

In This Issue:

"CHUMMING WITH LODER!"

By FRANK RICHARDS.

"THE SILENCE!"

By EDMUND BURTON.



The Magnet ¹/₂ 1⁰

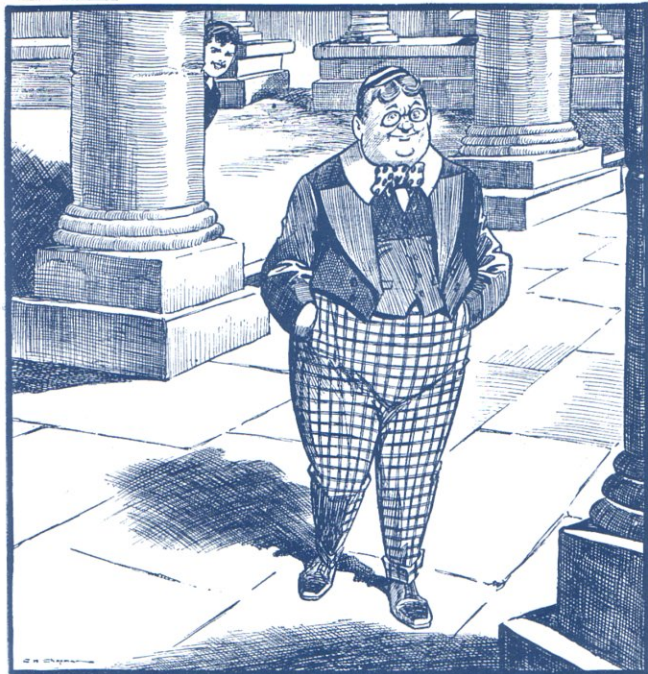
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Library

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SPLENDID SCHOOL TALE.



SHADOWING BILLY BUNTER TO THE HIDING-PLACE! AN ASTUTE MOVE BY THE REMOVE-FORM DETECTIVE!

(An Exciting Incident in the Magnificent Complete School Story of Greyfriars in this Issue.)

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For Next Monday :

"A THIRD FORM MYSTERY!"

By Frank Richards.

Next week's story will deal with the adventures of the fags of Greyfriars. A great sporting contest is organised by the great men of the Third, and Wingate minor, by a strange circumstance, becomes involved in a very bad affair.

Our popular author deals with the mystery in a masterful fashion, and although "Jacky" Wingate goes through troublous times, he emerges eventually with flying colours.

Our next issue will also contain another thrilling instalment of

"THE SILENCE!"

By Edmund Burton.

Please make certain of your copy of the MAGNET Library by ordering same from the newsagent well in advance.

An important announcement will be made in these columns next Monday in connection with a wonderful scheme for presenting readers of the MAGNET with a beautiful coloured model of their favourite school—to wit, Greyfriars! Don't miss it!

THE "BOYS' FRIEND" 4d. LIBRARY.

Owing to great pressure on our space this week the usual announcement concerning the current edition of the famous Library has been unavoidably held over.

Readers, however, should ask their newsagents to give them particulars of the four new editions which are now on sale.

TAKING THINGS COOLLY.

We say this is an age of hustle. It is quite right; but in many respects there is too much hustle and too little solid work. A fellow gets overrun by the number of his ideas, ideas which, in heaps of instances, are only happy thoughts. It is a mistake to get flustered, to imagine that there is not time in which to think, and to do the next job thoroughly. Ali hurry means shocking poor performance.

NOTHING DOING!

I cannot advertise all the articles which are mentioned in my letter-bag. Some correspondents want to unload excellent cameras, others have gramophones for sale, still more want to do deals in stamps. For the present there is not so much space for these things. I have no wish permanently to close the columns of the Companion Papers to exchange or sale business, but, as you will see, once the door is opened there is a perfect flood of advertisements. We all know that there is just only room for the yarns, etc. But it is something to bear in mind.

IF!

It is a magic word. Some folks browse on it. They let the rest go. They dwell in the mazy realm of supposition. It won't answer in the long run, and being what you are means a very long run. If there was room for half the good notions which pour in on me I should cram them into the paper. But there is not. I feel ready to lament my in-

ability in this line each time I open my mail. For crowds of the suggestions my chums send me are witty and so bright you could see to shave in them.

AN HONOURABLE OFFICE.

It was a pleasure to read the letter Miss Peggy Lloyd sent me from Lampeter. "Next month," she says, "I'm to cut the first sod of the War Memorial, and be presented with a silver spade. It'll be all right if it is fine, but dreadful if it's wet." I fancy, for my part, that it will be all right in any event so long as Miss Peggy is there. By the way, my girl chum cannot stand Billy Bunter, but I hope she will manage to tolerate him.

TRAMPS ABROAD.

You can talk of these and never get tired. As for that, there is no need to get weary of a tramp itself. A walk in the country is about the best reviver to be found. You can take your time over it, and enjoy the scene, while you are taking in fresh and helpful ideas at every turn of the lane. If you only manage to get on the fringe of the country you can still enjoy a ramble.

Your Editor

AFTER THE RAID!



Pa: "Was that burglar alarm any good?"

Ma: "It must have been; the burglars took it!"

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AND IT PUZZLES US TOO!



Dick: "There's one thing that puzzles me, Tom."

Tom: "What is that?"

Dick: "How is it that baby fish don't get drowned before they've learned to swim?"

HEARD AT THE SEASIDE!



Pa: "How can you be the top boy at school when you're at the bottom of your class?"

Lanky minor: "Because I'm above the average, pa!"

Pa: "In what?"

Lanky minor: "In height."



A minute later and Johnny Bull was groping in the cavity where he had seen Billy Bunter replace the missing pocket-book! (See Chapter 10.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Five in Trouble!

"O H!"

"Ah!"

"Mmmmmmmmm!"

Billy Bunter looked into Study No. 1, in the Remove passage, at Greyfriars, and grinned.

What he beheld there seemed to entertain him.

Five juniors were in the study; and, to judge by their looks, they were not enjoying life.

Harry Wharton was sitting very quietly, with a frowning brow. Bob Cherry was rubbing his hands hard. Johnny Bull was giving spasmodic grunts. Frank Nugent was groaning deeply. Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh was looking as pale as it was possible for him to look with his Oriental complexion. And at intervals the Famous Five lifted up their voices in chorus—a chorus of woe:

"Oh! Ah! Mum! Mmmmmmmmm!"

"I say, you fellows—"

Bob Cherry turned a lack-lustre eye upon the Owl of the Remove.

"Gerrout!" he mumbled.

"But I say—"

"Hook it!" hissed Johnny Bull.

"Isn't a licking bad enough, without you to make it worse? Take your face away!"

"He, he, he!"

"What are you cackling at?" roared Bob Cherry. "Is there anything funny in a licking?"

"Well, you fellows do look a set of mauling fowls!" said Billy Bunter cheerfully. "Buck up, you know! Bear it! Have a little fortitude! Be manly, you know—like me!"

Five ferocious glares were turned upon the Owl of the Remove. Bunter smiled pleasantly. Bunter could bear

anybody's troubles with fortitude—anybody's but his own.

"You chortling Hun!" said Bob Cherry. "As soon as I feel a little better, I'll mop up the passage with you!"

"The mopfulness shall be terrific!"

meant Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "Ow! Wow!" The esteemed Quelchly had laid it on not wisely but too well, as Poet Shakespeare remarks. "Wow!"

"I'm awfully sorry, you chaps!" said Bunter. "I've really come here to sympathise—"

"Bother your sympathy! Can you sympathise a pain out of a fellow's paws?" growled Johnny Bull.

"Of course, it's really your own fault, if that's any comfort," remarked Bunter.

Apparently it was not a comfort. Harry Wharton & Co. did not look comforted, at all events.

"You really walked round asking for trouble," continued Bunter. "Quelchly's down on playing cricket in the Remove-passage, whether it's raining or not. You jolly nicely bunged the ball on my napper one!"

"I wish it had knocked your silly head off!" groaned Bob Cherry. "That would have been a comfort! Ow!"

"And sending the ball through the landing-window—it was really too thick!" said Bunter, with a magisterial air. "Glass costs money, you know."

"It would have been all right if Loder hadn't reported it to Quelchly!" growled Johnny Bull. "We wouldn't mind paying for the dashed window—Ow! That villain Loder—"

"Well, you know, it's Loder's duty, as a prefect, to report it," said Bunter. "Prefects are prefects, you know, and busted windows are busted windows!"

"It wasn't his duty, as a prefect, to be sneaking round the Remove-passage

A Magnificent, New,
Long Complete Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co.
at Greyfriars School.

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

at all!" said Harry Wharton. "He came creeping up like a stealthy rotter to catch us. Any other prefect would have called out to us to stop. Wingate would have!"

"Loder's a beast!" groaned Bob Cherry. "He was jolly glad to catch us. We thought all the prefects were out, and he was sneaking round. He's as mean a sneak as Bunter—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Worse!" mumbled Nugent. "I never thought there could be anybody worse than Bunter; but Loder's worse—"

"Look here, Nugent—"

"The worsefulness is terrific!"

groaned Hurree Singh. "The esteemed Loder is a ludicrous and terrific beast! Ow!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, dry up!"

"I was going to say—"

"Cheese it! Oh, that rotter Loder—"

"That cad Loder—"

"That rank outsider Loder—"

"So that's the way you talk of a prefect, is it?" asked Loder of the Sixth, appearing behind Bunter at the doorway, and looking grimly into the study.

The Famous Five stared at him.

Loder had a most irritating way of going about quietly, and dropping on fellows when they least expected it. The chums of the Remove had not heard a sound of him as he came along to the study.

"You would interrupt me, you fellows," said Bunter calmly. "I was going to say that Loder was coming—"

"Oh!"

"Yow-ow!" howled Bunter, as Loder took hold of his fat ear. "Wharrer you up to, Loder? Leggo!"

Loder twirled Bunter out of the doorway by his ear, and stepped into the study. He looked at the five dolorous faces in Study No. 1, and seemed to find some satisfaction in the survey. The

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bully of the Sixth was very much up against Harry Wharton & Co., and that unlucky game of cricket in the Remove-passage had given him his opportunity.

"You've been calling me some pretty names!" he remarked grimly.

"How do you know?" asked Wharton, with a curl of the lip.

"I heard you."

"Listeners never hear any good of themselves," said the captain of the Remove. "If we'd heard you coming—but you took good care we shouldn't!"

Loder's eyes gleamed.

"You've had one coming from Mr. Quelch," he said. "It doesn't seem to have been enough for you. You have been making disrespectful remarks about a prefect—me! You will have two hundred lines each!"

"B-r-r-r!"

"As you don't know what to do with a rainy half-holiday, the lines will keep you busy," said Loder agreeably. "I shall expect them at tea-time. If they are not done, you will be taken to Mr. Quelch again."

And Loder walked out of the study with a grin of satisfaction. The Famous Five were down on their luck, and their old enemy rejoiced therein. The hapless Co. looked at one another.

"Lines! I couldn't hold a pen for hours!" mumbled Bob Cherry. "Isn't it awful luck! Who'd have thought that sneak was creeping up the passage—"

"The rotter!"

"Ahem! Better not call him any more names—he may be hanging about the passage now," murmured Nugent. "Owl! Owl! We've got to do the lines. If Quelch sees us again, he will put the steam on. Owl! Owl!"

But the chums of the Remove did not set to work on the lines yet. The chorus of lamentation was not yet finished.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Loder Asks For It!

"FEELING better?"

Billy Bunter asked that question about an hour later, when he met the Famous Five in the quadrangle. The rain—the cause of all the trouble that afternoon—had cleared off, and the sun had come out. Harry Wharton & Co. had come out also.

They were feeling better, certainly, though the pain in their palms was not quite gone. Mr. Quelch had felt it his duty to be severe on that occasion, and he had done his duty. The hapless victims felt that he had rather overdone it.

"You fellows can't stand much pain," remarked Bunter, blinking at them through his big spectacles. "You ought to try to be a little tougher, you know—like me! You wouldn't hear me kicking up such a fuss about an ache or two! Nothing like being manly."

"The Co. glared at him.

"So you can bear pain better than we can, can you?" rumbled Johnny Bull.

"I rather think so! I'm hardy, you know—in fact, manly. I should griu and bear it."

"I'll give you a chance," said Johnny Bull.

"Here, I say, leggo!" yelled Bunter, as the exasperated Johnny seized him in a powerful grasp.

Johnny Bull did not let go.

He held Bunter with one hand, and squeezed his ear with the other. That squeeze was certainly not so painful as the caning the Famous Five had received from Mr. Quelch. But it was too

painful for Bunter, and his remarkable fortitude was conspicuous by its absence. He squirmed and wriggled and roared.

"Yah! Leggo! Yarooooop! Hicp! Yoooop!"

"I'm waiting for you to griu!" explained Johnny Bull, still squeezing Bunter's fat ear.

"Yaroooh!"

"You're going to griu and bear it, you know!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"You haven't griined yet!"

"Leggo!" yelled Bunter. "Yow-ow-woooooop!"

"Not till you griu!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

So far from grinning, Bunter did not seem even able to bear it. He roared and howled at a terrific rate.

"Hallo! What are you doing to my porpoise?" demanded Peter Todd, coming out of the school shop.

"Bunter's showing us how to bear pain," explained Bob Cherry. "He thinks we make too much fuss about it, so he's showing us—"

"Yaroooh! Draggimoff, Toddy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help! Yooop! Oooo! Ow!"

Billy Bunter was not much hurt, as a matter of fact; but if his fat ear had been caught in a steel vice he could hardly have made more noise. It was just ill luck that Loder of the Sixth came along towards the tuckshop just then.

"Hallo! What's this row?" demanded Loder gruffly. "Bullying Bunter—eh?"

Johnny Bull released the fat junior. Bunter clasped his ear and continued to yell.

"Shut up, you fat duffer," whispered Peter Todd.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Bullying, I see!" said Loder. "Just what I might have expected of you. I must see into this."

Johnny Bull glared at the prefect.

"You know that's not true," he said.

"What?"

"I was squeezing Bunter's ear for his silly cheek," growled Johnny Bull. "If you say I was bullying, you're telling lies, Loder."

Johnny Bull was always a plain speaker—rather painfully plain at times. On this occasion there certainly was no doubt as to his meaning.

Loder gasped a little.

"You—you—you call me—" he stutted.

Loder had his asphalt under his arm, and he let it slip down to his hand.

"Hold out your hand, Bull!" he exclaimed.

Johnny Bull put his hands behind him.

"Do you hear me?" shouted Loder.

"I hear you," answered Johnny.

"I've had enough caning for this afternoon, thanks. I'm not taking any more."

"Will you hold out your hand?"

"No, I won't."

Johnny Bull turned his back on the prefect, with that. The next moment Loder's asphalt was whacking across his shoulders.

The sturdy junior turned round with a roar. Without stopping to think, he jumped at Loder, and in a moment the two were struggling.

"Pile in!" yelled Bob Cherry recklessly.

Loder was whacking away with his asphalt, and that was too much for Johnny Bull's chums. They rushed recklessly on Loder, and the Sixth-Former was collared on all sides. He came down on the ground with a terrific crash, the Famous Five sprawling over

him, and rolled there in the grasp of the juniors.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Bunter. The fat junior backed away from the scene a little.

The penalty of handling a prefect of the Sixth was severe, and Billy Bunter did not want to be mixed up in it. Peter Todd lent the Famous Five a hand, however. Bunter looked on, grinning. He was very glad to see Loder handled—he had a long list of cuffs in his memory. He enjoyed the scene—as a spectator.

Gerald Loder struggled frantically on the wet ground, which was not improving his clothes.

The elms shut off the scene from the view of the schoolhouse, which was fortunate for the juniors. It was unfortunate for Loder, as there was no help for him.

He struggled and gasped and howled, as the juniors rolled and hustled him on the muddy ground.

Harry Wharton & Co. were in an exasperated mood, and Loder's petty persecution had passed the limit. In their present tempers, instead of thinking of the consequences, they were only thinking of "taking it out" of the bully of Greyfriars while they had a chance.

Loder tore himself away at last, and sprang breathlessly to his feet. His trousers were muddy, his coat was smothered, and nearly all the buttons were gone from his waistcoat. His collar was cut, his necktie on the ground, and he was rumpled and ruffled from head to foot, and very nearly winded.

"Down him!" roared Bob.

Loder jumped away as the reckless juniors rushed at him again. It was miles below a prefect's dignity to take to his heels in a scuffle with juniors of the Lower Fourth; but Loder forgot his dignity. He bolted through the elms.

In high excitement the juniors rushed after him. The instinct of chase was roused as Loder fled.

Loder darted away, with six excited Removites in hot pursuit, yelling at his heels.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "Oh dear! There'll be an awful row about this! He, he, he!"

Bunter blinked after the chase for a moment, and then his eyes fell upon several objects on the ground where Loder had been struggling with the juniors. There were two or three caps, and Loder's necktie, a handkerchief, a number of detached buttons, and a pocket-book, evidently, had been dropped by Gerald Loder. Billy Bunter picked it up, and blinked at it.

Then he cast a hasty glance around.

Fellows in the quadrangle were staring after Loder and the juniors, and Bunter was screened by the trees. The Owl of the Remove slipped the pocket-book into his pocket, and walked away.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

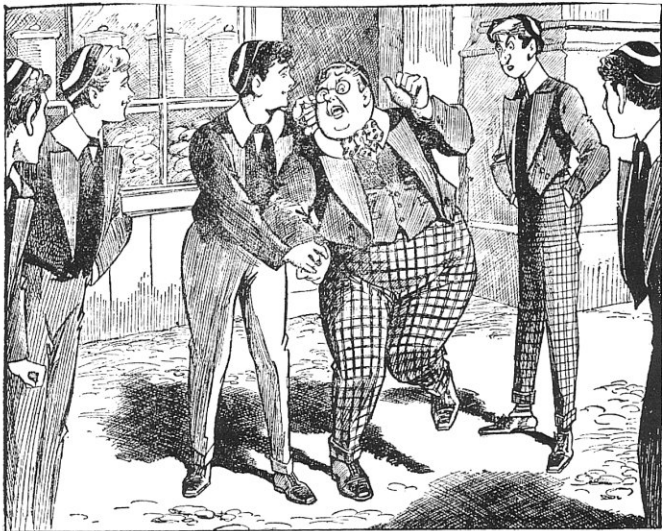
A Respite!

"W E R E in for it!"

Bob Cherry made that remark in dispirited tones.

The Famous Five had gathered in Study No. 1—to wait for the chopper to come down, as Bob had expressed it.

Loder had dodged into the schoolhouse; and there he had escaped. By great good fortune the excited Co. had recollected themselves in time, and had not chased Loder to the Sixth-Form passage. Such an invasion of the quarters of the high-and-mighty Sixth by mere



So far from grinning, Billy Bunter did not seem even able to bear it. He roared and howled at a terrific rate. "It's all right," explained Bob Cherry, "Bunter's showing us how to bear pain. He thinks we make too much fuss about it, so he's showing us—" (See Chapter 2.)

juniors would have caused the skies to fall, or something very near it. Harry Wharton & Co. had retreated to the Remove passage, as Loder vanished, and as soon as they had time to think, they thanked Fortune that they had not run into Mr. Quelch while in chase of Loder.

Not that it really made much difference, for Loder was certain to report the occurrence as soon as he had his second wind.

Mr. Quelch had caned the heroes of the Remove for playing cricket in the study passage. What was he likely to do when he learned that they had handled a Sixth-Form prefect in the quad, and rolled him in the mud, and chased him like a fag?

Exactly what Mr. Quelch would do the juniors did not know, but they knew that it would be something drastic. Indeed, Loder was quite likely to complain to the Head instead of to their Form-master, the case being so serious. The prospect of being called before Dr. Locke on the charge of assaulting a prefect was appalling.

The juniors looked at one another dolefully. This was worse than the caning!

"It was all Bunter's fault!" growled Johnny Bull at last.

"Oh, Loder's always looking for a chance!" said Frank Nugent. "It can't be helped. If he goes to the Head—"

"It may mean a flogging!"

"Ow!"

"We're in for it, and no mistake."

"The infusibleness is terrific!" mumbled Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Oh dear!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that Loder's fairy footstep?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

There was a heavy tread in the passage without. If it was Gerald Loder he certainly was not creeping this time.

The door was flung open.

It was Loder of the Sixth who appeared in the doorway. The Famous Five looked at him, and his eyes glittered at them.

Loder was still looking muddily, though he had brushed himself down a little, and put on a collar and tie. His manner was not so belligerent as the juniors had anticipated.

The Removites did not speak. They waited for Loder to open the ball, as it were.

"You young hooligans!" said Loder at last, between his teeth.

"Bow-wow!" murmured Bob.

"Give me my pocket-book!"

"What?"

"My pocket-book!"

"What the thump do you mean?" exclaimed Harry Wharton testily. "What do we know about your pocket-book?"

Loder compressed his lips.

"I found my pocket-book was missing when I got to my study," he said. "One of you young cads must have taken it

from my pocket. I dare say that's what you set on me for. Hand it over at once, or I'll take you to the Head and charge you with stealing it!"

"Why, you—you—" stammered Bob Cherry, in great wrath.

"Don't be a fool, Loder!" said Harry Wharton directly. "You know perfectly well that nobody here would pick your silly pocket. We set on you, as you call it, because you were bullying our pal, and you know it."

"My pocket-book's gone!"

"I dare say it dropped when you were wriggling. You shed a necktie, I noticed," said Frank Nugent.

"I've looked in the place," said Loder, with unexpected quietness. "I found my necktie, but my pocket-book wasn't there."

"Better look again."

"I've looked all round the place for a dozen yards every way. It's not there, and I want it at once!"

"Well, nobody here knows anything about it," said Harry Wharton.

Loder looked at the juniors, his eyes glittering, but his manner still quiet. It dawned upon the Co. that the prefect was in a state of unconsciousness, on account of his lost pocket-book. Loder had many little secrets, and possibly the contents of the pocket-book gave a clue to some of them, if examined by inquisitive eyes.

"You deny taking it from my pocket?" asked Loder, at last.

Wharton's eyes flashed.

"We don't trouble to deny it," he answered contemptuously. "If you're cad enough to suspect anything of the kind, you can suspect it, and be hanged to you!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

"I want that pocket-book!" said Loder, gritting his teeth. "There's the valuables in it—"

"I can guess what's in it," said Bob Cherry, with a grin. "Letters from Banks, the bookie, perhaps—"

"You cheeky cub!" shouted Loder.

"I've told you, Loder, that nobody here knows anything about your pocket-book," said Harry Wharton quietly. "If there's money in it you need not be anxious about it. There are no thieves at Greyfriars. You can put a notice on the board in the usual way, and if anybody finds the thing he will bring it to you."

Loder made no reply. He was looking troubled and angry, and the juniors could guess that it was not money he was anxious about. Lost money was certain to be returned to the owner. Even Billy Bunter could be relied upon to that extent. But doubtless there were some fellows inquisitive enough to look into private papers, and that was what the prefect was afraid of. Prefect as Gerald Loder was, there were a good many fellows in the school who suspected his shady ways. The sportsman of the Sixth could not keep them wholly a secret.

There was a minute of silence in the study. Loder seemed at a loss. As for "handing," he seemed to have forgotten that. He wanted to recover the precious pocket-book, before he thought of punishing the handlers.

"Will you own up?" he exclaimed; at last. "I know you had it. I've questioned Todd already. He denies knowing anything about it. But one of you had it, or all of you—"

Harry Wharton rose to his feet, his eyes gleaming.

"Come on, you fellows!" he said.

"Where?" asked Bob.

"To the Head! Loder's accusing us of stealing. We're going to the Head about it."

"Good!"

"Stop!" shouted Loder, in alarm, as the five juniors headed for the door.

"We're going to the Head," answered Wharton quietly. "This matter is going to be settled, Loder."

"Yes, rather!"

"I tell you, stop!" shouted Loder. "You're not to go to the Head. I don't want him to—to—I mean, I don't accuse you. If you give me your word you haven't the pocket-book—"

"We've done that already."

"Then I—I—I'm satisfied."

And Loder quitted the study hastily. Harry Wharton looked at his comrades.

"Now, what the flump does that mean?" he asked.

Johnny Bull gave a grunt.

"Plain enough," he said. "There's something in that pocket-book that Loder dares not let anybody see. He doesn't want the Head to be inquiring after it. He dare not let us go before the Head and have the matter out."

Bob Cherry burst into a chuckle.

"At that rate, he dare not report us for handling him!" he said. "He half thinks we've got the pocket-book among us somewhere. If there's something in it that would show him up he won't report us, and set us talking to the Head."

He's afraid of what we may know, and what we may let out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter in Study No. 1. It was evident that Loder of the Sixth feared the Famous Five now more than they feared him. Until the pocket-book turned up, at all events, they had nothing to fear from the black sheep of Greyfriars. It was a great relief to the Co. after their gloomy anticipations, and they fervently hoped that Gerald Loder's pocket-book would not turn up in a hurry.

—

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Prize!

"O H crumbs!"

William George Bunter uttered that exclamation.

Bunter's eyes were glistening through his big spectacles. The fat junior was in high feather.

Billy Bunter had scudded away after "bagging" the pocket-book Loder had dropped in the struggle. He had taken refuge in the old tower, a very secluded spot, to examine his prize.

In bagging that prize, Bunter had had no clear idea of what he intended to do with it. Inquisitiveness was his chief motive. He meant to look into the pocket-book, and read any letters that might be there, and he had a vague thought that, if there was any money in it, Loder might offer a reward for its recovery. In that eventuality, Bunter was prepared to claim the reward for "finding" it. First of all, the Owl of the Remove proceeded to satisfy his curiosity, which, was, after eating and sleeping, his ruling passion.

In the quiet seclusion of the old tower, safe from interruption, the unscrupulous Owl opened the pocket-book, and examined the contents.

To his disappointment, there was no money in it, not even a currency-note for ten shillings. The prospect of a reward for the finding of the lost article faded away. The book was not valuable in itself, and there were only papers in it.

Bunter grunted with discontent.

Nothing but his curiosity was to be satisfied, after all. However, that was better than nothing, from his peculiar point of view.

His expression changed as he continued to examine his prize. On several leaves of the book there were figures, apparently calculations of a somewhat abstruse kind. Bunter blinked over them inquisitively. He came upon a note pencilled in Loder's hand:

3.15. Sat. Jolly Boy, two to one agst.
5.0. Snooker's Pride, odds on.

Billy Bunter grinned.

He could see, of course, that this note referred to some horse-race in which Gerald Loder had been interested.

Many Greyfriars fellows knew, or suspected, that Loder dabbled in Turf matters, careful as the prefect was to keep it "dark." Bunter, from his Peeping Tom proclivities, naturally knew more about it than the other fellows.

Whatever the fellows might have suspected, nothing in the way of proof came into their hands, naturally. But there was proof in William George Bunter's fat hands now.

Loder could not carry on his extensive system of dabbling in turf matters without written notes on the subject. That precious pocket-book had never been out of his keeping, until it was bumped out in the tussle with the Removites. Billy Bunter was not, as a rule, quick at think-

ing; but the value of this pocket-book dived upon his fat brain at once.

For he knew that, if it came under the eyes of Dr. Locke, Loder would not only lose his position as a prefect, but would stand a very excellent chance of being expelled from Greyfriars altogether.

Bunter's fat fingers trembled now with excitement, as he turned over the leaves of the pocket-book.

He found more pencilled notes, and some in ink—some of them that he could understand, and some that he couldn't. But he understood enough to get Gerald Loder "sacked" from Greyfriars half a dozen times over.

There were some loose papers in the pocket-book, too, most of them referring to racing matters; two or three cuttings from sporting papers, trainers' reports concerning the "form" of certain horses, and so forth. For a Greyfriars fellow, Loder seemed to have a pretty extensive knowledge of Turf matters.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter. "I wonder how Loder would like the Head to see this little lot? He, he, he!"

For a good hour the Owl of the Remove pored over the pocket-book and its contents.

He closed it at last, and fastened the elastic band, and rose from the stone he had been seated upon.

He put his prize into his pocket, but took it out again. He had not the slightest intention of returning it to Loder yet, at all events. It occurred to his fat brain that that pocket-book was worth more in the way of a reward than if it had been crammed with banknotes. It was in Bunter's power to get the bully of the Sixth sacked from the school, and he realised it. He had only to walk into the Head's study and lay that book upon Dr. Locke's desk. The thought of having a Sixth Form prefect under his thumb was delightful to Bunter. But he realised that it would not do to place himself within Loder's reach with the pocket-book on his fat person. He looked round for a hiding-place for it.

That was easy enough to find; the walls of the old tower were full of nooks and crannies. Bunter selected a deep cavity in the old stone wall, pushed the pocket-book into it, and filled up the cavity with several fragments of stone.

Then, quite satisfied that his prize was safe, the fat junior rolled out, and trotted off cheerfully to the School House. He grinned as he caught sight of Gerald Loder near the tuckshop, scanning about under the elms. After his futile interview in Study No. 1, Loder was making another search for his pocket-book, hoping to find it in some corner where it might have rolled.

Billy Bunter approached him with a smiling, fat visage.

"Lost anything, Loder?" he called out.

The prefect looked quickly round, with a flushed and heated face.

He came quickly towards Bunter. He remembered that the Owl of the Remove had been looking on while he was struggling with the Removites.

"Bunter, have you picked up my pocket-book?" he asked, cying the fat junior with a searching look.

"Your pocket-book!" repeated Bunter. "What's it like, Loder?"

"Just a plain black one, with an elastic band."

"Any name on it?"

"No, no!"

"Then I couldn't tell whether it was yours if I picked it up, could I?" remarked Bunter casually.

Loder's eyes seemed to burn at him.

"Have you picked up any pocket-book at all?" he asked, breathing hard.

"I may have, or I may not have,"



"I asked you a question, Loder," said Mr. Quelch, who was amazed by the extraordinary changes going on in Loder's startled face. "Will you have the kindness to reply to it?" (See Chapter 9.)

answered Bunter cautiously. "If I have, it couldn't have been yours, Loder."

"Why not, you fat fool?"

"Well, you're a prefect, you know," said Bunter cheerfully. "You couldn't be mixed up with racing and betting, could you?"

Loder panted.

"You—you've been looking into it," he breathed. "You young scoundrel! Give me my pocket-book at once!"

"Is it yours—with stuff in it about betting on races?" asked Bunter, with an air of surprise.

"Give it to me, or I'll smash you, Bunter!" said Loder, in a choking voice, coming closer to the fat junior.

Bunter backed away.

"Better not touch me, Loder," he said. "I might go to the Head."

"Wha-a-at?"

"As your name isn't in the pocket-book, I think perhaps I ought to take it to the Head," said Bunter calmly. "He will know whom it ought to be given to, won't he? When he sees the papers in it—"

Loder choked.

"I'll—I'll— Will you give it to me at once, Bunter?"

He did not touch the fat junior. In the open quadrangle he could not seize him and search his pockets. But it required all Loder's self-control to keep his hands off the Owl of the Remove just then.

"I'll see you later," said Billy Bunter, quite enjoying the situation. "The fact is, Loder, I rather think I ought to take

that book to the Head. I don't approve of prefects doing these things."

"Wha-a-at?"

"As a prefect," said Bunter loftily, "it's your duty to set an example to the juniors. Suppose I followed your example, and began betting on horse-races? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Loder!"

"I—I—I—I'll—"

Loder's hands twitched almost convulsively. Bunter prudently backed away a little further.

"I'm shocked at you, you know," he said. "Keep off, or I'll yell for help, and then tell the Head—"

"I—I—I— You admit you've got my pocket-book, you fat thief!" breathed Loder.

"If you call me names, Loder, I shall go to the Head at once," said Bunter, with dignity. "Knowing what a rotter you are—"

"What?"

"Knowing what a rotter you are, I felt it my duty to look into that pocket-book. Keep off, you beast! I haven't got it about me!" gasped Bunter, as the infuriated junior closed in on him.

"Where is it, then?" panted Loder, stopping short.

"In a safe place," grinned the Owl of the Remove. "where I can lay hands on it when I choose. I'm not decided yet whether to take it to the Head. Do you think it's my duty to take it to the Head, Loder—as a prefect, you know?"

Loder choked again. He dared not touch Bunter. Enraged as he was, he

realised that he had to keep the right side of the fat junior until the precious pocket-book was in his hands again. It was in Bunter's power to ruin him.

Billy Bunter was quite conscious of his advantage, and he grinned with enjoyment. It was rather a triumph to have the bully of the Sixth at his mercy in this way.

"Get the book, Bunter, and—and give it to me, there's a good chap," Loder breathed at last. "I—I'll be ever so much obliged."

"So would the Head be if I gave it to him," said Bunter. "It would be rather an eye-opener for him, wouldn't it? I really think it's my duty to take it to him."

"Bunter! You—"

"I'll think about it," said Bunter generously. "I'll let you off if I can, Loder. I'll do the best I can for you, in fact."

The Owl of the Remove turned away.

"Bunter," gasped Loder, "give me that book, and—and I—I'll stand you ten bob!"

Bunter blinked round.

"I'm afraid I couldn't act in a mercenary way like that, Loder," he said. "But, speaking of ten bob, I'd be obliged if you could lend it to me. I've been disappointed about a postal-order, and I happen to be rather short of money."

"Give me the book—"

"Nothing doing!" said Bunter coolly. "You can make me a little loan or not, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 649.

as you like, Loder. I'm willing to be friendly."

"Certainly. But it's for you to decide. Still, perhaps on the whole, I'd better go to the Head—"

"Here's ten bob, you fat rascal!"

"I decline to accept a loan on those terms, Loder. If you ask me to take it as a pal, I'll take it. Do you ask me as a pal?"

If Loder could have slain, the career of William George Bunter would have come to a sudden termination there and then. Fortunately for the Owl of the Remove, looks couldn't.

"Yes," gasped Loder.

"In that case," said Bunter, with dignity, "I'll take it."

And he took it, and rolled away with Gerald Loder's ten shilling note in his pocket. Loder stood looking after him, breathing very hard, with fury in his eyes, and a tremor in his heart. Loder's manners and customs had brought him into danger before, more than once, but the blackguard of the Sixth knew that he had never before stood on such slippery ice as now.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Pig in Clover!

"**A** NYTHING for tea?"

Billy Bunter asked that question as he looked into Study No. 7 in the Remove.

Peter Todd and Tom Dutton were there, but there was no sign of tea. The Owl of the Remove blinked round with a dissatisfied expression.

"We've had tea in Hall," said Peter. "I'm not bothering about tea, anyhow. Seen anything of Loder?"

Bunter grinned.

"Yes, I've just had a chat with him."

"Oh, you've had a chat with him, have you?" growled Peter. "You have chats with Sixth Form fellows—what?"

"Why not? I'm rather chummy with Loder," answered Bunter calmly. "Are you trembling in your shoes about handling him in the quad this afternoon? He, he, he!"

"I'm not trembling in my shoes, Fatty, but I'm not looking forward to seeing the Head about it," said Peter Todd. "It was all your fault we had to handle Loder, and if you cackle, you image, I'll lay a stump around you, hard!"

"Nothing to be afraid of. I'll speak to Loder about it, if you like," said Bunter carelessly.

"And what good will your speaking to Loder do, you swanking ass!" asked Peter, eyeing his fat study-mate with great disfavour.

"I'll get him to let you off, I mean, and the other fellows, too," explained Bunter. "I've got a certain amount of influence with the prefects, you know."

"You babbling chump!" said Peter Todd. "What are you giving me that silly gas for? Have you got bats in the belfry, or are you trying to pull my leg?"

"Oh, really, Toddy! I don't mind doing you a good turn. Come with me to Loder now, and I'll get him to let you off."

"Futhead!" roared Peter Todd.

Peter was not likely to believe in Bunter's "influence with the prefects." He did not know anything about the found pocket-book. As a matter of fact, the fat Owl was telling the truth for once. Undoubtedly he had a good deal of influence with Gerald Loder—at present.

"Seeing is believing," said Bunter. THE MAGNET LIBRARY—No. 649.

"The fact is, as you've got nothing decent here, I'm thinking of dropping in to tea with a friend in the Sixth."

"A—a—friend in the Sixth!" babbled Peter Todd.

"Exactly! Loder, I think. I'm rather pally with Loder. He's not really a bad sort, in his way, you know. Would you like to come with me to tea in Loder's study?"

Peter Todd rose to his feet with a grim expression.

"I'll come with you to Loder's study," he said. "I'll march you into his study—by the neck, if you try to keep out. That will be a lesson to you not to blow off silly gas about having pals in the Sixth Form!"

"Done!" said Bunter calmly.

"Keep it up!" growled Peter. "Keep it up till we get to Loder's door, you gassy bouncer; then, when you try to dodge, you'll find my knuckles in the back of your neck."

"Oh, come on, old top!" said Bunter. "Don't chin-wag so much, old fellow! You always talk too much, Toddy."

Peter Todd breathed hard as he followed Bunter from the study. Not for a moment did he suppose that there was any foundation for the Owl's "swank." He fully expected that Bunter would attempt to bolt before Loder's study was reached, and he was prepared to nip that bolt in the bud.

But, to his amazement, Billy Bunter walked down the Sixth Form passage as if it belonged to him, and showed no inclination whatever to bolt.

Arrived at Loder's door, Bunter tapped on it carelessly and threw it open. Loder was sitting at the tea-table, and Carne of the Sixth had come to tea with him. Loder's brow was troubled, and the look he gave Billy Bunter was a black and bitter one.

Peter, utterly amazed, followed Bunter into the study. Bunter entered it with undiminished self-confidence, and Peter could not help wondering whether he was dreaming.

"Hallo, Loder!" said Bunter coolly.

"Oh! Ah! Hallo!" stuttered Loder. Carne looked on in astonishment, equal to Peter's. Had a Lower-Fourth boy walked into Carne's study and said "Hallo, Carne!" something would have happened on the spot. Gerald Loder was taking it like a lamb.

"Having tea, I see," remarked Bunter.

"Ye-es," said Loder.

"I'll join you, if you like; I haven't had my tea."

"You fat—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, do."

"I—I've been going to ask you to tea, Bunter, for some time. Draw up a chair."

"Certainly, old top!"

Loder gasped again, and Carne stared blankly. Peter Todd again wondered whether he was dreaming. Bunter of the Remove had addressed a Sixth Form prefect as "old top." Yet the skies had not fallen.

"What the thump's this game, Loder?" asked Arthur Carne gruffly.

"Did you ask me here to tea with a grubby face?"

"I—I didn't know Bunter was coming," stammered Loder.

"Well, can't you kick him out?"

"I—I don't mind his staying to tea," said the unhappy sportsman of the Sixth, whose sportiveness had come home to roost, as it were, in this exceedingly unpleasant way.

Carne grunted.

"By the way, Loder," said Bunter, "here's Toddy. Toddy was mixed up in handling you this afternoon. I want you

to let him off. I'm sure you'll do it to oblige me."

Loder glanced at Toddy. He had not given much thought to the "handling" he had received; he had been too worried about the loss of his valuable pocket-book. He was not sure, too, whether Toddy knew anything about that pocket-book. So far, all the juniors concerned had escaped the vials of Loder's wrath, owing to his uneasy fears. "You can go, Toddy," muttered Loder. "I overlook the occurrence. I shall not mention it to the Head."

"Oh!" stuttered Peter Todd. "Oh, my hat!"

He was quite dazed.

Evidently Bunter had not been uttering an empty boast when he stated that he had "influence with the prefects"—with one prefect, at least. Peter Todd was a very keen youth, but this was beyond his understanding. He stared at Loder, and he stared at Bunter.

Bunter waved a fat hand to him patronisingly.

"You see, it's all right, Toddy. You can cut off now. I'll have you here to tea another time. You won't mind, Loder?"

"Oh, no!"

Peter Todd almost staggered out of the study. Undoubtedly he was greatly relieved to hear that Loder was not going to report the affair in the quad to Dr. Locke. But he did not understand, and he was hopelessly puzzled and perplexed.

Billy Bunter sat down at the tea-table. His fat face was irradiated with smiles. Loder appeared to be in funds, to judge by the handsome spread on the table. The Owl of the Remove felt like a pig in clover. He proceeded to help himself liberally at once.

Arthur Carne looked very restive. He had been talking "gee-gees" with Loder before the arrival of the latest guest. He could not talk gee-gees before a Lower Fourth boy; and he did not care for Lower Fourth company at tea-time. He gave Loder several expressive looks, but Loder avoided meeting his eyes.

"Look here! What's this stunt, Loder?" Carne exclaimed impatiently, at last. "I'm not going to have tea with grubby fags! I don't take this as a compliment! If Bunter's grubbing hero, I'm not!"

"All the more for me," said Bunter cheerfully. "Loder doesn't mind if you do, do you, Loder?"

Loder made no reply. Carne, with another angry look at his chum, strode out of the study, and slammed the door after him. Bunter grinned, and applied himself to the spread.

"Pass the tea-cake, old top!" he said.

Loder silently passed the tea-cake.

"This is really decent of you, old fellow," remarked Bunter, with his mouth full. "I think I shall often drop in to tea with you, Loder. I know you'll stand me something decent."

"What are you going to do with that pocket-book, Bunter?" asked Loder, flicking his dry lips.

"I haven't decided yet."

"Where have you put it?"

"That's telling."

Loder clenched his hands convulsively. It was with difficulty that he kept them off the cheery Owl of the Remove. If he had thought for a moment that Bunter had his plunder about him, certainly he would not have kept his hands off. But he knew that even the obtuse Owl could not be obtuse enough to venture into his study with the pocket-book on his person. It was in some safe place—where, Loder could not guess.

Until he could guess, and recover his lost property, it behoved him to be civil to Bunter.

Billy Bunter, quite aware of Gerald Loder's suppressed feelings, was not in the least disturbed thereby. He had the whip-hand, and he knew it. With perfect serenity, he proceeded to clear Loder's tea-table, and he did not stop till it was quite cleared.

"Thanks awfully, old bean!" he said. "You've done me so well that I'll be sure to come again. Ta-ta!"

He rolled out of the study, smiling. Loder cast a bitter look after him; and when the door had closed on Bunter the hapless prefect walked restlessly up and down his study, his eyes gleaming and his fists clenched. He would have given a term's allowance to stretch Billy Bunter across a chair and lay on an asphalt with all the force of his arm. But William George Bunter was safe from the asphalt now.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Loder's New Chum!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. were astonished.

They could, in fact, scarcely believe their eyes!

It was the following day, and the Remove had come out after morning lessons with Mr. Quelch. The Sixth Form were already out, and Loder, Carne, and Walker stood in a group, chatting, in the quad. And Billy Bunter, detaching himself from the crowd of juniors, walked up to the Sixth-Formers, and calmly joined the group. Loder was making a remark; and Billy Bunter followed it with one of his own, joining in the conversation with perfect assurance.

The Remorites simply blinked.

At Greyfriars the great men of the Sixth had to be treated with respect. Between the lofty Sixth and the junior Forms there was a great gulf fixed. The Sixth did not chum even with the Fifth; even towards the Fifth there was lofty condescension in their manner. The Shell they ignored; and as for such Forms as the Fourth and the Remove, they appeared to be scarcely aware of the existence of such small fry. And here was Bunter, the most inconsiderable member of the Remove, joining a group of Sixth-Formers, and baiting into their conversation with a cheerful assumption of friendly equality.

The juniors, instead of dispersing round the quad, remained where they were, and looked on as if fascinated. They wanted to see what would happen to Bunter.

Loder coloured. Walker and Carne glanced at Bunter. They were as surprised as the junior spectators.

"Just what I think, old chap!" said Bunter, capping the remark Loder had just been making.

"Fiallo!" said Walker, staring at the fat junior. "Just what you think—what? And do you think you are allowed to butt into a Sixth Form conversation, you scrubby, grubby, tubby young scoundrel?"

"Oh, really, Walker—Yaroooooh!" Walker took the Owl of the Remove by the collar, and proceeded to shake him. He shook with vigour, and Billy Bunter quivered like a very fat jelly in his grasp.

"Yow-ow!" howled Bunter. "Leggo, you beast! Make him leggo, Loder! I'll go to the Head! Yow-ow!"

"Go to the Head!" repeated Walker, still shaking. "You can go to the Head,

or go to the dickens, but you'll take a pleasant recollection of my boot with you, wherever you go!"

And Walker held Bunter at arm's-length by the back of the collar, and drew back his boot.

"This is where Bunt gets it!" grinned Vernon-Smith of the Remove. "He can't say he hasn't asked for it."

"The askfulness was—"

"Terrific!" grinned Bob Cherry, interrupting the Nabob of Bhanipur. "I fancy the kickfulness is also going to be a bit terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter wriggled in Walker's powerful grip, waiting in terror for the senior's boot to land. But Loder started forward.

"Stop that, Walker!"

"Stop it!" repeated Walker, too surprised to land the kick, for the moment. "Why should I stop it, Loder?"

"Kick the cheeky young rotter across the quad!" growled Carne.

"I'm going to."

"Stop!" Gerald Loder caught Walker by the arm. "Stop it, I say! Bunter meant no harm, did you, Bunter?"

"Yow-ow! Leggo!"

Loder jerked Bunter away from his fellow-prefect. Walker was so astonished that he let him go, only blinking at Loder.

"Cut off, you young ass!" muttered Loder.

But Billy Bunter did not cut off. He kept a safe distance from Walker; but he remained by Loder.

"Don't you want my company, Loder?" he asked, with a threatening glare through his spectacles.

"Oh, yes—certainly! Don't mind Bunter, you fellows—" he stammered. "Don't mind Bunter!" repeated Walker. "But I do mind Bunter. If you've got friends in the Lower Fourth, Loder, I haven't. If you enjoy Lower Fourth conversation, I don't! If you're a silly idiot, I'm not! Don't mind Bunter! Are you off your silly rocker? If you're not, what's the matter with you, I'd like to know?"

"I—I—see—Bunter—h'm—"

"I'll leave you with your friend Zanter," said Walker, glaring. "Come on, Carne; we're interrupting Loder's conversation with his friend Bunter! By gad!"

"You—you fellows—" stammered Loder.

Walker strode away in great dudgeon, followed by Carne. They did not even look back at Loder's distressed face; they were too wrathful. Loder was left with his "friend" Bunter—at whom his look was not excessively friendly. He caught the curious glances of the Remove fellows, and his flush deepened.

Bunter was quite satisfied, however. He realised that it would not do to be chummy with Loder's Form-fellows; but undoubtedly he could be as chummy as he liked with Loder himself; and he meant to be. It was rather a distinction for a Lower Fourth junior to have a chum in the Sixth!

"Coming for a stroll, Loder, old boy?" asked Bunter, adjusting his collar, which had been rather disturbed by James Walker's grasp.

"Oh, yes—certainly!" gasped Loder. "Come along to the tuckshop, old fellow," said Bunter. "I'd like a snack before dinner. This way, dear boy!"

Loder opened his lips; but there were a dozen juniors within hearing, and he closed them again. With a crimson face, he followed Bunter across the quad.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another. The scene had quite taken their breath away.

"Is Loder off his dot?" said Squiff of the Remove. "If he isn't, what is he standing Bunter's check for?"

"Must be potty, I should think," said Vernon-Smith, in wonder.

"Loder chumming with Bunter!" said Hazeldene, with a whistle. "Why, he must be completely, absolutely insane."

"The barfoulness must be terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The juniors watched the queerly-assorted chums across the quad. They disappeared into the school shop. Evidently Bunter was going to have his "snack" before dinner; and pretty certain Gerald Loder was going to pay for it.

Harry Wharton & Co. gave up the problem. The mystery was too deep for them, and they had to give it up.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Wharton is Wanted!

IT'S come at last!

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent had finished tea that day in Study No. 1, when Dicky Nugent, of the Second Form, looked in with a message. It was a message from Loder of the Sixth, requiring Wharton's presence at once in his study. It was then that Harry remarked that it had "come at last!"

So far, no trouble had fallen upon the chums of the Remove for that episode in the quadrangle on Wednesday, when they had handed Gerald Loder so vigorously and effectively. That Loder would forgive them was highly improbable; he was not of a forgiving temper. Certainly, he had let the sun go down upon his wrath, but that was because, as the juniors guessed, Loder wasn't quite sure whether they knew anything about the missing pocket-book.

As soon as Loder felt safe about that, he was certain to exact vengeance; but, evidently, he could not leave the matter too long before reporting it to the Head.

It would not be much use to go to the Head on Friday or Saturday with a tale of what had happened on Wednesday. Harry Wharton & Co., therefore, hoped that Loder would remain in doubt about the lost pocket-book until it was too late to bring that "scrap" in to the quad to the Head's knowledge.

Apparently their hope was ill-founded, to judge by the message the fag had brought to Study No. 1.

The two Removites looked very serious, and Dicky Nugent grinned at them.

"What did Loder look like, Dicky?" asked his brother.

"Like a gargoyle, as usual," replied Nugent minor.

"You young ass—I mean, was he looking ratty? Had he got a cane handy?"

"I didn't see a cane," answered Dicky cautiously. "But he looked pretty black. Worried, more than savage, though, I thought."

"I'm!" said Frank Nugent thoughtfully. "It may be all right, Harry. After all, if it's about the row in the quad, he would want the lot of us."

"Bunter's been to tea in his study," said Nugent minor. "He was there yesterday. Tubb of the Third says he's not going to fag at getting tea for a Remove cad. He's Loder's fag, you know!"

"Did he say so to Loder?" grinned Nugent.

"No, fear—he says so in the Third!" chuckled Dicky. "He came to the Second Form room and banged Sammy Bunter's head on his desk."

"What on earth for?"

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"Because he's Billy Bunter's minor, you know. He can't bang Billy Bunter's head, so he banged Sammy's."

"The sins of the majors are visited on the minors," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "But never mind, Tubb—I suppose I'd better go and see Loder, Franky?"

"I suppose you had," remarked Dicky sarcastically, "unless you want Loder to come and see you!" And the fag walked away, whistling.

"If it's a licking," continued Wharton, "I'll refuse, and demand to be reported to the Head. Loder will have to explain why he hasn't reported the affair sooner, and he may find that difficult. I'll go."

And Wharton went.

He found Billy Bunter on the Remove staircase, with a fat and shiny countenance, and a smear of jam on it.

Bunter gave the captain of the Remove a lofty nod.

"You're sent for," he remarked.

"Yes—Loder."

"I heard him tell Nugent minor. I say, if you like I'll come with you and see you through," said Bunter patronisingly.

"I've got a lot of influence with the prefects, you know."

"At least!"

"Oh, really, Wharton?"

Harry Wharton passed on. Whether Bunter had any influence with the prefects or not, Wharton was not likely to take shelter under the Owl's wing.

He arrived at Loder's study in a very wary frame of mind.

To his relief there was no sign of a cane handy, and Gerald Loder nodded to him in an almost cordial way.

Loder seemed to have got over that disrespectful handling, after all.

"Come in, Wharton; shut the door. You can sit down."

"Thanks!" said Harry wonderingly.

He sat on the chair nearest the door. Loder was quite amiable, but his amiability was a rather uncertain quantity.

It was just as well to be ready to bolt, in case of possible eventualities.

"I've sent for you, as head boy in the Lower Fourth," explained Loder.

"I believe you are an honourable fellow, Wharton."

It was on Wharton's lips to remark that he was sorry he couldn't say the same for Loder. But he checked himself, and nodded.

"My pocket-book hasn't turned up yet," continued Loder.

"Oh!"

"I'm sorry I suspected you kids of taking it," said Loder, with an effort.

"You see, it was missing, and somebody must have taken it; and I did not think of Bunter at the time."

"Bunter!" repeated Wharton.

"Yes; Bunter took it. He has it now."

"Oh!" said Harry. "Are you sure, Loder?"

"He's admitted it."

"I remember he was looking on when we—

we—

Ahem! I mean, at the time," said Wharton. "I suppose he saw it and picked it up, the young rogue!"

"That's it. Now, as head of your Form, Wharton, of course you know it's your duty to stop any tricks of that kind."

Wharton looked at him.

"I don't see any difficulty," he said.

"You can ask Bunter for the pocket-book, if he's got it, can't you?"

"He refuses to give it up."

"Refuses!" exclaimed Wharton, in amazement.

"Yes," said Loder, biting his lip.

"But if it's yours, he's bound to give it up," said the astonished junior. "Besides, you can order him, as a prefect."

You don't mean to say that Bunter is sticking to the pocket-book when he knows who the owner is?"

"Not exactly. He's keeping it back. He's hidden it somewhere, and he won't say where."

"My only hat! And he's admitted it!" ejaculated Wharton.

"Yes, he's admitted it."

"But—but I don't understand. You're a prefect, and you can cane him for hiding your pocket-book. You can report him to the Head if he won't give it up. I don't catch on, Loder."

Gerald Loder took a turn or two up and down the study. There was a flush on his face, and his manner was very uneasy.

It was, in fact, a rather difficult matter to explain.

"The—the fact is, Wharton, there are some private papers in that pocket-book," he said at last.

"Bunter's looked at them—you know what a prying little cee he is."

"I suppose he would," assented Harry.

"The papers are—are private—about family affairs, and all that," said Loder, his flush deepening.

"I shouldn't care to have them talked about in the school, or—

or—shown. You see my point? Bunter's got me in a cleft stick, owing to the papers being—being private."

"Oh!" said Harry.

He understood now. He remembered the surmises that had been mooted in Study No. 1 on the subject of Loder's pocket-book.

The "private papers" in that book evidently did not relate to family affairs, as Loder stated.

It was pretty certain they related to transactions which Gerald Loder was very anxious to keep from general knowledge—especially from the knowledge of the Head of Greyfriars.

Wharton could not help smiling.

The sportsman of the Sixth was evidently under Bunter's thumb, and that situation was rather amusing from an outsider's point of view, though Loder himself did not find it so.

The mystery—

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ous friendship between the fat Removite and a prefect of the Sixth was explained now.

"You—you understand, Wharton?"

"I think I understand," assented the captain of the Remove. "You don't want to make a fuss about the affair, in case Bunter hands the pocket-book over to the Head."

"Ahem!—I—I won't say exactly that," stammered Loder.

"But—but I certainly don't want my private affairs made public. Now, as head of the Remove, and an honourable fellow yourself, you can't approve of a fellow in your Form acting in this way. Bunter has been screwing money out of me. It amounts to blackmail."

"The fat rascal!" said Harry.

"I think you ought, as Form captain, to chip in," said Loder, eyeing the captain of the Remove anxiously.

"It's a disgrace to your Form, this kind of thing. You see that?"

"Certainly!"

"We—wo—we've had our disagreements," pursued Loder.

"But—but I've always had a high opinion of you, Wharton. I know you couldn't be a party to mean tricks of this kind."

"Thank you!" said Harry demurely.

It was a new experience for Wharton to be "battered" by a Sixth Form prefect!

"You haven't done your lines?" asked Loder suddenly.

"Nunno!"

"You needn't do them. Tell your friends the same. The fact is, now I've thought it over, I think I was rather hard on you yesterday. I'm sorry!"

said Loder, with an air of great frankness.

"As for that row in the quad, I—I was hasty, and the affair won't be mentioned again."

"You're very good!" said Wharton.

"Not at all! I want to be just, you know. A prefect is bound to be just."

"Oh! Ah! Yes, of course!"

"I think that it's your duty to take up this matter," continued Loder.

"Make Bunter shell out that pocket-book. You can do it, I dare say. As his Form-fellow, you may guess where he's hidden it. You may have means of making him hand it over. If there should be ragging, or anything of that kind, you can rely upon me, as a prefect, to see that you do not suffer. If you should take drastic measures to make Bunter act honestly, you could rely on my support."

"Oh!"

"If there should be a public fuss over the affair I shall charge Bunter with stealing the pocket-book. That would be a very serious disgrace for the Remove."

"My hat! It would rather!"

"By keeping it back from the owner, he is practically stealing it. His conduct is utterly dishonourable, anyway!"

"No doubt about that!" said Harry.

"Then I can depend upon you to see to the matter?" said Loder at last, with an anxious look at Wharton.

Harry Wharton rose.

"Certainly, I'll do my best," he said.

"Bunter is an awful young rascal, and I'll stop him if I can. I must say it serves you right—"

"Eh?"

"A prefect oughtn't to have shady secrets!"

stammered Loder.

The prefect looked round for a cane. But he thought better of it next moment.

"But your shady secrets are nothing to me," continued Wharton calmly. "They don't concern the Remove. It's not the business of the Lower Fourth to bring up Sixth-Formers in the way they should go. But it is our business to see that a member of our Form doesn't act like a cad. I'll bring Bunter to book if I can, Loder."

**LIGHTING-UP TIME
FOR THIS WEEK.**



JULY.

12th Monday	- - -	- 9.42 p.m.
13th Tuesday	- - -	- 9.41 "
14th Wednesday	- - -	- 9.40 "
15th Thursday	- - -	- 9.39 "
16th Friday	- - -	- 9.38 "
17th Saturday	- - -	- 9.37 "
18th Sunday	- - -	- 9.36 "



"Let there be no more of this," said Billy Bunter, with a wave of his fat hand. "I'm willing to be chummy, so long as you play the game. Any more of this kind of thing, and I'm done with you!" (See Chapter 9.)

And the captain of the Remove quitted the study, leaving Loder clenching his hands. Loder was very much in need of Wharton's assistance just then, or certainly the junior would not have escaped from that study without a terrific thumping.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Called to Account!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! What's the merry verdict?"

All the Co. were assembled in Study No. 1 to wait for Harry Wharton's return from the lion's den. Nugent and Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh were all feeling rather anxious. Peter Todd was there, too, and Billy Bunter, observing the anxious meeting, had rolled in inquisitively to learn what it was all about.

But Wharton's smiling face as he returned relieved the anxiety of his chums. "All serene!" said Harry. "Loder's got his nicest manners on. We needn't do those lines."

"Oh, good!"

"The goodness is terrific!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"And Loder isn't going to mention the row any more; he's forgiven us from the bottom of his heart."

"Dear old Loder!" said Bob Cherry. "Is he ill?"

"He's got a very high opinion of me personally," continued Wharton. "He

thinks I'm a very honourable chap, and keen on doing my duty as captain of the Remove."

"What on earth's the game?" asked Johnny Bull, puzzled. "I suppose Loder hasn't been borrowing money of you, has he?"

"Ha, ha! No! But that isn't all."

"Ye gods! What more is there? Has Loder invited us to one of his merry little smoking and card-parties in his study?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No!" said Harry, laughing. "But we're allowed to rag Bunter as much as we like—"

"What?"

"Here, I say—" exclaimed Billy Bunter, in alarm.

The fat junior made a strategic movement towards the door, rather regretful that his inquisitiveness had brought him there. Harry Wharton closed the door, and put his back to it.

"Don't hurry away, Bunter," he said genially. "Loder's told me that you can be ragged to any extent—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"And it really seems too good a chance to miss," said the captain of the Remove. "If Bunter is heard howling 'Fire!' and 'Murder' no notice will be taken. It's really a chance for visiting Bunter's sins on his head in a thoroughgoing manner."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let me get out!" roared Bunter.

"I've got an appointment. I—I've got to see Quelch—"

"Quelch can wait!" said Peter Todd. "I say, Loder's turning out quite a brick! What about giving Bunter twenty dozen with a lives-but?"

"Hear, hear!"

"I—I say, you fellows—"

Billy Bunter blinked round in alarm. But the grinning faces of the Removites relieved his fears. He realised that they did not intend to take advantage of Loder's gracious permission.

"But what does it all mean?" asked Nugent. "Is Loder wandering in his mind?"

"Bunter's got his pocket-book," explained Wharton. "Loder dropped it when he was scrapping with us, and Bunter bagged it. He's hidden it, and Loder is nery about its being seen. That's why he's let the fat villain chum with him. That's Bunter's glib influence with the prefects. He's blackmailing poor old Loder!"

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Peter Todd, with a deep breath. "We really ought to have guessed something of the sort!"

"I—I say, you fellows," said Billy Bunter, uneasily. "I may have seen Loder's pocket-book, or I may not. I may have picked it up, or I may not. Loder's an awful fibber, you know; you can't believe a word Loder says. He's really a chap who hardly understands what truthfulness is."

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"Not the only one at Greyfriars like that!" growled Johnny Bull.

"You've got Loder's pocket-book, Bunter!" said Wharton, pointing an accusing forefinger at the Owl of the Remove.

"I haven't! You can search me if you like."

"That means that you've hidden it somewhere. Loder said you had hidden it."

"But you know what a liar Loder is. Wharton. George Washington was nothing to him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've got to produce it, Bunter!"

"How can I when I haven't got it? I don't know anything about Loder's old pocket-book. Besides, it's of no value—a cheap old thing—not worth more than two bob—"

"Then you've got it?"

"No. I haven't seen it. Besides, what is a prefect doing with racing and betting stuff written down in his pocket-book?" said Bunter indignantly. "Precious goings on for a Sixth Form prefect! I'm shocked at Loder. And you fellows ought to be shocked, too. But you never did have a very particular sense of honour—like me."

"Not like you, I hope," said Harry. "You've been screwing money out of Loder by threatening to show his pocket-book to a master."

"Loder may have made me a small loan, as one pal to another," said Bunter cautiously. "I'm going to pay him, of course, when my postal-order comes. I believe I've mentioned to you fellows that I'm expecting a postal-order—"

"I believe you have!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "About a thousand times, I believe!"

"Nearer a million!" said Johnny Bull. "I may have another loan from Loder. If there's any further delay in that postal-order coming! I may have two or three! Why not, I'd like to know? It's just like you fellows to be jealous of a chap for having friends in the Sixth Form!" said Bunter scornfully.

The juniors stared at Bunter.

"What I want to know is," said Bob Cherry, "why they sent Bunter to Greyfriars instead of to a home for idiots? Why did they, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Where's that pocket-book, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton. "It's got to be given up at once. You were a mean little cad to look into it at all, and a dishonest little rascal to make use of what you found out by prying. I suppose you haven't sense enough to understand what a rascal you are; but you've got to stop it. See?"

"I know what you mean, Wharton," said Bunter, with dignity. "I'm willing to do the fair thing. I—I wasn't really going to leave you fellows out of it. I'll take you all to Loder's study to supper."

"What!"

"I'll tell Loder to have a jolly good spread, and I'll take the lot of you," said Bunter generously. "I can't say fairer than that, can I?"

"You fat villain!" roared Wharton. "Do you think we want to take whacks in your plunder?"

"Oh? What else do you want, then?" demanded Bunter, blinking at the captain of the Remove in surprise.

"Why, you—you— Oh, there isn't a word for you!" gasped Wharton. "Look here, you're disgracing the Remove—and us—and you've got to stop it! Produce that pocket-book, or we'll jolly well rag you! Is that plain enough for your intellect?"

"Hand it over!" said Bob Cherry, taking up a cricket-stump. "Mind, we've

got a prefect's permission to rag you, old barrel!"

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I don't know where it is, you know! You—you're making a mistake! I never touched the pocket-book at all! I've never even seen it! I—I wasn't present when you were handling Loder. It's all a mistake!"

"Put him across the table!" said Bob.

"I—I say, I—I mean, I can't hand it over! It's hot!" howled Bunter.

"That's what I really meant to say! I—I dropped it into the river—"

"When?" demanded Peter Todd.

"This afternoon—"

"You haven't been out of gates this afternoon!"

"I—I mean I dropped it into the fire in the study—"

"There hasn't been a fire in the study to-day."

"I—I mean—" Bunter gasped.

"I—I meant— I—I—I—"

"Think a bit!" suggested Bob Cherry. "You can't expect to roll out a really good whopper without stopping to take breath. Practice doesn't make perfect in your case."

"Of course I'm telling the exact truth. I hope I should disdain to tell a lie," said Bunter. "The fact is—the fact is—the actual fact is, that—that I—I dropped it down a grating—"

"Shove him across the table, and back up!" said Bob. "When he's had a dozen or two with this stump his memory will improve."

"I—I mean I've hidden it!" wailed Bunter, as the juniors collared him, and jerked him to the study table. "Leggo, you beasts! I—I'm going to tell you fellows where it is, ain't I? I wouldn't—yarrak!—keep my old pals out of the secret. Where is it—sharp?" rapped out Wharton.

"I—I'll show you!" mumbled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, you're giving away a really good thing, you know. But come on, and I'll show you where I put it in the passage."

"Come on, then!"

Harry Wharton opened the study door, and Billy Bunter was taken out in the midst of the Famous Five. Peter Todd had hold of his fat ear, by way of additional security. Bunter cast a hopeless blink towards the stairs. But there was no escape for him.

"Well, where is it?" asked Wharton suspiciously.

"Downstairs," said Bunter. "You—you see—"

"You said in the passage—"

"I—I meant the lower passage—"

"Got that stump, Bob?"

"Yarook! Keep off, you beast! Help!" roared Bunter.

"The fat rotter is spoofing us! Stump him!"

"Yarook! Help!"

"What—what is this? Stop this at once!"

It was the voice of Mr. Quelch; and the juniors let go William George Bunter as if he had suddenly become red-hot.

—

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Loder Apologises!

MR. QUELCH came from the direction of the staircase, fixing a stern frown upon the confused Removites.

Billy Bunter gasped with relief. Never before had the fat Removite been pleased to see the severe features and gimlet eyes of his Form-master. But the countenance of Antinous would not have been so pleasing to his eyes at that

moment as was the far from charming visage of Mr. Quelch.

The Remove master eyed the juniors sternly. Sometimes Mr. Quelch took a little stroll through the junior quarters; it was quite a necessary part of his duties. While the cat is away the mice will play. In the case of the Removites, it was often horseplay. But never had it happened upon his cheery pupils so unluckily as now.

"Release Bunter at once! Bunter was calling for help," said Mr. Quelch severely. "This rough usage, Wharton, won't—"

"We—wo—" stammered Wharton.

"I fear that this horseplay approximates to bullying," said Mr. Quelch, in his most magisterial manner. "I am surprised at you, Wharton, as head boy of the Form—"

Wharton crimsoned.

"It—it's all right, sir!" he stammered.

"It is certainly not all right, to judge by Bunter's calling for help. Why were you hustling Bunter in that rough manner?"

Billy Bunter grinned a little. He was quite safe now, and it was the Co. who were in trouble.

The juniors were silent. They did not want to give the Owl away to Mr. Quelch, and, without revealing Bunter's casualty, they could not defend themselves. Fortunately, Bunter, who never knew when to hold his tongue, came un- intentionally to the rescue.

"That's true, sir! I haven't got it!" he gasped. "It's all a mistake, sir!"

"You haven't what, Bunter?"

"Oh, nothing, sir!"

"Do you suspect Bunter of having taken something that does not belong to him, Wharton?" asked Mr. Quelch more mildly.

He was well acquainted with some of William George's charming manners and customs.

"Ye-es, sir!" stammered Harry.

"What is the article, then?"

"A—a pocket-book."

"Dress my soul! This is serious. Have you taken Wharton's pocket-book, Bunter?"

"Not my pocket-book, sir," said Wharton hastily. "It—it's somebody else's. The fat duffer—I—I mean, Bunter has—has hidden it—"

"Oh, I see—a foolish joke!" said Mr. Quelch. "Whose pocket-book have you hidden, Bunter, and where is it?"

"I haven't—I wasn't—I didn't—" gasped Bunter. "You can ask Loder himself, sir."

"Loder! Is it Loder's pocket-book you speak of, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir!" mumbled the captain of the Remove.

"This is serious, Bunter. If you have found a pocket-book belonging to a Sixth Form boy, you are bound to return it at once. You are quite right, Wharton, in not allowing a Remove boy to play a foolish trick upon a prefect, though your methods were somewhat rough."

The juniors grinned helplessly. Mr. Quelch was quite in the dark as to the reality, and they could not enlighten him.

"You must give up the pocket-book at once," Bunter," said the Remove master. "I will see that you take it to Loder."

"I—I—it's all a mistake, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I'm willing to go to Loder and explain."

"Did you understand from Loder that Bunter had hidden his pocket-book, Wharton?" asked the puzzled Form-master.

"Ye-ee-ee, sir!"

"Very well! I will take the matter

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into my hands. You may come with me to Loder, Bunter."

Billy Bunter gave the chums of the Remove a triumphant blink. He did not mind going to Loder—not at all. His chum in the Sixth was certain to stand by him, so long as it was in his power to put the pocket-book into dangerous hands.

"I—I say, sir, I'll come to Loder with pleasure," said Bunter. "But will you tell these fellows, sir, to let me alone. They—they may not believe it's all a mistake, and—"

"Most assuredly," said Mr. Quelch. "Wharton and the rest, you are not to deal with Bunter in this matter, that is my express command. I will see to it myself. Come, Bunter!"

Mr. Quelch rustled away, and Bunter, after bestowing a fat wink on the exasperated juniors, followed him down the stairs.

"Well, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"That lets us out!" said Peter Todd. "Loder won't dare to say a word against Bunter! The cunning little beast! Still, it serves Loder right, he shouldn't be such a giddy sportsman!"

"Hear, hear!"

Billy Bunter followed Mr. Quelch contentedly to the Sixth Form quarters, greatly relieved at getting out of the hands of the Amalokites. The Form-master tapped at Loder's door and entered. Gerald Loder gave a start as he saw Bunter. His face became quite pale. The horrid suspicion was borne in upon his mind that Bunter had given him away.

"Loder—" began Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir?" almost groaned Loder. "I—I—"

"Have you lost a pocket-book?"

Loder made a rapid and frantic mental calculation. Was it possible to deny the ownership of the pocket-book? The contents were in his handwriting, which was sufficiently well known, but if hard lying could save him, and Mr. Quelch's question seemed to imply a doubt—

"I asked you a question, Loder," said Mr. Quelch, who was amazed by the extraordinary changes going on in Loder's startled face. "Will you have the kindness to reply to it?"

"Yes, sir—no, sir," stammered Loder. "I—I haven't—"

"You have not lost a pocket-book?"

"No, sir!" said Loder desperately.

"Then that settles the matter. You are exonerated, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch. "There appears to have been a mistake."

Loder blinked at him in wonder. That was not what he had expected to hear.

"It is somewhat extraordinary," said Mr. Quelch. "Some of the Remove boys supposed that Bunter had hidden a pocket-book belonging to you, Loder—"

"Oh!"

"They appear to have derived the impression from you, which is very odd if you have not lost a pocket-book—"

"Oh, I—I see!" Loder realised that he was not in danger, and his nerve came back. "I—I see, sir! The—the fact is I mentioned to Wharton that I had lost a pocket-book, but—but it has turned up since. I had almost forgotten the matter."

"Oh, that makes it all plain; the juniors doubtless suspected Bunter from his well-known character," said Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, really, sir—"

"You have only yourself to thank, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch sternly. "You have several times acted unscrupulously.

You will realise now the value of a good reputation."

Mr. Quelch quitted the study, quite satisfied. Bunter remained. As soon as the Form-master was gone he fixed a threatening blink upon Loder.

"You rotter!" he said.

"What!" breathed Loder.

"Don't scowl at me," said Bunter. "I'm not afraid of your scowling! For two jinks I'd go and get that pocket-book and show it to Quelch."

Loder clenched his hands helplessly. "You've been talking about me to Wharton," continued Bunter. "Making my friends think that I've been acting in a dishonourable way. Running a chap down behind his back, by Jove! I should have been ragged if old Quelch hadn't come along. You're a backbiter, Loder! I despise you!"

"You—you—" breathed Loder.

"Let there be no more of this," said Bunter, with a wave of his fat hand. "I'm willing to be chummy so long as you play the game. Any more of this kind of thing and I'm done with you."

Loder looked as if he were on the verge of a fit of apoplexy.

"Done with you!" repeated Bunter loftily. "Understand—done with you! If you apologise, I'm willing to go on being friendly."

Loder made an unintelligible sound.

"Do you apologise?" demanded Bunter sternly.

"I—I—"

"I'm prepared to go to the Head—"

"I—I—I apologise!" stammered Loder.

"Then I'll look over the occurrence this once," said Billy Bunter graciously.

"Don't let it occur again, that's all!" And, shaking a fat and grubby forefinger severely at the enraged prefect, Bunter rolled victorious out of the study.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Nice for Loder and for Bunter!

CHUMMING with Loder seemed to agree with William George Bunter. Apart from the more solid considerations, such as tea in a Sixth Form study, and a little loan every now and then, Bunter enjoyed the consequence he derived from it. And it was just like Bunter to overdo it. The Owl of the Remove was not famous for his tact, and it was inevitable that he should "run the thing into the ground," as Fisher T. Fish described it in the American language. At all times, in season and out of season, an astonished Greyfriars was treated to the spectacle of Billy Bunter chumming with Loder.

Bunter would wait for him at the door of the Sixth Form-room, and join him there, under the surprised and scandalised eyes of the Sixth. He could walk with him in the quadrangle in full view of a score of windows, chatting away amicably. He would call him "Loder, old fellow" and "Loder, old top," in the hearing of all and sundry.

The fact that Loder writhed under it did not matter to Bunter. He was not concerned about that.

It was a distinction for a Lower Fourth to chum with a prefect of the Sixth, and that was enough for Bunter.

Other fellows soon remarked upon it emphatically.

Wingate, the captain of the school, told Loder that a certain amount of personal dignity was expected of a Sixth-Form prefect. Coker of the Fifth asked what Greyfriars was coming to, without receiving a satisfactory answer.

As for the juniors, those who did not know already were not long in guessing

that Bunter had some hold over the bully of Greyfriars.

They concluded that the Peeping Tom of Greyfriars had routed out some of Loder's shady secrets, and was making an unscrupulous use of them. There was, in fact, no other way of accounting for the state of affairs.

For even if Loder could have been supposed to have developed a taste for big society, Loder's looks showed that that was not the case.

With all the self-command he could muster, Gerald Loder could not quite conceal the fact that when Bunter spoke to him familiarly he yearned to take the fat junior by the neck.

Once or twice, indeed, Loder's temper failed. Once he kicked Bunter. But that reckless kick was followed by terrified submission and the loan of a pound note.

The unhappy sportsman of the Sixth was held in thrall, and unless the pocket-book turned up, there was no escape for him.

It did not seem likely to turn up. Harry Wharton & Co. could not help him, as Mr. Quelch had positively forbidden them to deal with Bunter on the subject. Loder, too, at Bunter's command, had requested them to let the matter drop. If Mr. Quelch had been dragged into the affair again, he would have grown suspicious, Loder felt, and he dared not risk it.

The terror of that wretched pocket-book falling into Dr. Locke's hands kept Loder awake at night. And on the subject of Bunter he could have sung a Hymn of Hate with deep feeling. Bunter stuck to him like the Old Man of the Sea to Sinbad the Sailor, and Loder saw no prospect of getting rid of his incubus, for he could not treat Bunter as Sinbad treated the Old Man of the Sea!

Loder had to submit to Bunter's chumming with as good a grace as he could, thankful that Bunter was not tall enough to link arms with him when they walked in the quad, as certainly Bunter would have done if it had been feasible.

Harry Wharton & Co. had a very strong distaste for Loder and all his works, but even his old foes of the Remove felt rather sorry for Loder now. To be helpless under Bunter's fat thumb was a worse punishment than even Gerald Loder deserved.

"It's too bad!" Bob Cherry remarked, a few days later. "I saw poor old Loder in the quad to-day. Bunter poked him in the ribs and called him Gerald!"

The Co. chuckled.

"It's awful for Loder," grinned Nugent. "I suppose half the school knows by this time that Bunter has some hold over him."

"Quelch's noticed it," said Harry Wharton. "I've seen Quelch give them a very sharp look once or twice, when they've been together. He must think it's jolly odd."

"Just like that idiot Bunter to overdo it, as he does everything. I never thought the time would come when I should waste any sympathy on Loder," said the chucked Bob. "But the fact is, the fat boulder ought to be chucked off. He's screwing money out of Loder; he's always in the tuck-shop now stuffing, and the fellows guess where he gets the money. It's getting to be a regular scandal."

Wharton looked thoughtful.

"We can't take the matter up, after what Quelch said," he remarked. "It's all Loder's fault, of course, for being such a dashed blackguard. Bunter wouldn't have a hold on him if he hadn't done wrong."

"Still, it ought to be stopped; it's a disgrace for the Remove. Bunter's one of us, though we don't feel proud of it."

"Todd ought to interfere; he's Bunter's keeper. Let's go and speak to Todd."

The Famous Five repaired to Study No. 7, where they found Peter Todd sitting on a corner of the table, industriously rubbing his hands, while he uttered sundry ejaculations of an emphatic nature.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Licked!" asked Bob Cherry.

"Ow! Yes! Loder!"

"Loder breaking out again," exclaimed Bob. "I thought Bunter had tamed him."

"It's through Bunter," grunted Peter Todd. "I tackled the fat rotter about Loder—he's been getting money from him—and he actually set Loder on to me! Loder's came me for calling Bunter a dishonest youngascal. I don't think he wanted to; Bunter made him."

"Well, my word!" said Bob, with a deep breath.

"And Smithy's got a hundred lines," said Peter. "He kicked Bunter for disgracing the Form, and Loder gave him lines. Bunter's going to spring his blessed prefect on us like that, you see. He can make Loder do as he likes—like a dashed monkey on a stick, you know. Pleasant prospect for us, to have a Sixth-Form prefect backing up that fat rascal in everything he does. But I've been thinking it out—this blessed pain has sharpened my wits, I think," Peter rubbed his hands again, and winced. "Bunter's hidden that pocket-book somewhere safe; he never goes to the place, in case he should be seen. I've had an eye on him for some time. Suppose Bunter got a hint that the hiding-place was known—"

"But it isn't," said Bob.

"You're rather dense old chap. If Bunter got a hint to that effect, he would rush off to the place and secure the dashed pocket-book while he had time. And a fellow could be keeping an eye on him—"

"And he'd give away the hiding-place himself!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Exactly!"

"Not a bad idea, if you can pull his podgy leg to that extent," said the captain of the Remove. "But—"

"Cave!" murmured Bob Cherry, glancing from the doorway. "Here he comes!"

Billy Bunter was rolling along the Remove-passage from the stairs. Peter Todd made a rapid sign to his companions.

"Play up, you fellows!" he whispered. "I'll try it on now. He's bound to listen to what we're saying as he comes up—you know him."

The juniors chuckled. It seemed rather a good joke to turn Bunter's eavesdropping propensities against himself.

"It's jolly queer. Loder happening on his pocket-book in that way," said Peter Todd, loudly. "Quite by chance, you know."

A sudden gasp was audible in the passage outside.

"Where did he find it?" asked Bob Cherry, entering into the scheme.

"I say, you fellows—"

Bunter rolled in, with an alarmed face.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that you, Bunter?"

"Did you say Loder had found his pocket-book?" exclaimed Bunter, blinking from one eye to another.

"You can ask Loder," grunted Peter.

"You'll soon know if he's found it—he will pitch into you, you know."

The Famous Five walked away. Peter Todd going with them. But they did not go far. It was agreed that an eye was to be kept on Bunter, now that he was so thoroughly alarmed as to the safety of his prize.

The juniors separated, Peter remaining in the Remove-passage by the window, and Frank Nugent in the lower passage. Bob Cherry hovered near the box-rooms, and Harry Wharton and Hurree Singh went into the quadrangle. Johnny Bull strove away to the Cloisters.

The half-dozen juniors were pretty well placed now to keep an eye on Billy Bunter, whithersoever he went.

A few minutes later Bunter passed Todd in the passage, with a frown.

He rolled downstairs, and passed Frank Nugent, who appeared to be deeply interested in the view from a window.

The fat junior came out into the quadrangle.

Wharton and Hurree Singh were looking away towards the gates; but with the tail of their eye, as it were, they observed Bunter.

Bunter gave them a blink, and started across towards the Cloisters.

"So that's the quarter!" murmured Wharton.

"Is the followfulness the proper caper?" inquired the nabob of Blunipur.

Wharton shook his head.

"No; Johnny's over there, and he will spot the fat villain. Better not make Bunter suspicious."

Bunter was feverishly anxious to ascertain whether the precious pocket-book was still safe in its hiding-place.

Assured that he was not followed, the fat junior rolled into the Cloisters, and headed for the ruined tower. He was not aware that Johnny Bull was already in the Cloisters, and that that astute youth, as soon as he saw Bunter coming, had taken cover behind a stone pillar.

Bunter rolled by within six feet of him, without knowing that he was there. He disappeared into the ruined tower.

Then Johnny Bull, with a grin, stepped from cover, and followed on Bunter's track.

He did not need to enter the old tower; there were a dozen openings in the dilapidated old wall, through which he could look into the interior.

Johnny silently posted himself at one of them, and peered in.

He suppressed a chuckle as he spotted William George.

The fat junior had taken several fragments of stone from a cavity in the ancient wall, and was groping in it with his fat paw.

He gave a grin as he drew a pocket-book out into view.

"Beasts!" muttered Bunter aloud. "Rotters! Just giving me a fright! They knew I was there, the beasts, and they were pulling my leg! I'll jolly well make Loder cane them for this! I'll show 'em!"

Johnny Bull grinned his widest grin. Utterly unconscious of the fact that he was being watched, Billy Bunter shoved the pocket-book back into its hiding-place, and replaced the stones that concealed it.

Then, with another grunt, he quitted the tower, and rolled away through the Cloisters.

Johnny Bull did not move till Bunter's heavy footsteps had died away in the distance.

Then he came round the tower to the old doorway, and entered.

A minute more, and he was groping in the cavity where he had seen Billy Bunter replace the missing pocket-book.

He drew it out, with a chuckle, and slipped it into his pocket.

Then he strolled out of the tower, and returned to the quadrangle. He caught sight of Billy Bunter in the distance, going into the tuckshop. Johnny Bull snatched across and joined Harry Wharton.

"Well?" exclaimed Harry.

"Here you are!"

"Oh, my hat! You've got it?"

"Looks like it!" grinned Johnny, as he handed the pocket-book to the captain of the Remove. "Better give it to Loder and get rid of it."

"What-ho?"

Harry Wharton ran into the house, and hurried to Loder's study. The prefect gave him a gloomy stare.

"What do you want?" he grunted.

"I've got something for you," said Harry, laughing.

Loder gave an eager start.

"Not—" he began breathlessly.

"Yes; there's your pocket-book, Loder. Johnny Bull bagged it. Bunter doesn't know yet."

"Oh!" gasped Loder! He caught up the pocket-book with trembling fingers, and opened it quickly, going feverishly over the contents. Wharton watched him with an amused smile.

Loder drew a deep, deep breath as he finished his examination.

"It's all right!" he said. "Nothing missing! I—I'm awfully obliged to you, Wharton—sincerely."

And indeed, Loder, in his relief, was speaking sincerely for once.

"All serene," said Harry. "Can I tell Smithy he's let off his lines? You needn't worry about Bunter, you know."

"Yes, yes!"

"Thanks!"

And Wharton quitted the study; and Loder selected a cane and examined it with care. He was thinking of William George Bunter.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The End of a Friendship!

I SAY, you fellows!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were at tea in Study No. 1, with Peter Todd and Vernon-Smith. It was quite a merry little party; they were laughing when Billy Bunter blinked in, and they laughed still more at the sight of the Owl's fat face.

Bunter gave them a lofty look.

"I've come to tea," he remarked.

"I hope you've got something decent."

"Only a boot!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Which you'll get sharp if you don't buzz!" added the captain of the Remove, getting up from the table.

Billy Bunter backed to the door, giving the chums of the Remove a threatening blink.

"If you fellows want to be caned—"

he began.

"Catch this cushion!" interrupted Bob Cherry.

"I— Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as he caught the cushion with his chin, and rolled into the passage.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You won't, cherts! When I bring Loder and you're jolly well caned all round!" said Billy Bunter truculently.

"I can make Loder do it! You wait a minute or two, you rotters!"

"Oh, we'll wait!" grunted Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter shook a fat fist at the hilarious Removeites, and rolled away, leaving a roar of laughter behind him. Two minutes later he was blinking into Loder's study.

Gerald Loder smiled.

It was such a smile as a man-eating tiger might have given, when an unsuspecting victim stepped into his den. But the Owl of the Remove did not observe that.

"Ah! You, Bunter! Come in," said Loder softly.

"I'm coming in," answered Bunter. "I've decided to have tea here, Loder. No good telling me you're stony—you can borrow something along the passage, I suppose. Understand?"

Loder smiled again.

"But first," went on Bunter, "I want you to go to Study No. 1 and cane that lot all round. Give it to them hot! They've treated me badly. And look sharp. I'm hungry!"

Loder continued to smile. He was really enjoying the situation now. It was only too evident that Bunter had no suspicion that the precious pocket-book had been found and returned to the owner.

Loder slid his hand into his pocket, and produced the pocket-book, and held it up.

He did not need to speak.

Bunter gave the pocket-book a startled blink, and his round eyes seemed almost to bulge through his spectacles.

"Oh!" he gasped. "You—you—you've found it!"

"I'm glad to see you, all the same," said Loder.

He put back the pocket-book, and picked up his cane.

Billy Bunter made one frantic, terrified jump for the door.

Loder's grasp was on his collar before he could reach it. The prefect kicked the door shut, and whirled Bunter back into the middle of the room.

"So you've come to tea, have you?" smiled Loder.

"Oh! Ah! No! Certainly not! Oh!"

"You'll call me Gerald in open quad, will you?" said Loder.

"N-n-no! I—I won't! Did I?" gasped the helpless Owl. "Oh dear! I—I—I'll never call you Gerald again! Oh!"

"No, I don't think you will!" agreed Loder. "I don't think you will chum with me any more, Bunter! I don't think you'll try any more blackmail! I think you are going to have a lesson about that! What do you think?"

"Oh crumbs! What? Whack, whack, whack, whack, whack!"

Loder commenced operations with the cane. He did not seem to mind where he hit, so long as he hit Bunter. And the vigour he put into it was quite surprising for a slacker like Loder. He did not look much like a slacker now.

Loder's arm was tired when he finished. He pitched the howling Owl out of the study, assisting him into the passage with his boot. Billy Bunter crawled away groaning.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Still chumming with Loder?"

Bob Cherry asked that question when Billy Bunter came limping into the Remove passage a little later. Bunter's only answer was a deep groan. He limped on to Study No. 7, still groaning, and for a long time afterwards sounds of woe could be heard from that study. It was evident that Billy Bunter was no longer chumming with Loder.

THE END.

(Next Monday: "A Third-Form Mystery" by Frank Richards. Order your copy early.)



"THE SILENCE!"

THE
OPENING CHAPTERS OF OUR AMAZING
NEW SERIAL STORY.

A Wonderful Tale of the Future.

By EDMUND BURTON.

Chapter 1.

A.D. 1924.

"The Silence!"

TOM HOPE, the son of Admiral Sir Hensley Hope, a midshipman in the Navy, and Dick Elliott, a keen young inventor in the Flying Force, are great friends, and Dick is very fond of Madge Hope, Tom's sister.

When Tom arrives at Seahaven after a cruise he is met, as he comes ashore, by Dick Elliott, who asks him whether he has heard the news.

"What news?" said Tom.

"Pshaw! Fancy discovering anyone who doesn't know about the silence of America, Japan, and China!"

"Well, the main part of the matter is this: No news has come from either China, Japan, or the States for nearly a month past. They seem to be cut off from the world. Wireless messages have been ignored, cables unanswered, and their own Consuls here are as puzzled as everyone else is. Every ship from America, Japan, and China is weeks overdue, and, consequently, no mails."

"But what about our ships on the China and other Eastern stations—what about them?" said Tom. "And what of Canada, Newfoundland, and—"

"Silent—all silent, old man!" cut in the other.

The two boys meet Admiral Sir Hensley Hope, who tells them that he has had some very important secret papers stolen. The missing papers deal with a new invention, and Dick Elliott announces that he has invented something similar to the lost secret. He sets to work, and after many failures states that his invention—the Wilton Ray—is ready.

Whilst the new invention is being discussed at the Admiralty in London strange events are occurring at Seahaven. The port is suddenly visited by a huge fleet of airships. One of the airships settles down over H.M.S. Mammoth, and a man climbs down a rope ladder.

(Now go on with the story.)

Explanation and Demonstration.

THE reader's attention must now be transferred to the admiral's quarters aboard the Mammoth, for it is here that the ensuing chapter will explain much of what must have been a puzzle up to this point.

When Sir Stanford Martyn, followed by the stranger, reached the former's cabin, the foreigner coolly seated himself, crossed his legs, and stared closely at his companion, a stare which Sir Stanford met unflinchingly, though feeling strangely ill at ease.

"Well, my friend," began the newcomer, speaking in perfect English, "you are surprised, I suppose? You cannot understand many of the things that have just happened?"

The admiral nodded assent.

"You are wondering, for instance, how I have the nerve to board your flag-

ship alone, and why I sit here as though it were my right to do so? You are also wishing to learn my identity and intentions, is it not so?"

Again Sir Stanford nodded. He could not trust himself to speak, and preferred to let the other do the talking.

"Well," continued the stranger, "on these points I shall proceed to enlighten you. In the first place, allow me to introduce myself as Admiral Chang, of the Chinese Aerial Navy. Secondly, I must warn you that any attempt to detain me when it is my wish to depart will result in the instantaneous annihilation of these superb Dreadnoughts and all other ships under your command! I speak plainly, sir, because I never was one to favour beating about the bush!"

Sir Stanford flushed crimson, and his hands clenched tightly.

"You not only speak plainly, Admiral Chang," he replied, "but you speak solemnly! Certainly, I am willing to admit that you seem to hold the whip-hand for the present—by what means I do not know—but you seem to forget that you are dealing with the first Sea Power in the world!"

Chang smiled blandly.

"Bravely spoken, my friend!" he retorted. "But by your own admission that we hold the upper hand, and your confession that you cannot understand how, you display your weakness. No, you, as yet, know nothing; but let me explain:

"The influence that holds this Fleet inactive is a form of magnetism, so great in power that you have only seen a fraction of its capacity. It was this magnetism which drew off your torpedo flotilla, or, at least, all but one, which happened to be on the extremity of the radius, and managed to get away. We, unfortunately, did not notice it until too late."

"But if your power is so extraordinary, how does the escape of a single destroyer matter?"

"Patience, my friend, patience! It did not matter, as it happened; but, wonderful though our contrivances are, we never leave anything to chance, especially when dealing with the greatest sea navy in the universe. The power which we use is, even to ourselves, its discoverers, something of a mystery. It has proved itself extraordinary, truly, but it is well to be on the safe side. We, therefore, wished, for precaution's sake, to take you completely by surprise, and as soon as the destroyer was missed, we hurried operations so that you would not have time to be quite ready should your suspicions be aroused. Had you been prepared, and seen us before our influence properly gripped you—well, I might not be sitting here now! I am frank, you see!"

"But," gasped the perplexed admiral, "we didn't see you. We knew nothing until our wireless broke down, to all appearances, and the guns and engines seemed to jam. You arrived from nowhere, and we hadn't the slightest bit

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of your presence until you were right over us!"

"Exactly!" agreed Chang. "At a certain height our ships are quite invisible to anyone below, but in order to exert sufficient influence to grip the entire Fleet and the town as well, we were obliged to descend. This had to be done very carefully, so that each airship would drop as simultaneously as possible, for had some appeared without your guns being fully controlled by us, you might have succeeded in doing considerable damage before we could prevent it. You see, I have a great respect for the marksmanship of the British seaman; but even the poorest gunner in the world could scarcely miss such a target, for the shells would be literally drawn towards us by the same magnetism as can make the guns which fire them useless as bars of cast-iron! That is a weakness, however, which is well balanced by the immense advantages it gives us on the other side of the scale."

"But why tell me all this?" muttered Sir Stanford.

"Partly because I wish you to realise that, now we have come, you cannot oppose us, and partly because you must prepare to hand over your entire fleet to other crews, which will arrive presently. In a very short time—even as I speak, perhaps—the whole of Britain, and every other British warship, will be at our mercy. So we may be needed elsewhere."

Sir Stanford gasped indignantly. "Hand over the Fleet!" he echoed. "I'll see you hanged first, you—"

"Tut, tut, my dear sir," said Chang evenly. "Why waste time in useless argument? I am holding you up, so to speak, until a sufficient number of men come to work your ships to—er—another port, after you and your crews have departed for the shore. It is not likely that we are going to allow such a powerful factor as the British Navy to lie idle when it might be turned to good account. That is settled! Your only chance of defence was to strike before our forces congregated so closely. That chance is now past. At the present moment not only are your vessels useless, but every train, telephone, telegraph, every movable piece of metal within a certain radius is firmly held!"

"I—" began the other, and then paused as though stupefied. "You say the whole of Britain will soon be under the influence," he presently continued. "Am I to take it, then, that this air fleet does not constitute your entire resources?"

Chang smiled indulgently. "Our entire resources, my dear admiral! Not a fraction of them! We have transports for carrying large bodies of troops, squadrons of scouts and fast cruisers, fleets larger than that which you see above. Why, the work occupied years and years of patient toil and research in the innermost parts of China, where no white man has ever penetrated, and where we have been planning all this while the countries of the world watched each other and left us to sleep, as they thought."

"And the silence? America, Japan, the rebellious—"

"Japan, our nearest neighbour, was dealt with first. Astute though she is, she did not suspect, and America was attended to next. Our airships are as numerous as pebbles on the beach, Sir Stanford, and the surprise was complete. Every ship on the trade routes, every cruiser on the high seas, every wireless

apparatus and cable were influenced. Vessels that had left port were taken charge of, those which had not put to sea could not move. Not only that, but any leakages which leaked out were picked up by our aerial navy, and, by means of a special apparatus, prevented from reaching their destinations. Hence the silence, which has so surprised Europe. And the revolutions are also part of our preparations. They have occupied you for the time being!"

Chang's usually impassive face was flushed as he paused. Sir Stanford Martyn was sitting like a man turned to stone.

"There was only one thing we feared," continued the former presently—"a strange British invention which had power to liquify metal at a distance. From what we could gather, there was little in this apparatus which would succumb to our magnetism. But we have reason to believe that the formula was incomplete. The only successful apparatus was destroyed by fire soon after the tests were made, and the papers handed to your Government lacked some important details. Several of your most famous scientists strove to supply the missing particulars, but up to a short time ago all attempts were unsuccessful."

"You seem to have been uncannily well informed."

"We have need to be, otherwise we could not tell what might have happened. One of our cleverest spies had charge of the matter, but was arrested at the last moment. He had copied the papers and sent on particulars according as they were obtainable; but a hitch came, our people were rather baffled, and he was then ordered to bring the originals, substituting his own copies, which had been so carefully executed that it was difficult to distinguish one from the other. Thus, not only might we have gained time and hindered any sudden straightening out of the tangle on the part of Great Britain, when the ray might have been employed against us at the most awkward moment, but we should, perhaps, have been able to do what your people have failed to accomplish—that is, discover what is lacking, and use the invention for our own ends. However, our agent was frustrated, and the papers, still without these vital factors, were recovered by your authorities. Our ships are wonderful, but they are largely built of metal, and on this new weapon might have depended the success or failure of our enterprise. Yet, the mere fact of no such method of defence being used against us by your war vessels convinces me, more than anything else could, that the matter is still as baffling to your scientists as it was when the hitch I mentioned occurred."

Sir Stanford offered no comment. In any case, he was not one of those who knew very much about the affair. He, of course, was aware that the exciting melee of a short time back concerned some particulars of a new invention which had been stolen; but, beyond that, the circumstances were out of his province altogether.

"But, Europe—" he prompted; and Chang quite readily resumed:

"Europe is under the influence by now. Some of our largest fleets have crossed into Russia, while others are attending to France, Germany, Italy, and so forth. The Great War has done much to reduce any resistance which could have been put up against us. Many of the European nations are in a desperate plight as its result; their armies are still weak, their guns and munitions not even now up to

fighting standard, and, altogether, they are scarcely in a fit condition to enter into another struggle—particularly such a one as this."

"But how will you proceed?" Sir Stanford's curiosity, despite the desperate gravity of the situation, had reached fever-heat. "Magnetism cannot do all—"

"No; you are right, sir. The magnetism prepares the way; our armies do the rest. As I have said, our transports can carry large bodies of troops, all equipped with the most modern weapons of war. These troops can be landed at will anywhere we consider it advisable. They can advance under cover of our air-fleets, the resistance of any defenders being rendered useless by the influence; yet not affecting our men, for both airships and land forces consist of, and carry nothing but non-magnetic material. Attack by your war-planes would be equally futile, for immediately on coming within the radius their engines would cease working, and the machines themselves, being so much lighter, would dash against our steel hulls, to stick there until we chose to release them. That is about all, Sir Stanford, I think. Have you any further questions to ask?"

Chang stood up as he finished, and turned towards the door. The British admiral moved slowly across the cabin, his head sunk on his chest, and his shoulders stooping.

"I have many questions to ask," Martyn replied huskily, "but I cannot frame them. The whole thing is too stupefying—too unreal, almost, to believe!"

"But you have seen, my dear sir—" "Yes, I have seen; I wish I had never lived to see it! But you shall not leave this ship, Admiral Chang! At least, I can hold you as hostage!"

The other smiled calmly.

"You must be mad, Sir Stanford! Remember my warning! I shall leave here now; in a quarter of an hour I cannot do so, for then there would be no ship to depart from."

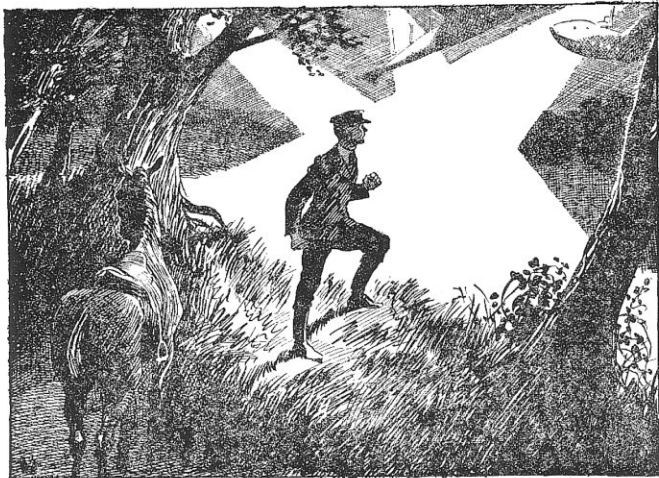
"What in Heaven's name do you mean?" "That in exactly the time I mention, if I am not back, the British Home Fleet will have ceased to exist! I say, I do not jest, sir; it is even as I say! So, for the sake of one hostage, would you destroy thousands of your fellow-countrymen?"

The Britisher's jaw fell, but, knowing so much already, and having witnessed the power of the invaders, he reluctantly bowed assent.

"I must submit to you for the present," he said; "but rest assured nothing will be left undone to outwit you! You will find England a tougher problem than you evidently imagine!"

"We have not underrated the power of Britain," replied Chang; "but there are many other things I would have liked to explain, had my stay not been so brief. However, come up on deck. I shall give you a very slight demonstration of what we can really do when it comes to actual destruction. I have just time to show you."

Discreetly by the closest approach to fear he had ever felt—yet a fear mingled with a burning curiosity—Sir Stanford followed the other upstairs, where Chang semaphored something to the airship nearest one of the rocky promontories flanking the bay entrance. Immediately, the craft moved forward until she hovered right above the cliff; then a streak of greenish light shot down, to be followed by a terrific roar, as rocks, earth, and foliage were scattered to the four winds of heaven. When the haze



Tom Hope peered through a gap in the trees, with difficulty checking a startled exclamation as he realised what was taking place only a few yards away. (See Page 18.)

cleared away, a gap through which a battleship might have passed showed in the bluff, with greenish smoke still issuing in wisps from its depths.

Chang set his foot on the first rung of the swinging ladder, his slant eyes gleaming as he pointed across the water.

"You see, Sir Stanford? Think what would have been the result had I chosen one of your ships instead of inanimate rocks and earth! But my orders are not to cause wanton destruction; so far, there is no necessity for it."

He clambered up like a monkey, disappearing through an opening beneath the airship's hull; then, as though paralysed by what they had seen, everyone mutely watched the ladder slowly rise until its tail vanished from sight.

Tom Hope's Mad Ride—London in the Grip!

WHEN the officer returned to the jetty, after despatching his momentous message from Mayburn, he found the pinnace which had conveyed him from his ship quite unworkable. Her engines would not budge, so he and his companion were obliged to commandeering a row-boat to carry them back.

In the meantime the extraordinary interview described in the foregoing chapter had taken place, so it was with little surprise that Sir Stanford Martyn received his lieutenant's report. He merely nodded, and sighed heavily.

"I was aware of all this, Mr. Shel'ard, but I'm particularly glad you succeeded in getting something through. Let us hope headquarters will profit by it. Much has happened since, however, which should be passed on if possible—but how? We are completely powerless, and Heaven only knows how far the radius may have been extended by now! Someone must get to the Admiralty without delay!"

"But the trains, sir, are—"

"I know—I know; but I was not thinking of those! This infernal magnetism prevents the use of any mechanical vehicle, so it only remains to try your own method."

"On horseback?"

"Yes. It's a long way to London, yet it's the only means I can think of. But who'll go—who—who?"

"Anybody you name, sir, of course," said the lieutenant, in surprise. "I, for instance—"

But Sir Stanford stopped him with a gesture.

"No: I want you here. I want every available senior officer, yet I must send someone whose word will be taken without question, for not a moment's delay must occur when Sir Headley Hope knows all—and I have much to add to your message. I— By Jove! Why, who could be more reliable, or more likely to carry conviction, than his own son?"

"In the Unconquerable, sir?"

"Yes. Signal him to come across immediately. Tell them to send a wooden boat—no other is of any use!"

It was with a thrill of intense excitement that Tom received that order, and a very few minutes later he was cloistered with the Commander-in-chief, who was writing something at lightning speed.

"Shut the door, my lad," said the latter quickly, "and come over here! You are the son of Sir Headley Hope, I think? I saw you with him at the Admiralty offices recently."

"Yes, sir!"

"Then I have an important commission for you. Just a few minutes, and I shall be finished."

He covered two more sheets, placed them in an envelope, which he sealed, and handed it to the middy.

"That must be delivered to your father without delay. A message explaining some of what has taken place has already been sent, but you can describe all you have seen fully to him. My own report is in that packet, and is vitally important. You must travel by horse—some of the distance, at any rate—but you may get other means of conveyance elsewhere; I do not know, though it is possible. We are magnetised, and so is everything for some distance round, so I trust to your own discretion. But this letter must be delivered without a second's unnecessary delay. That is all now, and God-speed!"

No attention was paid to the little skiff that bore the solitary rower towards the shore. She may have been noticed, but so small an object evidently did not impress the watchers above, particularly

as several other similar boats were passing to and fro. Tom reached the wharf, and looked for a swift horse, which he had little trouble in securing; then, in less time than it has taken in the telling, he was clattering out of Seahaven just as the sun sank in the west.

On and on he tore, referring every now and again to a road-map so that he might not lose his bearings. The dusk deepened into darkness, but he never halted a moment longer than was absolutely necessary, until he had reached a town some twenty miles inland. Here he made inquiries at the station. Here no trains were obtainable, nor was a car of any description to be had; so, having secured a fresh mount, he continued his mad race. Two further attempts alike proved futile; the influence had evidently gripped the main part of the country by now, and Tom finally decided to stick to horseback all the way.

He galloped out of the last village, his steed's hoofs ringing on the broad highway, and so on for another couple of miles, until the darkness was suddenly riven asunder by a shaft of dazzling, greenish light, whilst a low hum sounded in the air above.

Hope drew up instantly, dismounted, and led his steed towards a thick clump of foliage at the roadside. The light which was streaming down from the dark heavens presently was joined by a couple of others; then a quartette of strange objects descended in a field on his left. Tom tethered his horse, and peered through a gap in the trees, with difficulty checking a startled exclamation as he realised what was taking place only a few yards away.

Four huge airships were resting on the grass, their forms illumined by the greenish rays from others in mid-air; whilst from those beneath scores upon scores of men were pouring—yellow men, clad in strange uniforms, with kilts complete. Speedily they disappeared beyond the light, but evidently did not go very far, for several sharp words of command came to Tom's ears at odd intervals, though he could no longer see the throng. Beyond these, however, there was a little sound, save for the faint, steady hum in the gloom above.

Then came guns of various kinds, all taken with businesslike rapidity from the largest of the four vessels, and trundled away in the same direction, their wheels making scarcely a sound as they passed over the award.

"Good heavens—Chinese!" The words seemed to stick in Hope's throat, as he grasped the meaning of what he had witnessed. "It must be one of many landings. Goodness knows what number of yellow rascals may be overrunning the country elsewhere by now!"

Fearing to delay longer, he quietly led the horse some little distance farther on; then vaulted into the saddle, and sped off towards his goal. Luckily, he had not been seen; the country at that spot was but sparsely inhabited, and the invaders had not feared the presence of a spy. In any case, even if he had, it is doubtful if it would have worried

them overmuch. Their power was such that the ordinary methods of warfare would prove of little avail against it.

It was a dusty, travel-stained horseman who arrived at Whitehall in the small hours of that morning, and appeared like some strange vision to Sir Headley Hope, Dick Elliott, and one or two others, who had been busily occupied all night long—never having left the building, indeed, since that momentous 'phone message came through from Mayburn the previous afternoon.

"Good heavens, sir! It's — it's Tom!"

So dishevelled and covered with scattered soil was the newcomer, that instant recognition was not easy. He advanced, and placed Sir Stanford's neck in the hands of the Sea Lord, swiftly relating the startling events he himself had witnessed, and Sir Headley's tooth came together with a click as he broke the seals and rapidly scanned the contents.

"Ah, the Ray!" he muttered, as he read. "This Chang referred to the Wilton Ray, and frankly admitted to Sir Stanford that its perfection might be a serious matter to the enemy, for they seem to guess there is little in it that can be magnetised."

"And, of course, they're right, sir," remarked Dick. "Wilton's apparatus was merely wood, covered with a heat-proof material—that is, according to your own description of the one you yourself saw—and mine is something similar. There's very little metal used in the construction, and in any case no movable parts of the controlling mechanism come into direct contact with each other; all of which is most fortunate for us."

"I should say it is," returned Sir Headley grimly, "considering that we must confound ourselves dependent upon this solitary weapon for our defence. It's also rather lucky our invaders still believe the invention to be more or less a failure—that is, according to what Chang told Martyn."

"Well, sir, we must do our best to speedily change their minds," said Dick instantly. "Several apparatus are available now. It only remains for a chance to come to prove our superiority."

"And if we fail?"

"Then we shall never be in a position to fail again, dad!" put in Tom gravely. "So far, they've got us completely cornered, and any moment now they may—Hark! What's that?"

Somewhere out in the street a shrill cry was heard, followed by a droning noise which seemed to find an echo in the very room itself. All turned quickly towards the windows, as the early sunshine was suddenly darkened by a cluster of great shapes suspended less than two hundred feet above Whitehall. The noise of the early-morning traffic had ceased as though by magic, and after that single cry all was silent, save for the never-ending hum of those mighty fans.

Presently, the number of hostile airships was increased—by twos, threes, half-dozens—until a veritable cloud of them hovered over the waking city, all appearing as though from nowhere, taking shape, as it were, from the grey sky above, with the rising sun-shafts glinting on their hulls as they dropped lower.

Not a gun repelled them, nor a 'plane rose to engage them—all movable metal was firmly locked by the uncanny influence. London was in the grip!

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