his most grandiloquent way. "I can distribute them among my friends."

"How many?"

"I've lots of friends——"

"Ass! How many seats?"

"You can give me four five-bobbers. I'll settle for them when my postal-order comes."

"Oh, rats!"

"I'm expecting a postal-order this evening, and——"

"Cheese it! Are you going to pay for a ticket or not?"

"At the present moment it would be impossible. I shall be happy to take four when my postal-order arrives. It will be in to-night. I'm expecting a postal-order for thirty shillings——"

"Oh!" said Nugent. "It's grown since you were expecting it yesterday."

"This is a different postal-order. Now, if you give me four five-bob seats, and ten shillings in cash, you can have the whole of the postal-order when it comes, Wharton."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I'll wait till it comes, Billy."

"Oh, really, Wharton! Still, that's as you like; but about my doing a ventriloquist turn in the show——"

"Oh, all right, Billy, you shall have ten minutes!" said Harry good-naturedly

"How long is the show going to last?"

"Two hours."

"Then I think the ventriloquial turn ought to take an hour," said Bunter. "I can give a very good show, very different from the sort of piffle you chaps are going to give the audience."

"Modesty, thy name is Bunter!" grinned Nugent.

"I say, you fellows, I suppose I'm to have an hour."

"Ten minutes," said Wharton.

"But——"

"Ten minutes."

"Suppose we say half an hour——"

"Ten minutes——"

"Perhaps I could put in a pretty good show in about twenty minutes——"

"Ten minutes."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

The juniors walked on, leaving Billy addressing the desert air. The Owl of the Remove blinked after them indignantly.

"Sheer jealousy," he murmured. "Just jealousy, and nothing else. I'm blessed if I know how I stand those chaps."

It did not occur to Billy Bunter that it was also wonderful how the chaps stood him.

Up and down the Remove passage went the ticket merchants, disposing of tickets here and there, and replying in very plain English to all demands for credit. When as many of the seats had been disposed of as possible, they returned to the common-room. The remains of the cardboard were requisitioned, and a new issue of sixpenny tickets made.

These had a brisker sale than the more expensive ones.

Nearly every fellow in the Remove who had not already a shilling seat took a sixpenny one, and the rest promised to turn up at the "gate" if they could possibly raise the tin by the morrow.

"Of course, we shall have to depend on the gate to make up the tin," said Harry Wharton thoughtfully. "Still, we've got a pretty good sum already. Hallo, young Hopeful, what do you want?"

Nugent minor had just come into the junior common-room with Gatty and Myers, of the Second Form.

He grinned at the committee.

"I've seen your notice," he remarked.

"Well?"

"We've jawed it over in the Second Form-room," explained Dicky, "and we think that, upon the whole, Bob Cherry is a decent chap, and we'll back him up."

"You cheeky young rascal!" said Frank Nugent.

"Oh, come off!" said his minor. "Look here, we're willing to back the affair up, and make it a success for you——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cut the cackle!" said Gatty.

"If you came here for an assortment of thick ears, you're going the right way to work," said Nugent major.

"Rats!" said Dicky. "We came here to help. If you like to issue a set of threepenny tickets, we'll see that the fags buy them."

"Good egg!" said Wharton. "I don't see why the Third and Second shouldn't rally round. It's a good wheeze."

"Well, we'll do it," said Nugent minor.

"Got any cardboard?" asked Harry.

"Here's a strip left," said Nugent. "Not enough for the tickets. Make paper do—paper's good enough for threepenny tickets."

"Good!"

Tickets were cut up in paper, and Wharton priced them and signed his initials. Nugent minor looked them over.

"You haven't numbered them," he remarked.

Wharton shook his head.

"No; can't reserve seats at 3d.," he replied. "The ticket-holders will have to take what's going."

"H'm!" said Dicky dubiously, and he looked at Gatty and Myers.

"Won't do," said Gatty decidedly.

"Oh, rats!" said Harry warmly. "What the dickens do you want for threepence?"

"Well, hand 'em over," said Nugent minor, as if struck by a sudden thought "We'll make 'em do. How many are you giving us?"

"Fifty."

"Good! I'll make the chaps buy them. Any fellow who refuses will get a thick ear. I'll bring you the cash presently or in the morning."

"Right you are."

And Nugent minor marched off with the sheaf of tickets. As soon as they were out of the common-room, Gatty and Myers addressed him wrathfully.

"What on earth do you mean, young Nugent?"

"Eh?"

"We're jolly well going to have reserved seats or none," said Gatty. "These blessed seats aren't numbered. What do you mean?"

"All serene, old son. We can number them."

"What?"

"We can number them ourselves," said Nugent minor coolly.

"But—but then they'll be the same numbers as the other seats that Wharton has numbered, won't they?" said Myers.

"I suppose so."

"Won't that lead to confusion?"

"Bound to," said Nugent minor coolly. "It depends on who's on the ground first who gets the seats. See?"

And Gatty and Myers admitted that they did see.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.
Mr. Quelch Misunderstands.

ON Wednesday morning the last arrangements for the benefit were made, and the chums of the Remove felt satisfied with the result of their labours. The weather promised to be very fine and warm, and the idea of an al fresco entertainment was quite popular.

Forms and seats were to be borrowed from the studies and the lecture-hall, and the juniors were to carry them out themselves and arrange them. All the juniors, Upper as well as Lower Fourth, were heartily co-operating in the

work of making the benefit a great success. Bob Cherry was the one who seemed most indifferent.

During morning school, many of the juniors were thinking more of the show than of the lessons, as was natural enough. Those who were to be audience were not so keen about it; but the amateur entertainers were deeply engrossed in the "turns" they were going to give. Fellows had copies of words and music concealed in their books, and took surreptitious looks at them during the lessons. Mr. Quelch could not help observing that his class was more than usually inattentive.

He looked sharply at some of the amateurs again and again, and finally he rapped out Nugent's name like a pistol-shot.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear what I said only this moment?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! What did I say?"

"You said 'Nugent,' sir," said Frank innocently.

There was a chuckle in the class, and Mr. Quelch frowned.

"I did not mean that, Nugent. I mean, what I said before."

"Yes, sir."

"What did I say, then?"

Frank wrinkled his brows.

"That—that—that——"

"Yes?"

"That—that——"

"Well?"

"That——"

"You did not hear what I said, Nugent."

"Yes, I did, sir; but I've forgotten for the moment."

"Stand out, Nugent!"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"And bring that paper which you have just placed under your desk."

"Oh!"

Frank turned scarlet, and picked up the paper, and stepped out before the class. Wharton gave him a glance of sympathy. Frank had been studying his part instead of attending to the important subject of Latin prosody.

"Ah! That is the paper, Nugent?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"You have written something down, I suppose, to remember it the better?" said the Form-master.

"Yes, sir."

"Something in connection with the lesson?"

"N-no, sir."

"Then what is it? Let me see it."

Frank held out the paper. The Remove watched Mr. Quelch breathlessly as he took it. Mr. Quelch looked astounded.

"Bless my soul! What does this mean?" he exclaimed. "You wrote this, Nugent?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is not true, I presume?"

"T-true, sir!"

"Yes!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "If it is true, Nugent, you stand a good chance, sir, of being expelled from Greyfriars."

"Oh, sir!"

"It is astounding!" said Mr. Quelch. "I never imagined that you were this kind of boy, Nugent! That you should write such things down is even more surprising than that you should be guilty of the actions themselves!"

"If you please, sir——"

"Is it possible that what you have written here is true?"

"You see, sir——"

"I will read it out,'" said Mr. Quelch. "Last night I strolled around the town just looking out for fun—— May I ask if that was after locking-up, Nugent?"

"You see, sir——"

"Was it after locking-up or before locking-up?" exclaimed the Remove-master. "I insist upon knowing whether you broke bounds or not'"

"No, sir."

"You did not?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"Then am I to understand that you visited public-houses in the daylight?"

"Public-houses, sir?" stammered Nugent.

"Yes."

"Certainly not!"

"Then what does this mean—'I found a dozen pubs. or so, and called at every one'?" said Mr. Quelch, reading from the paper.

"Oh, sir! I——"

"Did you call at the public-houses in Friardale?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Then where were they?"

"You see, sir——"

"Come, Nugent, you had better be frank."

"Well, sir, I——"

"If this is not true, why did you write it down?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

Nugent smiled involuntarily. A soft chuckle swept through the Remove, but it was instantly silenced by a glance from Mr. Quelch.

"Now, Nugent, you will learn that this is no laughing matter," said Mr. Quelch sternly, as he caught Nugent's expression.

"I—I didn't mean to laugh, sir."

"From your statement here, you seem to have been out in the evening, and to have visited several public-houses," said Mr. Quelch. "You also hint that you were in a state of intoxication when you did so."

"Oh!"

"You have written here—'And when I started homeward it was nearer three than two. The roads were turning round and round, and I was turning, too.' What does that mean, Nugent, if it does not mean that you were in an intoxicated state?"

"You see, sir——"

"Well, I'm waiting for you to explain."

"That's a song, sir."

"What?"

"It's a comic song."

"Eh?"

"You'll see it's in rhyme, sir, if you look again, and—and in metre, sir. It's a song I'm learning the words of, sir."

"Oh!"

Mr. Quelch glanced at the scrawled paper again. He handed it back to Nugent

"Read it out," he said.

Nugent obeyed, with a very pink face.

"'Last night I strolled around the town just looking out for fun;
I found a dozen pubs. or so, and called in every one.
And when I started homeward it was nearer three than two;
The road was turning round and round, and I was turning, too.'"

There was a chuckle in the Form-room.

But Mr. Quelch was frowning.

"I understand now," he exclaimed. "So that is the first verse of a song?"

"Yes, sir; a comic song. I'm learning up the words for our show this afternoon," stammered Nugent.

"Oh, I see!"

Mr. Quelch was silent for a moment. The Remove did not dare to grin now. The Form-master had found a mare's-nest, as Micky Desmond whispered to Bob Cherry, and put his foot into it.

"I understand, Nugent," said Mr. Quelch at last. "But I cannot approve of your singing an absurd and vulgar song, and I request you to throw it away, and select something a little more elevated. There is really nothing comic whatever in intoxication, although there is a general idea to the contrary."

"Yes, sir," said Nugent.

"You may put that in the wastepaper-basket."

"Ye-e-s, sir."

And Nugent's song was deposited in the Form-room wastepaper-basket—quite a fitting place for it as a matter of fact. Nugent returned to his place the richer by a hundred lines, and no more songs were "mugged up" during lessons that morning.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

The Rehearsal.

THE welcome hour of dismissal came at last, and the Remove poured out of the Form-room.

Harry Wharton & Co. were busy till dinner in making the final arrangements for the entertainment. The most difficult part of the work was in making up the list of artistes. Every member of the Remove Dramatic Society thought he was quite able to give a good turn; and as nearly all the Form were in the Dramatic Society, it was evident that every fellow who belonged to it couldn't appear on the stage. There were wrathful looks among the kind offerers whose kind offers were declined with thanks.

Wharton made up a list, and it was a goodly list; but, as he said, it was impossible to have as many fellows on the stage as off it.

Besides, a fellow might be able to sing a song or dance a dance to his own satisfaction, but the satisfaction of others was what had to be considered.

People had paid for admission to the concert, and they could not be expected to pay to be inflicted by every barking bass or squeaking tenor who thought—wrongly—that he could sing.

"It's awfully good of you chaps to offer," said Wharton pacifically. "But we can't have a list without an end, you know."

"Faith, and a programme isn't much good without an Irish song," said Micky Desmond persuasively. "I'll give ye 'Molly Aroon.' Listen!" And the Irish junior burst into melody:

"'Oh, sure I love ye, dear, my Molly Aroon!
I'm crazy now, I fear, for Molly Aroon!
Alanna, 'tis ye'r smile—'tis ye'r saucy, winning smile—
That has brought me many a mile, my Molly Aroon!'"

"Well, that's jolly good," said Wharton. "We'll shove you in, Micky. I suppose it doesn't matter if we leave Bunter out?"

"Doesn't it?" exclaimed Billy Bunter wrathfully. "You're jolly well not going to leave me out, Wharton! The audience pay to come in, and they ought to have at least one decent turn, I think."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really——"

"Well, Bunter can have five minutes."

"I ought to have an hour."

"Oh, rats!"

"I could give a fairly good ventriloquial show in a quarter of an hour, perhaps——"

"Ten minutes," said Wharton decisively. "I'll cut my second song to make room for Micky, and only do the duet with Marjorie."

"That's a jolly good idea," said Elliott. "Couldn't you cut the duet, too, and then I could shove in my song—'Fifteen Men on a Dead Man's Chest!'"

"Never mind the Dead Man's Chest now," said Harry. "We can manage without that. Hallo! There's the dinner bell."

And the juniors hurried off to the dining-room, and the discussion was cut short.

After dinner, the company were to meet in the wood shed for a rehearsal, and they wended their way thither in two's and three's.

While the other fellows turned out to the cricket, or went on the river or in the woods, Harry Wharton & Co. rehearsed in the wood shed.

As most of them had selected items that they knew pretty well already, the rehearsal went off pretty well.

True, many of the singers, like the piper in the ballad, 'wandered around into several keys." But that would be corrected when they were singing to a piano accompaniment. Hoskins, of the Shell, had agreed to "punch" the piano, and he could always be depended upon to keep his end up against the singer.

Songs and dances were gone through, and Harry Wharton expressed himself as satisfied upon the whole.

"Well, that's over," said Nugent.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Let's get off! It's time we began to get the seats out."

"I say, you know——"

"Come on, then."

"Look here!" howled Bunter. "I haven't rehearsed yet."

"By George! I forgot you."

"Oh, really——"

"But it's all right, Bunter. You're such a splendid ventriloquist that it's not really necessary for you to rehearse," said Nugent solemnly.

Bunter blinked at him suspiciously.

"H'm! Still, I think I'd better make sure. You fellows stand round and listen, and——"

"I think I'll go and see about the seats," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"So will I," remarked Tom Brown.

And the two juniors disappeared. Billy Bunter blinked after them wrathfully. As a matter of fact, the Remove were getting "fed up," as they expressed it, with his ventriloquism. His gift caused him to play too many ill-natured tricks for it to be popular.

"Look here, I'm going to give imitations of a turkey first——"

"Why not give imitations of a porpoise?" asked Hazeldene. "You could do that without making up for the part."

And he departed before Billy Bunter could reply.

The fat junior snorted.

"I say, you fellows—look here, you're not going?"

"Oh, hang it, Bunter," said Nugent. "Time's getting on, and we know exactly how you ventriloquise. No good your rehearsing."

"But——"

"Come on; let's get off."

And the juniors left the wood-shed.

Bunter simply glared.

There was no need, certainly, for him to rehearse; but Billy Bunter never would get out of the limelight, so to speak, while there was a chance of remaining in it.

"You're all right, Billy," said Wharton, as he went. "You're ripping, you know."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said a voice at Wharton's shoulder. And he turned sharply towards Nugent.

"What's that, Frank?"

"Eh?"

"Did you speak?"

"No."

"Liar!"

Nugent glared.

"What's that, Wharton?"

"Eh?"

"Look here——"

"Look here——"

"If you start calling me names——"

"I didn't. You——"

"Oh, shut up, you dummies," said a voice that ought to have been Bob Cherry's. "Are you going to waste all the afternoon jawing like a pair of magpies?"

Both Nugent and Wharton swung round towards Bob Cherry. Bob was coming towards the shed, and looking towards them.

"My hat!" said Wharton. "Of all the cheek! Bump him!"

"What-ho!" said Nugent emphatically.

They ran towards the unsuspecting Bob.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! I—— Oh!"

Bob rolled over on the ground. He sat up and looked dazedly at the two Removites, who glared down at him, as if uncertain whether to bump him again.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! You chumps! What are you up to?" roared Bob Cherry.

"What did you mean, then?" said Nugent.

"I! Eh? Oh, you're dotty."

"You called us a pair of magpies."

"I! I hadn't opened my mouth."

"What?"

A light dawned upon Wharton. He turned back towards the shed.

Billy Bunter was standing in the doorway, with a grin on his fat face. He was blinking at the chums of the Remove with a very peculiar expression.

"You young sweep!" roared Wharton. "So this is some of your blessed ventriloquism, is it?"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"My hat!" exclaimed Nugent. "So it was he who——"

"It was he who——"

"Oh!" grunted Bob Cherry. "You'd better make sure before you bump me again, you fatheads, or there will be trouble in the family."

"Ha, ha, ha! We nearly started on one another," said Nugent. "Never mind—let's all start on Bunter."

"Ha, ha! Jolly good idea."

"I—I say, you fellows—oh—really—you know—Yarooh!"

The three Removites collared the fat junior promptly. Billy Bunter struggled vainly in the grasp of three sinewy pairs of hands.

"Ow!" he roared. "Yah! Leggo! D-d-don't sh-shake me like that! You'll make my glasses fall off, and if they get broken, you'll have to pay for them! Yarooh! Yowp!"

And Billy Bunter rolled breathlessly on the ground, and the three chums walked away grinning, and left him there.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.
All Ready.

"CAREFUL, there!"

"That's all right!"

"Mind!"

"Rats!"

"Mind the door, ass! And the walls! And the piano!"

"Crumbs! It's heavy!"

"Careful!"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

The Remove were busy. Harry Wharton had called up the Form from all quarters, and the Lower Fourth had come in loyally from the river and the cricket field, to help in making the preparations for the al fresco performance.

Wharton had selected the ground, marked off the places for the seats with chalk lines, and now the fellows were carrying out forms and chairs and benches.

The heaviest of all the work, however, was the carrying out of the piano.

It was an upright piano, used by such of the juniors as were musical for piano practice; and it had seen its best days, and seen the last of them. Still, it was possible to extract quite a lot of music from that piano, and, anyway, it was the only one available.

Wharton would have preferred the grand piano from Mrs. Locke's drawing-room; but he had not the nerve to think of asking for it. The practice piano would serve the turn, anyway, and Hoskins, of the Shell, who had kindly offered his services as accompanist, was used to it, and the piano was used to him.

A dozen or so of the juniors were carrying the piano out, with many a bump and gasp and grunt in the process.

They had got it as far as the doorway, and there they allowed it to sink down to rest themselves a little. The bumping had been audible in every quarter, and Wingate, of the Sixth, who was wrestling with a problem in mathematics in his study, came out with a ruler in his hand to inquire the cause of the disturbance.

He grinned at the sight of the juniors with the piano. They were lifting it again, preparatory to a desperate plunge down the steps with it.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Wingate. "You'd better let me help you."

Wharton gasped for breath.

"Thanks, awfully," he exclaimed. "I wish you would. It's heavy."

"Here, Courtney—Walker! Lend a hand here."

The two Sixth-Formers came up.

They helped Wingate, and with Wharton, Bob Cherry and Mark Linley helping too, the piano was got safely down the steps.

"Where do you want it?" asked Wingate.

Wharton pointed to the spot.

The seniors bent themselves to the task, and the piano was run across to the scene of the concert. They plumped it down with a great deal of relief.

"There you are!"

"Thanks, awfully."

"Anything else you want carrying?" said Wingate a little grimly.

"Only the seats; we can manage those ourselves."

Juniors were constantly passing and repassing with seats and forms. Temple, Dabney & Co. lent helping hands.

Forms were arranged in a semi-circle, enclosing the space marked off as a stage, where the piano now was. Hoskins, of the Shell, came out with a music-stool under his arm. Hoskins was a weedy youth, with a pale, æsthetic face, long, lank hair, and a wide turn-over collar, and a very large tie. Hoskins was very musical, and often composed things himself, and asked fellows to come and listen—an invitation which generally resulted in the fellows walking directly away from the neighbourhood of the piano. Hoskins had been known to give fags lollipops to sit out some of the compositions when he played them; and Nugent minor was often heard to relate, with great glee, how he had gained a whole packet of chocolates from Hoskins for listening to a sonata from beginning to end, having previously stuffed his ears with cotton-wool to keep out the noise.

Still, Hoskins could play accompaniments; the only failing being that, having cultivated a habit of absent-mindedness as being a necessary part of a musician's equipment, he would sometimes forget that he was accompanying, and would wander off into a piano solo of his own. That would lead to trouble.

Hoskins planted the stool before the piano, planted himself upon it, and opened the instrument.

"Not beginning now, are you?" asked Tom Brown.

Hoskins nodded.

"Yes, I may as well go over my piece," he remarked. "You see, I have composed a special thing as an overture to the entertainment, and I've only played it through once."

"When did you compose it?"

"Last night."

"Quick work," grinned Nugent.

"Yes; work is naturally quick to the finished musician," said Hoskins. "As Whistler said of his picture, 'it contains a day's work and a lifetime's knowledge.'"

"Ahem!" said Bob Cherry. "I say, couldn't you play the overture before the people come? Then we could go straight on with the show as soon as they arrive."

But Hoskins was not listening.

His fingers were wandering over the ivory keys, and all sorts of strange discords were proceeding from the piano.

"How long does it usually take you to tune up?" asked Nugent.

Hoskins stared at him.

"Tune up?"

"Yes."

"You ass! This is the overture."

"Oh!"

"Let's go and get the seats," grinned Wharton.

"Yes, rather!" gasped Nugent. "My only hat! That's the overture! When I was studying harmony they told me to keep off consecutive fifths. That blessed overture seems to me to consist wholly of consecutive fifths and sevenths."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors hurried away. It was hard work carrying out the seats and forms. But it was easier than listening to Hoskins. Hoskins composed on the system of Richard Strauss; only more so, as Nugent put it. If asked to name some modern musicians in their proper order, Hoskins would have replied: Wagner, Strauss, Hoskins.

The seats were all arranged at last, and then the chums of the Remove went in to dress themselves for the show.

Hoskins was still playing; he was not likely to leave off unless he was forcibly removed from the piano stool.

As soon as Harry Wharton & Co. were gone, a crowd of Second-Formers appeared upon the scene. Almost all the fellows having bought reserved seats, they were not in a hurry to take their places. But with the Second Form it was different. They had taken the trouble to number their own seats, and they wanted to be first in the field.

"Here you are!" said Dicky Nugent, calmly walking down the front row of seats. "These belong to us."

"Hallo, there!" exclaimed Ogilvy of the Remove. "You kids go to the back."

"Rats!"

"These seats are for the masters and the Sixth."

"More rats!"

"You cheeky young beggars, get out!"

"Bosh!"

"Look here——"

"Oh, get off the grass!"

Ogilvy laid violent hands upon Dicky. In a moment the fags were swarming over him. The unfortunate Removite was overcome by force of numbers, bumped and rolled in the grass, and finally left in doubt as to whether he was on his head or his heels.

The Second-Formers calmly proceeded to seat themselves in a row.

They had had their tea early on purpose, and were first on the ground. As the time fixed for the entertainment drew nearer, fellows began to gather round. Fifth and Sixth-Formers looked puzzled to see Dicky Nugent & Co. in possession of the front seats.

The Second-Formers sat tight.

"I say, there's some mistake here," said Blundell of the Fifth, tapping Nugent minor on the shoulder. "You kids have to go back. What's your number?"

"Here's my ticket," said Dicky Nugent innocently.

He held it up. The number agreed with that of the seat he was sitting upon. Blundell looked perplexed.

"Well, that seems to be right," he assented. "But I believe there's some mistake."

"Oh, we're quite comfy!" said Gatty.

Harry Wharton & Co. came out as a hack drove in at the gates of Greyfriars. They hurried forward to help Marjorie and Clara to alight.

"In good time, Marjorie," said Wharton cheerfully. "So glad you've come! Have you had tea?"

Marjorie nodded brightly.

"Yes," she said. "We're quite ready, too."

"Good!"

"The seats are filling up, too," said Nugent. "Hallo! Here's the Head! He's coming to the show! Awfully decent of him, I think."

"Yes, rather!"

Dr. Locke and Mrs. Locke were coming to the ground. Several armchairs had been arranged in front of the bulk of the seats for the honoured visitors. The Head, with a smile, sat down with Mrs. Locke in the fore-front of the audience.

Mr. Quelch and Mr. Capper joined him, and the audience now began to roll up in good numbers. Fellows came in in their cricketing flannels, and in whatever they happened to be wearing at the time. As Bob Cherry remarked jocosely, evening-dress was not indispensable. Some of the fellows who had been inclined to take the benefit performance as a joke, changed their minds as they saw the Head take his seat. When the Head was present, and Mrs. Locke, it was necessary to be circumspect. The scamps of the Second Form had counted upon that in bagging the front seats.

Harry Wharton was stage-manager, and he was also generally master of the ceremonies. He soon found that he had his hands full.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Al Fresco.

"WHERE'S my place?"

"I want my seat!"

"My number's ten!"

"Mine's eight!"

"Front row, No. 10. There's a kid there. I say, young Gatty, what are you doing in my seat?" exclaimed Courtney of the Sixth.

"Well, I like that!" said Gatty virtuously indignant. "This is my seat."

"No, it's mine."

"But I've reserved it."

"I've reserved it too, then."

"Get out of those front seats, you fags!"

"Look here, here's my ticket!" exclaimed Gatty.

Courtney looked at his ticket. It bore the legend, "Front Row, No. 10." There was no mistake about that. But the senior showed his own ticket; "Front Row, No. 10."

"Well, first come, first served," said Gatty. "This is a reserved seat."

"But——"

"Order there!" called out Nugent minor. "I hope you fellows are not going to make a disturbance when there are ladies present, and the Head, too!"

Courtney gave him a look. He was greatly inclined to take Nugent minor and Gatty by the collars, knock their heads together, and sling them out of the place. But that could hardly be done without a disturbance, and a disturbance in the presence of the Head and Mrs. Locke was not to be thought of.

"Get out, Gatty!" said the senior, in a low voice.

"Eh?" said Gatty. "Speak up."

"Get out!"

"What are you whispering for?"

The Head was looking round. Courtney grunted, and went towards Harry Wharton. He tapped the captain of the Remove on the shoulder.

"Where's my seat, Wharton?" he asked.

A dozen other applicants were already worrying Wharton. He glanced at Courtney's ticket.

"No. 10, front row," he said.

"The seat's occupied."

"It oughtn't to be."

Courtney grinned.

"I'm not so much bothered about what ought to be, as about what is," he remarked. "There's a fag there, and he won't get out. He says he's got that number."

"The Second Form seats are not reserved."

"His ticket was numbered."

"Then he must have numbered it himself," said Wharton wrathfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry went along the row of seats. The Second-Formers sat tight, and met him with a most provoking grin.

"Get out!" said Harry, under his breath.

The fags replied in chorus, keeping time:

"What—did—you—say?"

"Get out!"

"Say—it—louder!"

"Get out of those seats."

"We—can't—hear—you!"

Wharton was crimson with rage, but he dared not raise his voice and give the Head an impression that a row was going on in the seats behind.

"Will you buzz off?" he demanded, in a low tone. "These seats have been reserved for the Sixth."

"Your mistake; they're reserved for the Second and Third," said Nugent minor imperturbably.

"But they've paid for them."

"So have we."

"Look here, the seniors have paid half-a-crown each——"

"We've paid threepence each, and three d. is as much to us as half-a-crown to Wingate or Courtney," said Nugent minor argumentatively. "This is really too bad of you, Wharton, wanting to turn us out of seats we've paid for."

"You—you——"

"What—did—you—say?" chorused the fags.

"Get out!"

"Say—it—louder!"

"Will you get away from these seats?"

"SAY—IT—LOUDER!"

Wharton retreated, baffled.

Without a row, there was evidently no dislodging the heroes of the Second.

"Never mind," said Wingate, laughing. "The other seats will do for us."

"We don't mind," said Courtney.

"You see how it is," explained Harry. "We don't want a row with the Head present, and those young sweeps pretend they've reserved the seats. I gave Nugent minor a number of seats to sell, but I never meant him to reserve them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton was relieved to see the seniors take the matter as a joke.

They went into the other rows of seats.

Half a dozen Removites had been appointed to show the audience to their places, but their services were not of much use. The Second Form invasion had thrown the whole arrangement into confusion, and every fellow took what seat he could get.

There was little time for Wharton to occupy himself about it. Hoskins was already playing the overture, a performance to which the Head listened with a great deal of astonishment.

"A most singular time to choose for tuning a piano," was his murmured comment to Mrs. Locke.

The artistes, fortunately, were ready by the time Hoskins had finished the prelude. It was really fortunate, for the audience, because Hoskins would have played the whole thing over again if he had been allowed a chance.

Harry Wharton came on to speak a "few words" before the entertainment started. He had no choice, because a crowd of juniors shouted "Speech" as soon as he appeared.

"Gentlemen——" said Wharton.

"Hear, hear!"

"That is to say, ladies and gentlemen——"

"Bravo!"

"Order!"

"Ladies and gentlemen, we are giving a little entertainment for the benefit of Bob—I mean Robert—Cherry, as you are already aware——"

"How kind of him to tell us what we know!" grinned Skinner.

"Order! Silence!"

"We shall do our best to please you, but you will remember that the company consists wholly of amateurs——"

A Voice: "We're not likely to be allowed to forget it!"

"Order!"

"The benefit is given for the purpose of purchasing a new bike for Robert Cherry, who lost his life—I mean his bike in performing a heroic action——"

Voice from behind the scenes: "Oh, chuck it!"

"Hurrah!" yelled the delighted audience.

"We're now going to begin," said Wharton, somewhat confused. "I have the pleasure of announcing that sufficient money has been taken by the sale of the tickets to make up the sum we require, so that will be all right. The concert——"

A Voice: "Let's hope that will be all right, too! Get on with the washin'!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Very well! The first item——"

Hoskins stood up at the piano.

"I suppose I'd better play the overture over again?" he said.

Wharton shook his head hastily.

"Certainly not!"

"But it ought——"

"The first item is a clog-dance by Messrs. Cherry and Linley," said Ogilvy, to whom the task of announcing the artistes had been assigned. "Hoskins will play an accompaniment."

"But——"

"Sit down!"

Hoskins sat down with a dissatisfied look, and played up. Bob Cherry and Mark Linley came in and did their clog-dance.

They did it well, too, and evoked a round of cheering. The clog-dance was encored, and repeated, and Bob and Mark went off very red, and very pleased.

Then Ogilvy announced a duet between Harry Wharton and Marjorie Hazeldene. There was a loud cheer as they appeared from behind the stretched canvas which served as "scenes."

Hoskins put a new sheet of music on the piano desk, and started. Ogilvy had announced the duet as "Tell Me What is Love," and Hoskins should have played the prelude, but instead of that, weird sounds proceeded from the piano. Wharton and Marjorie looked amazed.

"That isn't the music!" murmured Marjorie.

"Hoskins! Hosky!"

But Hoskins did not hear. He played on. Bang—bang—crash! Thump! Rattle!

"My only hat!" exclaimed Ogilvy. "He must be playing a selection from Richard Strauss, or trying to bust the machine! Hoskins!"

Bang—crash—thump!

The audience gave a yell of laughter.

Ogilvy ran to Hoskins and jerked him by the shoulder.

The pianist's fingers trailed off the keys with a crash of horrid discord.

"What are you up to?" roared Ogilvy.

"Eh?"

"You've got the wrong music!"

"Oh!"

"You ass!" exclaimed Ogilvy, dragging a sheet of manuscript music off the desk, and putting on the duet. "What were you playing?"

"Oh! I forgot! That was a little thing of my own——"

"You ass! If you play any more little things of your own you'll go off that piano stool on your neck!" said Ogilvy. "Play up!"

Hoskins pushed his hair back from his forehead, and played.

THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

Rain!

"TELL me, tell me, what is love,
That sets the world a-sighing,
That makes a maiden shyly smile,
Or dims her eyes with crying?"

Marjorie's clear, sweet voice delighted the audience. The girl sang very well. Then Wharton's deeper voice replied:

"Oh, love it is to man or maid
The boon that all are needing,
Though wilful maidens often frown
When lovers true are pleading!"

Then the two fresh young voices came together in the refrain, and the effect was great. The second verse was followed by loud cheers, and it had to be repeated to satisfy the audience. Then there were fresh cheers as Harry led Marjorie from behind the scenes by the hand, the girl blushing and smiling at the ovation she received.

"It's going strong, and no mistake!" Harry Wharton remarked. "Next man in—I mean, you go on next, Nugent."

"Right you are!"

"What's the matter with you, Bob?"

Bob Cherry was staring at the sky.

"Nothing! Only look at the sky!"

"Phew!"

"Going to rain," said Mark Linley. "Never mind; it may hold off till we're finished. Let's hope for the best."

There was a drift of clouds high above the Greyfriars elms. It looked like the promise of sudden rain, but the juniors hoped for the best, as the Lancashire lad advised. Nugent went on with a song and dance, and did very well; and then came Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's turn with his recitation.

The Nabob of Bhanipur recited in all good earnest, but his efforts sent the audience almost into convulsions.

Harry Wharton clapped him on the shoulder when he came off, looking very pleased, but a little puzzled.

"Splendid, old chap!" he exclaimed.

"I am gladful to hear my esteemed chum say so," said Hurree Singh. "But it is also that the recitefulness was a serious one, and the honourable duffers have all received it with terrific laughfulness!"

"Never mind. It was a success, and that's the chief thing."

"Yes, nothing succeedfully successes like successfulness, as your English proverb says!" remarked the nabob, with a nod.

"Next man in!" grinned Wharton. "Go it, Browney!"

Tom Brown, of New Zealand, went on, and sang a football song, in which the Maori yell was worked in, and the audience liked it, and testified the same in the usual manner. Some heavy drops were falling as the New Zealander came off, and many of the audience were glancing up anxiously towards the sky. Mrs. Locke rose quietly, and went into the house.

Bunter blinked at the coming rain, and gave Wharton a dig in the ribs.

"I say, Wharton——"

"Your turn next, Hazeldene. May have time for you before the rain."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"But I say, hadn't I better do my ventriloquial turn next, in case there isn't time for it?" expostulated Billy Bunter. "It's not fair to risk depriving the audience of the best turn on the programme."

"Rats!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Get on, Hazel!"

Hazeldene went on. More glances turned towards the sky now than towards the stage. The junior started his song, when a sudden howl of wind rang round the roofs of Greyfriars, and there was a dash of rain.

Hazeldene stopped in dismay. Dr. Locke rose to his feet.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "We really——"

Dash—splash—wash!

With almost tropical suddenness the rain burst.

In a moment or two it was coming down in a sheet, and there was a wild stampede of the audience towards the house.

Dr. Locke, with his gown rustling and trailing behind him,

led the rush. After him went the fellows, seniors and juniors, in wild haste.

The rain dashed down on chairs and forms and piano and pianist. Only Hoskins seemed to be unaware that it was raining. He played on, with the rain-drops splashing on him and on the keys.

"My hat!" gasped Wharton. "This is—is ripping!"

"Great Scott!"

"Nice weather!"

"The niceness is terrific!"

Bob Cherry and Harry dragged down the canvas which formed the scene and made a cover of it to protect Marjorie and Clara, and they ran for shelter. The juniors all ran, and Hoskins was left pounding the piano in the rain.

Nugent ran back.

"Hoskins! Come in!" he shouted.

Hoskins played on. Nugent reached out and kicked the piano stool from under him. The enthusiastic pianist rolled on the grass.

"Oh!" he ejaculated, as the rain dashed in his face. "Ah! It's raining!"

"Go hon! Get inside, dummy!"

And Nugent ran, and Hoskins ran after him. The juniors crowded in at the doorway, wet and breathless, and mostly laughing.

"My only hat!" said Harry Wharton. "What a ghastly ending to an open-air concert!"

"Can't be helped!" said Nugent cheerfully.

"We live in an uncertain climate," grinned Tom Brown. "It might have been better to have had the Lecture Hall."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Did you speak, Bunter?"

"Yes, I did, Cherry," said the Owl of the Remove, blinking at them. "I was going to suggest that all of you might as well come into the Lecture Hall, and I'll give you my ventriloquial entertainment all the same."

"Thanks, awf'ly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How good!"

"As the other items won't be given now, I can make it half an hour instead of a quarter, or an hour if you like," said Billy Bunter generously.

"Well, what do you say?"

And with one accord the Removites said:

"Rats!"

Whereat Billy Bunter snorted disdainfully, and rolled away.

"It was a pity," said Marjorie, with a smile. "It must have been a great disappointment to the audience."

"Well, I don't know about that," said Wharton, laughing. "I don't know that the audience care much about missing the rest. Still, I think we can consider the entertainment a great success."

"The successfulness seems to be terrific, my worthy chums, but somewhat wetful!"

Harry Wharton laughed, and held up a little leather bag that gave forth a musical clink as he shook it.

"I mean, it's a success financially," he remarked. "We've raised more than the amount we needed. There will be a new jigger for Bob, and something left over for the sports fund. Bob will ride in the cycle race on Saturday, and win the prize for the Remove, and everying in the garden will be lovely!"

And the juniors agreed that it would be.

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. next Tuesday, entitled: "Wun Lung's Loss," by Frank Richards. Please order your copy of "The Magnet" Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

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. In the course of their investigations the young detective and the professor discover a secret crypt near the college chapel. While exploring further, they are surprised by a gang of masked men and overpowered. The masked gang form a court and proceed to try their prisoners, but MacAndrew dashes forward and seizes a glass bomb which is lying on the table. The gang make a rush for the door, and the professor hurls the bomb after them. A blinding flash and a terrific explosion follows.

(Now go on with the Story).

The Escape—The Finding of the Stolen Plate.

As Dare, with the instinct of self-preservation, flung himself flat on to the ground, he heard the rumble of falling masonry. But high above all other sounds there arose an agonised shriek that even in this moment, so fraught with perils, appalled him by its horror. The scream ended abruptly, and presently dead silence fell upon the place.

"That was awful," muttered Dare, as he rose again to his feet, and looked around him.

"One man at least has gone to his last account."

One lamp was still burning, but its dim light scarcely availed to penetrate the fog of dust which still filled the great chamber. The wall at one end of the refectory was simply a mass of ruins now, completely blocking the exit which the members of the gang had made use of.

"Mon, it's a peety—a great peety; but it couldna' be helped. It was the only way to save our lives. It is a peety, though, that such a gran' auld edifice as this should be partially destroyed. Are ye there, Stanley, and are ye a' right? Mon, ma eyes are fu' of dust, and I canna see well yet."

"I'm here and unhurt," replied Dare, his voice sounding strange in his own ears. "That was a terrible smash up. That exit is completely blocked, wherever it led to; one of the gang is dead, and the rest, I suppose, have escaped. How did you find out that that cardboard box contained a glass bomb?"

"Weel, tae begin with," explained MacAndrew, calmly sitting down on the broken stone column, "I made a guid feight when they sprang out on us, but they were too many for me, and after they had knocked me doon, an' sat on me, they picked me up again, an' put me in the chair with my hands secured behind me. You had disappeared, and I gathered that you had been dropped into some sort of pit."

"It was little else," said Dare.

"They meant to leave ye there tae dee, but I concocted a story tae the effect that you could give them some informa- which would be useful. They decided then to have ye up and question ye. At the same time one of them referred to the explosive contained in the glass globe which was packed in the cardboard-box. They meant to have used it at King's College, where there is a bigger store of valuable plate even than there is here at St. Martin's. That was to be their last haul in Cambridge. While they were discussing their plans I was wriggling free of my bonds, and I kenned weel that if once I got my hands on that bomb their last haul had already been made."

"You were right in your surmise," said Dare.

"After a time you were brocht up," pursued MacAndrew, "and by that time I was ready to act. I knew that if you caught my eye I could signal tae ye, if it was only wi' a wink, tae be on the alert. You understood, and—well, ye ken the rest."

"I am not likely to forget it," replied Dare. "But, professor, did you see that man's face when his mask fell off? The man who was addressed as Jim Bargrave, I mean."

"I did," returned the professor. "It was the face of the murdered man, Latimer. I canna understand it. The man we have known as Latimer was buried yesterday. There are many things which we canna understand in nature, but I'll no be persuaded that a deid mon can get oot of his coffin, and come back looking as weel as ever."

"It is a mystery to which at present I can find no solution," said Dare.

"It'll keep," answered MacAndrew. "Meantime, hadn't we better finish up this business at once?"

"You mean, look to see if the college plate is hidden anywhere in this underground monastery?"

"Yes. The money and the diamond ring that were stolen from Latimer's room we're no likely to find," said the professor. "For if the man we saw just noo is Latimer——"

"If we start an argument on that puzzle," exclaimed Dare, "we shall remain down here for the rest of the day or night, for I am a bit uncertain as to the time. Let us search the place."

Their search was rewarded with success, for the whole of the stolen plate, worth several thousand pounds, was discovered by them in a room which had evidently been once the monastery larder.

"Well, they can't come back for it, that is sairtain," observed MacAndrew, "so they've had a lot of trouble for naething. They'll be remembering us, though, so we'll need to be on our guard for a bit against treacherous attacks of all descriptions; but for choice, perhaps, either explosive bombs or poison."

"We are used to that," replied Dare, "and before now we have had to combat men as cunning and villainous as any in Europe."

That one of their opponents had been killed there was no reason to doubt; but they could not get at his body. It was buried beneath many tons of debris, and there his grave would have to be unless the college authorities had excavations made, which was hardly likely, as it might endanger the stability of adjacent buildings.

As there was nothing more to be done they made their way to the upper earth once more, via the secret opening in the college chapel.

Day was just breaking when they emerged from the underground building which was so very nearly becoming their tomb. A crowd of undergraduates, proctors, dons, and college servants, in all sorts of costumes, just as they had rushed down from their rooms, had collected in the chapel and quadrangle, for they had heard the noise of the explosion, and were unable to account for it.

The sudden appearance of Dare and the professor through a mysterious opening in the wall of the chapel added considerably to their amazement, and questions were showered upon our hero and the Scotsman.

Dr. Golightly pressed forward, and took his old friend by the arm.

"Dear me, MacAndrew," he cried, "this is very extraordinary! What has happened? Where have you come from? We heard the sound of an explosion. Can you give any explanation of so remarkable an occurrence?"

"Ay—ay, I can that!" replied the professor. "My young freend, Mr. Stanley"—he indicated Stanley Dare—"and I have made some interesting discoveries, and one of them, you'll be glad to hear, is the discovery of the stolen plate. We will show you where it is."

This announcement was made loud enough for everybody to hear, and the sacred edifice, probably for the only time on record, echoed to resounding cheers.

It is, perhaps, needless to state that the only persons to whom a full account of what had taken place in the underground monastery was given were Dr. Golightly and the three undergraduates—Blount, Paget, and Graham.

The others were told nothing of the gang, and the explosion was supposed to have been the result of an accident.

Wild excitement there was as the plate was brought up and restored to the college strong-room, and still wilder conjectures as to who the thieves were, and how they obtained access to the subterranean monastery. The professor and Stanley Dare were the heroes of the hour, and as the Scotsman had discreetly retired to the privacy of Dr. Golightly's rooms, knowing the way of students, Dare was honoured by being carried round the quadrangles on the shoulders of two athletic undergraduates, while the remainder followed in procession, singing in chorus, "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow."

The discovery of the stolen plate was another step forward towards the solution of the mystery of Latimer's murder, for it had brought to their knowledge the existence of an organised gang of thieves, who had evidently made plans for extensive robberies at the University.

But Dare realised that it would be necessary to use still greater caution now in pursuing his investigations, for he was menaced now with a new and terrible danger—the vengeance of the gang!

'Varsity Life—A "Town and Gown" Row—The Professor on His Mettle—A Chase—And Its Consequences.

The young detective, while he was an inmate and a supposed student of St. Martin's, had to act up to the part he was playing in all essential matters, in order that no suspicion should be aroused that he was not what he pretended to be.

Lectures were attended with commendable regularity, just as though he was reading up for a degree; the ordinary rules of the college were strictly observed by him so long as they did not interfere with his investigations—if they did, Dr. Golightly was able to arrange matters; and, what was more to his taste, he had to join the boating club, and row in the college eights.

He was particularly careful to make no mistake in the part he was playing while Sennitt, his gyp, was present, for more than once he had observed that individual's eyes fixed on him in a peculiar manner.

But on the other hand Dare was watching the gyp with a closeness that the weird-looking servant little dreamed of, for the young detective suspected that he, too, was playing a part.

Two evenings after the day of his adventure in the underground monastery, Dare, Wilfred Blount, and two other undergraduates were strolling back towards the college from the river, when half a dozen town roughs who were lounging at a street corner made some jeering remarks and then pushed violently against them.

Stanley Dare, who was walking by Blount's side, suffered in the collision, for a lout of a fellow, who in ordinary life was a butcher's assistant, trod heavily on his feet, and drove his elbows into his ribs.

"You clumsy clown!" exclaimed Dare. "Can't you see where you are going?"

"Yes, I can," replied the butcher; "I was running into you. And don't you call me a clown, or I'll give you a lift under the jaw!"

"Indeed, will you?" said Dare, coolly buttoning up his flannel boating coat. "We'll try that."

Then, much to the delight of the undergraduates, and to the astonishment of the butcher, the latter received a stinging blow on the side of the head, which caused him to stagger back, and then sit down with remarkable suddenness.

The butcher poured out a string of oaths, and as he scrambled to his feet again, called upon his companions to aid him "slog the 'Varsity swells." Evidently he had no stomach to continue the fight alone.

His companions responded to his call, for the odds were in their favour—six of them against four of the students. The next minute a free fight was in progress in the quiet street.

The undergrads could have "kept their end up" in this scrimmage without any difficulty, for both Dare and Blount were good all-round athletes, and knew how to use their fists scientifically; but other townsmen came to the assistance of the butcher and his pals, and there was nothing for it but a retreat on the part of the quartette of collegians.

In their "strategical movement towards the college," as Blount afterwards humorously described their somewhat hasty retreat, Stanley Dare became separated from his companions, and in a rather dilapidated and torn condition—for the townsmen had handled them roughly before they got clear of them—came suddenly upon a proctor and two "bulldogs."

One of the bulldogs stopped our hero and said:

"The proctor wishes to speak to you, sir."

Stanley Dare approached the great man.

"Your clothes are in a disreputable condition, sir," observed the proctor sternly. "What is the reason of it?"

Dare, striving hard to repress a smile, gave an explanation which, however, did not appear to satisfy the proctor.

"Your name and college, sir?" he said.

"Stanley, of St. Martin's," replied Dare.

"You will go to your rooms at once, sir."

The young detective, who, of course, could not reveal his identity, bowed politely and retired, and the incident ended by the payment of a fine of six-and-eightpence on the following morning.

The whole affair, from the fight to the fine, was merely regarded by Dare as an amusing interlude, for he little dreamt at the time that it would lead to startling developments in connection with his investigations.

The story of the unprovoked attack by the townsmen soon spread, and the wilder spirits among the students having taken counsel together, determined to retaliate. Men of other colleges joined forces with St. Martin's, and on the following night a strong body of undergraduates collected in the street eager to meet their foes.

Shopkeepers who had not already closed hastened to put up their shutters, for they foresaw there was likely to be a town and gown fight such as had not been witnessed in the streets of Cambridge since the famous old days when they were more common then they are now.

Stanley Dare meant to enjoy the fun, for there was fighting blood in his veins, and with Blount, Paget, Graham, and a dozen others of their college, sallied forth in search of the enemy.

There were numerous other bands of undergraduates parading the streets on the same errand, and it was not long before hostilities commenced.

Shouts and yells were heard down a side street, and three individuals in caps and gowns were seen flying before a mob of townsmen about fifty strong.

"Rally up, boys!" shouted Wilfred Blount. "Keep cool, and hit hard!"

It was excellent advice, and the "hitting hard" part was followed with praiseworthy zeal. They did not all manage to "keep cool," however.

Dare, Blount, Paget, and Graham fought shoulder to shoulder at first, and great was their surprise when one of the flying trio precipitated into their midst proved to be none other then Professor MacAndrew. He had donned cap and gown again on revisiting the University.

"Hallo, professor!" exclaimed our hero. "How is it you have got mixed up in this affair?"

"Mon, I was walking quietly down the street wi' two worthy deans of Trinity College," panted MacAndrew, "when we were attacked and chased by yon mob. We had tae rin in a maist undignified manner—me, that am an Edinburgh professor, and two deans. I dinna ken where they are now, for they couldna rin as well as I did, being unco' stout. It's scandalous!"

"They're safe enough now," interposed Graham. "Some of the fellows have just got them into a house. We can get you through into the same house, professor, if you'll just slip behind us for a few minutes."

"Into a hoose?" ejaculated MacAndrew. "They'll be looking oot o' a window, maybe?"

"No fear," replied Graham cheerfully. "The shutters have all been closed over the windows."

"Then," said the professor calmly, "I'll e'en stay ootside and hae a smack at yonder loons. They made me rin till I was oot of breath, and made me look ridecculous. I have a great objection to that, so it leaves me wi' a score to settle wi' them. And I'm aye a mon who likes weel to pay his debts in full."

A rousing cheer went up from the students at the professor's words, which was answered by a sort of howl of defiance by the townsmen. Then the opposing forces charged into each other, and the "fun" began in real earnest.

Most of the undergrads had fastened their gowns in a knot behind them, so as to be out of the way, a plan which was adopted by Dare and the professor. The Scotsman found himself immediately opposed to a stout, fat man, who, with shirt-sleeves rolled up, was pounding away windmill fashion at any gownsman who came within his reach.

"Nah, then, old dandy grey russet," said he to the professor, "I'm going to double you up like a bent sausage!"

To the fat man's amazement, however, the doubling-up business was done by the other side.

"Get oot o' my way!" roared the professor. "Ye muckle scoondrel, I'll teach ye not tae use disrespectfu' language tae me!"

MacAndrew had been an athlete in his youthful days, and having led a clean, healthy life, he was still tough and wiry.

A right-hander, straight from the shoulder, caught the boastful fat man just about the third button of the waistcoat, and the next instant he was rolling on the ground, emitting howls of pain and dismay.

The professor, having vanquished his immediate opponent, sailed in to demolish others.

Meanwhile, Stanley Dare, Blount, and their comrades had been kept busy, and it was very soon proved that science was more than a match for brute strength, even in a free fight where the Queensberry rules were not at all strictly observed.

Few, indeed, of the townsmen could stand up before Dare and Wilfred Blount. These two, hard, sinewy, muscular, and in perfect training, had no superiors and few equals.

A bargee came up confidently, thinking to demolish our hero easily, but after a hard set-to of about five minutes' duration, he was "grassed," with a cut lip and one eye closed. The combat waged fiercely for a space over his body, and then the students drove their opponents back.

There were plenty of men on the town side who were big and muscular, but they were heavy, and wanting in activity. A mere ponderous muscle, without activity to back it, is of no value in any athletic sport, boxing or fighting in particular, and the light, sinewy, active man, lean-flanked as a Colonial, comes out on top all the time.

The great fight waged with varying success for some time. The St. Martin's men had vanquished one section of the enemy, and driven them pell-mell before them.

Rallying his band, Wilfred Blount led them along two or three bystreets to where loud shouts and yells told that another detached fight was waging fiercely. Here a handful of St. John's college men were having decidedly the worst of it, and were already retreating before a big crowd of the enemy.

"Hurrah for St. Martin's!" shouted Blount. "Rescue! Rescue!"

With a cheer, the "Saints" swept forward, and the tide of battle was soon turned. The townsmen could not withstand their onslaught. They wavered, broke, and fled in all directions, pursued by the victorious students.

The ultimate victory gained by the undergraduates was a signally complete one. By ten o'clock—when the students, by the way, ought to have been in their respective colleges—scattered parties of townsmen were flying in all directions before the victors, who were cheering enthusiastically.

It was just before the end of the fight that Dare, having become separated from his comrades, saw a townsman in a tweed suit, and soft cap pulled down to his ears, savagely kicking an undergrad, who was lying on the ground.

In justice to the townsmen, as a whole, it must be stated that they would not have permitted such an act of cowardice had they observed it.

Stanley Dare made a rush for the fellow, who immediately turned and ran. As he passed under the glare of an electric-lamp, he raised his hand to pull his cap still closer down on to his head. For about one second the inside of his right hand was in full view, and the young detective caught a glimpse of a mark on the middle finger which he had very good cause to remember.

It was the diamond enclosing the cross—the mark of the gang!

Dare immediately slackened speed so as to lead the man to suppose that he had given up the chase. But nothing was farther from his thoughts. Never once did he let him out of his sight now; but, without being himself seen, shadowed the fellow with that unerring skill which was already one of his most notable characteristics.

Up one street and down another, the fellow made his way, until the sounds of the fighting were left far behind him. The streets were narrow and deserted, and they presently came to one in which the old and neglected houses were in course of demolition. A tall hoarding was round the end house, a building of moderate size, which stood in its own grounds

Dare slipped behind an empty contractor's cart, which was tilted up, just as the man he was shadowing came to a halt before a door in the hoarding. The fellow glanced to right and left, as though to assure himself that he was not observed, and then unlocked and opened the door.

After passing through into the enclosure, he closed the door again after him.

There was not another soul in sight. Dare crossed the road, and tried the hoarding door through which the man had passed. It was locked.

"This house is either a new rendezvous of the gang," mused the young detective, "or else it has been used in connection with the underground monastery, which is no longer available to them. In either case I mean to have a look inside. Such an opportunity is not to be missed."

It was his custom to carry with him on all occasions a small leather wallet containing a few beautifully made skeleton keys. Selecting a key from this case, he tried it in the lock. The next instant the door swung open noiselessly on hinges that had been well oiled.

The front of the house was about a dozen yards from the hoarding, and although a man had so recently entered, there was no sign of life about the place. Dare made his way to the back of the premises. The night being dark and cloudy, the risk of being seen was comparatively small. A few mournful-looking trees stood in the grounds, which were in a state of most utter neglect, but there was nothing to show at present that the house was going to share the fate of its neighbours and be pulled down.

At the back, the house was also in darkness, but as several of the windows had wooden shutters across them, a light would very easily be masked. There was a garden door at the top of a flight of stone steps. Dare tried it, but it was bolted on the inside. He next had recourse to a small square window on the left of the door, and after some difficulty managed to turn back the catch and raise the sash.

This done, he climbed into a small room, and softly opened the door which was opposite to the window. The harsh tones of a man's voice came down from the upper part of the house, and the words he uttered were sufficiently startling:

"We've got him safe enough! The bird flew straight into the net. Evidently he has managed to escape from the police. Nothing could have happened better. It will be looked upon as an additional proof of his guilt. One of us, rigged up as an "honest" working man, can hand him over to the police again, and claim the reward that is sure to be offered."

To whom did this unseen man, whose voice had reached Dare out of the darkness, refer?

Not one of their number, that was very evident. They would certainly not hand one of their own associates over to the police, that went without saying. Moreover, judging by their words, it was an innocent man who had escaped from the police or prison—a man, possibly, who had been accused of a crime which had been committed by some member of the gang.

In such a case, it would certainly be to their advantage to act the part of informers, or for one of their number to do so, as it would put the police off the track.

But who could the individual referred to be? A surmise flashed into the young detective's brain that troubled him greatly. More than ever it was necessary that he should penetrate the secrets of this house, which was supposed to be untenanted.

This determination he began to act upon at once. He could hear the voice of another man making reply—a man who spoke in high-pitched, sneering tones that he had heard once before. Then a door closed sharply, so that the sounds no longer penetrated to where he was standing.

Unfortunately, he had not his portable electric lamp with him, as in the town and gown row it would have stood a chance of being smashed. But on the first landing a thin ribbon of light showed underneath one of the doors, and this served as a guide.

That the house was not very much used by the gang was evidenced by the fact that dust and grime lay thick upon the floor, stairs, and walls. They had only made the place a temporary headquarters, perhaps, since the monastery was no longer available as a hiding-place.

(Another instalment of this detective story next Tuesday.)

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