

IN THIS "THE WHITE FEATHER!" ISSUE:

A Splendid Complete Tale of School Life.



Down went Bolsover major at last, battered, beaten, and breathless; licked as thoroughly as any fellow had ever been licked. Then Esmond—the Funk!—picked up a ruler, whirled Bolsover over on the floor, and then proceeded to whack the bully with all his remaining strength "Ow! I give in!" roared Bolsover. (See the grand, long complete story of the chums of Crayfriars contained within.)



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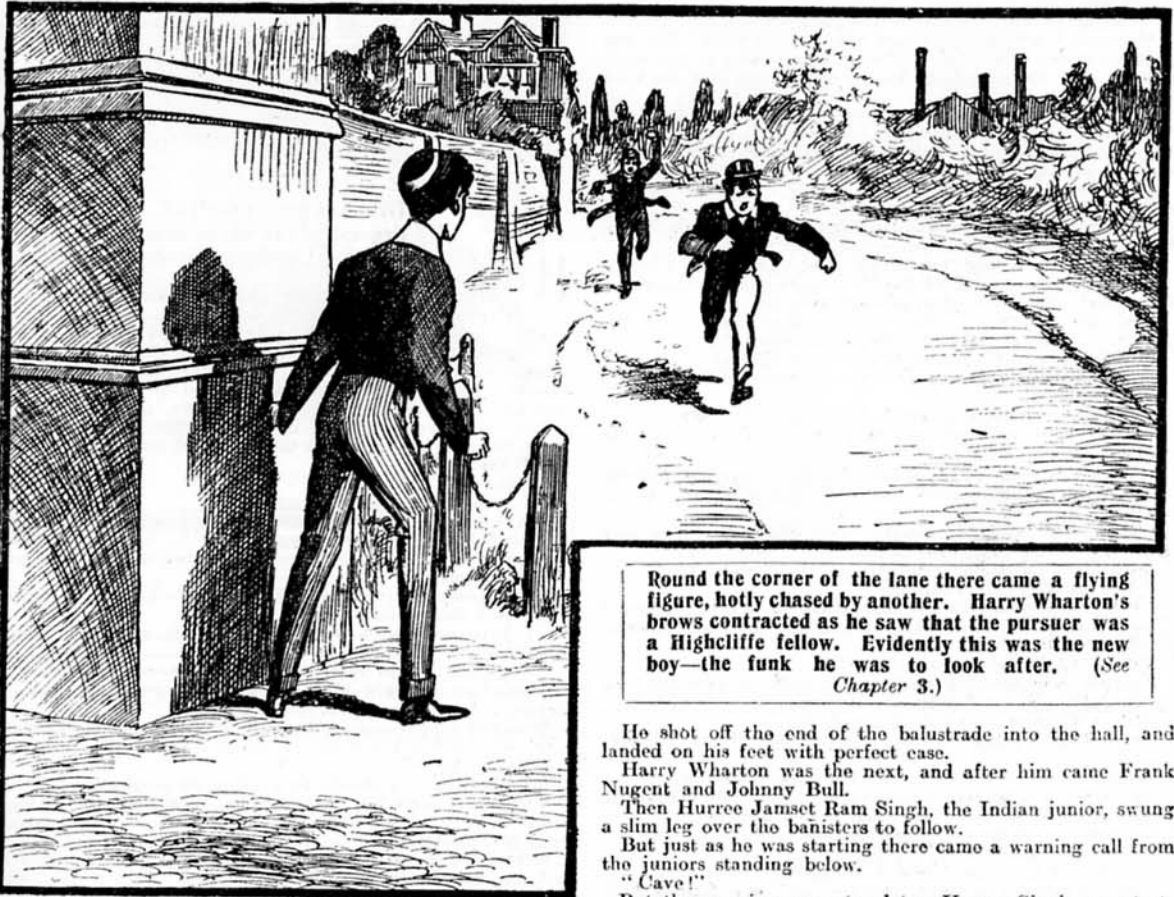


The Editor will be
obliged if you will
hand this book, when
finished with, to a
friend.

THE WHITE FEATHER

A Grand, New, Long, Complete Story of the
Chums of the Remove Form at Greyfriars.

By **FRANK RICHARDS.**



Round the corner of the lane there came a flying figure, hotly chased by another. Harry Wharton's brows contracted as he saw that the pursuer was a Highcliffe fellow. Evidently this was the new boy—the funk he was to look after. (See Chapter 3.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER. A Little Too Previous!

"**F**OLLOW your leader," said Bob Cherry. Bob Cherry was the leader. A little crowd of juniors were collected on the landing at the end of the Remove passage in the School House at Greyfriars.

From the landing to the lower hall, following the curve of the staircase, was a balustrade of polished oak, smooth and slippery as glass; and it was a favourite amusement for some of the more daring of the juniors to slide down it astride without holding.

It was a dangerous pastime, for a momentary loss of nerve would have led to a fall into the hall below; and hence it was forbidden by the powers that were.

But the powers were not visible just now. It was a half-holiday, and nearly everybody was out of doors.

Bob Cherry swung one leg over the banisters, and slid away in a sitting position at a really terrific speed.

He shot off the end of the balustrade into the hall, and landed on his feet with perfect ease.

Harry Wharton was the next, and after him came Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull.

Then Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Indian junior, swung a slim leg over the banisters to follow.

But just as he was starting there came a warning call from the juniors standing below.

"Cave!"
But the warning came too late. Hurree Singh was starting, and it was quite impossible for him to stop. He slid away like lightning.

Monsieur Charpentier, the French master, had come out of his study. Perhaps the heavy bumping of boots in the hall, as the juniors landed one after another, had disturbed him. He came towards Harry Wharton & Co., just as Hurree Singh came whizzing down the banisters.

"Look out!" roared Bob Cherry.
"Vat is it—Mon Dieu!"
Crash!

Hurree Singh shot off the banisters, and landed upon Monsieur Charpentier's chest with a terrific impact.

Mossoo was not a big man or a strong man. But if he had been a second Goliath, he could hardly have stood that impact without falling.

As it was, he was simply swept off his feet. The unfortunate little Frenchman gave a horrified gasp as he was carried away, and he found himself stretched on his back in the hall, with Hurree Jamset Ram Singh rolling helplessly over him.

"Ah, mon Dieu! Vat is zat? Is it an earthquake?" gasped Monsieur Charpentier.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The sorrowfulness is terrific, honoured sir!" panted Hurree Janset Ram Singh, as he rolled off the French master.

"Sorry, sir!"

"It was an accident."

"Inky didn't see you!"

The juniors rushed to help Monsieur Charpentier to his feet. The little Frenchman staggered up, aided by many hands, and stood gasping in a dazed state, and blinking round him.

"Vat is it?" he gasped. "Vat has happen? I am smito wiz a fearful concussion. Is it zat ze house shall tumble down viz itself?"

"It was only Inky, sir," said Harry Wharton, striving manfully not to laugh. "He didn't see you coming, sir."

"Hélas! I am almost stun. It is zat you have been sliding down ze banisters, isn't it?" Monsieur Charpentier exclaimed severely.

"Ye-es, sir."

"Zat is against ze rules. You have hurt me severely."

"So sorry, sir!" murmured Nugent.

"It was quite an accident, sir."

"The accidentfulness was terrific, honoured sahib."

Monsieur Charpentier rubbed his chest ruefully. He was a good-natured little man, but there were limits to his good-nature. But the juniors all looked so penitent that the kind little Frenchman melted.

"Zat vish you have done is very reckless," he said. "You sall not do him any more. Mr. Quelch would be very angry if he sall know. But I zink zat you are sorry, so it is zat I say nozing."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

"You are awfully good, Mossoo."

Monsieur Charpentier staggered away to his study. He had really had a very bad shaking.

"Jolly lucky it wasn't Quelch!" murmured Bob Cherry. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, would certainly not have taken that accident so good-temperedly.

"Master Wharton!" Trotter the page came along the passage. "Master Wharton, if you please—"

"Hallo, what's the trouble now?" asked Harry.

"Mr. Quelch wants you in his study, Master Wharton."

"Oh, crumbs!"

The juniors exchanged looks of dismay.

"He's heard us!" groaned Bob Cherry. "I thought he was out."

"He never is out when he's wanted out!" growled Johnny Bull. "But what does he want only Wharton for? We're all in it."

"Well, one licking's enough," said Harry. "You stay here, and I'll go and get it over."

"No fear!" said Bob promptly. "We'll come, too."

"But Quelch only wants me."

"Then he's going to get more than he wants," grinned Frank Nugent. "Come on, you fellows; we'll all face the giddy musio together."

"The togetherfulness is terrific."

And the Famous Five started in a body for Mr. Quelch's study, rubbing their hands in anticipation.

Harry Wharton knocked at the door.

"Come in!" called out the sharp tones of the Remove master.

Wharton opened the door, and the juniors filed in.

Mr. Quelch, who was seated at his table, raised his eyebrows at the sight of the five, and looked surprised.

"I sent for Wharton," he remarked.

"Yes, sir," said Harry. "But—"

"We're all in it, sir," said Bob Cherry.

"So we thought we ought to come, sir," said Johnny Bull.

Mr. Quelch looked puzzled.

"I do not quite understand you," he said. "The matter concerns Wharton alone."

"Oh, no, sir!" said Bob immediately. "I was really the chap who started it, sir."

"What?"

"I said follow your leader, sir, and they followed," explained Bob.

"What are you talking about, Cherry?" exclaimed the Form-master testily.

It was Bob's turn to look surprised.

"About what you sent for Wharton for, sir. It was just bad luck that Mossoo came along just in time to be bumped over."

"The badness of the luck was terrific, sir."

Mr. Quelch looked at them grimly.

"So Monsieur Charpentier has been bumped over?" he asked.

"I—I thought you knew, sir," stammered Bob Cherry. "You—you sent for Wharton—"

"We—we thought you heard us sliding down," stammered Johnny Bull.

"Indeed! So you have been sliding down the banisters, and you have bumped over Monsieur Charpentier?" said Mr. Quelch in his most magisterial tone.

"Ye-es, sir."

"Very good. You will take a hundred lines each, and I thank you for informing me of this circumstance, of which I knew nothing."

"Oh!"

"I sent for Wharton upon quite another matter. You others may go!"

"Oh!" murmured the juniors.

And they went, feeling very much inclined to kick themselves.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

By Request of the Form-master!

HARRY WHARTON remained in the Form-master's study.

He wondered what Mr. Quelch wanted with him.

Evidently it was not the accident to Monsieur Charpentier which had caused him to be called into the study. He ran hastily over in his mind all his latest delinquencies, wondering which of them had come to the ears of the Remove master. Had Mr. Quelch been informed of the fact that he had put treacle in Loder's Sunday topper, or was it the incident of Coker's "bags" being sewn up, so that he had burst them in trying to put them on that morning?

"Wharton!"

"Yes, sir."

"I wish to speak to you seriously."

"Yes, sir," said Harry, with an inward groan. Mr. Quelch had a most biting tongue when he talked to a fellow seriously; and, upon the whole, Wharton would have preferred a caning.

The Form-master smiled slightly as he caught the expression upon the junior's face.

"I have not sent for you to find fault with you, Wharton," he said reassuringly.

"Oh, good!" said Harry. "I—I mean, very well, sir."

"The fact is," said Mr. Quelch impressively, "I have, in a way, a favour to ask of you, Wharton."

Wharton suppressed a whistle of surprise. It was certainly not often that a Form-master asked favours of a fellow in the Lower Fourth.

"Indeed, sir! I should be glad to do anything—"

"You are head boy in the Form, and you are in some respects of a more serious nature than most junior boys," said Mr. Quelch.

Wharton did not know whether that was a compliment or not, but he murmured "Thank you, sir!" very respectfully.

"I have sent for you for that reason," continued Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir."

"What I am about to ask of you, Wharton, may cause you some inconvenience, and may put some responsibility upon you."

"Ye-es, sir," said Harry wonderingly.

"The fact is, there is a new boy coming to Greyfriars this afternoon, a boy named Esmond—Percy Esmond. He will be in the Remove."

"Yes, sir," said Harry again. How on earth it concerned him that a boy named Percy Esmond was coming to Greyfriars he could not guess. He wanted to be enlightened.

"This boy," resumed Mr. Quelch, "is of a somewhat peculiar nature. His parents are very anxious about him, and the Head has consulted me on the matter, and I have decided to speak to you about it, Wharton. This lad Esmond is of a very timid nature—in fact, from what I hear, I am afraid he is what you boys would call a funk."

"Oh!" said Harry.

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Monsieur Charpentier came towards Harry Wharton & Co., just as Hurree Singh came whizzing down the banisters. "Look out!" roared Bob Cherry. Crash! Hurree Singh shot off the banisters, and landed upon Monsieur Charpentier's chest with a terrific impact. (See Chapter I.)

"Such a timid lad is likely to find some trouble in a Form like the Lower Fourth—do you not think so?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"My hat! I should say so!" said Wharton involuntarily. "I—I mean, the Remove don't like funks, sir. Greyfriars isn't really the place for them—is it, sir? A funk is jolly certain to be ragged. Is he an invalid, sir?"

"Not at all. I understand that he is quite fit physically." "If he's able to look after himself, sir, what is he a funk for?"

Mr. Quelch smiled. "Apparently he is timid by nature, Wharton. His father hopes that at Greyfriars he may be cured of this unhappy failing. I think it quite possible. But it is also possible that a boy who cannot protect himself may be ragged and bullied, and may even have his spirit quite broken. That would be very unfortunate."

"I suppose so, sir." "That is why I am speaking to you, Wharton. You are a serious lad, and I believe you have a kind heart and a generous nature."

Wharton coloured a little; he felt that his Form-master was laying the butter on rather thick. And he was feeling a little apprehensive, too, about the favour Mr. Quelch was going to ask. He began to have a glimmering of what it was.

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FOR NEXT
MONDAY—

"BLUNDELL'S PRIZE!"

"Would it be asking too much of you, Wharton, if I requested you to take this unfortunate lad a little in hand at first?"

"So that's it?" murmured Harry, in dismay.

"To look after him a little, and see that he is not bullied, and so forth, for a time?" said Mr. Quelch, his eyes keenly on the junior's face. "There is hardly another boy in my Form of whom I should think of asking such a thing, Wharton."

Wharton felt pretty sure of that.

"I know it will be a trouble to you, and a responsibility," said Mr. Quelch. "But, as head of your Form, you must expect a certain amount of responsibility, and you are not the kind of boy to shirk it."

"I hope not, sir."

"If you would, to a certain extent, take this lad under your protection, and care for him, and give him time to find his feet, so to speak, it would be a good deed, and a great favour to myself."

Wharton was silent.

He wanted to oblige the Form-master; and he was sorry for any chap who was unfortunate enough to be a funk. But to have a funk "planted" upon him to look after, to have the responsibility of such an outsider on his hands, that was far from being a pleasant prospect. At the same time, it was impossible to refuse what Mr. Quelch asked.

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of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars. Order Early.

A request from a Form-master was like an invitation from Royalty—not to be refused.

Mr. Quelch was watching his face keenly. He understood quite easily the thoughts that were passing in the mind of the junior. His experience of boys extended over forty years, and he knew them better than they knew themselves.

"You do not care to do this, Wharton?" he asked.

Wharton flushed.

"Not—not exactly that, sir," he stammered. "But—but I—I don't know— Certainly, sir, I'll do it. I'll do my best."

"It is the duty of the strong to help the weak. Wharton, and of the brave to protect the timid," said Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, of course, sir!"

"I do not think you will regret it afterwards," said Mr. Quelch quietly. "There is a great satisfaction, Wharton, in feeling that one has done a duty well, however unpleasant the duty may have been. That is all, Wharton. Esmond will be here this afternoon. If you could make it convenient to meet him when he comes, and show him some civility, it would be a good beginning."

"Very well, sir."

"Thank you, Wharton. I am much obliged to you."

"Oh, not at all, sir!"

And Harry Wharton left the Form-master's study, with a far from cheerful expression of countenance.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. A Clean Pair of Heels!

THE Co. waited for Harry Wharton in the doorway of the School House.

They were a little anxious about their chief. That afternoon the Remove were playing a Form match with the Shell, and it was close on time for getting on the football-ground.

Harry Wharton was captain of the Remove eleven, and he was wanted in the match, of course. The Shell were two Forms above the Remove in the school; older fellows—in fact, almost seniors. They had the advantage of age, size, and weight, and were a hard team for the Lower Fourth to play. If Wharton happened to be detained, and the Remove deprived of their captain, it might make all the difference between victory and defeat for the junior eleven.

So the Co. looked anxiously at Wharton as he came along, with a slight shade upon his brow.

"Detained?" asked all four together.

Wharton shook his head.

"Oh, good luck!" said Bob Cherry, with a sigh of relief.

"I was afraid that you might have to miss the match."

"Which would most likely mean a licking for us," remarked Nugent. "Hobson and his team think they are going to lick us, anyway."

Wharton started a little.

"The match!" he repeated. "Oh, my hat!"

"What's the matter?" asked Bob anxiously. "You're going to play, of course?"

"I can't!"

"Can't play!" exclaimed Bob warmly. "What do you mean? Quelch hasn't detained you."

"No; it's not detention."

"Then what is it?"

Wharton groaned dismally.

"I've got a job as a dry-nurse."

"A wha-a-at!"

"There's a new kid coming here this afternoon—a freak named Esmond. Quelch wants me to take him under my wing and look after him."

"Oh, blow!" exclaimed Bob indignantly. "You can take him under your silly wing after the football match, I suppose?"

"I've promised to meet the beast when he comes, and be civil to him."

"And miss the match?" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"Well, I shall have to. I can't meet the beast, and look after the beast, if I'm playing footer when the beast arrives!" said Wharton, apparently finding some solace in this characterising the new boy.

"Well, I call that rotten. Why couldn't Quelch ask somebody else to look after a rotten new kid? Alonzo Todd would do it—or Bunter. You'd better run back and tell Quelch that, upon second thoughts, you're sorry you can't do anything of the kind."

Wharton grinned.

"I couldn't refuse Quelch. He put it in the form of asking a favour, and talked to me like a Dutch uncle," he said. "But what on earth I'm to do with the new kid is a giddy mystery."

"What does he want looking after for?" asked Bolsover major, who had been standing near, and heard what was said. "Is he ill, or dotty, or what?"

"He's timid."

"Hey?"

"In other words, a funk," said Wharton. "His people are anxious about him, it seems."

Bolsover major burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! Well, they're right to be anxious about a giddy funk who's coming into the Greyfriars Remove. He will be slaughtered!"

"He won't!" said Wharton. "That's what I've got to prevent."

The bully of the Remove sneered.

"So you're going to take him under your protection, and dry-nurse him, and bring him up in the way he should go?" he sneered. "Well, you'll have all your work cut out. Funks ain't popular here."

"No fear!" chimed in Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars. "You'd better chuck it up, Wharton, and let the fellow be well ragged to begin with. That may help to knock the nonsense out of him. To oblige you, I'll take a hand in the ragging."

"Thanks; but it won't do! There's to be no ragging."

"I'll bet you there'll be plenty!" said Bolsover major.

"There'll be trouble for the raggers, then," said Harry Wharton quietly. "I don't like the job Quelch has given me, but I have given him my word, and I'm going to keep it. Now, you chaps, it's time you got down to the ground."

"And you're really standing out?" asked Johnny Bull.

"I must."

Harry Wharton & Co. walked down to the footer-ground. Hobson and his men were already there, punting the ball about. Wharton could not help feeling worried. Mr. Quelch had not taken into consideration such matters as junior football matches, and he had had no idea that he was seriously interfering with Wharton's business as captain of his Form. There was no help for it, and Harry had to make up his mind to it, and he tried to do it with a good grace.

"Time, you fellows!" called out Tom Brown, the New Zealand junior, as the Famous Five came up.

"Ready!" said Wharton. "I want you to captain the team this afternoon, Browney."

"What for?"

"I'm standing out."

Tom Brown looked very concerned.

"I'll skipper the team with pleasure," he said. "But you oughtn't to stand out, Wharton. The Shell are in great form."

"Can't be helped."

"Oh, all right, then!"

And the Remove team went on without their captain, Tom Brown, at right half, taking the command. Vernon-Smith was put in at centre-forward in Wharton's place, and Tom Dutton took the Bounder's place on the wing.

"Wharton not playing?" asked Hobson of the Shell, when he tossed for choice of ends with the new skipper.

"No; he's standing out."

"Well, it won't make much difference," said Hobson loftily.

"I hope not," agreed Tom Brown. "We shall lick you, all the same!"

To which the captain of the Shell replied only with a snort.

Harry Wharton stood by the ground, watching the match as it started. He was anxious about the result. The Remove required to be at their full strength to beat the Shell, and without their captain they certainly weren't at their full strength. But they started well.

Vernon-Smith, at centre-forward, played up remarkably well, and he led a brilliant attack on the Shell, and succeeded in getting the ball through in the first ten minutes of the match.

And there were loud shouts of "Goal!" and "Bravo, Smithy!" in which Wharton joined joyfully.

Somewhat relieved by the good start of the match, Harry Wharton walked away from the football-ground.

Mr. Quelch had said that the new boy would arrive that afternoon, but Wharton did not know exactly when to expect him. But he would probably come by the three train in Friardale; and, if he did, he would arrive before very long. Wharton wondered whether he ought to walk down to Friardale to meet him.

But he wanted to keep one eye on the footer-ground; so

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he compounded with his conscience, as it were, by waiting at the school gates for the coming of Percy Esmond.

From there he could hear the shouts on the footer-ground, and the shouting was enough to tell him how the match was going.

"Bravo, Hobby!"

"Well kicked!"

The teams had evidently equalised.

Wharton grunted, and leaning on the stone pillar of the gateway, he looked down the long white road towards the village.

Suddenly he started.

A running figure came in sight—a lad of about his own age, with a silk hat on the back of his head, and his jacket flying in the wind as he ran.

He came on towards the school gates with a terrific burst of speed.

Wharton gazed at him in wonder.

The boy was a well-built lad, and the speed he was putting on showed that he was physically fit. Wharton had never seen him before, and he wondered whether this was Percy Esmond, the new "kid" for Greyfriars.

If so, what was he coming to the school at such a rate for? It was not usual for new boys to arrive at Greyfriars tearing along at top speed, crimson with exertion, and with their hats on the back of their heads.

But the cause of the stranger's haste was soon apparent. Another fellow came in sight round the bend of the road, a dozen yards behind him, and Wharton recognised a Highcliffe cap, and the face of Ponsonby of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe, underneath it.

Ponsonby of Highcliffe was evidently in hot pursuit of the running figure.

Wharton stared at them blankly. The boy in advance was bigger than the fellow who was chasing him, and there was no reason at all why he should run from Ponsonby, unless he was a coward. Wharton guessed that this must be the new boy—the unfortunate, timid youth whom he was expected to take under his wing.

His brows contracted as he gazed.

There was a keen rivalry between the junior boys of Highcliffe School and Greyfriars, and they seldom met without a row; but in those rows Highcliffe generally came off second best. It was quite a new experience for Ponsonby to chase a Greyfriars fellow. Undoubtedly he had fallen in with the new boy in the village, and discovered that he was coming to Greyfriars, and started ragging him. And the boy had started disgracing the school he was coming to by taking to his heels.

The fugitive came tearing on breathlessly, and he arrived at the school gates still a dozen yards ahead of his pursuer.

He paused in the gateway, panting.

"Is this Greyfriars?" he jerked out, as he caught sight of Wharton.

"Yes," said Harry curtly.

"Thank goodness!"

And the boy darted in.

Harry Wharton caught him by the shoulder, and swung him round angrily. For the moment he forgot that he had promised to take the new boy under his protection, and he shook him savagely.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed.

"My name's Esmond!" gasped the other.

"The new kid?"

"Yes."

"And what are you running for?"

"That chap's after me!" panted Esmond. "Let me go! He'll be here in a tick!"

"Why don't you face him, then?"

"I—I— Let me go!" shouted Esmond, struggling, as Ponsonby came panting up.

"Oh, don't be afraid!" exclaimed Wharton scornfully. "I'll stop him fast enough!"

He released Esmond, and stepped out of the gateway as Ponsonby came up. Ponsonby halted. It was great fun to chase a funk along the road, but it was not so funny to encounter the captain of the Remove, who was famous for his powers as a hard hitter.

"Well, come on, Ponsonby," said Harry Wharton grimly. "What are you stopping for? You seemed to be in a hurry a moment ago."

"Where's that kid?" demanded Ponsonby.

"Never mind that kid," said Harry. "If you're looking for trouble, I'm here!"

Ponsonby backed away.

"Oh, that's all right!" he said airily. "You've got a precious funk there! Ha, ha, ha! I hope you're proud of him. He's bigger than I am! Why don't he come out?"

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"BLUNDELL'S PRIZE!"

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"I'll come out!" said Wharton angrily. And he came out, and in another moment he and Ponsonby were "going it" hammer and tongs.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Funk!

PERCY ESMOND stood in the gateway, looking on. He stood with his hands in his pockets, looking quite calm and cool now.

At a glance he had seen that Harry Wharton could easily account for the Highcliffe fellow, and that there was no cause for further alarm.

So he took matters easily.

"Go it!" he called out encouragingly. "Thump him! Thump the rotter! Bravo! He's down! Bravo!"

Ponsonby was on his back in the dust.

"Want some more?" asked Wharton, glaring down at him. Wharton was very angry—it angered him to see a Greyfriars fellow running from the enemy, and he was wreaking his anger upon the unfortunate Ponsonby. But for his promise to Mr. Quelch, he would have licked the new boy, too. As he was prevented from doing that by his promise, he let Ponsonby have it all; and after three minutes Ponsonby looked decidedly the worse for wear.

He sat up in the road, and dabbed his nose with his handkerchief. Ponsonby rather prided himself upon the aristocratic shape of his Grecian nose, but at the present moment it looked anything but Grecian. It had a bulbous look, and it was highly coloured.

"Ow!" said Ponsonby. "Yow! Grooh!"

"There's some more if you want any!" said Wharton politely.

Ponsonby did not want any more. He staggered to his feet, and gave the Greyfriars fellow a black look, and limped away.

Wharton turned back into the gateway, and looked at Esmond.

"Well done!" said the latter. "You handled him a treat!"

"Why didn't you handle him?" demanded Wharton angrily.

"I was afraid!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Afraid!" explained Esmond, with perfect calmness.

Wharton stared at him blankly. It was only too plain that the new boy was a funk; but Harry had expected him to be a little bit ashamed of it, at least,

and attempt to make some lame explanation or other. But if Esmond was a funk, he certainly was not a humbug as well. He did not appear to be in the slightest degree ashamed of that little peculiarity of his nature.

"You—you—you're a funk!" said Wharton.

"Exactly."

"And—and you're not ashamed of it?"

"Why should I be?"

Wharton stared at him.

"Why?" he repeated. "Why? Well, I should think any fellow would be ashamed of being a funk."

"I don't see why. You wouldn't be ashamed of being lame if you happened to be lame, would you?"

"No; but—"

"Or deaf, if you happened to be deaf?"

"Of course not. But—"

"Well, then, what's the good of being ashamed of weak nerves, when you can't help it?" said Esmond. "I've got no nerve, and I suppose I was born so, and it's not my fault. I've thought it out quite calmly, and I've reasoned it out that there's nothing to be ashamed of in it. So there you are."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I can't fight, and I don't pretend I can," said Esmond. "I'm not built that way, you see. You can fight, it seems; but I dare say I can do some things you can't do. So it comes to the same thing."

"Well, you are a queer beggar, and no mistake!" exclaimed Wharton, bursting into a laugh.

His anger melted away. It was impossible to be angry with the new boy. After all, if the fellow had no nerve, perhaps it was not his fault. And Esmond was certainly very frank about it.

"Who was that chap, by the way?" Esmond asked.

"Ponsonby—a Highcliffe chap. We generally have rows with the Highcliffe fellows," said Harry.

"Oh, that accounts!" said the new boy. "He pounced on

me in Friardale, and asked me if I belonged to Greyfriars; and when I said I did he went for me."

"And you ran for it?"

"Well, what could I do?"

"You could have licked him if you stood up to him," said Wharton, frowning again. "You are bigger than he is."

"I hadn't the nerve."

"And do you seriously mean to say that you're not ashamed to own it?" exclaimed Wharton, looking at him curiously.

"Not in the least."

"Well, that beats it. How do you think you are going to get on here, if you can't stand up for yourself?" demanded Wharton.

Esmond shook his head.

"I really don't know. I shall have to chance it. Do they rag new boys in this school?"

"Yes; if they're funks."

"Oh, dear!" said Esmond. "I say, by the way, what's your name?"

"Wharton. I'm captain of the Form you're going into."

"Good!" said Esmond, with satisfaction. "I'll tell you what. I'm a rich chap. Heaps of tin. As much as I want, in fact."

"Well?"

"You seem to be a great fighting man. You handled that chap a treat. I couldn't help admiring the way you did it. Suppose we chum up?"

"Eh?"

"I'll stand you anything you want—feeds and things, and anything, in fact, and you'll stand by me and fight all my battles," said Esmond. "Is it a go?"

"Great Scott!"

"It's a fair offer, isn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Blessed if I don't think you're a little bit off the top!" exclaimed Harry, in amazement. "Of all the ideas—"

"Well, I think it's a jolly good idea."

"I don't," said Harry. "In the first place, I don't want your money. I've got enough of my own, and if I hadn't I shouldn't want anybody else's. If you weren't a funk I should punch your head for suggesting such a thing."

"Sorry!" said Esmond, backing away promptly. "Consider it unsaid."

"But I shall look after you as much as I can, though I don't know about fighting your battles," said Wharton. "My Form-master has asked me to do so."

"That's good. Is that why you chipped in just now?"

"Yes. Otherwise I'd have taken you by the back of the neck and forced you to stand up to that Highcliffe rotter!"

"Oh, by Jove, would you?" exclaimed Esmond. "Then I'm much obliged to your Form-master! He seems to be quite a brick."

"I'll give you some good advice," went on Harry. "The best thing you can do is to get over this rotten cowardice!"

"Can't!"

"Have you tried?"

"Lots of times," said Esmond ruefully. "But it's no good. I've even tackled chaps on purpose, to see whether I couldn't get over it; but as soon as they came for me I bolted."

"And you've got the nerve to say so?" exclaimed Wharton, in disgust.

"Yes, I've got plenty of that kind of nerve!" said Esmond calmly.

"I'm blessed if I know what kind of life you're going to get in the Remove here," said Wharton. "Why, even Bunter and Snoop will begin to bully you, as soon as they know you are a rotten coward. I'm going to look at the footer now. Will you come along?"

"Certainly!" said Esmond.

And they walked down to the playing-fields together.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Pig in Clover!

THE Form match was still going strong.

The score was level, and the first half was not yet over.

The Shell were attacking hotly, but the Remove defence was sound, and the Shell forwards could not get through.

"Same old score?" asked Wharton, as he joined the crowd of fellows looking on.

"Yes, one to one," said Skinner of the Remove.

"There goes old Bob!" exclaimed Russell, as Bob Cherry, left-half, raced the ball down the touch-line, and drove it across to the forwards.

Hobson intercepted it, but Vernon-Smith robbed him of it neatly, and ran on for goal, and sent it spinning in amid a roar of cheering.

"Goal! Goal!"

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"Bravo, the Bounder!"

"Two for the Remove," said Wharton, with satisfaction.

"The Shell are going to get it in the neck this time, after all."

The teams lined up again, and the struggle was renewed. Wharton glanced round at his new companion.

"Do you play footer?" he asked.

Esmond shook his head.

"Why not?" demanded Wharton.

"Too rough."

"Oh, crumbs! Are you afraid of being pushed?"

"Yes," said Esmond calmly.

"Hallo! Is that the new kid?" exclaimed Bolsover major, bearing down upon them.

"I'm the new boy," said Esmond, looking at him.

"The blessed funk, hey?"

"Yes, I'm a funk."

"Wha-a-at!"

Bolsover major's jaw dropped in his astonishment. He had never expected to hear any fellow admit that he was a funk in that perfectly cool and matter-of-fact manner.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"He's not ashamed of it," he said. "Let him alone, Bolsover. You remember what I told you."

Bolsover major snorted.

"I don't care twopence what you told me. The rotter ought to be ashamed of himself. What he wants is a good hiding."

Esmond looked alarmed.

"I say—" he began.

"And I'm jolly well going to tan his hide to begin with," said Bolsover, in his most bullying tone. "What right has a rotten funk to come here at all, I'd like to know."

"Let him alone!" said Wharton, frowning.

"Rats!"

And the bully of the Remove bore down upon Percy Esmond. Wharton's eyes flashed, and he jumped between them, mindful of his promise to Mr. Quelch. But Esmond had already taken to his heels. Whatever else he could not do, he could certainly run. Indeed, it was probable that, owing to his peculiar disposition, he had had plenty of practice in that line.

He darted away towards the School House at top speed, and Bolsover major stood staring after him almost in stupefaction.

"Well, my hat!" gasped Bolsover. "What's he running like that for?"

"Ha, ha, ha! He's afraid."

"Well, I wasn't going to slaughter him! Here, come back, you silly ass! I'm not going to hurt you, you dummy!" roared Bolsover major.

But Esmond did not come back. He disappeared into the School House, and the Remove fellows shouted with laughter. Most of them were anticipating a great deal of fun with that very peculiar new boy.

"Well, that beats the band!" exclaimed Skinner. "Blessed if I've ever seen such a fellow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll have enough to do if you're going to look after that silly rotter, Wharton," said Bolsover major, with a chuckle.

Wharton thought so, too.

A fat junior, who had been blinking on at the scene through a big pair of spectacles, rolled away towards the School House. Billy Bunter's eyes were glistening behind his spectacles. Ever since dinner that day Billy Bunter had been making vain attempts to raise a small loan, to be expended in jam tarts at Mrs. Mumble's tuckshop. But Billy Bunter was too well-known for his efforts to be successful.

Fellows had learned to turn a deaf ear to his assurances that he was expecting a postal-order for a large amount by the next post. New boys were Bunter's special prey. He had a wonderful gift for extracting loans from them, and this particular new boy seemed to Billy Bunter to be really a windfall. Bunter was a funk himself, but his funkiness paled into insignificance beside that displayed by Percy Esmond. Bunter saw in prospect a gorgeous feed at the tuckshop, enforced, if necessary, by his fat fist.

He blinked round for the new boy when he reached the School House. Esmond was not to be seen, but Trotter, the page, was crossing the hall, and Bunter called to him.

"Have you seen a new chap come in, Trotter?"

"Yes, Master Bunter."

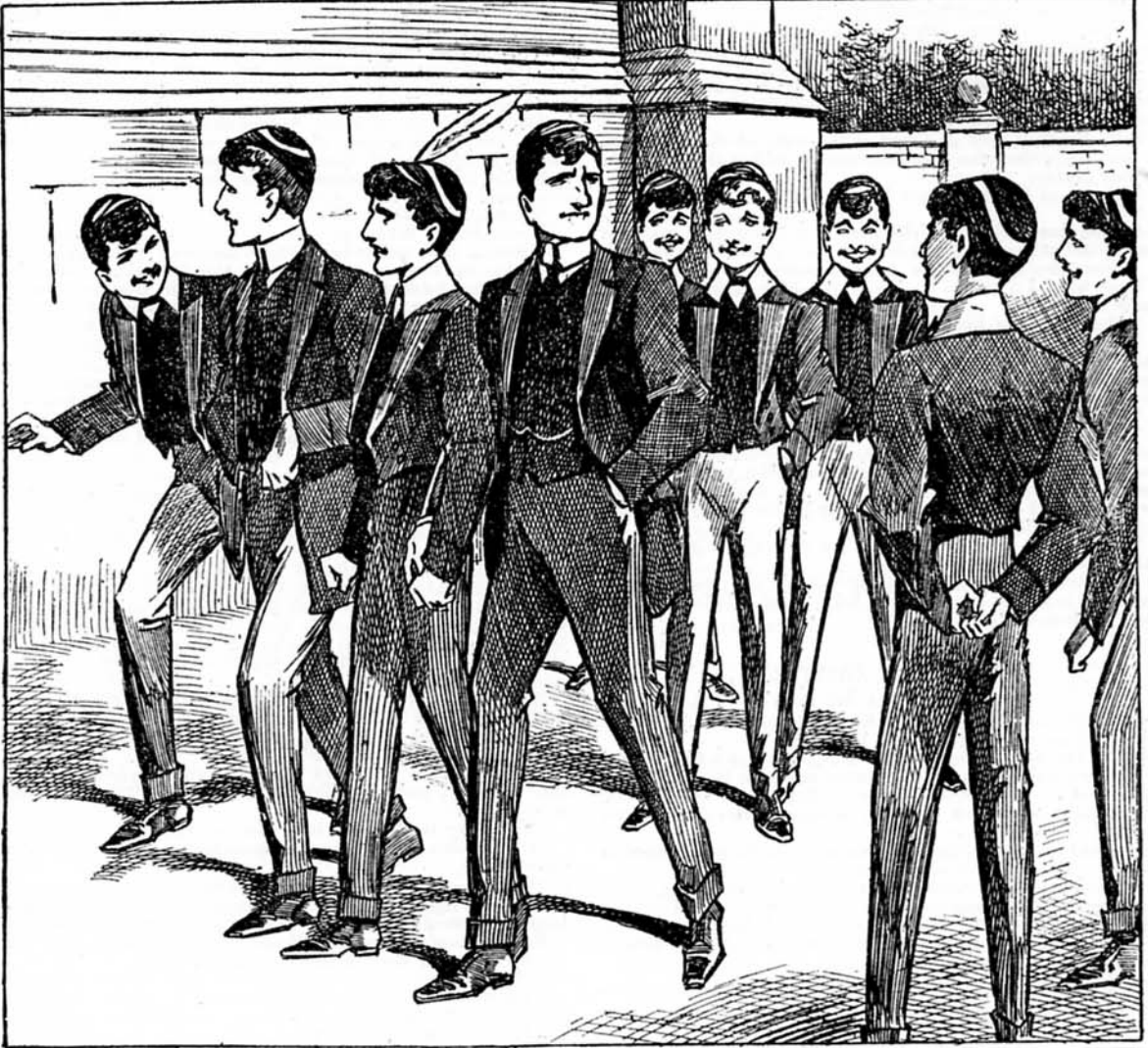
"Where is he?"

"I've shown him in to Mr. Quelch."

"Oh, all right."

Billy Bunter took up his stand in the passage near the door of the Remove master's study. There he waited with great patience for the new fellow to come out. After his interview with the Form-master was over, he would fall into Bunter's clutches.

Bunter waited patiently. It was some time before the



"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!" yelled Skinner. "Here's the coward—here's the giddy funk! Make room for the white feather!" Esmond, his face crimson, was walked round the Close between Bolsover and Skinner, crowds of juniors joining in the procession. (See Chapter 12.)

Form-master's door opened; then Esmond came out into the passage. Bunter detached himself from the wall.

"Hallo!" he said familiarly.

Esmond looked at him.

"You're Esmond?" said the Owl of the Remove cordially.

"Yes."

"I'm Bunter—of your Form."

"Are you?" said Esmond, running his eye over the fat junior, and apparently not very much impressed by his looks.

"Yes, I am," said Bunter frowning. "I've been looking for you, Esmond. It's a custom here for new boys to stand a feed when they come. I'll show you the way to the tuckshop, if you like."

"Thanks—I want to see after my box, now."

"I think you'd better come to the tuckshop first," said Bunter.

"I think not."

"Did you come to Greyfriars specially to look for a thick ear?" asked the Owl of the Remove menacingly.

Esmond backed away a little. He was six inches taller than the fat, clumsy Owl of the Remove. Physically he was able to hold his own against at least two Bunters, if not three. But he did not seem even to think of trying to do it.

The evident alarm in the new boy's face encouraged Bunter. He had had his doubts at first, and at a sign of resistance

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he would have beaten a prompt retreat. But it was only too plain that the new boy was afraid even of the fat, unwieldy Owl of the Remove.

"I—I don't want to quarrel with you, Bunter," Esmond faltered.

"Don't you?" said Bunter, his manner growing more truculent. "Well, you'll jolly soon quarrel with me, whether you want to or not, if you don't do the decent thing. Are you coming to the tuckshop, or are you not?"

"I—I'll come with pleasure," said Esmond weakly.

"This way, then."

Billy Bunter took Esmond's arm, to make sure that his prey did not escape him. He had seen what a wonderful turn of speed the new boy had, and if Esmond had had a chance of taking to his heels, the fat junior would have had no chance of getting near him again. But with Bunter's weight hanging on his arm, Esmond could not run.

Bunter marched him triumphantly out of the School House into the Close, and led him away to the school shop.

There was a sound of loud shouting from the football field. The Shell had scored another goal in the second half, and the score was level again, with only ten minutes more to play. But Bunter did not heed that—he was not thinking of footer. He was thinking of the good things in Mrs. Mimble's tuckshop.

"Here we are!" said Bunter, as he marched his victim

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"I say, Mrs. Mimble, this is Esmond, the new kid. Ho wants to stand a feed, don't you, Esmond?"

"Ye-es," murmured Esmond.

"Order some things, then," said Bunter. "Buck up! Why don't you ask me what I'd like, Esmond?"

"What would you like, Bunter?" said Esmond.

"Tarts to begin with, and ginger-beer," said Bunter.

"Tarts and ginger-beer, please, ma'am," said Esmond, throwing a sovereign on the counter.

Billy Bunter's eyes glistened at the sight of the sovereign. It was plain that the new boy was blessed with the riches of this world.

"Plenty of tin, eh?" said Bunter.

"Yes."

"Look here, Esmond, old man," said Bunter, with his mouth full of jam tart, and feeling quite affectionate towards a fellow who could throw down a sovereign so carelessly. "Look here, I'll pal on to you if you like. I like you, you know."

"Thanks!" said Esmond.

"A queer beast like you will want a friend in the form," said Bunter. "Now, I've got lots of friends, and lots of influence. There are a good many fellows who think I ought to be captain of the Form, instead of Wharton!"

"Are there?" said Esmond.

"Yes. Look here, you pal on with me, and I'll look after you," said Bunter. "I'm a good boxer—quite a fighting-man, in fact—and I'll protect you. You stick to me, and I'll see you through. All you've got to do is to stand a feed every now and then, and you can rely on me to protect you."

"Done!" said Esmond.

"Right-ho!" said Bunter. "It's a go! Order some more tarts—I'm hungry."

And Billy Bunter piled into the tarts, and washed them down with ginger-beer ad lib, with great satisfaction, and the new boy watched him.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. Wharton Does His Duty!

THERE was a trampling of feet, and quite a little army of fellows marched into the tuckshop.

The football match was over; the teams had drawn. And the fellows who had been watching the match had adjourned to the tuckshop for refreshments to follow.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Bolsover major. "Here's the new freak!"

Esmond looked at him apprehensively, and then glanced at Bunter. Bunter went on eating tarts.

"Come into a fortune, Bunter?" asked Skinner.

"Esmond's standing a feed," said Bunter. "You can all pile in if you like. It's the new fellow's treat."

"Good egg!" exclaimed Bolsover major. "Mine's ginger-beer."

"Mine's lemonade!"

"Mine's tarts!"

"Mine's doughnuts."

"Mine's cake."

Orders poured in on all sides. But Mrs. Mimble was not in a hurry to execute those orders. She looked inquiringly at Esmond.

"Look here, that's rather too thick!" exclaimed Esmond.

"Draw a line, you know."

"So you're not standing a feed, after all!" demanded Bolsover, contracting his brows into a terrifying frown.

"N-no, I'm not."

"Then I'll stand you some tarts myself—down the back of your neck!" exclaimed Bolsover major; and he grabbed a jam-tart from Billy Bunter's plate, and started for the new boy.

Esmond dodged round Bunter.

"Stop him, Bunter!" he gasped.

Billy Bunter did not move. He would as soon have tackled a wild bull as Bolsover major.

Bolsover chased Esmond round the high stool upon which Billy Bunter was seated with a tart in one fat hand, and a glass of ginger-beer in the other.

"Here, look out!" roared Bunter. "Don't bump me over—yarrooh!"

Esmond bumped into him blindly, and the fat junior went flying.

The tart flew in one direction, and found a resting-place on Skinner's neck, and the glass of ginger-beer in another, swamping into Bolsover major's face.

Billy Bunter sprawled on the floor of the tuckshop, and roared.

"Ow!" yelled Skinner, clutching the sticky part of his collar. "Ow! I'll—I'll slaughter you, Bunter—ow!"

"Groo!" gasped Bolsover, blinded by the ginger-beer.

"Where is he? I'll smash him—ow!"

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"Help!" yelled Bunter. "I'm killed! Yarrooh!"

Esmond was making a wild break for the doorway.

But Stott and Snoop collared him together, and dragged him back, struggling. A crowd of laughing fellows surrounded him. There was no escape for the unfortunate funk.

"Ow! Leggo! Let me go!" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here he is, Bolsover!"

The bully of the Remove dashed the ginger-beer, from his eyes. He was in a state of towering rage by this time. He simply hurled himself upon the new junior.

But at the same moment a voice rang out from the doorway:

"Hands off, Bolsover!"

It was Harry Wharton.

Wharton had remembered his charge—a little late, it is true, having stopped to chat with the footballers after the match. But he had arrived on the scene in time to chip in. Bolsover did not heed his voice. He had grasped Esmond, and the new boy was fairly swung off the floor in his powerful hands.

Wharton rushed in.

He grasped Bolsover major in his turn, and dragged him over, and the bully of the Remove went with a crash to the floor, with Esmond sprawling over him.

Wharton stooped, and grasped Esmond, and pulled him to his feet.

"Cut off!" he said curtly.

Esmond did not require bidding a second time. He darted out of the tuckshop, and disappeared.

Then Wharton waited for the bully of the Remove to gain his feet.

Wharton was brave enough, and he was a good boxer, and he was not afraid of the bully of the Remove. But he knew that he had a hard fight on his hands now. It was not the first time he had tackled Bolsover, and the result was at least doubtful. Bolsover was so big and strong and heavy that all Wharton's skill and pluck were needed to enable him to hold his own against him.

And there was evidently going to be a fight. Bolsover major scrambled to his feet, his rugged face red with rage.

"Where's that fellow?" he roared, glaring round.

"He's hooked it," said Skinner.

Bolsover made a rush to the door, and Wharton jumped into the way, and they came into collision. Then the fight started.

The fellows stood round in a cheering ring.

Mrs. Mimble held up her hands in horror behind her little counter.

"Young gentlemen—oh, young gentlemen!" she exclaimed.

"It's all right, ma'am!" said Hazeldene. "They'll have to pay for the damage! My hat! There go the bottles!"

Bolsover and Wharton bumped on the counter, and two bottles of sweets went to the floor with a crash.

"Hurrah!"

"Go it!"

"Pile in, Bolsover!"

"Wallop him, Wharton!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The shouting and the trampling in the tuckshop could be heard half across the Close. It reached the ears of Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, who was strolling there with Courtney of the Sixth. The two prefects came into the shop.

They arrived just in time for the two fighting juniors to lurch into them.

Wingate and Courtney did not waste time in words. Wingate collared Wharton, and Courtney collared Bolsover major. Then they smote.

"Yarrooh!" roared Bolsover. "Leggo! Yah!"

"Chuck it!" gasped Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But the two prefects did not "chuck it" till they were tired. Then they released the two red and dishevelled juniors.

Wingate regarded them with a stern frown.

"How dare you fight here?" he exclaimed. "Did you do that damage?"

"I—I suppose we did!" gasped Wharton.

"Then you'll pay for it—half each!" said the captain of Greyfriars. "Pay Mrs. Mimble for those bottles at once!"

"Look here—" began Bolsover.

"You hear me?" said Wingate sharply.

Harry Wharton handed out the money at once, and Bolsover major reluctantly followed suit. Wingate shook his finger at them.

"If there's any more of this you'll hear from me!" he exclaimed; and he walked away with Courtney.

Bolsover major grunted, and tramped after him. He had had enough. So had Wharton, for that matter. His nose

was swollen and red and streaming with "claret"; his mouth had a sideways look, and one of his eyes was closed.

He limped a little, too, as he left the tuckshop after Bolsover major.

His chums met him as he came into the School House, and there were surprised exclamations from all of them at his appearance.

"What on earth have you been up to?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Been in a dog-fight?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Or wrestling with a motor-car?" asked Nugent.

Wharton gasped.

"I've been fighting Bolsover."

"What for?"

"To stop him ragging the new kid."

"Already!" groaned Bob Cherry. "My hat! Quelch has given you a lovely job, I must say! I can foresee a high old time for you if you're going to chip in every time that fellow is ragged."

"So can I!" groaned Wharton. "But I've given my word."

"Come down and ask cooky for a beefsteak for your eye, old man," said Bob Cherry sympathetically. "You need one."

Mr. Quelch met the juniors a moment later. He stopped to stare at the captain of the Remove.

"Goodness gracious, Wharton," he ejaculated, "what have you been doing?"

"Fighting, sir!" said Harry meekly.

"I can see that!" said the Form-master tartly. "Pray whom have you been fighting with, and why? You know that I do not approve—" Mr. Quelch paused suddenly, apparently a new thought striking him, and he looked very curiously at Wharton. "Has the new boy been getting into trouble already, Wharton?"

"I—I think so, sir."

"Very well. I shall inquire no further into this matter," said the Remove-master. "You had better do something for your eye as soon as possible."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Quelch walked away.

"He guesses!" grinned Bob Cherry.

Wharton grunted.

"It would be rather thick if he gave me lines, after planting this on me!" he said. "I didn't ask to have a howling funk to look after, and I don't like it. Br-r-r-r!"

And they proceeded in search of the beefsteak, which Wharton had the pleasure of wearing over his eye for the remainder of that happy half-holiday.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

After Lights Out!

BOLSOVER MAJOR did not show any disposition to rag Esmond again that day. His fight with Wharton, brief as it had been, had taken out of him the desire to rag anybody for the present.

But it might have been noticed that there was a considerable amount of whispering among Bolsover, and Snoop, and Stott, and Skinner, and one or two other fellows of the same sort.

Something was evidently "on," and it was not difficult for anybody to guess what that something was.

There was to be fun in the Remove dormitory after lights out.

In the dormitory the juniors would have the funk all to themselves, and they intended to give him what Skinner described as a really high old time.

They were looking forward very keenly to lights out.

Esmond wasn't.

He had heard stories of new fellows being ragged at public schools, and he was anticipating his first night in the dormitory with feelings of anything but pleasure. His only comfort was his knowledge that the Form-master had asked the captain of the Remove to look after him, and that Wharton was plainly a fellow of his word, and a great fighting-man to boot.

How long Wharton would go on fighting his battles Esmond could not say. But he hoped that the Form captain's protection would be available that night at least.

But it was in fear and trembling that he made his way to the dormitory along with the Removites.

Wingate of the Sixth came in to see lights out, and he gave the juniors a grim look. Mr. Quelch had apparently spoken to him on the subject of the new boy.

"There's not to be any row in this dorm to-night," said Wingate. "If there is I shall hear it. I'm going to keep one ear open. If I have to come up I shall bring a cane with me!"

Bolsover major grunted. He did not mean to be deprived of his prey by the fear of Wingate and a cane.

The Greyfriars captain extinguished the light, and left the dormitory. Immediately there was a buzz of voices.

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"Wingate guesses what's on!" Skinner remarked. "We shall have to put it off for another night, Bolsover."

"Rot!" said Bolsover.

"Too risky to-night," said Stott.

"Rats!"

"Look here, Bolsover, we shall all get into a row if there's any ragging to-night," said Vernon-Smith. "Leave it over."

"I won't!" said Bolsover.

"Then you can go ahead without me, for one."

"If you're afraid, Smithy, you can stay in bed," said Bolsover, with a sneer.

"Well, I'm not afraid, but—"

"Then keep to the arrangement," said Bolsover. "We're going to put that rotten funk through it; and if Wharton raises any objection, we're going to put him through it too. That's the arrangement."

"I certainly shall chip in," said Harry. "You know I've promised Quelch to see that the new kid isn't ragged."

"Oh, rats!"

Bolsover major allowed a quarter of an hour to pass to make sure that the captain of Greyfriars was gone back to his study. Then he jumped out of bed.

"Esmond!" he rapped out.

"Ye-es!" said Esmond.

"Get up!"

"Yes, Bolsover."

Esmond got up.

"Don't get up," said Harry Wharton.

"I'll jolly well yank him out if he doesn't!" snorted the bully of the Remove.

"I'll jolly soon stop you if you try it!"

"We'll see about that!" growled Bolsover.

Bolsover major struck a match, and lighted a candle-end. Percy Esmond was out of bed, standing shivering in his pyjamas.

Bolsover eyed the new junior with scorn and contempt.

"Pretty-looking specimen, ain't you?" he sneered.

"I—I—I—"

"Come here!"

Esmond obeyed.

"We're going to toss you in a blanket, to begin with," said Bolsover. "Turn out, some of you fellows. Are you afraid Wingate will hear you?"

"I'm not turning out, for one," said Vernon-Smith.

"You're a silly ass, Bolsover. I'll bet you Quelch has spoken to Wingate, and told him to look out."

"Blow Wingate!"

"You won't say that when he comes in."

"I want three fellows to help me hold the blanket," said Bolsover, glaring along the beds. "You, Skinner, and Snoop, and Bunter."

Skinner and Snoop reluctantly turned out. They did not dare to resist the bully of the Remove. Billy Bunter emitted a deep snore.

"Do you hear me, Bunter?" called out Bolsover.

Snore!

"Are you asleep, Bunter?"

Snore!

Bolsover strode towards Bunter's bed, and grasped the fat junior, and yanked him out. Bunter descended upon the floor with a bump and a yell.

"Ow! Help! Leggo! I'm asleep—ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get up!" growled Bolsover, seizing a blanket from Bunter's bed. "Now, take a corner of this, do you hear?"

"Oh, really, Bolsover—"

"I'll wallop you if you don't do as I tell you. Take a corner."

"I—I—I was only going to say that—that I'll do it with pleasure, Bolsover, old fellow," stammered Bunter.

"Better look sharp, then, you fat duffer."

Bunter took a corner of the blanket and Skinner and Snoop followed his example. The other fellows looked on from their beds. They did not want to risk Wingate's cane but they were quite prepared to enjoy the ragging of the funk. Esmond was looking quite white.

"Now, get into that blanket," said Bolsover.

Harry Wharton stepped out of bed. He was feeling far from inclined for another fight, but he was a fellow of his word. He had promised to look after Esmond, and he was going to do it.

"Get back into bed, Esmond," he said curtly.

"Stay where you are!" thundered Bolsover.

"Get to bed, Esmond," repeated Wharton.

Esmond glanced uncertainly from one to the other, and made a step towards his bed. Bolsover rushed at him and collared him promptly, and dragged him towards the blanket.

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Harry Wharton promptly seized him, and dragged him back.

"Let go, you silly fool!" shouted Bolsover.

"Rats! You let go!"

"Ow-ow-ow-ow!" came a yell of anguish from Esmond, as the two sturdy juniors pulled at him in different directions. It was like the struggle over the body of Patroclus in olden time, only Esmond happened unfortunately to be alive.

"Ow! Leggo!" he wailed. "Yow-ow! You'll p-p-pull my beastly legs off, Wharton! Yow! Leggo my neck, Bolsover! You're chook-chook-choking me."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Removites.

Bolsover made a terrific effort, and dragged Esmond out of Wharton's grasp, but the sudden cessation of resistance caused him to lose his balance, and he went over backwards on the floor with a heavy bump.

Esmond sprawled over him.

"Pull devil, pull baker!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Try again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton rushed forward, and grasped Esmond, and swung him back to his bed. Bolsover sat up, a little dazed by his fall.

"Cave!" yelled Skinner suddenly, as there was a sound in the passage of footsteps. The noise in the dormitory had been heard.

The juniors made a wild bolt for their beds.

But there was no time to escape. The dormitory door was flung open, and Wingate came striding in, with a cane in his hand, and a wrathful frown upon his face.

"I thought so!" he said grimly.

Lash! lash! lash!

Like the celebrated justices of Jedburgh, who hanged the culprits first and inquired into their guilt or innocence afterwards, Wingate did not ask for explanations. He laid the cane about all the fellows who were out of bed, and as they were very thinly clad, the lashes of the cane told with great effect. There was a sound of wild wailing and howling in the Remove dormitory.

The Remove fellows bolted for their beds like rabbits for their burrows. Not till they were all in did the prefect's cane cease to lash.

"There" panted Wingate. "I told you what would happen if there was any row here to-night! Now keep quiet, you young rascals. If I hear anything more, I'll bring your Form-master up next time."

And taking up the candle, Wingate carried it out of the dormitory with him. There were deep groans among the unfortunate juniors.

"I say, Wharton," called out Vernon-Smith.

"Well?" groaned Harry.

"Did you get any of the cane?"

"Ow! Three cuts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "That's really too good. Wingate might have stopped to ask which side you were on. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Serve you jolly well right," growled Bolsover major.

"Perhaps you won't chip in next time!"

Harry Wharton did not reply. His feelings just then were too deep for further words.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Rag!

PERCY ESMOND took his place in the Form-room with the Remove the next morning.

It was not a happy morning for him.

As it happened, he was placed between Skinner and Snoop, and both those amiable youths found a cheering occupation in whispering to him what he might expect after morning lessons.

Esmond was naturally apprehensive of what would happen when the Remove were dismissed by Mr. Quelch, and his apprehensions were not without foundation.

When the Remove were dismissed, he joined Harry Wharton in the passage.

Wharton looked at him rather grimly out of a discoloured eye. Percy Esmond was beginning to get on his nerves.

"Going out for a walk?" asked Esmond affably.

"No!"

"Staying in?"

"No!"

"Ahem! What are you doing, then?"

"I'm going down to footer practice."

"Good; I'll come with you."

"You don't play footer," said Harry.

"I—I'd like to learn," said Esmond.

Wharton understood why Esmond wanted to learn to play footer. He wanted to keep with the captain of the

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Remove. Bolsover & Co. had their watchful eyes upon him, and a ragging awaited him as soon as he was away from the shade of Wharton's protecting wing, so to speak.

"Well, come on," said Harry.

Esmond walked down to Little Side with the Famous Five. Bolsover & Co. walked after them. They did not want a row with the Famous Co.; and they were content to await their opportunity.

Harry Wharton was quite willing to initiate the new junior into the mysteries of soccer. It was possible that learning to play a manly game might make some difference in the peculiar nature of the new Removite. Esmond was sturdy and strong, and very quick upon his feet. He proved an apt pupil, and Bob Cherry gave him a word of commendation.

Bolsover major joined in the practice. As he explained with a grin to Skinner, his object was to see how the funk would stand a charge. Esmond did not stand it at all. When the burly Removite bore down upon him, Esmond abandoned the ball and backed away.

"Stop that, Bolsover!" shouted Harry Wharton angrily.

Bolsover chuckled, and charged on. Esmond fairly turned and ran. He disappeared from the football ground with Bolsover after him.

Bob Cherry burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! That chap will make a footballer—I don't think."

Harry Wharton gave a growl.

"Let's get on," he said. "He's a good sprinter, anyway, and he can look after himself for a bit. I'm not bound to be his giddy shadow."

And the juniors went on with the practice, while Esmond fled at top speed with the bully of the Remove on his track. Esmond headed for the house, but he found Skinner and Snoop in his path, and swerved away. Two or three more grinning juniors joined in the chase, and Esmond was run down at last in the ruined chapel. There he halted, panting, as he found himself surrounded.

Bolsover major came up breathing hard.

"Got you!" he remarked.

"Lemme alone!" muttered Esmond. "Look here—"

"Is that rotter Wharton following us?" asked Bolsover, looking round.

"No!" said Skinner. "He's still at the footer."

"Good! Now we can put this cad through it."

"Yes, rather."

Esmond looked round at the circle of grinning juniors with scared eyes.

"I—I say, would you fellows care to come to the tuck-shop?" he faltered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, we wouldn't," said Bolsover major.

"I'll stand treat!"

"We're going to stand treat now. We're going to teach you not to be a funk," said the bully of the Remove. "You ran away from a Highlife chap yesterday."

"Well, he—he ran after me, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Collar him!" said Bolsover.

Esmond was promptly collared. Then the ragers looked to Bolsover major for instructions. The bully of the Remove was master of the ceremonies.

Five or six more fellows had arrived on the scene. They wanted to be in the fun. Bolsover major looked at his watch.

"Plenty of time before dinner," he remarked. "Gentlemen, I vote that we put this worm on his trial as a cad and a coward and a disgrace to the Remove."

"Hear, hear!"

"If he is found guilty, he is to be executed according to law."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This isn't a laughing matter," said Bolsover, with a wink aside at his comrades. "This is serious. We can't be disgraced by this funk. Open the trap, there, Skinner."

Skinner bent over an iron ring that was fastened in a broad flagstone in the floor of the ruined chapel. Trevor helped him, and the flag was raised. A dark orifice was revealed.

"Do you see that, Esmond?" demanded Bolsover.

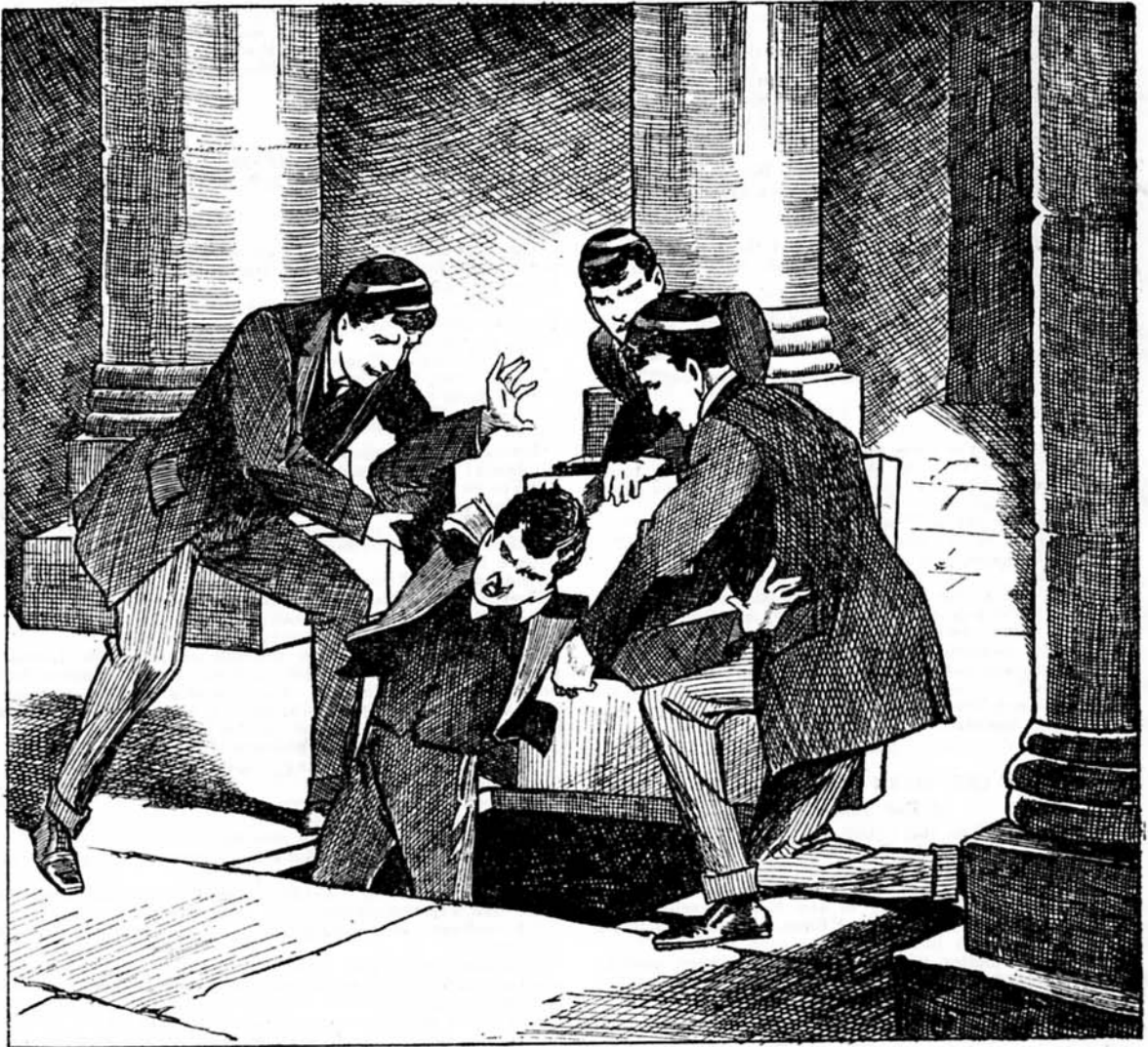
The new boy glanced at the dark opening.

"Ye-es," he faltered.

"There isn't any bottom to it, so far as is known," said Bolsover impressively. "It goes down and down. Never been plumbed right to the bottom."

Esmond trembled. The other fellows grinned; they knew that the cell under the floor of the old chapel was only six feet deep. But it was so dark that the floor could not be seen.

"Gentlemen," said Bolsover, as grave as a judge, "I put



The new junior was dragged towards the opening in the flags, struggling wildly. "Let me go! Help! Help!" "Swing him in!" shouted Bolsover. In the grasp of three or four fellows, Esmond was swung over the edge of the opening. He sank down through the gap, held by the fellows above, his face white and his eyes starting.

(See Chapter 8.)

it to you. Is that fellow a fit person to be a member of the Remove?"

"No!" chorussed the juniors.

"Isn't he a disgrace to the school?"

"Yes!"

"Wouldn't it be a mercy to him, and a benefit to the school generally, to drop him into that pit, and have done with him?"

"Hear, hear!"

"There couldn't be any trouble afterwards. He would simply disappear," said Bolsover, with terrible grimace. "It's the simplest way of getting rid of a rotten funk. I put it to the vote. He's found guilty of being a disgrace to the Remove. Do you admit that you are a disgrace to the Remove?" demanded Bolsover, turning a ferocious glare upon the new boy.

"Yes," faltered Esmond.

"The prisoner at the bar pleads guilty. Gentlemen, hands up for dropping him into the bottomless pit!"

Every fellow present held his hand up. They all looked very grave and solemn now. It seemed great fun to them to play upon the fears of the unfortunate funk. Nobody but a fellow in the last stage of funkiness could have believed that Bolsover was in earnest; and the pallor in Esmond's face, and the trembling in his limbs, showed that he was in

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mortal terror. But there was no sympathy for him; only scorn and contempt could be seen in the looks of the juniors.

"Passed unanimously!" said Skinner.

"Good! Prisoner at the bar, you have heard your sentence?"

"I—I say—"

"Have you anything to say before the sentence is carried out?" demanded Bolsover.

"I—I say, you—you don't mean it, you know," stammered Esmond. "I—I know you're only in fun, you know."

"We'll jolly soon show you whether we're in fun," said Bolsover. "Execute the sentence!"

And the new junior was dragged towards the opening in the floor.

He struggled wildly.

"Let me go! Help! Help!"

"Swing him in!" shouted Bolsover.

In the grasp of three or four fellows, Esmond was swung over the edge of the opening. He sank down through the gap, held by the fellows above, his face white, and his eyes starting.

As he swung there, in the grasp of Bolsover & Co., his feet were only a dozen inches from the floor of the little cell; but of that, of course, he was not aware. It seemed to

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him, as his feet swung in space, as if a bottomless depth was below him.

"Ready?" exclaimed Bolsover.

"Quite ready!"

"Let go!"

"Help!" shrieked Esmond.

As the juniors let him go, he made a wild clutch at Bolsover, and caught him by the collar, and hung on. Bolsover was very nearly dragged headlong into the opening.

"Let go, you fool!" he shouted.

"Help!"

Bolsover struck at him savagely, and Esmond's grasp relaxed. He disappeared into the black opening, and vanished from sight.

Bump!

His feet touched the floor at once, and there was a bump as he rolled over, and the juniors burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was no sound further from the dark cell. Bolsover, chuckling, leaned over the opening, and called out to the unseen junior.

"You rotten funk! You're not hurt! Come out!"

There was no reply.

"Esmond!"

Silence!

Bolsover felt a vague sense of uneasiness.

He peered down into the shadowy cell, and dimly made out the form of the new junior, stretched upon the floor. Esmond did not move.

"Why don't he answer?" said Snoop.

"He can't be hurt!" muttered Skinner uneasily.

"Esmond! Speak, you idiot!"

Dead silence!

"He only fell a few inches," said Bolsover. His ruddy face was a little pale now. "My hat, what a wretched funk! I—I believe he's fainted."

"The rotten coward!"

"Better get him out!" muttered Skinner. "There'd be a row if—"

Bolsover swung himself into the opening, and dropped into the cell beside the still form of the new junior.

THE NINTH CHAPTER. A Bad Scare!

ESMOND! You fool! Get up!"

Esmond did not stir.

Bolsover major bent over the motionless form.

His eyes were closed, his face fixed. He seemed hardly to breathe. The bully of the Remove seized him, and lifted him to his feet by sheer force. Esmond lay like a log in his grasp.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Skinner, peering down from above.

"Fainted, I think!" said Bolsover savagely.

"Not hurt?"

"Of course not, you ass!"

"Get him out, for goodness' sake. There'll be a row about this, if he's found like that, the beastly coward!"

"I'll pass him up to you!" growled Bolsover. "Collar the brute and drag him out."

The burly Remove raised the new boy in his arms, and lifted him within reach of the juniors above. Skinner and Snoop and Stott grasped him, and dragged him out of the opening. Then Bolsover climbed out.

Esmond was laid on the flags of the old chapel. He did not move, and he did not open his eyes. The juniors stood round him, regarding him with utter dismay. They had intended to give him a severe fright; but they had never dreamed that it would go to this length.

"Well, he's a queer fish," muttered Stott. "I—I wish we'd let him alone. It was all your fault, Bolsover."

"Oh, shut up!" growled Bolsover.

"What are we going to do with him?" snapped Skinner.

"He's not coming to. We can't leave him here like this."

"He's opening his eyes!" exclaimed Trevor in great relief.

Esmond's eyes opened.

He gazed at the juniors with a blank, unseeing gaze, as if he did not know they were there. There was something creepy and weird in his fixed stare.

Bolsover shook him roughly by the shoulder.

"Esmond! Wake up, you ass! You're all right."

"It was only a joke, Esmond," said Skinner reassuringly.

"You're not hurt, you know. You only dropped a few inches."

Esmond did not speak.

"What on earth's the matter with him?" growled Snoop.

"It looks like a fit."

"How was I to know that the beast had fits?" muttered Bolsover. "Why couldn't he say that he had fits?"

"Esmond! Get up!"

"I believe he's shamming!" said Bolsover fiercely. "He can't be so frightened as all that. Look here, Esmond, if you don't stop your monkey tricks, I'll give you a jolly good hiding! Do you hear?"

"Who are you?"

"What?"

"Where am I?"

"You know where you are well enough!" snorted Bolsover. "I know you're shamming, you rotter! You know I'm Bolsover!"

Esmond stared at him fixedly. If he was indeed shamming, he was a finished actor.

The juniors exchanged uneasy glances. Had the unfortunate funk been indeed frightened out of his senses? It looked like it.

"I'll give you one minute to get up and clear!" said Bolsover deliberately. "Then I'll start on you, if you don't chuck shamming!"

"Let him alone!" said Trevor.

"I tell you he's shamming!"

"He doesn't look like it."

"Hush! What's he saying?" muttered Skinner, with a scared look.

Esmond's lips were moving.

"Don't! Oh, don't do it! Don't!"

"You're all right now," said Skinner. "I—I say, this is awful, you chaps! Who'd have thought he'd take it like this?"

"He's shamming!" said Bolsover. "I'll bring him round with a licking!"

And he started towards the new junior.

Trevor pushed him roughly back.

"Don't touch him, you fool! It may be serious!"

"Here comes Wharton!" muttered Snoop.

Harry Wharton ran into the old chapel. The football practice was over, and the captain of the Remove had bethought him of Esmond. He uttered a startled exclamation at the sight of the white-faced boy stretched on the flagstones, with the alarmed juniors standing round him.

"What's the matter with Esmond?" he exclaimed.

"He's in a fit, or something!" snarled Bolsover.

Wharton's eyes blazed.

"What have you brutes been doing to him?"

"It—it was only a joke—"

Wharton knelt beside the new boy.

"Esmond, old man! What's the matter with you? Here, get up! Lean on my arm!"

Esmond shuddered. A little colour came back into his face. He was recovering slowly from the shock now.

"I believe he's shamming!" said Bolsover major obstinately.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Wharton angrily. "Can't you see he's been scared almost out of his wits? You have been frightening him!"

"Well, he shouldn't be such a rotten funk!"

"It was only a joke!" said Skinner. "We dropped him into the cell. It was only a few inches, only he didn't know—"

"I—I thought I was falling—falling—" muttered Esmond. "They told me that it was bottomless, and I—I thought—"

"You are a set of fools and brutes!" said Wharton. "You ought to have more sense."

"He ought to have known it was a jape!" snorted Bolsover. "Did the silly idiot really think we should drop him into a bottomless pit?"

"You knew he was a funk. It's all right, Esmond; it was only a rotten joke! Get up, and come out of here!"

Esmond rose to his feet with Wharton's assistance.

He left the ruined chapel, leaning heavily on the arm of the captain of the Remove.

Bolsover & Co. looked at one another.

"Did anybody ever see such a beastly coward?" growled Bolsover.

"Better leave him alone, after this, all the same," said Trevor. "He's got something wrong with his nerves. He might have had a fit, and we might have been sacked from the school if it had turned out to be serious."

Bolsover major snorted.

"Rats! He wants a jolly good hiding every day, till he learns not to be a rotten funk!" he said.

And he swung angrily away.

When the Remove came in to dinner many curious glances were cast at Percy Esmond. He sat at his place at the table, looking a little pale, but otherwise the same as usual. He had apparently recovered from the shock to his nerves.

Bolsover gave him a glare of contempt.

Some of the ragers were a little uneasy, thinking that

Esmond would probably speak to Mr. Quelch about what had happened. A funk was only too likely to be a sneak as well, in their opinion. But apparently sneaking was not one of Esmond's weaknesses, for he did not say a word about the occurrence to the Form-master.

After dinner Wharton stopped to speak to Bolsover. He spoke out plainly, and straight to the point.

"There's not to be any more of that kind of thing, Bolsover," he said.

Bolsover major sneered.

"No? Have you been made Head of Greyfriars, by any chance, Wharton?"

"If you don't let Esmond alone, I shall speak to Mr. Quelch about it," said Harry quietly. "The kid might be seriously hurt in his health by tricks like that. The poor beast can't help being a coward, and he's not going to be ragged."

"So you're going to start as a sneak?"

"You can call it that if you like; but I've promised Quelch to look after that poor rotter, and I'm going to do it. No more ragging, mind!"

"Rats!"

"Well, you know what to expect now."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Bolsover.

And he swung away.

THE TENTH CHAPTER. A Really Good Wheeze!

HOBSON of the Shell was in his study, with Hoskins and Pinner, his study-mates. The three Shell fellows were looking very serious.

Each of them had been going through his pockets, exposing the lining to public inspection, in the vain search for some coin that might have escaped previous searches. But no coins had come to light.

"This is rotten!" Hobson remarked. "Stony!"

"Absolutely on the rocks!" said Pinner dolefully.

"Not a brown!" said Hoskins.

"Tea in Hall, I suppose?" said Hobson, in a lugubrious tone. "And for the rest of the week, too! I wonder if we could raise a loan? There's old Coker—"

His companions grunted.

"Coker was all right when he was in the Shell with us!" growled Hoskins. "Now he's in the Fifth, he's forgotten that there's such a thing as a Shell at all. No good thinking of Coker."

"I say," began Pinner. "What about that new kid in the Remove?"

"Is there a new kid in the Remove?" yawned Hobson.

Hobson regarded the Remove with the same lofty contempt that the great Coker felt for the Shell.

"Kid named Esmond, or Desmond, or something," said Pinner. "Simply rolling in money!"

"Oh, blow the Remove! I suppose we haven't come down to borrowing from fags yet!" said Hobson, with a great deal of dignity.

"The kid's a frightful funk," went on Pinner, unheeding. "They say that the other kids in the Remove make him stand feeds to them, and threaten him with thick ears if he doesn't do it. Even that fat beast Bunter bullies him. Why shouldn't he stand us a feed?"

Hobson shook his head.

"No fear! We're not going to bully a fag into standing us a feed. We can leave that kind of thing to Loder and Carne. They make their fags find 'em in grub when they're short of tin. Not good enough for us!"

Tap!

"Oh, come in, fathead!" growled Hobson, as a knock came at the door.

Esmond of the Remove entered.

"Hallo! Talk of angels!" said Pinner. "Here he is!"

"Well, what do you want, young shaver?" demanded Hobson brusquely.

"I want to speak to you, Hobson—in private," said Esmond calmly.

Pinner and Hoskins glared at him.

"Well, of all the cheek—!" began Hoskins.

"Like us to clear out of our own study, perhaps!" snorted Pinner.

"Yes, please."

"I'll 'yes, please,' you, you cheeky fag!" growled Pinner, getting up.

"Hold on!" said Hobson. "Clear off a minute or two, you fellows, if the kid wants to speak to me. Perhaps it will be all right."

Pinner and Hoskins understood. The possibility of raising a loan from the junior in time for tea cleared the clouds from their brows at once. They left the study.

"Now then!" said Hobson. "What is it? Like your cheek to come here at all! But I'll hear what you've got to say. Pile in!"

"Thanks!" said Esmond. "I understand that you're short of money, Hobson."

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ONE
PENNY.

Hobson bestowed a glare upon him.

"You cheeky young sweep! What's that got to do with you, and how do you know anything about it, anyway? Have you been listening at the door?"

Esmond flushed.

"I don't listen at doors!" he said. "I know about it because I heard you ask Temple of the Fourth for a loan, and he couldn't manage it."

"Oh, you did, did you? Well, what then?"

"I've got lots of money," Esmond explained.

Hobson's look became kind and cordial at once.

"Oh, I see!" he remarked. "Well, it's like your cheek to think of loaning money to a fellow in the Shell; but I'll look over that. I could do with a loan of ten bob till Saturday."

"I dare say you could," said Esmond, with a grin. "But that isn't what I mean. One good turn deserves another, don't you think?"

"You want me to do something for you?" asked Hobson, puzzled.

"Yes."

"Well, what is it?"

"I dare say you've heard about me," said Esmond calmly. "I'm a funk."

"Wha-a-at!"

"I can't fight."

"Can't you?"

"No; and that makes things rather rough on me in the Remove. The Remove fellows seem to like fighting better than eating."

Hobson chuckled.

"They're an unruly set of young rascals!" he agreed. "I suppose a chap who admits that he's a funk can't have a very rosy time among them. Serve you jolly well right, too. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Well, I'm not!" said Esmond cheerfully. "I've thought it out, and I don't see anything to be ashamed of in having weak nerves. I suppose you're not ashamed of your face, are you—you can't help it."

Hobson turned almost purple. He was not a beauty, certainly; but the Removite's remark was really quite uncalculated.

"You—you impertinent young whelp!" stuttered Hobson. "You let my face alone! I'll—"

Esmond backed away hastily.

"I was only putting a case," he explained. "Don't get ratty. To come down to business, I want you to stand by me. I've asked the fellows about you. You're a good boxer."

"That's so!"

"And you ain't a funk."

"I'd like to hear any fellow call me a funk," growled Hobson truculently.

"And you don't object to a fight now and then?"

"Of course I don't."

"And you could lick Bolsover of the Remove?"

"I suppose so," said Hobson, puzzled. "What on earth are you driving at?"

"I want to make an arrangement with you," explained Esmond. "You're short of tin, and you don't have a big allowance, either—so the fellows say. I have as much money as I want, and more. Now, why shouldn't we strike a bargain?"

"A bargain!" said the perplexed Hobson. "Blessed if I know what you're getting at! Suppose you explain."

"You can fight, and I can't—I've got heaps of money, and you haven't," said Esmond succinctly. "Now, if you agree to fight my battles for me, I'll agree to stand you all the feeds you can possibly want. I'll give an order regularly every day for you at the tuckshop, so long as you stand by me. Is it a go?"

Hobson started blankly at the Removite.

The cool proposal almost took his breath away. His first impulse was to take Esmond by the collar and throw him out of the study, for having the cool cheek to suppose that he, Hobson of the Shell, would take his beastly money. But he did not act on that impulse.

It was true that Hobson had a small allowance; and he also had expensive tastes, and a very excellent appetite. The prospect of unlimited feeds was an attractive one, and after all, if he rendered service in return for them, why shouldn't he accept such an offer?

Besides, it would be a good deed to protect this miserable specimen of humanity from raggings. Hobson, who was a big, powerful fellow, was rather given to being overbearing himself; but he objected to bullying on principle. He had a way of cuffing fags, but when he was himself subjected to kind attentions from Loder of the Sixth, he realised that a bully was a real rotter. On second thoughts—which are said to be

always best—Esmond's proposed bargain struck him as a really good idea.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Hobson, at last, after quite a long silence.

"What do you say?" asked Esmond eagerly. "It's a jolly good wheeze, I think! Every time I'm ragged, you chip in and whack them. And all the time you can live on the fat of the land, without being a penny the worse."

Hobson burst into a laugh.

"Well, you are a queer beggar!" he exclaimed. "Of course, if I consented to anything of the kind, it would have to be kept dark."

"Oh, of course!"

"You see, it would be utterly impossible for me to accept any favours from a rotten fag in the Remove," Hobson explained.

"Quite so," agreed Esmond, suppressing a grin.

"If anything should be said on the subject, I should make it a point to give you the hiding of your life," added Hobson.

"Not a syllable, Hobson."

"All right, then—you can go and order a feed for this study!" said Hobson.

"And then you'll come with me and liek Bolsover major?"

"Ahem! Of course, I can't pitch into a chap for nothing," said Hobson. "If Bolsover bullies you, of course, it's a

different matter. As an older chap, in fact practically a senior, it would then be my duty to chip in and stop any bullying. I disapprove of bullying."

"That's good enough," said Esmond. "You're a good chap, Hobson."

"I make it a point to be kind to fags," said Hobson, condescendingly.

"I'll buzz off at once," said Esmond. "Could you happen to stroll along the Remove passage after tea—say about half-past six?"

"Done!"

Esmond left the study, looking quite satisfied. Hoskins and Pinner, who had been waiting for him to go, came in.

"Well, what was all the jaw about?" demanded Pinner.

"Oh, I've been giving him some good advice," said Hobson airily. "It's up to us in the Shell to look after the fags a bit, don't you think so?"

Pinner and Hoskins stared at him. It was the first time they had heard the captain of the Shell give expression to those views.

"Gone off your rocker?" asked Pinner.

"By the way, it's all right about tea," said Hobson, apparently not hearing the question. "I'm expecting some things from the tuckshop."

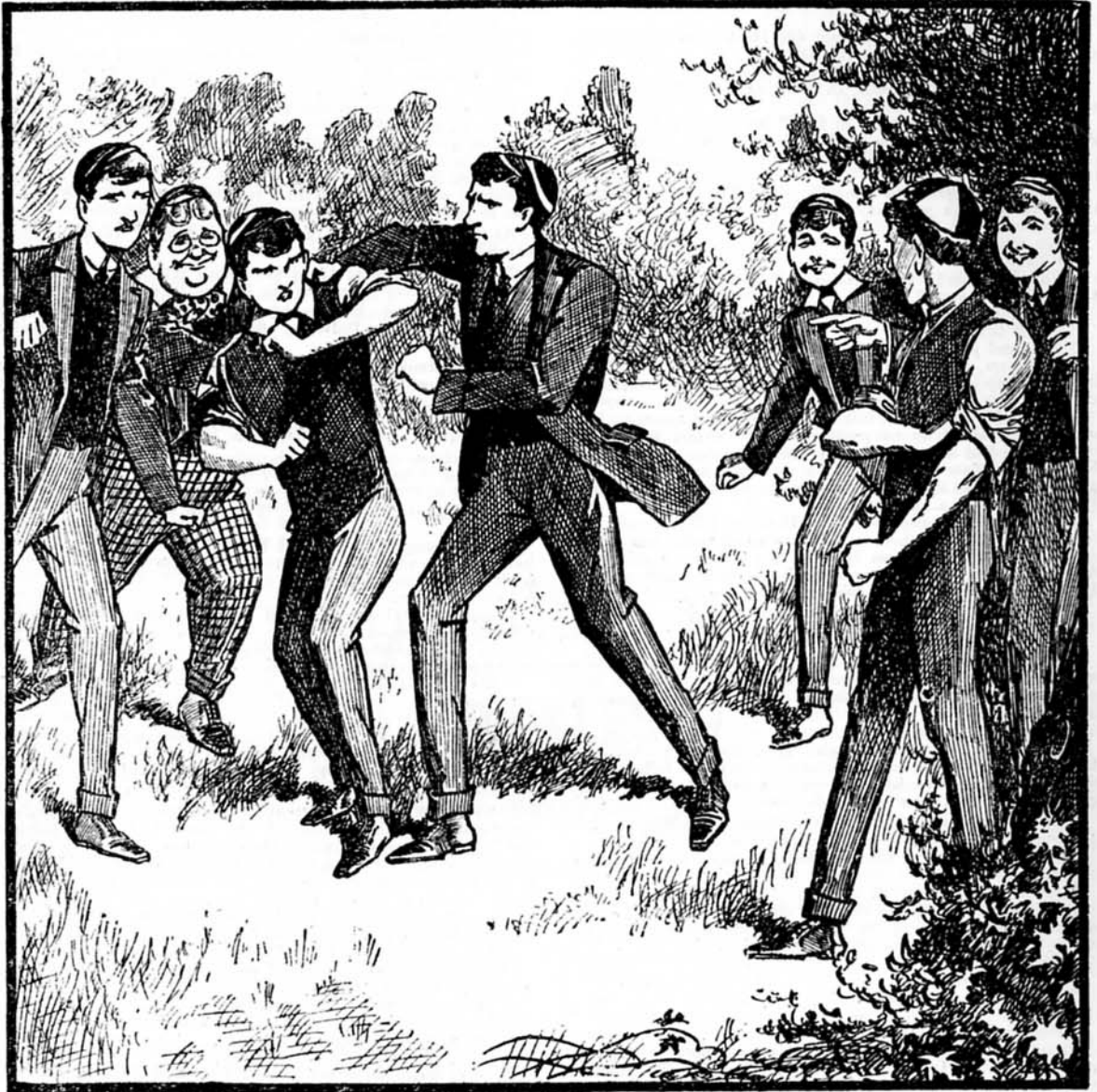
"Esmond standing it?"

"Esmond has taken an order to the tuckshop for me," said



GOOD TURNS.
No. 33.

A kind-hearted and sturdy Magnetite goes out of his way to lend a helping hand to a little girl who has to trudge up a long, steep hill, against a rough wind, on her way to school.



"You're going to fight Ponsonby!" said the bully of the Remove. "Hallo—stop him—collar him—after him!" Esmond made a sudden break for the road, but he was secured before he could escape, and dragged back, struggling and panting! (See Chapter 13.)

Hobson, with dignity. "I'm standing the tea. If you fellows care to join me—"

"What-ho!" said Pinner and Hoskins together emphatically.

Ten minutes later Mrs. Mimble's hopeful son arrived in the study with a large package.

"Shove it down there, kid," said Hobson.

The heavily-laden basket was dumped on the floor, and the boy left the study.

The Shell fellows opened the basket eagerly.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Pinner. "This beats it! I have you come into a fortune, Hobby, old man?"

Hobson grinned with satisfaction.

"Ham and tongue and jam and cake and doughnuts!" he murmured. "My only summer hat! I think I've made rather a hit this time!"

And the chums of the Shell revelled in plenty—such plenty as had seldom been seen in their study before. And Hobson's feelings towards the funk of the Remove were the kindest imaginable.

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THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER. Not as Per Programme!

HARRY WHARTON looked out of his study. A loud bump had sounded along the Remove passage. Esmond was sprawling on the floor, and Bolsover major was glaring down at him. At the window at the end of the passage, three Shell fellows were standing, chatting. They all looked round at the sound of the bump.

"What's the row there?" called out Wharton.

Esmond sat up.

"Ow, ow, ow!" he groaned.

"Look here, Bolsover—"

"The cheeky rotter had the cheek to come into my study!" roared Bolsover. "Came into my study, and called me names! That funk!"

"I called you a rotter!" gasped Esmond. "So you are a rotter!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, who had also been attracted out of his study by the noise. "What's



the matter with you, Esmond? Not much in your line to beard the lion in his den, is it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I'll make him beg pardon on his giddy knees!" howled Bolsover, seizing Esmond and jerking him to his feet. "Now, then—"

Hobson of the Shell left Pinner and Hoskins at the window, and came striding along the passage.

"Now, then, none of that!" he exclaimed.
Bolsover released Esmond, in sheer amazement, and stared at the Shell fellow.

"What are you chipping in for?" he demanded. "What are you doing in our passage at all, you rotter? Clear off!"

"I'm not going to allow any bullying," said Hobson, loftily.

"You're not going to allow!" yelled Bolsover. "What's it got to do with you, anyway? Clear out before you get chucked out!"

"Let that kid alone."

"Wha-a-at!"

"You hear me?" said Hobson. "If you touch that kid again, I'll lick you!"

Bolsover gasped.

"You'll lick me?"

"Yes, and jolly sharp, too!"

"Come on, then, and do it!" roared Bolsover. "I can lick any chap in the Shell, or in the Fifth, either! Come on and do it!"

Bolsover had his faults, but he had plenty of courage. He would have stood up to anybody at Greyfriars in a fight, whether he had a chance or not. And he was so powerfully built, such a mass of muscle and sinew, that he really stood a good chance even against a fellow in the Shell who was known for his powers as a fighting-man.

The passage was crowded with Remove fellows now, and they gave Bolsover a cheer. Bolsover was a bully, and a good many fellows in his Form had felt the weight of his heavy fist. But it was the Remove against the Shell, now, and the Remove fellows backed up Bolsover to a man.

"Bravo, Bolsover!"

"Go it!"

"Pile in, old chap!"

Encouraged by the cheers of his Form-fellows, and the novel sensation of finding himself, for the moment, the hero of the Form, Bolsover clenched his big fists, and pranced up to Hobson.

"Come on!" he roared.

Hobson came on fast enough. He intended to keep his bargain with Esmond, not only because he was a fellow of his word, but because he had a pleasant anticipation of another gorgeous feed to follow on the morrow.

And he had no doubt whatever about his ability to lick Bolsover major, big and strong as he was.

In a moment more, the two burly fellows were going it hammer and tongs.

Esmond retreated out of the way. All the Remove fellows who were in their studies crowded out to see the fight. They shouted encouragement to Bolsover, transformed for the nonce into the champion of the Remove.

"Go it, Bolsover!"

"Go for his nose!"

"That's right, thump him!"

"Bravo!"

"Hooray!"

Pinner and Hoskins looked on in astonishment. They did not know why Hobson had brought them to the Remove passage, and they didn't know why he had tackled Bolsover major. And they had their doubts about whether he could lick that formidable antagonist.

And they had reason for their doubts.

Hobson made the speedy and painful discovery that Bolsover, junior as he was, was a decidedly tough nut to crack.

He did not care in the least for Hobson's blows; he did not even seem to feel them. They rained on him, and he did not heed.

And all the time he was pommeling the Shell fellow with fists that seemed as heavy as lead, and as hard as iron.

They clutched one another, and reeled to and fro, trampling and punching and gasping and snorting. There was very little science in that fight, but a terrific amount of hard hitting.

"My hat! What a giddy circus!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Blessed if I don't think Bolsover will pull it off! Hooray!"

Wharton frowned a little.

"Hobby was chipping in for Esmond," he said. "That was decent of him."

"Oh, rats! Let him keep out of our quarters," said Bob warmly. "You've taken the ducky darling under your wing, and there's no need for Hobson to chip in. We don't want the Shell here."

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Every Wednesday.

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"Rather not!" chimed in Nugent; and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh observed that the "rather-notfulness was terrific."

Tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp!

"Grooh!"

"Ow—ow! Yah, you rotter!"

"Take that—ow!"

"Grooh! Take that!"

Bolsover went down heavily at last, his eyes blinking, his nose streaming red. Hobson stood panting over him.

"Now, then, you rotter—"

Bolsover jumped up like a Jack-in-the-box.

"Go it, Bolsover!"

"I'm going it!" gasped Bolsover major.

And he went it.

Hobson had hoped that that knock-down blow at close quarters would have finished the Removeite. But his hope was ill-founded. Bolsover was as keen as ever.

At it again they went, hammer and tongs. Tramp, tramp, tramp!

"A giddy battle of the giants, isn't it?" chuckled Johnny Bull. "Bolsover is getting the best of it, by George!"

"Hobby's got bellows to mend, I guess," said Fisher T. Fish. "Go it, Bolsover. My aunt, that was a regular sockdolager!"

Hobson went down with a crash. Bolsover major reeled against the wall, and held on to it for support.

"Come on!" he panted. "I ain't done yet! Come on, you rotter! I'll finish you, if you ain't finished already! Come on!"

But Hobson only sat up dazedly, and blinked round him, gasping as if he would never cease to gasp.

"Come on!" panted Bolsover.

"Ow!" groaned Hobson. "I'm done with you, you beast! Ow!"

"Had enough?" demanded Bolsover, secretly very glad to hear it. He also had had enough; but he would have gone on if Hobson had come up to the scratch.

"Grooh! Yes."

Pinner and Hoskins picked up their unfortunate Form-fellow, and helped him away. Bolsover major dabbed his nose with a handkerchief that came away deep red.

The passage rang with cheers.

"Bravo, Bolsover!"

"Hooray!"

"Well done!"

Harry Wharton & Co. joined in the cheering. Bolsover had put up a splendid fight, and it was a victory of the Remove over the Shell. Bolsover major, the bully of the Remove, was the hero of the hour.

Esmond stole away, greatly dismayed. His excellent arrangement with Hobson of the Shell had not "panned out" well. The obnoxious Bolsover had licked his champion. Esmond made his way to the Shell passage, and looked in at Hobson's study. Hobson had collapsed into his arm-chair, and was feebly dabbing his nose with his handkerchief, and Pinner and Hoskins were telling him what they thought of him, possibly by way of comfort and consolation.

"I—I say, you didn't bring it off!" said Esmond.

Hobson glared at him out of one eye. It was impossible to glare, or to do anything else, with the other.

"You—you worm!" he muttered.

"Are you going to try again?" asked Esmond.

"Try again!" murmured the arrangement.

"Yes, you remember the arrangement."
Hobson made an effort to rise, and sank back again. He was utterly fagged out, and had not energy enough left to kick Esmond down the passage.

"Pinner, old man," he said imploringly, "do me a favour, will you? Take that rotten young beast by the neck, and kick him along the passage."

"Certainly," said Pinner.

But Esmond did not wait. He was gone before Pinner could reach the door, and his rapid footsteps died away down the passage.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The White Feather!

"LETTER for you, Esmond!" said Billy Bunter.

Esmond took the letter. It was a large one, and evidently contained something more weighty than mere letters.

The new junior looked a little puzzled.

"I don't know anybody at Highcliffe," he remarked, as he noted the postmark on the large envelope.

"Letter from Highcliffe," said Skinner, who was looking on. "From one of the Highcliffe chaps, perhaps. Let's see what's in it. Yes, I know that writing—it's Ponsobny's fist."

"I don't see why Ponsobny should write to me," said

Esmond, apparently hesitating about opening the letter. Perhaps he guessed that it contained something unpleasant.

"Oh, open it," said Skinner, whose interest was awakened. "Let's see what Ponsonby's got to say. He's the chap who was chasing you the day you came here, isn't he?"

"Yes."
"Well, open the letter."

"I'll chuck it into the fire without opening it," said Esmond. "I don't want to hear from him."

"No, you won't," said Skinner, as Esmond made for the big fireplace in the hall. "Stop that. We're going to hear what Ponsonby has to say."

"It's my letter," said Esmond.

"Rats!" Skinner exhibited a clenched fist. "Do you want your front teeth knocked through your back ones?"

"Nunno!"

"Open that letter, then."

Two or three more fellows had gathered round, and they all echoed Skinner's demand. They all wanted to know what Ponsonby of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe had to say to the funk of the Remove.

Esmond did not resist further. He opened the large envelope.

There was no letter inside. A large white feather was revealed to view. Esmond stared at it blankly.

There was a yell of laughter from the Removites.

"The white feather! Ha, ha, ha!"

Esmond's face became crimson.

He understood Ponsonby's little joke. The white feather was a reminder of the cowardice he had shown in his encounter with the Highcliffe junior.

"The rotter!" he muttered. "The cad!"

"The white feather!" chuckled Skinner. "Might have guessed it!"

"Like his rotten cheek sending a white feather here, all the same," growled Bolsover major. "Disgraceful, I call it. And we can't say anything—this rotter is a funk, and they all know it. Any other fellow would go over to Highcliffe, and knock Ponsonby into the middle of next week. But Esmond won't."

"Of course he won't!" sneered Skinner.

"Too rotten a coward for that!" growled Bulstrode.

"I—I can't go there, you know," faltered Esmond. "I—I couldn't! They—they wouldn't let me in, you know."

Bolsover major snorted.

"You could get at Ponsonby easily enough, if you wanted to," he said.

"That isn't what's troubling you. You're afraid!"

"Yah! Funk!"

"Coward!"

"Stick the white feather on him, and march him round the Close with it on," suggested Ogilvy.

There was a chorus of approval at once.

Esmond made a bound to escape; but Bolsover major's powerful hands grasped him and dragged him back. Esmond parted in the clutch of the bully of the Remove. Skinner took the white feather, and fastened it in Esmond's cap.

"Now bring him out!" he exclaimed.

"Good egg!"

"March!"

And Esmond was marched out of the School House in the midst of a crowd of juniors.

It was Saturday afternoon, a half-holiday, and the Close was full of fellows. At the sight of Esmond with the white feather in his cap, there was a shout of laughter on all sides.

Esmond walked between Bolsover and Skinner, who held his arms, so that he could not remove the badge of cowardice. His face was crimson, and his eyes lowered. The laughter of the crowd, and the jeers that greeted him, jarred upon his ears, and stung him to the very heart. He had said that he was not ashamed of being a funk; but at this moment he looked the picture of shame.

"Oyez! oyez! oyez!" ohrrrupted Skinner. "Here's the coward. Here's the giddy funk! Make way for the white feather."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah, funk!"

Crowds of juniors joined in the procession, till more than half of the Lower School were marching round the unfortunate funk, who walked on miserably, with the tall white feather waving in his cap.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as he caught sight of the procession in the Close. "There's your hopeful protegee, Wharton."

Wharton uttered an angry exclamation.

"Why can't they let him alone?" he growled. "I'm going to put a stop to this."

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FOR NEXT MONDAY—

"BLUNDELL'S PRIZE!"

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Bob caught his arm.

"Don't chip in now, Harry. After all, he shouldn't be a funk. Besides, there's old Quelch coming."

Wharton paused. The procession was passing the School House door, and the master of the Remove, aroused from his studies by the shouting, was looking out. Mr. Quelch's brow set in a dark frown at the sight of the procession and the white feather waving over Percy Esmond's head.

He strode out of the School House, and raised his hand.

"Stop at once! Do you hear?"

"Cave!" murmured Skinner.

The procession halted in a disorderly array before the steps of the School House. Some of the fellows looked uneasy under the Form-master's stern glance; but Bolsover major did not lose his nerve.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"This chap is a rotten funk, sir," replied Bolsover calmly. "We're showing him up. He's had this white feather sent to him from a Highcliffe chap, and he's not ashamed of it. We're trying to shame him."

"I will not allow this kind of thing, Bolsover. Release Esmond at once."

"Very well, sir."

"Follow me, Esmond."

Esmond followed the Form-master into the School House. A deep groan of contempt from the crowd followed Esmond.

Mr. Quelch took the white feather, crumpled it, and tossed it into the fire in the hall, where it was consumed at once. Then he signed to Esmond to follow him into his study. Esmond entered the room after the Form-master in silence.

Mr. Quelch was silent for some moments, appearing to be at a loss for words.

"This is very unfortunate, Esmond," he said at last.

"Yes, sir," said Esmond, with downcast eyes.

"Of course, I cannot approve of fighting," said Mr. Quelch; "but surely, Esmond, you know that a boy should try not to be a coward."

"I know, sir."

"Really, Esmond, unless you can acquire a little more firmness of character, the best thing you can do is to request your parents to take you away from Greyfriars," said Mr. Quelch sharply.

"What has just occurred is simply disgraceful—but it is difficult to punish half a hundred boys for showing their contempt of cowardice."

"I don't want them punished, sir."

"But such scenes cannot be permitted. Really, Esmond, I think it was a mistake your coming to Greyfriars at all. I

recommend you to enter into manly sports and games, and to endeavour to acquire a little more firmness. So long as you remain a known coward, you will be persecuted—it is in the nature of things. By making an effort you can overcome this weakness. I advise you to try. You may go, Esmond."

And Esmond went, with downcast eyes.

The Form-master wanted to be kind to him, but he was impatient, and he could not conceal the fact that he shared, to a great extent, the contempt that the juniors felt for the coward.

And his contempt cut Esmond to the quick. Yet what was he to do, he wondered miserably, as he went his way. He was a coward—there was no getting out of that—and he could not help it. Was it possible that, as the Form-master said, by an effort of mind the weakness of the spirit could be overcome?

Esmond shook his head hopelessly at the thought. He had tried—he had tried hard. But always a want of confidence in himself had foiled him. He was ashamed—miserably ashamed—but he had resigned himself to his shame.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Forced to Fight!

"COMING out, Esmond?"

Esmond started a little.

He was standing by himself in the Close, his hands plunged into his pockets, in moody reflection.

Harry Wharton & Co. were playing football, and most of the other fellows had their various occupations on the half-holiday; and Esmond was feeling very lonely.

Almost the only fellow who had shown him any friendship was Wharton; and his kindness was mingled with scorn.

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Esmond felt keenly the want of a "pal." He was glad even when Billy Bunter spoke to him.

"Coming out?" he repeated.

Billy Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles with a peculiar glimmer in his little round eyes.

"Yes; come out for a walk, Esmond."

Bunter was about the last person at Greyfriars with whom Esmond would have cared to be friendly; but Bunter was better than solitude. So the new junior nodded.

"I'll come with pleasure," he said.

And they walked across the Close together, and out of the school gates.

Billy Bunter took the lane to Friardale, and Esmond strolled with him. The countryside was showing the green tints of spring, and there was a fresh breeze from the sea. It was very pleasant in the leafy lane, but Esmond had no eyes for scenery. His thoughts were bitter and unpleasant.

He started as they came in sight of the stile in the lane. On the stile, in a row, were seated Bolsover major, Skinner, and Snoop.

Esmond cast a quick glance at Bunter. The Owl of the Remove was grinning.

"You—you fat rotter!" exclaimed Esmond breathlessly.

"You've tricked me."

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter.

Bolsover and his companions had jumped off the stile, and were running towards them. Esmond understood at once that Bunter's invitation to take a walk was a trick to get him outside the school, into the hands of the ragers. He turned back towards Greyfriars, but Billy Bunter planted himself in his path, with a pair of fat fists raised.

"Stop!" said Bunter.

"Let me pass!"

"Rats! Here he is, Bolsover."

Esmond panted.

On any other occasion, he would not have tackled even a fat, unweildy fellow like Bunter, but with Bolsover major behind him, he found a desperate courage in his fear itself. He made a rush at Bunter, hitting out blindly. Bunter gave a roar as Esmond's fist crashed on his fat chin, and he went spinning across the road.

"Ow! Ow! Beast! Yah!"

Esmond passed him and fled like a deer.

"After him!" roared Bolsover.

The three juniors dashed in pursuit. Bunter sat up in the dust, and held his fat chin in his fat hands, and groaned.

Esmond ran fleetly; but as he ran, Stott of the Remove jumped out of the hedge in advance of him, and stood in his path. Esmond halted. His flight was cut off. He cast a desperate glance at the high hedges bordering the road; but before he could make up his mind what to do, his pursuers were upon him. Bolsover's heavy grasp fell upon his shoulder, and he was a prisoner.

"Don't be afraid, you wretched cad," said Bolsover contemptuously. "We're not going to hurt you. It's not a ragging this time."

"What do you want?" gasped Esmond.

"We want you. You wouldn't have come out if we'd asked you, though any other fellow would have been glad to, considering what's on."

"What do you mean?"

"We're going to meet Ponsonby of Highcliffe."

"Ponsonby?" faltered Esmond.

"Exactly. We happen to know where he is this afternoon, and you're going to lick him for sending that white feather—see?"

Esmond shivered.

"I—I can't!"

"Wait till we plant you face to face with Ponsonby," said Skinner, "you'll stand up to him then. You'll have to!"

"I won't!" panted Esmond.

"Don't you want to lick him for sending you a white feather?" bawled Bolsover angrily.

"N-no!"

"And you ain't ashamed to say so?" exclaimed the bully of the Remove, in deep disgust. "Blessed if you don't take the whole giddy cake! Well, if you're willing to take it quietly, we're not! You're not going to disgrace the Remove, if we can stop you. Do you think we're going to have the Highcliffe rotters cackling at us, simply because you're a rotten coward?"

"No fear!" said Skinner. "You ought to be jolly keen to meet Ponsonby, and give him something back for his white feather."

"I—I—I—"

"Keen or not, he's going to meet him!" said Bolsover.

"Come on!"

"Let me go. I—I—"

"This way!" said Bolsover major. And he linked his arm

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in Esmond's; and the funk of the Remove had no choice about accompanying him.

Esmond's face was red and white by turns as he walked into Friardale with his tormentors. There was no escape for him now, but he knew that he had no courage to face the enemy he was seeking. Bolsover major halted outside Uncle Clegg's tuckshop.

Three fellows in Highcliffe caps were there, sitting round the little table under the old elm tree, and sipping lemonade. They were Ponsonby, and Monson, and Vavasour of Highcliffe.

They rose to their feet as the Greyfriars fellows came up. There were five of the Greyfriars juniors, and only three of the Highcliffians, and Ponsonby & Co. anticipated trouble.

"I thought we'd meet you," said Bolsover, with satisfaction. "We've brought a fellow along to see you, Ponsonby. You sent him a white feather to-day."

Ponsonby grinned.

"He's come to give you a licking in return for it," said Bolsover. "One good turn deserves another, you know. Haven't you, Esmond?"

"I—I—I—"

"Have you come to give Ponsonby a licking or not?" roared Bolsover, compressing Esmond's arm till he gasped with pain.

"Ye-es!" stammered Esmond.

The Highcliffe fellows laughed derisively.

"He looks as if he would give anybody a licking—I don't think!" remarked Monson. "More used to using his feet than his hands, I should say."

"Will you come out of the village and stand up to him, Ponsonby?"

Ponsonby yawned.

"My dear chap, I've no time to waste licking that rotten funk!"

"You'll lick him or me, and you can take your choice," said Bolsover grimly. "I suppose you know I could wipe up the ground with all three of you, and not half try, either."

The Highcliffe fellows exchanged glances.

"Of course, I don't mind giving the fellow a licking, if you really want me to," said Ponsonby airily. "It is understood that we get fair play—none of you others interfere?"

"Honour bright!"

"Then we're quite at your service, my dear fellow."

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Come on, then."

The three Highcliffe fellows strolled out of the village with Bolsover & Co. On second thoughts, Ponsonby did not object to reaping a little cheap glory by licking a fellow who was evidently too funky to take care of himself.

Bolsover halted in a field, where a clump of trees hid them from view from the lane.

"This will do!" he remarked.

Ponsonby peeled off his jacket, and gave it to Monson to hold.

"Ready?" he remarked.

"Take off your jacket, Esmond!"

"M-m-my jacket!" stammered Esmond.

"Yes, your jacket, idiot!" snorted Bolsover major. "Do you want to fight with your jacket on, fathead?"

"I—I don't want to fight at all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Ponsonby & Co.

"Take his jacket off him, Snoop!"

Snoop grinned and jerked Esmond's jacket off. The funk of the Remove stood in his shirt sleeves. Bolsover jerked him forward to face Ponsonby.

"Ready?" he demanded.

"Nunno!"

"Ready or not, you're going to fight!" said the bully of the Remove. "Hallo, stop him—collar him—after him!"

Esmond had made a sudden break for the road.

The juniors dashed after him, while Ponsonby & Co. yelled with laughter. Esmond was secured before he could escape, and dragged back, struggling and panting.

"If you break away again, I'll hammer you till you won't know your own chivvy in the looking-glass," shouted Bolsover. "Now begin!"

He swung Esmond forward at Ponsonby, with such force that the funk of the Remove bumped on the Highcliffe junior. Ponsonby promptly hit out, and Esmond measured his length in the grass.

"Time!" shouted Bolsover.

"Get up!"

"I—I won't!"

"I'll kick you black and blue if you don't!" roared Bolsover, infuriated by the mocking laughter of the Highcliffians.

"Get up, you coward!"

He drew back his heavy boot. Esmond jumped to his feet.

"Now pile in, you beastly worm!"

And Esmond—between the devil and the deep sea, as it were—piled in. He was more afraid of Bolsover than he was of Ponsoby, and he chose the lesser antagonist. And the Greyfriars juniors stood close round, on the watch for him, to drag him back if he made another attempt to bolt.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER. A Surprising Victory!

ESMOND'S face was white as he stood up before Ponsoby. Ponsoby was grinning maliciously.

He winked to his chums, indicating that he was going to give them some fun, and Monson and Vavasour grinned with delighted anticipation.

Ponsoby "sailed in" and started by knocking Esmond all round the ring. Bolsover & Co. looked on grimly. A rat in a corner will fight—and Bolsover had expected that when Esmond found that there was no escape, he would put up a good show. But the wretched funk was allowing himself to be knocked about like a punching-ball.

"Oh, this is funny!" gasped Monson. "Go it, Ponsoby! Another on his nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Buck up, you worm!" shouted Bolsover furiously. "If you don't lick him, I'll thrash you within an inch of your life when he's finished with you."

Esmond panted.

He was getting excited, and the pain of the blows he was receiving roused his angry feelings.

To his own surprise, he found himself beginning to feel keen for the fight—the instinct for battle was waking within him.

He stood his ground at last, and Ponsoby's attack was checked—indeed, pushing on a little too recklessly, in his contempt for his opponent, Ponsoby found himself stopped by a heavy right-hander full on the nose.

He staggered back with a gasp, and sat down; and Bolsover gave a chirrup of delight.

"Bravo! You rotter, you can fight after all! Pile in and win!"

"Go it, Esmond!"

"Give him beans!"

Esmond's face lighted up, and his eyes gleamed. The shouts of encouragement from his Form-fellows were like wine to him.

And he was amazed to find that he was not afraid.

Ponsoby jumped up and came on furiously. There were no rounds in that fight; the two combatants hammered away at their own sweet will. Ponsoby had not expected it to last as long as a round in fact. But it was lasting longer than he had anticipated. The wretched funk, whom he had intended to knock sky-high, or higher, was developing an unexpected obstinacy.

Esmond piled in; and as he was an active, sturdy fellow, fully a match for Ponsoby physically, in fact rather more than a match, for Ponsoby was out of condition, he began to gain the upper hand.

Ponsoby was surprised to find himself sitting in the grass again.

Bolsover's face was illuminated with delight. He patted Esmond on the back, as the champion stood gasping, waiting for Ponsoby to rise.

"Good—good!" he exclaimed. "You can fight, you bouncer. What have you been pretending to be a funk for? You're beating him!"

"Beating him hollow!" said Skinner encouragingly. "Go in and win!"

"I'll beat him!" said Esmond, setting his teeth.

"Bravo!"

Vavasour had helped Ponsoby to his feet. The Highcliffe fellow was looking decidedly groggy, and he had bellows to mend with a vengeance. At that moment Ponsoby bitterly regretted the "doggishness" which had impelled him to smoke half a dozen cigarettes that day. He needed all his wind now—and his wind was wanting.

Ponsoby would have been glad enough to leave off at that point, and the signs of hesitation in his looks were very encouraging to Esmond.

"Come on!" shouted Esmond. "I'm waiting for you!"

"Bravo!" yelled Bolsover major.

Ponsoby came on—slowly!

Esmond met him with a hot attack, and the Highcliffe fellow backed away, and was driven round the ring in his turn, followed up by the funk of the Remove.

Esmond seemed to have forgotten, in the excitement of the

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combat, that he was a funk at all; certainly he did not look like a funk now.

His teeth were set, his eyes were gleaming, and he took no notice of the blows that Ponsoby rained upon his flushed face, as he attacked the Highcliffe fellow. Ponsoby was getting twice the punishment he gave, and he was plainly sickening of it.

Bolsover was in a state of great delight. Although he did not make himself agreeable in the Remove, he had the honour of the Form at heart, and he keenly desired to avenge the affront of the white feather. Esmond was turning out better than he had ventured to expect. Bolsover felt very friendly towards him just then, and he chirruped out encouragement at every blow.

"Stand up to him! Go for his ribs! One on his nose! Bravo! He won't last much longer! Pile in! That's right! Hooray!"

Thus encouraged, Esmond piled in manfully.

One of his eyes was closed, his nose was swollen and streaming with red, and a thin stream of scarlet ran from the corner of his mouth.

But he did not seem to feel his injuries.

He seemed to be, as Skinner remarked, a "hog" for fighting, now that he had fairly started. His expression was almost bloodthirsty as he followed up the weakening Ponsoby, knocking him right and left.

Bump!

Ponsoby was down at last, so knocked about that he could hardly see out of his blinking eyes.

Monson ran to him.

"I—I'm done!" gasped Ponsoby. "I—I can't go on!"

"Just try him one more round," urged Monson. "He's a funk, you know!"

Ponsoby groaned.

"Not much like a funk, the way he's been handling me. He's been spoofing us, I suppose. Ow! I feel as if my face was knocked, right off!"

"Just try—"

"Try him yourself!" snarled Ponsoby.

But that Monson had no mind to do.

"Is your man ever going to get up?" hooted Bolsover major.

"He's done!" said Monson.

"Licked?"

"Yes."

"You own up you're licked, Ponsoby?"

"Ow! Yes!" groaned Ponsoby.

"Good!"

Vavasour and Monson helped Ponsoby up, and put on his jacket, and helped him away.

He bathed his face dismally in an adjacent pond, inwardly resolving that the next time he tackled a funk he would make sure that he really was a funk.

Bolsover clapped Esmond on the back with a force that made him stagger.

"You've licked him!" he grinned.

"Licked him hollow!" chuckled Skinner. "What a giddy surprise!"

"I—I don't know how I did it," muttered Esmond. "I—I—I wasn't afraid after I'd started. Oh, I've got a pain all over! Is my eye black?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Both of 'em as black as the ace of spades!" chortled Bolsover gleefully. "Never mind that. It's something to be proud of. I'll bet the chaps will be surprised to see you with two black eyes, when they know you got 'em in a fight!"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Stott.

"I—I feel awfully done up!" groaned Esmond. "All the same, I'm glad I licked him; and—and I'm much obliged to you, Bolsover!"

"So you ought to be!" said Bolsover good-humouredly. "I've looked after you like a friend and a brother; and I'm going to keep on doing it. If you show any more signs of the white feather, I'm going to lick you every time, old chap!"

Esmond did not look very grateful.

"Better bathe your face in the pond," said Bolsover major, eyeing him critically. "You do look a lovely sight, and no mistake. If Quelch sees you like that, he'll have a fit. Come along! Bring his jacket, Skinny!"

Esmond bathed his face in the pond, and removed the worst signs of the combat. But he could not remove the dark hue from his eyes, the swelling from his nose, or the cut from his lip. But, as a matter of fact, he did not want to remove them. It was the first time had had the scars of honourable combat to show, and he was quite keen to let all the Remove fellows see them.

"I say, you fellows," remarked Billy Bunter, when Esmond had donned his jacket, and they came out into the road, "I think we ought to celebrate an occasion like this. I'd offer

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to stand a feed at Uncle Clegg's, only I—I've been disappointed about a postal-order. But Esmond can stand it!"

"I don't feel much inclined for a feed," said Esmond.

"Well, I do!" said Bunter, in a bullying tone. "You just trot along with us to Uncle Clegg's, or you'll have a thick ear to add to your black eyes. Understand?"

Esmond turned on the fat junior. He did not speak, but he swung out his open hand, and his palm came on Bunter's fat cheek with a report like a pistol-shot. Billy Bunter uttered a fiendish yell, and staggered away, and brought up against the fence on the other side of the road.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Why, you beast— Ow! Yow!"

Esmond glared at him.

"Want some more?" he demanded.

"Why—ow—yow—your rotten funk— Yaroop!"

"If I can lick Ponsonby, I can lick a fat beast like you, Bunter," said Esmond victoriously. "Come on, if you want any more!"

But William George Bunter did not want any more. He had had enough—indeed, he felt as if he had had more than enough. He set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and blinked at Esmond from a safe distance.

"I—I was only joking, of course," he stammered. "I—I really meant to say—"

"Oh, shut up!"

And Esmond walked on to Greyfriars, his arm linked in Bolsover's; and Billy Bunter followed dolorously, feeling a dismal foreboding that all his little feeds at Percy Esmond's expense were at an end now.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER. Mr. Quelch Is Surprised!

"HALLO—hallo—hallo!"

"What on earth have you been doing with your chivvy?"

"Run into a motor-car?"

These exclamations, and a good many more, greeted Esmond as he came into the school gates with Bolsover & Co. The Remove football match was over, and the crowd had come off the field, and they were in time to meet Esmond as he came across the Close with Bolsover.

Esmond's face was certainly a striking sight.

"Look here, what has been going on?" exclaimed Harry Wharton, his brows contracting. "If you have been ragging that kid again, Bolsover—"

"It's all right," said Esmond hastily.

"Then what's happened to your face?"

"It's been hammered," said Esmond ruefully.

"Esmond has been in a fight!" grinned Bolsover major.

There was a chorus of unbelief.

"Rats!"

"Draw it mild!"

"Tell us something easier!"

"If he'd been in a fight, he'd have all the damage on his back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a fact," said Bolsover. "I made him stand up to Ponsonby; and he fought like a giddy Trojan, and licked Ponsonby!"

"Licked Ponsonby!" shouted the juniors.

"Licked him hollow!"

"Well, my only summer hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"You didn't dream it, Bolsover?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then you've only been pretending to be a funk all along!" exclaimed Nugent, in wonder.

"Blessed if I can quite believe it!" said Johnny Bull, with a shake of the head. "I'm jolly glad to hear it, if it's true. I was going to look for Ponsonby myself!"

"You'd find him with two lovely black eyes, if you looked for him now!" grinned Bolsover. "I tell you, Esmond simply walked over him! Knocked him right and left—knocked him fairly out; and Pon had to cry off, and the other chaps had to help him away!"

"Well, wonders will never cease!" remarked Bob Cherry.

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Esmond walked into the House with Bolsover major, leaving the fellows in a buzz of talk, and a great state of wonder. As luck would have it, the damaged hero met Mr. Quelch face to face in the passage. Mr. Quelch stopped dead, his eyes fixing at once upon Esmond's battered face.

"Good heavens, Esmond!" he exclaimed. "Who has been treating you like that? Was it you, Bolsover?"

And Mr. Quelch's glance turned upon Bolsover, with a look that made the bully of the Remove exceedingly glad that it was not he who had handled Percy Esmond like that.

"No, sir," said Bolsover hastily.

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"Someone has treated the boy disgracefully," said Mr. Quelch. "How did this happen, Esmond?"

Esmond's half-closed eyes twinkled.

"I've been taking your advice, sir," he said demurely.

"Taking my advice!" repeated the Form-master, puzzled.

"Yes, sir."

"I do not quite understand you, Esmond," said Mr. Quelch. "Have the kindness to explain yourself."

"Certainly, sir! You remember what you said to me this afternoon, when the fellows were ragging me about the white feather, sir?"

"Ye-es."

"Well, sir, I've made that effort!" said Esmond.

"You—you have been fighting!" exclaimed the Remove-master.

"Yes, sir," said Esmond calmly.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Quelch, very much taken aback. "I did not mean my advice to be taken in that sense, Esmond. I was not advising you to become quarrelsome, not at all. I had no intention of encouraging you to—to fight."

"Well, sir, I thought I'd make an effort, as you advised, sir," said Esmond, with an inward chuckle at the Form-master's discomfiture. "I wanted to please you, sir."

"Ahem! I am afraid you misunderstood me a little, Esmond. However, I will say no more about the matter."

And Mr. Quelch walked hastily away.

"You're getting on, Esmond," murmured Bolsover, with a chuckle. "First licking Ponsonby, and then checking your Form-master. We'll make a man of you some day."

Esmond laughed, and went up to his study. He was feeling very tired and sore, but he had a sense of inward satisfaction that far outweighed the pain of his personal injuries. He had vindicated himself in the eyes of his Form-fellows; he had avenged the insult of the white feather. He had made the discovery that he was not the coward that, in his want of assurance, he had believed. What he had done once he could do again.

After all, what was it to get a black eye or a bruise or two? Injuries of that kind soon mended. What was it he had been afraid of? Next to nothing. It was simply want of resolution that had unnerved him, and placed him at the mercy of any fellow who chose to bully him.

Had he finished with that now?

He wondered!

What he had done once, could he not do again? If he had found resolution on one occasion, why not on another? He wondered! He glanced at himself in the glass, at his sturdy limbs, his powerful shoulders. Physically, he was splendidly made, almost a match for the overpowered Bolsover himself, so far as that went. All he wanted was resolution, to wipe out the stain of disgrace that his cowardice had brought upon him.

Would that resolution be forthcoming when required, or would it fail him again in the time of need? He wondered!

He was not left alone in his study. Fellows came from far and near to look at him. The story of his victory over Ponsonby had spread. The Removites were amazed. The fellow who had allowed Billy Bunter and Snoop to bully him had stood up to, and licked, the best fighting man Highcliffe possessed. Naturally the Removites were amazed and keenly interested. Esmond's character seemed to be a puzzle that was past finding out.

Harry Wharton came in, and carried him off to Study No. 1 to tea. There Esmond had to give an account of the great battle, which he did with pleasure.

"Well, it beats the band!" said Bob Cherry. "Ponsonby is the only one of those chaps who can put up a good fight, and you've licked him."

"Jolly good thing Bolsover made you take him on," said Nugent. "You ought to be obliged to him."

"I am!" said Esmond.

"Well, I'm blessed if I understand you," said Harry Wharton. "Anyway, now you've made a start, don't let's have any more beastly funking."

"I—I'll try!" said Esmond doubtfully.

"Ain't you sure about it?" howled Bob Cherry, in astonishment.

"Well, no!"

"I'll tell you what!" said Bob generously. "I'll take you on with the gloves if you like, and teach you to stand up and take a whacking. I'll keep on knocking you about till you get used to it, and don't mind it—see?"

"Ahem! I—I'd rather not, thank you!" faltered Esmond.

"I—I won't give you the trouble, if you don't mind."

"No trouble at all," said the obliging Bob. "I always punch the ball for exercise, you know. Well, I'll punch you instead of the punching-ball."

"I—I'd rather not, especially now."

"Well, perhaps you've had enough for one day," assented Bob. "We'll start on Monday, and I'll make a fighting man

of you, or smash you into little pieces. Not a word. I'm glad to take the trouble to help a chap on. Don't trouble to thank me."

Esmond did not take the trouble to thank him. He was not feeling thankful. He was feeling worried.

After tea he left the study in a very thoughtful mood. Bob Cherry chuckled when he was gone.

"All he wants is plenty of hammering to get him used to it," he remarked. "I'll take a lot of trouble about him, and set him right on his feet, whether he likes it or not. Must be cruel only to be kind, as Tennyson says."

"Shakespeare," grinned Nugent.

"I don't care who it was; that's what I'm going to do," said Bob.

Esmond, after leaving Study No. 1, went down the passage, and met Bolsover major in the doorway of his study. Bolsover major's good humour had vanished. He was looking decidedly cross.

"Hallo, Esmond!" he exclaimed. "You'll do!"

Esmond stopped, and looked at him inquiringly. The good-humoured Bolsover of the afternoon had given place once more to the bullying, overbearing Bolsover he knew so well.

"What's wanted?" asked Esmond nervously.

"I told that fat rotter Bunter to make my toast," said Bolsover. The bully of the Remove arrogated to himself the right of fagging fellows who did not like the weight of his heavy hand. "He's cleared off somewhere instead. You can do it, Esmond."

"I—I've got to do my prep," said Esmond.

Bolsover major's face assumed at once its most bullying expression. He glared at the unfortunate funk, and Esmond backed away to the opposite wall.

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"I—I mean I will!" yelled Esmond. "I—I'll do anything you like, Bolsover."

But submission came too late. Bolsover was in a bullying humour. He grasped Esmond, swung him into the study doorway, and kicked him into the study. Esmond staggered across the room, with Bolsover's heavy boot behind him. The bully of the Remove kicked the yelling funk right round the room, finishing with leaving him sprawling on the hearthrug and gasping for breath.

"Now are you going to make the toast?" he demanded.

"Ow! Yes!" groaned Esmond.

And he made it!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER. A Promising Pupil!

BOB CHERRY came out of the Remove Form-room, after lessons on Monday morning, with the intention of going down to the footer-ground to practice.

That intention was not carried out.

Esmond came after him, and overtook him in the doorway, and touched him on the arm. Bob looked round inquiringly.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he said. "Coming down to the footer?"

Esmond shook his head.

"No. Do you remember what you said on Saturday?"

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"Going to cheek me, are you?" said Bolsover menacingly. "Do you think because you've licked a Highcliffe cad you can cheek me? Do you?"

"N-no!" stammered Esmond.

"I should rather say not!" remarked Bolsover emphatically. "Why, if you give me two words of cheek I'll kick you the length of the passage."

"I—I—I—"

"Get into my study, and make my toast!" snorted Bolsover. "And if you don't make it all right I'll wallop you! Understand?"

Esmond hesitated. He tried to recall some of the courage that had carried him through the combat with Ponsonby. But it seemed to have oozed out at his finger-tips. He tried to summon up resolution enough to knock Bolsover back into his study with a doughty right-hander. But his right hand hung at his side. Bolsover stared at him, angry at once at his slowness in obeying.

"Do you hear me?" he thundered.

"Ye-es."

"Do as I tell you, then!"

"I—I—I won't!"

Esmond tried to make the words defiant, but he couldn't. They came from his lips in a mumble of uncertainty and nervousness. It was no use, and he realised it. He had found courage enough to lick Ponsonby, but he was still the funk of the Remove. What was going to happen to him now?

"You won't!" roared Bolsover. "I'll jolly soon show you whether you won't or not! My hat! Why, I'll pulverise you."

He made a jump at the shrinking junior.

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FOR NEXT MONDAY—

"BLUNDELL'S PRIZE!"

"I believe I said a lot of things on Saturday," said Bob. "Which thing specially do you mean?"

"About teaching me to box."

Bob whistled, and regarded the funk of the Remove curiously. He had not forgotten, and he fully intended to keep his promise of using Esmond as a punching-ball. But he had certainly not expected that peculiar junior to remind him of it.

"Do you want a lesson?" he asked.

"Yes," said Esmond firmly.

"After school, then—"

"Why not now?"

Bob Cherry laughed.

"Are you specially keen on being knocked about?" he asked. "You've still got two lovely black eyes. Still, if you're keen on it, come on! I'm quite at your service. Mind, I'm going to hit hard."

"I don't care."

"Come on, Bob!" called out Harry Wharton.

"Got an engagement," replied Bob, with a chuckle. "I'm going to hammer Esmond black and blue. Chuck the footer for once, and come and see the fun!"

"Oh, rather!"

And the Famous Five, grinning, accompanied Percy Esmond into the gymnasium. Esmond was looking a little pale and nervous. But there was a determined gleam in his eyes. Since his fight with Ponsonby, he had fallen back into his old wretched ways. Not only Bolsover major, but Skinner, and even Snoop, bullied him with impunity. It seemed that the hope which had dawned for him had been extinguished for ever. And that it would be extinguished for ever he knew, unless he made an effort before it was too late. And he had summoned up all his resolution now.

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The two juniors took their jackets off, and put on the boxing-gloves. Esmond stripped quite as well as Bob Cherry. Bob cast an admiring glance at his muscular arms and deep, strong chest.

"Blessed if I see why a chap built like you should be afraid of anybody!" he remarked.

"I'm going to get over it if I can," said Esmond.

"Hear, hear!"

"I want you to hit me hard," said Esmond quietly.

"That's all right. I'm going to."

"And if I try to back out, hit me all the harder."

"My dear chap, I will."

"If I should scoot, I want you fellows to collar me, and bump me as hard as you can," went on Esmond, with a glance at the Co.

And the Co. grinned, and promised faithfully that they would.

"Well, you mean business, I can see," remarked Bob Cherry, greatly delighted. "Now toe the line, and I'll give you the kybosh."

"I'm ready!"

"After I've handled you a few times, you'll be so used to hammering that you'll find it a pleasant change to tackle even Bolsover major," added Bob Cherry.

"That's what I want!" said Esmond. "Come on!"

Bob Cherry came on—like a whirlwind. Esmond evidently knew very little of boxing, and he was knocked right and left. He gasped, backed away, and made a rush for the door. The old strain of the white feather in his nature was too much for him, in spite of all his heroic determination.

But the Co. were mindful of their promise. They collared him promptly, yanked him back, and bumped him hard on the floor of the gym. Esmond roared.

"That enough?" asked Nugent, with great consideration.

"Ow! Yes! Ugh! Ow!"

"Sure?" asked Johnny Bull. "We don't mind giving you another bump or two if you think you ought to have it. We take any trouble to oblige our clients."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That'll do!" groaned Esmond. "Oh, crumbs!"

"Stand up!" said Bob.

And Esmond stood up.

"Still want to be hit hard?" grinned Bob.

"Yes," said Esmond, gritting his teeth; "as hard as you like. I'm going to learn to stand it."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Wharton. "My dear chap, you're not a funk, you're a giddy hero! But why not give him some instruction before you thump him, Bob?"

"Good wheeze!" said Bob Cherry. "I never thought of that! Now, put up your hands, Esmond, and I'll show you how to box. Now, you're to stop this drive at your nose. If you don't stop it, it will lay you right out—like that!"

Bump!

"Oh! Ow! Groogh!"

"Try again," said Bob encouragingly. "If I keep on giving you the same drive, you'll learn how to stop it in time, or you won't have any nose left."

"Ow!" gasped Esmond. "I don't feel as if I've got any left now."

"You have—in fact, more than usual," said Bob. "It's increasing in size. Now, keep your guard up—so! Don't get flabby just as I'm coming on. Keep your eye steady. Remember that it really doesn't matter if you're hurt. Any fellow ought to be able to stand a little pain. See how I do it, and then try for my nose."

Esmond succeeded in stopping the drive this time. Then he tried for Bob Cherry's nose, with such eminent success that Bob went bowling over backwards with a roar like a bull.

The juniors burst into a yell of laughter, and Esmond stood staring at the fallen fighting-man, amazed at what he had done.

Bob Cherry sat up dazedly, and blinked at Esmond, and put his hand to his nose. His glove came away red.

"Was that right?" asked Esmond anxiously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Right," mumbled Bob Cherry, dabbing at his nose with his handkerchief—"right, you silly ass! I didn't tell you to knock my nose through the back of my beastly head! Ow! Right, you silly dummy! I've a good mind to slaughter you!"

"I—I did my best, you know," faltered Esmond.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry gained his feet, looking rather grim. Esmond had certainly benefited by his instructions, and Bob's nose was looking decidedly bulbous.

"Shall I try again?" asked Esmond.

Bob Cherry burst into a laugh.

"Yes, you young ass! Try again. It's all right. Don't

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mind if I was a bit rusty for a minute. It was rather a shock. I don't mind how much trouble I take over you, but I want to have a nose left to smell with, you know."

Esmond stood up to the champion fighting-man of the Remove till he could stand no longer. He could hardly walk out of the gym when he was finished. But he made an appointment with Bob for another lesson after school that evening.

And he kept his appointment, too. Bob Cherry was a splendid boxer, and he was only too willing to impart his knowledge of the manly art of self-defence to the funk of the Remove. He bestowed more hard hitting than instruction upon him, it is true. But that was a valuable training for Esmond. He learned to stand up steadily to the hardest drives, to take punishment without wincing, and to look his opponent in the face whatever was happening to him. Every fresh bout in the gym hardened him, and gave him more confidence in himself.

Indeed, he picked up the manly art so quickly that Bob Cherry, after a few days, found that he had his hands full with the funk of the Remove, who no longer showed the slightest signs of funkiness in the encounters.

"By Jove, you're getting on!" said Bob Cherry, gasping after a bout one evening. "Look here, do you know that I don't know whether I could lick you if you stood up to me in real earnest?"

"You really mean that?" asked Esmond joyfully.

"Honest injun."

"But you can lick Bolsover major?" said Esmond.

Bob nodded.

"Then I should have a chance with him?" said Esmond eagerly.

"Yes, rather! A jolly good chance, too!" said Bob. "I can't imagine why you let him rag you. Why, he's been fagging you for the last week as if you were a kid in the Second Form and he were a prefect."

"Yes; and he has ordered me to come to his study this evening and get his tea ready," said Esmond quietly.

"Don't do it!" said Bob.

Esmond grinned as he peeled off the gloves.

"If you fellows want to see some fun, you can drop into Bolsover major's study about teatime," he said.

Bob Cherry chortled.

"Good egg! We'll be there!"

"What-ho!" said all the Co. together. And they grinned with anticipation.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Last of the Funk!

BOLSOVER MAJOR was in a bad temper. He had come into his study, expecting to find his tea ready. He found the study empty, the table bare, and the fire out. The bully of the Remove was righteously indignant. Hadn't he given Esmond, the funk of the Remove, explicit orders to have his tea ready for him when he came back from his spin on his bike, at half-past six exactly? And here was his study, cold and cheerless and inhospitable, and no sign of Esmond!

Bolsover major breathed wrath and vengeance as he stood in his doorway, and called for the funk of the Remove.

"Esmond! Where's Esmond? Come here, Esmond!"

Esmond came out of his study further up the passage. Bolsover major glared at him.

"Come here!" he rapped out.

"Here I am," said Esmond, coming calmly along the passage. "What's the matter, Bolsover?"

"Matter!" snorted Bolsover. "Didn't I tell you to have my tea ready, and the toast made, and the sardines opened at half-past six?"

"Yes," said Esmond.

"Look at the fire! It's out!"

"Looks like it," agreed Esmond, glancing at the study fireplace.

"Look at the table! Not even set."

"Not even set," agreed Esmond.

"And the toast? Where's that?"

"Can't see any," remarked Esmond, looking round the study, as if in search of toast. "I fancy there isn't any, Bolsover."

"You cheeky whelp!" roared Bolsover. "So you're making fun of me, are you?"

Esmond shook his head.

"Can't make fun of you," he said. "You're as funny already as you can be."

Bolsover stared at him blankly. Was this the funk of the Remove who was answering him as coolly and independently as Bob Cherry himself could have done? It was a time for action, not words, Bolsover felt that. This "cheek" must

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be nipped in the bud. The funk must be instructed that he could not give the bully of the Remove back-answers. Bolsover glanced round, and picked up an ebony ruler.

"Lean over that chair!" he commanded.

"What for?" asked Esmond, without moving.

"I'm going to give you a lesson," explained Bolsover. "A dozen cuts—that's the kind of lesson you want."

"Thanks! I'm not taking any!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, looking into the study, with the Co. behind him. "Trouble in the happy family—what?"

Bolsover major scowled at the Famous Five.

"That rat is cheeking me," he said. "I'm going to give him a hiding, and if any of you rotters chip in, I'll give you a hiding, too."

"We won't chip in," said Bob, with a chuckle. "Let's see you give Esmond the hiding. I want to see you do it."

"The wantfulness is terrific, my esteemed and ludicrous Bolsover!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Go it!" said Harry Wharton heartily. "We'll stand here and see the fun."

Bolsover major glanced at them suspiciously. He did not quite understand the hilarity of the Co. But he was satisfied with their assurance that they would not interfere; and he turned with a black brow to Esmond.

"Are you going to lean over that chair, or are you not?" he demanded.

"Not!" said Esmond calmly.

"Then I'll jolly soon make you, and I'll give you two dozen cuts instead of one!" roared Bolsover major.

He clattered the ruler down on the table, and jumped at Esmond.

"Back up, Esmond!" shouted Bob Cherry.

Bolsover major's powerful grasp closed upon the new junior. For a moment Esmond seemed to yield in his grasp—it was the old pusillanimity returning, in the critical moment when all was at stake? If so, it was only for a second. Then he returned grasp for grasp, and Bolsover major, to his astonishment, found himself seized in a grip fully as powerful as his own.

"Why, what—what—" he gasped.

Crash!

The bully of the Remove was swept off his feet, and he landed on the carpet with a concussion that knocked all the breath out of his body. Esmond stood over him, panting. Bob Cherry gave a chirrup of delight.

"Hurrah!"

Bolsover major sat up and stuttered.

"M-m-my hat! That rotten funk! Why, I'll smash him! I'll strew him about in little pieces! I'll—I'll—"

Bolsover major did not wait to finish saying what he would do. He jumped up to do it. He came for Esmond like a whirlwind, with eyes blazing with rage, and fists lashing out like hammers. It was a terrific attack, and a fellow who was not a funk might have been excused if he had backed away from it. But Esmond did not back away. His severe training at the hands of Bob Cherry had not been wasted. Furious as Bolsover's attack was, it was not worse than the hard hitting Esmond had learned to face during his training in the gym.

The funk of the Remove stood as firm as a rock.

The Famous Five gazed on the scene in surprise and delight. Behind them the passage was crowded with Remove

fellows, attracted by the noise, and amazed and delighted to see the bully of the Form handled by anybody. For Bolsover was being handled now, and handled severely. His fierce attack was met and baffled, and he reeled back from a right-hander that made him stagger, and then he lurched across the study under the impetus of a terrific upper-cut, with all the force of Esmond's strong arm behind it.

"Ow—ow—ow—groogh!" stuttered Bolsover, as his jaws clacked together. "Oh! Ow! M-m-my hat! Oh, lor'!"

There was a roar from the crowd in the passage.

"Hurrah! Go it, Esmond!"

"Pile in, funk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Bolsover was not beaten yet. He recovered himself, and rushed at Esmond again; and they fought it out, hammer and tongs. Blows rained upon the fellow who had been called the funk of the Remove; but he did not heed them—he did not seem to feel them. Heedless of his own punishment, he slogged away at Bolsover, and Bolsover's rugged face was soon a study in bruises and cuts. The juniors looked on spellbound. Seldom had such a terrific combat been witnessed in the Remove—never, in fact, since Bob Cherry's famous fight with Bolsover major.

Down went Bolsover at last—battered and beaten, breathless; licked as thoroughly as ever any fellow had been licked. The study was a wreck—the chairs and table had been knocked flying—the clock swept off the mantelpiece—the fender kicked out of its place—the books swept off the shelf. In the midst of the wreck lay Bolsover major—looking the greatest wreck of all.

And then Esmond picked up the ruler, and whirled Bolsover over on the floor, and the ruler came down upon Bolsover's nether garments with a resounding smack.

"Ow!" gasped Bolsover. "Chuck it! I give in! Ow! Yow!"

Esmond blinked at him out of his half-closed eyes.

"You were going to lick me," he said. "I'll let you off if you promise not to be such a beastly bully again."

"Ow! Ow! All right."

"Honour bright?" demanded Esmond.

"Honour bright!" groaned Bolsover.

Esmond pitched the ruler into the grate.

"Good enough! It's a go!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the Removites. "Well done, Esmond!"

Bolsover major staggered to his feet. Harry Wharton helped him up. The bully of the Remove was utterly spent; and he had to lean heavily upon Wharton to keep his feet at all. He blinked uncertainly at Esmond.

"You're good stuff!" he gasped. "Ow! You've licked me, fair and square—I don't bear any malice! Give us your fist!"

And Esmond grinned and gave it.

Esmond had a "pal" in the Greyfriars Remove from that day forth—it was Bolsover major! And nothing more was ever heard on the subject of the White Feather!

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READ THIS FIRST.

Ferrers Lord, the famous multi-millionaire, is surrounded in his magnificent London residence by his friends Ching-Lung, Barry O'Rooney, Gan-Waga, the Eskimo, and Prout & Co.—the stalwarts of the millionaire's famous submarine, the Lord of the Deep. After a period of inaction there is a rumour afloat that Ferrers Lord is about to start upon one of his great expeditions again. Meantime, the millionaire himself is devoting all his attention to a curiously carved narwhal's tusk which he has picked up in an East-End curio-dealer's shop. This tusk proved to be hollow, and to contain some gold coins and a small wad of parchment, which bears a strange message from the sea. This tells of a mysterious floating island inhabited by strange monsters which Ferrers Lord determines to go in search of. Thurston immediately christens the phantom island "Mysteria" in advance. All hands board the Lord of the Deep, and as they are steaming along one day a bank of fog ahead suddenly parts, and there, not a league away, appears Mysteria—the weird island. Before sunrise the next morning a move is made to explore Mysteria. The landing-party find the island to be an evil-smelling swamp, with little sign of life. They catch a glimpse of a terrifying monster which inhabits a black lake, and then Barry creates a diversion by falling down a deep tunnel, and injuring his head. Shortly after this adventure, Jimson, the parrot, is found croaking over a huge bush, and when Prout advances to catch his pet, he stumbles over the body of a man whom they have never seen before. The castaway is found to be alive, and is taken aboard the submarine. The adventurers then find a great hole has been blown in Mysteria. Ferrers Lord and his men explore the bottom of the pit, and find a miniature island has been formed inside Mysteria. While crossing to the island in canvas boats, they are attacked by one of the great monsters which inhabit Mysteria; but, although the party have narrow escapes, nobody is injured. While Ferrers Lord and his party are exploring the inside of Mysteria, Hal Honour, the engineer, takes a walk. He is captured by Julius Faber and his men, and is imprisoned in their camp. During the night, however, he awakens, and sees that Faber himself is keeping guard. He enters into conversation with him, and suddenly the engineer raises his clenched fists, and strikes Faber senseless to the ground. Hal Honour succeeds in getting away in a boat, and when he is well at sea he finds that Stumpy, Faber's wooden-legged accomplice, is also in the boat. Meanwhile, Ferrers Lord and his companions in the cave are experiencing a rough time. The naphtha lamps accidentally upset, catch fire, and the cavern becomes like a furnace. Rupert Thurston, on board the submarine, sees the flames issuing from the top of the cave, and sends out a raft, manned by Joe and the German cook, to the rescue. The raft has proceeded nearly round the miniature island, when the occupants are ordered to put up their hands by an unseen man. He turns out to be Faber, who, with his gang, is nearly starving. Faber decides to throw himself on Ferrers Lord's mercy, and with that object in view the whole gang, with Joe and the cook, set to find a way out of the cave. One of the men, Derrick by name, thinking it might benefit him later on, attempts to make friends with Joe. "I'll get you and your pal safe back to the ship!" he says. "I'll look arter yer!"

(Now go on with the story.)

Treachery—Just in Time—Cooky is Injured—Hal Honour Again.

The carpenter's face expressed its contempt.

"Get a move on," he growled, "and stop your whistle! You tire me!"

Joe was very shrewd. As a rule, he talked very little, leaving the talking to Barry—the champion of the art—Prout and Maddock. The carpenter was quite tired of talking. A glance at the faces of his captors filled him with glee. They looked like beaten men—all except Faber.

They formed up. Obviously they had taken Joe's word for his bond, for they made no attempt to interfere with him. As they set off up the slope the only man behind himself and the cook was Derrick. Derrick, as a warning, made a big stir about loading his rifle.

"Id vas no goot, den, der esgabe, is ud?" whispered Herr Schwartz.

"We don't want to escape," said Joe.

"Vy nod?"

"Oh, it's too silly! They're as tame as sheep, cooky. They'll take us home in style."

"Und den?"

"Ow do I know? Wait and see."

It was a long and weary climb. When they reached the summit at last Faber swore heartily. The island on that side was steeped in a damp white mist that even hid the sea.

It was cold, too, but any further move was out of the question. Vast precipices and pits might lay hidden in those dark folds of vapour. Hours dragged away, but the mist, although the sun hung bright and clear overhead, refused to

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lift. It hung there like a vast curtain pegged to the hills, and stretched out to the horizon. On the other side it was quite clear, and the sun sparkled on a choppy sea. They lay down and endeavoured to sleep.

"It was Joe who, thirsting for news, roused them. A smart squall peeled the mist away, and flung it back in torn patches.

"Wake up—wake up! 'Ere's your chance!" he shouted.

They sprang to their feet. A good breeze, fresh and salt, blew in their faces. Joe looked out for the hole that Hal Honour had blasted, but they did not go near it. After that the difficulties of the descent kept him too busy. Then the great, tall stems were all around them, and the roof of the forest choked out the light.

"Which is the way?" snarled Faber. "You said you knew it."

"Well, if you'd axed me before, I might have 'elped you hout," said Joe. "I'll be shot if I know. You've got axes, and you know where the hills is. Keep a straight line. 'Ere, give me one."

"'Ere, mate, take mine!" cried several eager voices.

"One's enough," said Joe, and hid a grin.

He looked back, and then sliced a creeper in two. By the turn affairs were taking, Joe felt that, instead of being a prisoner, he would soon be appointed captain of this ragged brigade.

"Blaze the trunks!" he called out. "and keep a straight line. I'll make the dogs useful, anyhow!" he muttered.

And so they went on, foot by foot, and yard by yard. Joe was as tough as leather, but the castaways were also tough—so tough that he was amazed. But at length they began to flag.

"Keep on—keep on!" cried Joe. "If we ain't clear o' this by dark, the fever'll get us all! Slash away!"

"Fever?" asked Derrick.

"Can't you smell it, man? If you don't want to die and rot, keep movin'. It's soaked with fever!"

Eyes under shaggy brows—eyes that were big with terror, glared at Joe. He slashed away untiringly.

"Quickly!" he said. "We'll 'ave the night on us. It can't be far now."

"Ve vas gedding glose," said the cook. "I gan smell der sea."

Faber had worked as hard as the youngest of them.

"Gosh! I smell it, too!" said Derrick.

The perspiring fat man drew in a breath of tainted air, and licked his lips. He could taste the salt. Up went Joe's axe and cut down, bringing with it a mass of leaves and shrivelled branches.

"Through!" he shouted.

The shadowy sea was breaking lazily almost at their feet, and a sweet, life-giving breeze blew in their faces.

They were sure, and so was Joe, that they had crossed the island, but he could not discover the submarine.

"Dot vas der vay, Choe," said the chef quickly. "I know dot."

He pointed to a mass of rubbish. Joe also recognised it. The creek they had used so often for landing lay to the right.

"After me!" he shouted.

The days were shortening fast, but it had taken them from an hour after sunrise to dusk—an amazing length of time—to cross the island. Considering that they had practically to carve their way through the forest, it was not, after all, so astonishing. As Joe darted forward, Faber drew a revolver.

A powerful wind, threatening to develop into a rough gale, flung a mass of thick clouds over the sky, and doubled the gloom as the clouds shut out the fading light.

"What's that?"

Joe nearly fell over a human figure that started up before him.

"Grab them!" thundered Faber.

The carpenter went down like a skittle with four men on top of him. Schwartz, seized from behind ere he could utter a sound, was similarly treated. A blow from the butt of Faber's heavy revolver quieted the other man.

"It's all true what I told you," said Faber hoarsely and triumphantly. "I tumbled to it. I've heard of that fellow, Ferrers Lord. He's gone into that place and got lost, and they're all looking for him. You lazy curs! When you were all asleep I risked my neck and climbed the hills. I could see their lairns. I knew what was happening. If we can find her, she's at our mercy."

"He's right," said Derrick. "Well done, cap. I didn't believe you, but you're right."

The launch floated in the creek. It had been guarded by only one man, who was now a prisoner.

"Down east—there!" cried a voice.

"Where?"

"Clear of the corner, cap. Not a six 'undred yards off!"

It was the submarine. She lay so low, and the light was so deceptive, that it was difficult to see her. Faber stepped into the launch.

"The luck's turned," he hissed. "Cursee! What's this thing?"

He understood sails better than steam, and steam better than any other power.

"Electric!" he said, with a snarl. "Who knows how to work it?"

There was no answer. The cold barrel of a revolver touched Joe's forehead. Joe had guessed also.

"Come and run this boat, or I'll blow your brains out!"

"Blow away!" said Joe, clenching his teeth.

Faber turned on their latest prisoner and got the same answer.

"Leave 'em and chance it, cap," said Derrick. "Murder won't do us no good."

"All right. It's life or death now. Pole her clear. It won't, that's a fact. We might fail!"

It was growing darker, although the moon had risen. There were two sweeps in the launch. They jumped in and pushed her into the weak surf. An electric launch is simplicity in itself compared with even the simplicity of a petrol one. In ten seconds Faber had discovered how to stop, slow and reverse the little craft. She whizzed seaward.

"Wake up, man! Wake up!" yelled Joe, shaking the sentry. "Who's aboard! How many, Bertram?"

He had recognised the sentry, but the man was stunned. With such a gale in his teeth it was folly to shout. Joe rushed about frantically, searching for a gun—searching for anything, he did not care what, for he was almost frantic.

"Clack!"

Joe could have shrieked aloud. His foot had struck an electric lamp. Then, as he clutched it, he saw a rifle.

"Cooky," he shrieked, "pump this off! Blaze like mad!"

Herr Schwartz jumped to his feet, very dazed.

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"Bang first, pull down, and then bang!" said Joe.

"Vere?"

"At that shadder—that boat! Quick, you fool! Shoot low. Go on! Get on your knees!"

The little German was no fool, and what had happened had shown him that Joe was no fool.

"Shoot!"

Schwartz sank upon his knees. There is a legend that the novice who first plays cards for money, or backs his first horse, always wins—as if evil Fate did this to tempt him on to ruin—and that the novice on the shooting-field always gets a good bag at this most expensive sport. The cook fired at the dark, moving object, and the gale hurled back a shriek on the heels of the report.

He had killed Derrick.

"Go on—go on!" yelled Joe. "I can't make the beast work—I can't—"

The light blazed out. Would they see it? Would he be in time?"

Cr-ack!

A scream of agony broke from Faber's lips. His right arm dropped loose and helpless, but he caught the tiller with the other one. There was a streak of flame from the sea.

Schwartz reeled.

"I vos tone, Choe!" he gasped, and dropped.

Joe's lip tightened, but that was all. He seized the rifle, and emptied it. The next minute the lamp was winking and blinking.

"Look out!" said the voiceless message. "Faber's lot in launch. Sink them! Look out—look out!"

"Hooray!" howled Joe.

There was no answering signal by lamp, but he saw a red gleam, and the crack of a rifle followed on the wings of the gale.

"Thunder!" said Joe. "She's moved!"

Flash—flash—flash! Cr-ack—cr-ack—cr-ack! came the sounds. The next instant the Lord of the Deep was ablaze with dazzling light. The launch was wheeling round. Clear into the glare rode an ugly canoe with a flapping sail.

There was a shout that even Joe and Schwartz heard.

"Mr. Honour—Mr. Honour!"

It was impossible to mistake that giant figure. The Lord of the Deep began to move. Joe picked up the cook in his arms, and staggered away into the shadow of the trees. Faber steered straight for the creek, biting his thin lips with pain and rage. The launch struck the shore, and almost overturned. Then it rode in, and the next moment the terrified cinnabar-hunters dashed madly away, their speed increased by a few whistling bullets.

"Ow are you now, cooky?"

Joe got no answer. Herr Schwartz was very limp and still.

"Poor old Shorts! I 'ope they ain't wiped you out," said Joe mournfully. "You're a plucky one, and a good use, though I ain't fond o' Germans, as a rule. It's a pity if they've got you, mate."

The carpenter, not knowing whether his comrade was living or dead, carried him back to the creek. The boat contained a lot of water. Joe bailed it out as fast as he could. He glanced over his shoulder. A sail fell with a rattle, and a searchlight poured its rays over him.

"Joe!" called the deep voice of Hal Honour.

Joe stood up in the launch, and saluted.

"Ay, ay, sir," he said.

A few strokes of the paddle brought the canoe alongside the launch.

"Tell me about it."

The carpenter had never spoken so fast in his life, or said so much in so few words. Honour lifted the cook easily, and placed him in the launch.

"Get aboard," he said, "and take that."

At a sign, Stumpy scrambled into the launch as nimbly as a monkey. Honour took the lamp.

"Ain't you comin', sir?"

"No—cavern," said the engineer.

Long before the launch reached the Lord of the Deep his solitary light had vanished in the gloom of the forest. The cheers that greeted Joe's return were quickly silenced. Tender hands raised the cook, and carried him below.

The cripple winked, and rubbed his hands joyously.

"I'm clear!" he muttered. "The brimstone luck's turned for me! 'Onour can't go back on me now, arter what we've been through together! I'm safe, ain't I? Safe as a brimstone bank!"

Then he yelled as a rope's-end fell across his shoulders.

"You get down to the fo'c's'le, and stick there!" growled a big sailor, "stead of muterin' and snivellin'. Get down! If I find you wanderin' about I'll flay the skin off you!"

"You brimstone brute!" snarled Stumpy, under his breath, and slunk away.

They did their best for the chef, but they were not doctors. He had been shot in the right shoulder, and was unconscious. "Had any news at all, Tommy," Joe inquired—"I mean, just lately?"

"Not a word. I ain't told 'em as you've turned up yet, nor about Mr. Honour."

"I'll do that. You look arter poor old Shorts. Is the thing workin' all right?"

"Oh, it's workin'—leastways, it was an hour ago," replied the sailor.

Joe dashed out of the cabin.

"Ray! Ray! Ray!" came a wild yell from the deck.

An instant later a man tumbled down the ladder. The shock rendered him breathless, but he waved his cap.

"They're safe?" howled Joe.

"You bet!" panted the sailor.

Joe began to dance. Then he remembered his wounded comrade, and went back to the cabin.

"They'll be wanting you and the launch, Tommy," he said. "I'll stop wi' cooky."

The sailor repressed a howl of delight, and crept out on tip-toe. When he reached the deck he roared like a redskin. Schwartz opened his eyes, and Joe bent over him.

"They're all safe and snug, Shorts," he said—"all safe, old man! What's that?"

The cook moved his lips. Joe could not catch what he said clearly, but it sounded strangely like this:

"Dere vos sossitches vor preakfast, Choe!"

The gallant little cook was living over again the events of the past few days, and as one after another of the long string of incidents flitted into his brain, he murmured a few words, some laughable, others serious, many even tragic, as he tossed to and fro. He rambled shockingly, and as Joe watched him, and heard his wild mutterings, tears came to his eyes as he thought of his brave companion lying there unconscious. The cook had won the heart of the carpenter of the Lord of the Deep.

Safe Home—Good News about Herr Schwartz—"Thanks!" —A Surprise for Thomas Prout.

It was getting towards midnight before the eager watchers caught their first glimpse of the winking lights and heard the faint cheers that they answered vociferously. Both the launch and the big canoe were pressed into service to bring the rescuers and the rescued aboard.

Ferrers Lord and Hal Honour locked themselves in the cabin where the cook lay, and their hands and eyes and nerves were as steady as if they had gone through nothing at all. The millionaire tossed the bullet into a basin.

"Good!"

"Good!" said the engineer laconically.

Schwartz was sleeping quietly a couple of hours later, and Joe, on whom the duties of the chef devolved, was cooking either a very late supper or a very early breakfast in the galley. The rescuers had little to tell. After many hours of labour, fruitless pulling, and almost despair, they had found the lost ones. Ching-Lung and Gan Waga feasted in the galley. Gan had revived, and was drinking pea-soup. All is well that ends well. It had been a ghastly experience for everyone, but it was over.

"I've made up my mind that I've had some," said Ching-Lung.

"Some what, sir?"

"Too much enough, Joe," said the prince. "No more cavern for this young man."

"And no morer fo' me, Chingy," said Gan-Waga, shuddering. "He had 'nough horribles."

"Oh, you're a thief, Wagtail! If you'd kept your fingers from picking and stealing you wouldn't have been there at all. Let this be a lesson to you. Never steal when anybody is looking. I'll have a little more of this, Joe—thank you kindly. And how's my dear old pal, old Red Nob?"

"Well, he didn't look quite 'appy, sir," said Joe, filling up the soup-plate. "I give him your kind compliments and love, and telled him the 'at fitted you very nice."

"I guess I shall have the pleasure of telling him so personally very soon. Don't make such a noise when you eat, Eskimoses, 'cos it's vulgar, and I hate vulgarity. More soup, Joseph, for three hungry rascals!"

Heavy footfalls announced the arrival of Prout, Barry O'Rooney, and Maddock. A warm bath and change of clothes had removed all traces of their unpleasant adventure, though they had been blacker than sweeps. It was Thurston who had suffered most—for mental suffering is worse than physical and more wearing—and his anxiety had been terrible. The soldier, with the bullets shrieking round him, does not suffer like the wife or mother or sweetheart he has left at home. And the dauntless three looked as spruce as ever.

"Ahoj, ahoj!" growled Prout. "What do I smell, by hokey?"

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"Ut's pay-soup," said Barry, "or, bedad, O'll niver trust the nose av me any more! Any lift, Joe?"

"Gallons!"

"Then ladle it hout, souse me!" said the bo'sun. "I'm dyin' of 'unger!"

Joe quickly supplied their wants, and for a time they were too busy to talk.

"Ah-h," said Barry at last, with a long, deep sigh of satisfaction, "wance more the immortal Barry of Ballybunion is himself! That's av warmin' and comfortin' av foive overcoats. For—

"Oi love yez, Joe,
And wish yez luck.
That foine pay-soup
Is splendid tuck.

"Troth, yez are a foine hand at soup, my bhoy; but an ould aunt av moine, named Beatrice Gwendoline Maloney, could beat yez into a cocked hat! Oh, that pay-soup! Whiu she made ut, she—"

Barry broke off abruptly. The millionaire had suddenly turned into the galley.

"Sit still," he said. "I do not wish to disturb you."

He held out his hand to Joe.

"Thanks!" he said. "Good-night!"

Joe flushed. He was a proud carpenter just then. The millionaire closed the door behind him. He had recognised Joe's pluck by only one single word and a hand-clasp. But it meant much, for the millionaire seldom uttered a word of praise.

"By hokey, Joe," said Prout, stroking his red beard, "I'd sooner 'ave that nor a boatload o' gold medals!"

"You bet!" said Joe.

Gan-Waga pricked up his ears at a welcome sound. The water was rearing into the tanks, and into the swimming-bath. It was some time since Gan had been able to go to bed in peace.

"Dat's fo' me, Chingy," he gurgled. "I ons dat. Too-oo-ooral! I offs, Chingy!"

The gay Gan went to sleep in the swimming-bath with a cigar in his mouth, and a pound of tallow-candles on his chest, in case he should find himself in need of refreshment during the night. The Lord of the Deep descended about eight fathoms, and floated.

"Well, so-long boys!" said Ching-Lung. "Sweet dreams! I'm jolly tired, I can tell you."

They were all wearied out. It was in order to give every man a long night's rest that Ferrers Lord had sunk the vessel, for had she remained afloat a watch must have been kept. Before going to bed, the prince glanced into the saloon. The millionaire was writing. He looked up with a smile.

"Not in bed yet?"

"As thou seest," said Ching-Lung. "You ought to be in bed."

"I am looking after the poor chef for an hour or two, until Honour relieves me. Nor am I particularly tired. I have just signed the death-warrant of Mysteria."

"Thank goodness!" said Ching-Lung. "Mysteria ought to be put to the torture, and killed by inches. But how are you going to execute this diabolical criminal?"

"I have just been figuring out the quantity of explosives needed. I shall blow her up."

"And Red Nob & Company, dread executioner?"

Ferrers Lord laughed.

"Ah, that is another matter!" he answered. "Sleep well, dear lad!"

Prout sat on a locker to finish the stump of a cigar, and when this was accomplished he made for his hammock.

"What the—ow!" gasped the tired steersman, staggering back. "What the—Ere! By hokey! Wha-at?"

Prout grasped a piece of timber that protruded over the canvas edge of his sleeping-quarters, and gave it a jerk. Then another piece of wood shot into the air and came down on Prout's head with a thud and a crack that filled his eyes with tears and the air with twinkling stars.

Prout and the Cripple—Some Unpleasantness—Prout Finds Another Bed, and Many Spectators.

It is quite unnecessary to remark that Prout was both astonished and hurt. He rubbed his head, and, glaring upwards, encountered the downward gaze of Stumpy's little cunning eyes.

"What do yer mean catchin' 'old of my brimstone feet, hey?" snarled the cripple.

For a time Prout fancied he was in the presence of a ghost. He was not aware that Harold Honour had brought back a prisoner. Still, he had never heard of a ghost with wooden

legs, or of one who could hit so hard. Prout licked his lips.

"Do you know where you are, messmate?" inquired Thomas.

"You won't know where you are if you start any of your brimstone foolery on me," said Stumpy.

Maddock and Barry opened their blue orbs and looked interested.

"I ain't startin' nothin', by hokey," said Prout. "I axes a simple question. Do you know where you are?"

"Oh, close up your brimstone face," retorted the cripple, "and lay back. I ain't goin' to talk to you."

Prout arose and felt his scalp carefully as if he expected to find some portion of it missing. His fears must soon have been allayed, for he had a good deal more scalp than he usually carried about with him. The bo'sun and the boy from Ballybunion grew more interested still. They wanted to see how it would end. It was not likely that Thomas Prout would abandon his cot without an effort.

"Phwat's the matter wid yez, Tommy? Why don't yez go to bed?"

The gallant steersman coughed.

"That's just it, by hokey," he remarked. "I'm as fond of a clean hammock as anybody. I don't want to be coarse and vulgar and so I won't mention the name of the hinsect. But you'll never catch me sleepin' in no 'ammock where there's one o' them hinsects, which, bein' well brought hup, I don't name."

"Do they bite, souse me, and raise lumps?" asked Maddock, with a grin.

"They don't, not 'alf! Look at my 'ead!"

"Troth, ut must be a full-sized wan, and moighty savage, av ut did that!" grinned Barry. "The poor craytur can't be properly fed. O'm surprised at yez, Tom. Av yez kape pets, yez ought to fade them properly!"

"Ave you taught it any tricks yet?" chuckled the bo'sun.

"Can it stand on its 'ind legs?"

Prout did not lose his temper, at least he did not lose his self-control. In any case he could not sleep in the hammock until it had been washed, for Prout was most particular about cleanliness.

"No, Benjamin," he said quietly; "I ain't started its eddification yet, but I'm goin' to—by hokey, I am! When a bundle of rags and wood and dirt comes along and bags your 'ammock, there's sorer for somebody 'angin' about. That 'ammock is spiled. I shall 'ave to chuck it hoverboard. 'Ow did that walkin' ragshop and timber-yard get 'ere?"

"Mr. Honour found it somewhere," said the bo'sun, "and brought it back for Mr. Rupert's collection of hinsects."

"Oh, did he?" said Prout, spitting on his hands. "I ain't cruel by nature, and I don't like killing worms and beetles, but summat has to be done, by hokey! Now, young feller-me-lad, out o' that! That's my special cradle. Out of it, sharp!"

He struck upwards with his open palm at the hammock. The sound of the blow was heard all over the fore-castle. The cripple bounded upwards and fell back again, uttering a howl. The next moment, his ugly face livid with rage, was pouring out a torrent of curses.

"'Old 'ard, by hokey—'old 'ard!" said Prout grimly.

"Stop that, my lad! We're no saints aboard this ship, but we manage to get on very well w'out usin' bad language. I don't want to 'urt you, you bein' a cripple, but if you don't belay, I'll 'ave to cram some of your teeth down your throat to teach you what manners are. You've come to the wrong show for swearin'. Just reverse your screws, by hokey!"

"Then keep your paws off me, you brimstone 'ound!" snarled Stumpy.

"Roll out!"

"I'll see you brimstone—"

Again Stumpy yelled and bounded into the air, as Prout struck the bottom of the hammock.

"Go easy, Tommy!" called the carpenter. "Don't hurt him, old lad!"

"Ain't that just what I'm tryin' not to do?" said the steersman. "This is grand, by hokey, this is! Are you comin' out, or must I punch you through the roof? Are you—Ow! You spiteful brute!"

One of the wooden legs dropped like a cudgel across Prout's wrist, and a lightning stroke from the other narrowly missed his temple. Some of the men laughed, but most of them were silent.

"Come a bit nearer, and I'll jab the brimstone eyes out of you!" hissed Stumpy, foaming at the mouth. "I ain't afraid of your size, you dog! I've done in bigger bullies than you, though I am two feet short."

The steersman sucked his wrist. His left hand was quite numbed and helpless. It was wonderful that his wrist was not broken. Barry descended from his snug retreat, and came forward.

"Pace—pace!" he said. "Oi expected some fun, but this is goin' a bit too far, bodad!"

"So I think, souse me," said the bo'sun, also leaving his hammock.

"Pace—pace!" repeated Barry. "Oi want to spako words of wisdom. Av Oi'd found a man in my hammock Oi'd have gone for the spalpeen, and pasted him black and blue and pink and purple. Troth, Oi'd have— But, niver moind phwat Oi'd have done. Whin yez only foind half a man and half a woid baste, and a cripple at that, the case is altered. Phwat can we do? We're men, at laste. Oi maintain, in any case, that the reptoise should have lift the hammock whin he was towld by the roightful owner!"

"Hear, hear!" said several voices.

"And Oi maintain, also," went on Barry, "that, after phwat's happened, ould Tommy deserves a gould medal, studded wid diamonds, for not wadin' in and swallowin' the insect! Tommy, yez are a gentleman!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Wait wan minute; Oi've not quite finished! Stand a bit back there, Ben, my boy! Now, Misher Timberlegs, Oi'll talk to you a thrifle, but only a thrifle! Oi'll merely say wan word. Git!"

Barry accompanied that word with a tremendous two-armed push, that flung Stumpy headlong out of the hammock. He was caught by Maddock, who was waiting for him.

"I'll have the brimstone lives of some of you! I'll— Let me go! I'll— Pigs! I'll kill—I'll—"

"Get 'old his sticks, Irish," said Ben quietly, "or he'll do some damage, souse me!"

O'Rooney seized the flying stumps and brought them together.

"Look out! He's trying to bite!" cried Joe.

Maddock laughed, and tightened his grip. Aided by Barry, he carried the cripple away. Prout cut his hammock down. Had the vessel been afloat, he would have bundled it into the sea, blankets included.

"By hokey," he said, "that's put a bad taste in my mouth! I'll go and sleep in the conning-tower!"

Having locked Stumpy in the strong-room, Barry O'Rooney and Maddock came back.

"Keep your heyes open, Tommy," grinned the bo'sun.

"He don't like you as much as he does rum. He's goin' to jab a knife in you, at least he says so! It's his one ambition in life, souse me!"

"All right," said Prout, gathering a few donations, in the shape of blankets. "I reckon I shall be there at the time and 'ave a bit of say in the matter! Good-night, boys!"

"Good-night, Tommy!"

Prout climbed the ladder, and switched on the electric light. There is no stillness like the stillness of the realms beneath the sea. A great goggle-eyed fish looked in wonderingly through the glass, and beat at it with his blunt nose. Presently, attracted by the light, other strange creatures of the deep gathered round.

To an ordinary person, the sight of these shadowy shapes and glaring eyes would have been terrifying, but Prout was used to such things. One brute, attracted like a moth by a candle, dashed against the tough glass with a force that must have stunned it. Prout arranged his blankets, and grinned.

"Go away!" he said. "It's rude to look through a gentleman's bed-room window when the gent's goin' to bed! By hokey, you ain't got no better manners nor that cripple! Go away, all of you! You're fishy!"

And then, winking solemnly at a great staring fish of the beam tribe that was gazing at him with its glassy green-tinged eyes, Thomas Prout took a final pull at his pipe, and went to sleep.

It was raining sharply when the Lord of the Deep rose to the surface, and a dense mist shrouded Mysteria. All had slept the clock completely round with the exception of Harold Honour and the millionaire, who had taken it in turns to watch Herr Schwartz, and Joe, who had to do the cooking.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the mist was as heavy as ever, and it was still raining in torrents. The vessel sank again. It was more pleasant under the sea than above it, for the wind and rain were very cold. Ching-Lung, Rupert Thurston, Ferrers Lord, and the engineer gathered round the radiator in the saloon, stretched out their legs luxuriously to the warmth, and smoked in comfort and content.

"Then you have finally decided to blow up the island, Ferrers?" said Rupert Thurston.

"I have come to that decision," answered the millionaire, with a slight yawn.

(This serial will be concluded shortly; but OUR GRAND NEW SERIAL, by Sidney Drew, starts next week—DON'T MISS IT! Order your copy in advance, or you will be disappointed.)



My Readers' Page

WHOM TO WRITE TO:
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The Editor is always pleased to hear from his Chums, at home or abroad.

FOR NEXT MONDAY:

"BLUNDELL'S PRIZE!"

By FRANK RICHARDS.

In this grand, long, complete tale of school life at Greyfriars School, Blundell, the skipper of the Fifth Form, has an amazing slice of luck. He receives a communication from the editor of a certain paper, informing him that he has won a big cash prize in a competition, and Blundell's delight naturally knows no bounds. At last he will be able to buy the object upon which his heart is most set—namely, a motor-cycle.

Various difficulties crop up, apparently expressly designed by Fate to delay Blundell's ownership of the coveted motor-cycle, but Blundell's zeal and determination overcome all obstacles, and the machine becomes his. From that moment Blundell's real troubles commence, owing to an entirely unforeseen circumstance which comes upon the unfortunate youth like a bombshell; and it is only a chance opportunity of displaying his pluck and skill that finally enables the winner of

"BLUNDELL'S PRIZE"

to set himself straight once more.

MORE GOOD THINGS FOR MY CHUMS!

There are some good things coming in the four companion papers, so it behoves my chums to keep a sharp look-out, and not miss a single number of either "The Magnet," "The Gem," or "The Penny Popular." In next Monday's "Magnet," for instance, another

Grand Serial by Sidney Drew, entitled: "THE BLUE ORCHID!"

will commence. There is no need for me to enlarge upon the merits of famous Sidney Drew. As an author of adventure stories of the most thrilling and powerful type, he simply stands alone; and my chums may rest assured that in

"THE BLUE ORCHID"

I have secured the best example of his work that it has ever been my luck to read.

Then for the "Gem Library" I have in preparation a series of

SPECIAL ARTICLES ABOUT CANADA,

by a man who went out a year or two ago as an ordinary emigrant, and wooed and won fortune in the great Far West. These articles are more than usually interesting, containing much first-hand information and sound advice, and will be a reliable guide to all who have any thoughts of emigration or are interested in Canada in any way; while the true tales of the author's actual experiences make fascinating reading for all. I will have more to say to my chums about these special articles shortly.

"The Penny Popular" has been increased in interest by the addition of an Editorial Chat column, entitled:

"BETWEEN OURSELVES";

while this week's three complete stories are simply grand, and embrace every type of fiction—school, detective, and adventure as well. I have no hesitation in saying that our splendid Friday companion paper, the good old "Penny Pop," is now better than ever.

As for "Chuckles," our Saturday halfpenny companion, there is simply no stopping it—it is bounding ahead like a racehorse, and its popularity and circulation are increasing literally hourly! Such a success has exceeded my most

sanguine anticipations, and can only be accounted for by the assumption that the splendid programme of funny pictures, bright colours, good jokes, and first-class stories have met with universal appreciation; in short, my chums and their friends, and the fiction-loving public generally, realise that for real, solid value in exchange for one halfpenny

"CHUCKLES" CANNOT BE BEATEN!

THE HOME WIZARD—No. 5.

The Mysterious Tobacco Pipes.

It is a popular saying that there is no smoke without fire, but the wizard is not bound by the prosaic laws of ordinary life. Not only can he on occasion produce smoke without fire, but he can even dispense with tobacco, and yet keep his pipe going merrily.

A popular method of presenting the trick is as follows:

The performer begins by asking if any gentleman present can oblige him with the loan of two clean clay-pipes. As even the most inveterate of smokers does not usually carry new pipes about with him, nobody complies with his request, and he is, therefore, reluctantly (?) compelled to provide the needful himself. He accordingly produces a couple of new pipes, of the "cutty" description, and announces that he is about to teach the company how to smoke after the new twentieth-century method, without either pipe-light or tobacco.

Taking the one pipe in his mouth in the usual way, he holds the other upside down upon it.

This, he explains, is done to concentrate the electric fluid. Forthwith thick clouds of white smoke begin to roll out, not only from his lips, but from between the two bowls. At any given moment he separates the two pipes, blows through each, and shows it empty, but the moment they are brought together again and he begins to smoke, the white clouds again roll out from between them.

The secret lies in the fact that the two pipes are chemically prepared, the one having been rinsed out just before using with liquid ammonia, and the other with hydrochloric acid. The moment they are brought together the fumes of the two chemicals combine in the form of chlorine gas, a heavy white vapour, in appearance not unlike tobacco smoke.

A paper spill, freshly dipped in the acid, may be substituted for the uppermost pipe. The performer must be very careful only to puff into the pipe, so as not to inhale any of the gas, which would be very injurious.

By way of variation, the performer may dispense with the pipes, and, lighting a genuine cigarette, offer to pass the smoke from it into a tumbler (of thin clear glass) which he shows empty and apparently innocent of all preparation. Turning the glass upside down on a plate, he directs the smoke from his lips towards it. The smoke disperses, but is seen to gather again under the tumbler.

A still more surprising effect may be produced by the performer offering to pass, not only the smoke, but the fire from his cigarette under the tumbler. To do this, he places on the plate a bit of crumpled paper, and covers it with the glass. He continues to puff at the cigarette, and to direct the smoke towards the tumbler. Presently the bit of paper is seen to catch fire. The glass being removed, the paper continues to burn until it is entirely consumed.

As the reader will no doubt have guessed, the plate and glass are treated after the manner described for the two pipes, the one with liquid ammonia, the other with hydrochloric acid. The bit of paper, which should be extremely thin, is saturated with spirits of turpentine, which will burst into flame under the action of chlorine gas.

There is a special advantage in the fact that the smell of the tobacco tends in this case to cover that of the ammonia, which if perceived by the audience might, to some extent, "give away" the trick.

(Another Grand Article
 Next Week.)

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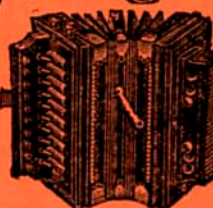
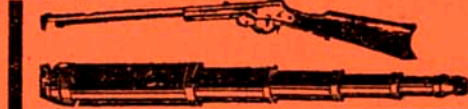
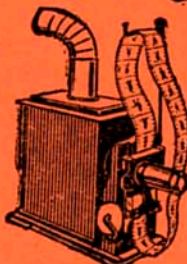
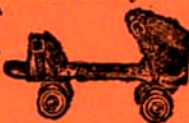
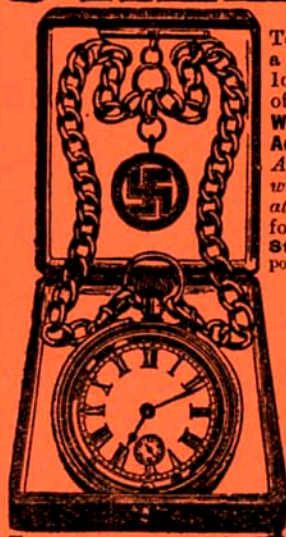


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