

GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER!

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Week Ending December 20th, 1924.

# The Magnet<sup>2</sup>

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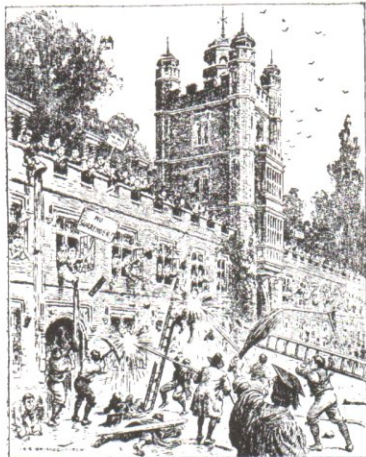


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### H.M.S. Princess Margaret.

An instructive article on the subject of this week's FREE Plate.

By "JACKSTAFF."

UNTIL the Navy turned her into a minelayer, H.M.S. Princess Margaret was a Canadian Pacific liner. That accounts for her unwarship-like appearance. Being still a commodious vessel, the Princess Margaret is often used as a guest-ship of naval reviews and such functions. She displaces 3,070 tons, is but lightly armed, and has a speed of about twenty-five miles an hour. At present she acts as minelayer to the Atlantic Fleet. Two long strings of submarine mines are stretched along her deck—one on each side—and as the vessel steams ahead she drops these into the sea through openings in the after-part of her hull, one of which may be seen in this week's wonderful free art plate.

There is a considerable number of minelayers in the Navy. A cruiser built especially for the work is now being completed at Devon-

port dockyard. Another type is the "M's," which displace about 340 tons, have a speed of only twelve miles an hour, and carry about fifty mines each. Some fast destroyers are likewise fitted for minelaying, this being work that almost any ship can do. The business of the minelayers proper is to sow fields of these dangerous contraptions at the mouth of harbours and in the creeks followed by shipping on the seas. Fast minelayers, such as destroyers, have a special function. They dash in ahead of enemy fleets and drop mines in their path. It was a temporary minelayer laid in this manner by the Abdiel into which the fiercest fleet blundered when it was escaping after the Battle of Jutland.

The submarine mine is now regarded as so important a weapon that a school for studying its development and teaching how to handle it has been opened in connection with the Navy. In principle the mine is of comparatively simple structure, being merely a steel cylinder that contains several hundred pounds weight of high explosive. A number of horns project from the top of the cylinder, and immediately a ship touches one of these the mine goes off and blows her up. The mine is a

deadly and sinister thing. One type works magnetically. A steel ship does not have to strike it, for the mine is so constructed that magnetic attraction will cause it to float towards a passing vessel and destroy her.

Every class of fighting-ship has her opponent. That of the minelayer is the minesweeper. "Sweepers" are craft that work in pairs. A long steel hawser stretches between them and brings to the surface any mines that may be encountered, and they are destroyed by gunfire. For clearing mines out of their way warships are provided with an attachment called a paravane. This consists of a torpedo-shaped "sinker" that keeps a wire hawser stretched out for a considerable distance. As the mineslide along the hawser a cutting arrangement severs their mooring wires and they float harmlessly to the surface. One paravane is put out on each side of a ship, and enables her to cut her way safely through a minefield. Paravanes are used by merchant vessels as well as by warships in war time. They saved many vessels for the Allies between 1914 and 1918.

Next Week: H.M.S. Vivacious.

WONDERFUL ART PLATE OF A TORPEDO BOAT DESTROYER  
GIVEN AWAY FREE WITH NEXT WEEK'S  
“MAGNET LIBRARY.”

MIND YOU GET IT, CHUMS!

GET OF HIS ELEMENT! For once in a way, Harry Wharton does not spend his Christmas holidays with the rest of the Famous Five. He accepts an invitation from Vernon-Smith to accompany him to Monte Carlo. Once there, however, Wharton realises that the Bounder's ways are not his ways; "high life" and the fever of the gaming tables disgust him.



A Magnificent New Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars.  
By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Matter of Great Importance!

"ABOUT Christmas—"  
No answer.  
Harry Wharton was standing by the window of Study No. 1 in the Remove, staring out into the misty quadrangle.

There had been a fall of snow, and roofs and walls were white and gleaming. In the quad snowballs were being thrown, and loud shouts reached Wharton's ears as he stood at the window. A battle was raging between a crowd of Remove fellows, and Temple, Wharton & Co. of the Fourth. Bob Merry's powerful voice could be heard above the rest.

But Harry Wharton, captain of the Remove, did not seem disposed to enter into that merry tussle. He stood at the study window, with a frown upon his face.

"About Christmas, old chap—"  
No answer. The captain of the Remove did not even seem aware that Bob Merry was in the study at all.

Bunter coughed loudly.  
"Hem!"  
Wharton did not turn his head. The break-up for the Christmas holidays was close at hand, and possibly Wharton was thinking of that matter. If he did not seem to want to discuss it with William George Bunter.

"I say, Wharton," bawled Bunter, "going deaf?"  
"Oh, roll away!" said Harry impatiently, and still without turning his head.  
"Oh, really, Wharton—"  
"Cut!"  
"But about Christmas!" urged Bunter.  
"Don't worry!"  
"We break up in a few days more, you know," said Billy Bunter. "It's rather important, Wharton. Never leave arrangements till the last minute, or you'll be sorry. I was thinking of coming home with you this vac—"

"Better think about something else, then," said Harry.

"I know there's a difficulty," said Bunter calmly. "Your uncle having gone off to Russia, he won't be at home, I suppose. Rather inconsiderate of him to buzz off like that just before the vac. I think. It leaves you in rather a hole for Christmas, doesn't it?"

No reply.  
"The idea was that you were going to take your friends home for Christmas," went on Bunter, "Bob and Nugent and Bull and Inky and—and me. Well, is it off?"

"Yes."  
"There's not going to be a Christmas party at Wharton Lodge?"

"No."  
"Oh!" said Bunter.

There was a pause. The captain of the Remove, who had not even looked at Bunter, continued to stare gloomily from the window. But he hardly saw the merry crowd of juniors below, pelting one another with snowballs. He was thinking of quite another scene—of a distant frozen land, a land of terror and death, where in those very hours his uncle might be falling a victim to savage enemies.

"Rather thoughtless of the old Johnny, you know," said Billy Bunter peevishly. "I don't see what he wanted to go to Russia for—at least, just before Christmas. But look here, Wharton!"

Wharton did not "look here." He did not seem to hear.

"There's your aunt, you know," said Bunter. "She's a good old sort. Seems quite fond of you, for some reason—no accounting for tastes, you know. Well, won't she stand you and your friends for Christmas, even if the colonel's away?"

Billy Bunter paused, like Brutus, for a reply.

Like Brutus, he paused in vain. There was no reply, important as the matter was. For the entertainment of

William George Bunter in the Christmas vacation was a matter transcending in importance anything else that was going on in the universe—at least, in William George's opinion.

"I say, Wharton, can't you look round at a chap?" exclaimed Bunter, in exasperation. "I can't go on talking to the back of a fellow's head."

The captain of the Remove looked round at last.

"Don't worry, Bunter," he said. "Don't be an ass! If I'd been taking a party home for Christmas, I suppose I'd have let you land yourself on me as usual; but it's off, so you may as well be off, too. Nothing doing!"

Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles, with a blink of wrathful indignation.

"Land myself on you!" he ejaculated. "I like that! Why, the trouble really is that I'm so overwhelmed with invitations that I hardly know which way to turn."

"Go and accept some of them, then."  
"Smithy wants me to go abroad with him for the vac," pursued Bunter. "Smithy's going to the South of France, but I told him I was going to stand by my old pals. Lord Maulverer is keen to take me to Maulverer Towers. My old pal, D'Arcy of St. Jim's, has written me an urgent letter. I've got it here, and you can see it, if you like, you grinning beast. No, I suppose I've left it in my study. Nothing to cackle at, Wharton, that I can see."

Harry Wharton laughed.  
The Owl of the Remove had succeeded, at least, in dispelling the cloud from his brow.

"Then there's the Caterpillar over at Highcliffe. He urged me almost with tears in his eye."

"Tell him it's a go, then."  
"You see, I've turned all these fellows down," explained Bunter. "Relying on you, I've turned them down. I can't very well raise the

subject again, after refusing them. Bad form, you know. I shouldn't like to be supposed a fellow who would fish for invitations."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Now, you tell me that there's nothing doing, and you've let me down!" said Bunter warmly. "I don't call that playing the game. Of course, I could ask you all home to Bunter Court. That would be all right, only Bunter Court happens to be in the hands of the decorators just at present. That knocks it on the head."

"Have you finished?" asked Harry. "No. The question is, what's going to be done? I think that in the circumstances we'd better go home to your place, all the same. Miss Wharton isn't a bad old sort, and I can stand her all right."

"Vary likely; but I'm not going to ask her to stand you," said Harry. "You need a lot of standing."

"Beast!"

"I'm afraid you'll have to be satisfied with Bunter Court, decorators and all," said the captain of the Remove. "Now hook it!"

"The trouble is that I've told my people I'm staying with you for Christmas," explained Bunter. "You seem to have forgotten giving me a pressing invitation—"

"I have—quite!"

"Beast! Look here, if there's nothing doing at Wharton Lodge, I suppose you'll be going with one of the chaps. That's all right; I'll come. But which chap is it?"

"Fathead!"

"Cherry's people aren't very well off," said Bunter thoughtfully. "It wouldn't be much of a catch there. Inky hasn't any people in England. Johnny Bull's people are rather rough and ready—hardly my style. But Nugent can stand a decent Christmas party. It had better be old Franky. I should like that all right. See?"

"Better tell Nugent so."

"So I jolly well will!" snapped Bunter. "And as you're so jolly cheeky, I shall give Franky a hint not to ask you."

"Ass!"

"You've been jolly bad-tempered lately, rowing with chaps, even your own pals," said Bunter. "I daresay Nugent's fed up with your rotten temper—I know I am. Most likely he would be glad to get shut of you for the vac; stands to reason he would. Still, I suppose he'll feel bound to ask you. I should like it a good deal better without you, Wharton; and really it is a bit thick for you to land yourself—"

"What?"

"Land yourself on Nugent and me, with your rotten bad temper, and all that," said Bunter. "I don't see why you can't go home; you'd spoil any Christmas party. And I don't see why Nugent should be landed with you, simply because he's your chum here—"

"Will you get out?" asked Harry. "I'm not finished yet. I think—"

"Keep off, you beast!" roared Bunter. "Leggo my collar! Ow!"

Bunter had not finished. But his cheery conversation with Harry Wharton had to be left unfinished. A strong arm swung Bunter to the door, and tossed him out into the Remove passage.

"Ow! Beast!"

Slam!  
Bunter scrambled up, red with wrath. "You rotter!" he roared, through the keyhole of Study No. 1. "I've a jolly good mind to come in and lick you! Do you hear?"

No answer.

"You come out here, you rotter!" roared Bunter.

Silence!

"You come out, and I'll mop up the passage with you!" bawled Bunter.

"Yab! Funk!"

There was a footstep in the study, approaching the door.

Bunter did not wait for the door to open.

On second thoughts—proverbially the best—he decided not to mop up the passage with the captain of the Remove.

Only two seconds had elapsed when the door opened. But in those seconds William George Bunter had elapsed, too.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### The Bounder is Ratty.

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH, the Bounder of Greyfriars, sat in the comfortable armchair in his study, and frowned.

Tom Redwing, his study-mate, stood on the hearthrug, and looked troubled and distressed.

All was evidently not as it should have been in Study No. 4 in the Greyfriars Remove.

"You're an ass, Reddy!" said the Bounder.

"Yes, old chap!"

"And a silly chump!"

"Yes."

"And a blithering idiot!"

"All right, Smitty."

"And a howling dummy!"

Tom Redwing smiled faintly. He was distressed, as he always was when he had to cross the wishes of his best chum. But with the distress there was resolution in his handsome, sunburned face.

Fellows in the Remove had often wondered at the firm, loyal friendship between Vernon-Smith, the millionaire's son, and Tom Redwing, son of a sailor-man—poor as a church mouse, as Skinner described him, and only at Greyfriars School at all because he had won a scholarship there and had no fees to pay.

But that friendship, though often it had been shaken, owing to the Bounder's wayward temper, had never been broken. Trouble had occurred more than once in Study No. 4; but it had always blown over. Now it looked as if more trouble had come.

The Bounder was angry—that was clear. His brows were knitted, and his eyes gleamed under them.

"I've fixed it all up with my father," went on Vernon-Smith.

"I'm sorry, Smitty! But you never asked me first, so how could I know?" said Redwing.

"I had to ask my father first, fat-head!"

"Yes, that's so, I know," assented Tom. "But it's all right, Smitty; Mr. Vernon-Smith can't possibly care what friend you take with you for the Christmas holidays. He hardly knows me."

"Of course he doesn't care a rap!" said Smitty.

"Well then, that lets your father out, doesn't it?" said Tom, with a smile. "He won't mind!"

"I mind!" growled the Bounder.

"I'm sorry—"

"Oh, keep your sorrow!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "I never dreamed that you'd let me down like this. Do you call it pally?"

"I—I haven't let you down, Smitty! I—I never dreamed that you were going to tell me—not till you told me."

"You knew I wanted you for Christmas."

"Well, that's different. But when you told me your father was taking you to the South of France—Nice and Cannes and Monte Carlo, and all that—I never expected for a moment you'd suppose I could come."

"Why not?" granted Smitty.

"Smitty, old man, do be reasonable. It's a frightfully expensive trip. You're spending no end of money, and I haven't any money to spend."

"I'm not asking you to spend any."

"I know. You're the most generous fellow at Greyfriars, Smitty; I like you for it," said Tom. "But I can't sponge on you, old chap. You'd despise me yourself, in the long run, if I did!"

"Rot!"

"Well, perhaps you wouldn't, Smitty, but I should despise myself," said Redwing. "Lots of the fellows wonder at your chumming with me at all, and some of them think I pal with you for what you're worth. I know Skinner thinks so."

"Hang, Skinner!"

"Hang him as high as Haman, and welcome!" said Tom, smiling. "It's rather unusual, Smitty, for a chap with nothing in his pockets to chum with a fellow who has all the money he wants."

It looks—Redwing paused.

"Don't care how it looks, so long as nobody has a right to say that I'm after your money."

"I'd punch any fellow's head who said so!"

"But that wouldn't alter the facts, Smitty, if I sponged on you—and this would be sponging."

"Rubbish! My pater will pay all the bills."

"I know! It's the same thing!"

"You don't want to come?" grunted the Bounder. "And I was thinking all the time what a ripping thing it would be for you."

"So it would, old fellow; I'd like it like anything," said Tom. "I've never been out of England, excepting for a trip in my father's boat across the Channel. Wouldn't I just like to see the Mediterranean, and the palm-trees, and the sun shining in December, like summer." His eyes glistened. "But things like that aren't possible for a chap who has little more than the clothes he stands up in. A fellow can't have such things at another fellow's expense; it's not right!"

"Boeh!"

"You've always had such a lot of money, Smitty, that you don't understand," said Redwing. "Why, I haven't even the clothes for such a trip. Three suits of clothes have to last me a term—and they look as if they'd done it, too, at the end of the term! I'm almost ashamed, sometimes, of being so poorly dressed when I'm with you, and you always dressed to kill, old chap!"

"Fathead!"

"Fancy me dining in the big hotels and strolling round Monte Carlo in my old Etoms!" said Redwing.

The Bounder laughed impatiently.

"My pater's going to make you a Christmas present," he said. "You won't be short of cash."

Redwing crimsoned.

"I couldn't take it, Smitty—I couldn't. I hate to say no to anything you suggest; but I couldn't! I've precious little to call my own excepting my self-respect. I want to keep that, Smitty."

"Oh, rubbish!" growled the Bounder.

"Who's going to bother about your dashed self-respect? Plenty of fellows in the Remove would jump at it!"

"Fellows who could pay their footing, Smitty."

"Others, too!" snapped the Bouncer.

"Well, I'm not one of the others," said Redwing. "I'm not criticising them; but I couldn't do it! If we're going to be friends, Smithy, I've got to keep clear of sponging."

"Have I called it sponging?"

"No; but that's what I call it; because it's the right name. And, really, Smithy, if you think a bit, you'll know that that's right."

"Rot!"

Tom Redwing sighed and was silent. He felt keenly the disappointment he was inflicting on his chum, and he knew that the disappointment was keen. But there was no help for it.

"You don't want to come, and that's the long and short of it," said the Bouncer moodily. "Have you fixed up with somebody else for Christmas?"

"No. Nobody's specially keen on me for the vacation," said Tom, with a smile. "I shall be going home."

"To your cabin at Hawkscliff?" said the Bouncer, with a curl of the lip.

"It's my home, Smithy."

"And you prefer that to a holiday in the south of France?"

"No; but—"

"Oh, but—but—but—!" snapped the Bouncer. "The long and the short of it is that you won't come."

"I can't!"

"You won't, you mean. Well, don't then, and be blown to you!" said the Bouncer angrily. "I'll ask another fellow—precious few other chaps in the Remove who will turn me down. Let a drop."

Redwing nodded, with a clouded face, and crossed to the door. He had to be firm, he felt that; but he was disappointed as well as Smithy, and he wished that Smithy had taken it better. But it was seldom that the headstrong, impetuous Bouncer could take the crossing of his wishes patiently.

Redwing left the study—and almost fell over Bunter, who was very close to the door.

"Mind where you're going!" grunted Bunter.

Redwing gave the Owl of the Remove a glance of contempt, and walked away across the Remove passage. Billy Bunter pushed the door of No. 4 open again.

A grim, dark look from Herbert Vernon-Smith greeted him. But Billy Bunter was not abashed. He rolled into the study with his most ingratiating smile.

"I say, Smithy—"

"Get out!"

"Cheeky cad, and no mistake," said Bunter.

"What?"

"Shabby rotter, you know, having the cheek to refuse an offer like that," said Bunter. "No wonder you're waxy, old chap."

"So you've been listening?" said the Bouncer, glancing round for a missile.

"Oh, really, Smithy! I happened to hear a few words. I say, you're really well out of it, you know. You couldn't make that low rotter with you—on an expensive trip among expensive people," said Bunter, shaking his head seriously.

"It wouldn't do, you know."

"You fat idiot!"

"What you want on a trip like that, Smithy, is a really decent, well-conducted chap—a fellow accustomed to the best society," said Bunter, blinking at the Bouncer through his big spectacles.

"Great mistake not to take a gentleman with you. I know you mean to be kind to that low fellow, Smithy, and all that, but there's a limit. It's wasted,

you know. Look here, Smithy, I'll come."

"Eh?"

"Of course, I shall pay my own footing," said Bunter hastily. "I shall ask my pater specially for a rather handsome Christmas cheque. Generally he gives me twenty pounds—"

"You fat ass!"

"I shall ask him for fifty this time. When do we start, Smithy?"

Vernon-Smith glared at the Owl of the Remove and grasped a cushion.

"You'll be jolly glad, Smithy, to have a chap like me with you, instead of a low rotter like Redwing— Yarooogh!"

Crash!

The cushion whizzed, and landed on Bunter's extensive and well-filled waistcoat.

"Oooooooh!"

Bunter sat down with an impact that almost shook the study.

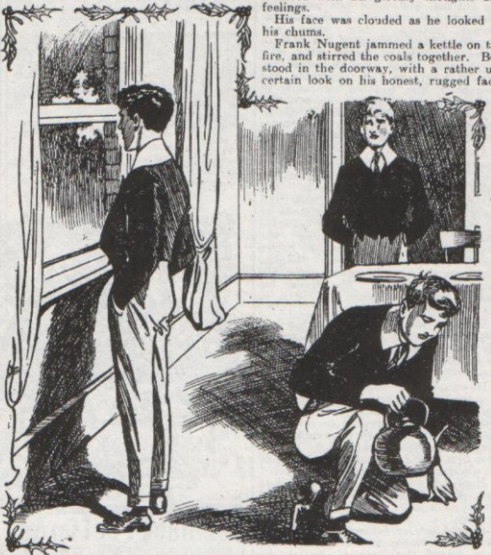
"Ow! Wow! Wow! Beast!" he roared. "Ow! I jolly well won't come now— Ow! Yooop!"

Vernon-Smith jumped up and grabbed the cushion. It rose and fell in the Bouncer's heavy hand.

Smite, smite, smite!

"Ow! Ow! Wow!"

For the second time that winter's afternoon, William George Bunter quitted a Remove study in frantic haste. Vernon-Smith hurled the cushion after him, slammed the door, and returned to his armchair, scowling.



The question of the Christmas vacation was still unsettled for Bunter. But it seemed to be fairly clear that he was not going with the Bouncer.

**THE THIRD CHAPTER.**

**A Rift in the Lute!**

**"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"** boomed Bob Cherry's powerful voice into Study No. 1.

Bob's rugged face was ruddy and bright. He had thoroughly enjoyed the snow battle in the quad—all the more because Temple, Dabney & Co. had been put ignominiously to the rout. The Removists had remained victorious; and now most of them were coming up to the studies to tea.

Bob's bright face looked in at the doorway of the study. There was a red glow from the fire, but no other light.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Not here," said Bob. "You had better come along to my study to tea, Franky."

"I'm here," said Wharton's quiet voice.

"Oh, my hat! All in the dark?"

"Yes."

Frank Nugent passed Bob into the study and lighted the gas. Harry Wharton was still standing by the open window.

He had not troubled to put on the light. Indeed, perhaps the gloom harmonised with his gloomy thoughts and feelings.

His face was clouded as he looked at his chums.

Frank Nugent jammed a kettle on the fire, and stirred the coals together. Bob stood in the doorway, with a rather uncertain look on his honest, rugged face.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" boomed Bob Cherry. "Harry's not here!" "I'm here!" came Wharton's quiet voice. "Oh!" gasped Bob. "All in the dark!" Nugent lighted the gas, and picked up the kettle to jam on the fire. But Harry Wharton still stared moodily out of the window. (See Chapter 3.)

Johnny Bull glanced in, and, having had one look at Wharton's face, walked on along the Remove passage without speaking. His impression was that Wharton was "edge-wise" once more, and at such a time the least said was the soonest mended.

Wharton's clouded brow darkened still more.

There had been trouble in the Co., and something like a rift in the lute still subsisted. But Harry had not meant to be sullen or sulky now. He had been thinking of his uncle, with a heavy heart—thinking of the terrible perils that Colonel Wharton was facing in going to the rescue of an old comrade-in-arms, who had fallen foul of the Bolsheviks in the savage land of the Muscovites.

He had expected to see his uncle, as usual, that Christmas—until that sudden journey to the frozen North made it impossible. And the dark thought was always in his mind that he might never have another Christmas with the stern, quiet, but kind-hearted man who had been a father to him from his early infancy. It was possible—it was more than possible—that Colonel Wharton had gone to find his death in the frozen North—that he would add one more to the countless victims of a grim and savage tyranny.

With such thoughts in his mind, and trouble heavy at his heart, it was not easy to fall in with the cheery humour of his chums.

Indeed, that humour jarred on him. He did not, and could not, expect his friends to feel as he did—to share his incessant anxiety; they knew and respected Colonel Wharton, but to them he was only Wharton's uncle, whom they seldom saw. They were concerned for him, it was true; but, naturally, the thought of him was not constantly in their minds. And, indeed, his peril did not seem so great to them as it did to Wharton—they were able to take a more detached view of the matter.

And Wharton, who had always been reserved, was more than ever reserved now. He had never been a fellow to wear his heart on his sleeve. His anxiety for his uncle was keen and sharp; but he seldom or never spoke of it, even to Nugent, his most intimate chum. Anything approaching the emotional was barred in the Lower Fourth Form of Greyfriars. Besides, what was the use of speaking—idle talk could not alter facts. The deeper his anxiety grew, the deeper he hid it in his own breast.

Many a time, of late, Wharton had felt himself rather a wet blanket among his cheery chums; and more than once he had felt something like resentment at their seeming indifference.

He caught the look on Johnny Bull's face, and it gave him a throb of annoyance. Bull evidently supposed that he was "ratty," and desired to avoid the possibility of dispute by not coming into the study. What right had he to suppose him ratty? Was a fellow bound to be always grinning like a hyena?

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked in over Bob Cherry's shoulder, and the cheery grin faded from his dusky countenance.

He did not, as Johnny Bull did, suppose that Wharton was sulky. His keen eyes traced the lines of anxiety in Harry's clouded face. But he knew that dependancy of spirits and irritation go hand-in-hand—that when a fellow was down in the dumps, he was much more likely to quarrel than when he was cheery.

So the nabob of Bhanipur, after a moment's hesitation, followed Johnny Bull along the passage.

"Aren't you coming in, Cherry?" asked Wharton, with a slight inflection of sarcasm in his voice.

Bob frowned a little.

Wharton never, or hardly ever, addressed him by his surname. When he did so it was a sign that all was not well.

"Anything up?" asked Bob.

"Eh! Oh, no!" said Harry, with a deeper note of sarcasm. Bob had apparently forgotten that Colonel Wharton was in Russia, in danger of his life, and that that was a matter of keen concern to his nephew. If so, Wharton was not likely to remind him.

"You didn't come down to help us wallop the Fourth," said Bob.

"I didn't feel in the humour."

"No?" said Bob. "Well, I'll get along—you fellows come to tea in my study?"

"Thanks, no!" said Harry.

"Right-ho!"

Bob Cherry moved away with his heavy tread; and his rugged face remained clouded for about two minutes. It cleared when he came into his own study, No. 13 in the Remove. Hurree Singh and Mark Linley and little Wun Lung, the Chinese, were there; and Bob was never anything like a wet blanket. Tea in Study No. 13 was quite a merry meal.

Frank Nugent, as a matter of fact, would have preferred to go with Bob. But he did not think of doing so. Wharton had been so thoughtful of late, so morose and touchy, that Frank did not find Study No. 1 so cheerful as of old. But Frank Nugent was not a fair-weather friend; and he bore with his chum patiently and kindly.

He assumed a cheery air, as he boiled the kettle for tea, and put on the tin saucenap with the eggs.

"We jolly well walloped the Fourth!" he said.

"Did you?"

"Temple got a snowball right in the eye."

"Oh!"

"We jolly well drove them right along to the Cloisters," said Frank. "I wish you'd joined in."

Harry did not answer.

"Coker of the Fifth butted in," said Frank, with a chuckle. "Just like Coker! We rolled him in the snow."

"Good!" said Harry, forcing a smile. "Coker's talking about raiding this passage with a gang of the Fifth, and winding up the term by giving us jip!" said Frank.

"Let him!"

"Yes, rather—we'll make him glad to go home again," said Nugent. "Here you are—tea's ready."

"Right-ho!"

The two juniors sat down to tea.

After the snow battle, Frank had come in, like the others, merry and bright. He was feeling fit and fresh and elated with the exercise in the keen winter air. But Wharton's gloomy face was an effectual damper; and it was only by an effort that Nugent kept up cheery talk over the tea-table. Nugent fell silent at last, and tea was finished in silence.

When it was over Frank rose to his feet. Perhaps he was feeling the need of more cheerful company.

Wharton understood, and he coloured.

"I—I'm sorry, Frank, old chap!" he said. "I know I'm a bit of a wet blanket—but I'm not feeling very bright. Cut along."

"Come down to the Rag," said Frank. The captain of the Remove shook his head.

"Look here, Harry," said Nugent after a pause. "You're not keeping it up, are you—about the words we had the other day? We can't expect to get through a term without any differences of opinion, can we?"

"No," said Harry.

"It isn't like you to keep up a grudge, either," said Frank. "I hope you're not thinking about that little trouble—"

"No," said Harry again.

"Well, what's the matter, then?"

"Nothing."

Nugent smiled. "You don't look so jolly bright for a fellow who has nothing the matter with him," he said.

"I'm not feeling bright, as I told you."

"Well, give it a name," said Frank, puzzled. "Of course, it's rather a muck-up about Christmas, your uncle being away. But it doesn't matter much where we go, so long as we all go together."

"I'm not thinking about Christmas being mucked up," said Harry. "I'm not worrying about holidays."

"We'll have a jolly Christmas, anyhow, wherever we go," said Frank. "My

people will be jolly glad to have the lot of us."

"I—I was thinking—" Wharton spoke in a low voice. "I'm a bit worried about my uncle."

"I understand," Nugent nodded. "I shall be jolly glad for your sake when he comes home safe and sound again. But you don't want to keep on thinking about that. I've no doubts he's all right."

"Oh!" said Harry.

"Colonel Wharton's a man to be able to take care of himself. And, after all, lots of people go to Russia, even in these days," said Nugent.



"You know, old chap, that you can keep on harping on a thing until a little trouble seems a jolly big one."

Wharton flushed.  
"I don't think I've harped on it," he said. "I haven't mentioned it before that I know of."

"I didn't mean that—I mean, harping on it in your own mind. I'm only too jolly glad if you speak to me about anything that's worrying you, and you know that, Harry," said Nugent rather warmly. "Don't put things into a fellow's mouth that he hasn't said."

Wharton turned away.  
"Look here, Harry, don't play the goat!" said Nugent quietly. "You're getting jolly touchy lately."

"Am I?" said Harry grimly.  
"Yes, you are, old chap; and all about nothing. Skinner says—"

"I don't want to hear what Skinner says."

"Well, Skinner isn't the only one; lots of the fellows—"

"I'd rather not hear their views."  
Nugent breathed hard and deep.

"You'd rather not make the fellows look on you as a bear with a sore head, I suppose, and on this study as a sort of wild animal's den that fellows had better keep clear of," he said sharply.

"They can keep clear of it if they like—and of me, too," said Wharton savagely. "I noticed Johnny Bull and Bob doing so, and Inky, too—well, let them! If they want to give me the go-by, let them go ahead!"

"They don't want to—but—"

"And if you want rather more cheerful company, theirs is waiting for you," said Wharton. "You can go along and mull over how touchy I am, and what Skinner thinks of it."

"Look here, Wharton—"

"Oh, let it drop!" exclaimed Harry impatiently. "What's the good of chinning? We shall be quarrelling soon, at this rate."

"It's not so jolly easy to get on with one without quarrelling," said Frank loudly. "It looks to me as if you want a row with the whole party."

"I don't care a rap one way or the other."

"Then you jolly well ought!" said Nugent, with more tartness than he had ever shown before to his chum. "Anyhow, you're not going to row with me; I'll cut till you feel in a better temper."

And Frank Nugent walked out of the study, and the door closed behind him.

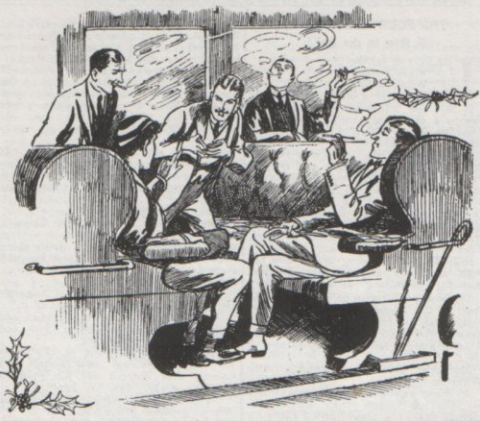
Wharton stood very still.

After a few minutes he took a letter from his pocket and read it over for the third or fourth time. It was from his aunt, Miss Wharton, the colonel's sister, on one passage in it his glance lingered. It ran:

"While my brother is away, I shall remain with my friends at Bournemouth. It will be hard to lose our usual pleasant Christmas together at home; but for me the holiday would not be a happy one while your uncle is in a dangerous country; and I think, my dear Harry, that you feel the same. But you must make up your mind to enjoy your Christmas as much as you can. You have many dear friends at school who will be glad to have you for the holidays; though if you would prefer a very quiet vacation with your old man, I need not tell you how pleased I should be to see you here, and my kind best wishes would be equally pleased. I feel, however, that you will enjoy yourself more among young people; but let me know, my dear Harry, what arrangements you are making—"

There was a good deal more, in the same kind and affectionate strain.

Wharton smiled faintly.



"Quite jolly to butt into you like this, Smithy!" said Ponsonby. "Yes, rather!" agreed Gadsby. "Oh, absolutely!" grinned Vavasour. Ponsonby handed round the cigarette case. Four cigarettes were soon going, but Harry Wharton declined. (See Chapter 10.)

He was very fond of his aunt, as she was of him; but a "very very quiet" vacation with the old lady at Bournemouth would have been more than a little irksome to both of them, especially as Wharton did not share his aunt's opinion that her kind hosts—an elderly vicar and his wife—would be "equally pleased" to have a Lower Fourth boy lingering in their quiet and sedate establishment for the Christmas vacation.

Wharton, as a matter of fact, cared little what he did that Christmas. He was not keen on making merry.

But he had to go somewhere.

He could not stay on through the holidays at the school, like one or two hapless fellows, who had no people in England, and had to stay on for a deadly dull vacation in charge of the house-dame, counting the days till the holidays were over and the fellows came back.

Plenty of places were open to him, for that matter, and the most natural thing was for him to go home with Frank Nugent, his best chum. It had been intended that Nugent should go home with him, and it was easy enough to reverse the order.

But he was not, now, on the same cheery terms of confidence with his chum that he had always been on with him. After the sharp words that had been spoken, only a few minutes ago, in the study, how could he take it for granted that he was to go home with Nugent.

And he was ashamed of it; but there it was—the gibing words of Billy Bunter lingered in his memory. Bunter was nobody, and less than nobody, and what he said was of no more account than the whistling of the winter wind among the leafless old elms in the quad. Nevertheless, his gibes lingered, in Wharton's present troubled and touchy frame of mind. Why should Nugent be "landed" with him, simply because he was his chum at school? Did Frank look at it in that light?

Wharton knew that he did not. Yet the bitter feeling lingered. The plain truth was that he could not go home for Christmas, and the bare thought of looking round for an invitation stung his pride to the quick. To run the risk of being classed with Bunter—a "butter-in at other fellows' parties, and a fisher for invitations—his cheeks crimsoned at the thought.

And yet—

It was quite unlike Wharton to seek solitude, and brood over real or fancied grievances. But he was not as usual now, and he moved restlessly about the study, thinking and thinking, and forgetful even of prep. He started when the door opened, and Bob Cherry looked in, with a rather curious expression on his face.

"Dorm!" said Bob.

"Dorm!" repeated Wharton. "So late as that?"

"Done your prep?"

"No."

"Let's hope Quelchly won't pick on you in the morning, then," said Bob cheerily. "Come on! Wingate's on the way!"

And Bob tramped on.

Wharton did not follow him for the moment. Nugent had done his prep elsewhere apparently. Certainly he had not come back to Study No. 1, as usual, for it. He was deliberately avoiding the study; deliberately avoiding his chum. Was it true, then, that Wharton's temper had grown so touchy that even his best friends felt forced to keep away from him? Or was it that Nugent did not want to be "landed" with him for Christmas? In the first case, could not his chum be a little more patient with a fellow who had a deep trouble on his mind? In the second case—Wharton's eyes gleamed, and he set his lips. Nugent should not be "landed" with him over the vacation, at all events. That much was settled now definitely in Harry Wharton's mind.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

## A Row in the Rag!

"I SAY, you fellows!"  
 "Well, Fatty!"  
 "Who's taking Wharton?"

There was a laugh in the Rag. It was the following day, and after lessons a crowd of juniors had turned into the Rag, where a great log-fire blazed and sparkled on the wide, ancient hearth. Outside the snow was falling, thicker and thicker, deeper and deeper. From the distance the boom of the sea on the rocky shore was faintly audible; wild weather tossed the ocean to foam and fury. In the Rag, however, all was merry and bright. A crowd of cheery fellows discussed the coming holidays, most of them with keen anticipation.

Billy Bunter, standing before the fire with his fat hands in his trousers pockets, was talking—as usual!

There was a fat grin on the face of the Owl of the Remove. He was upon a topic that he found entertaining, and some of the other fellows seemed to find it entertaining also, especially Skinner & Co.

Moreover, Bunter was annoyed with Wharton.

As there was to be no Christmas party at Wharton Lodge, Billy Bunter obviously could not plant himself there for the vacation. This threw all Bunter's arrangements out of gear.

For though, according to Bunter's own account, crowds and crowds of fellows were keen to bag him for the vac, he was not able to put his fat finger on any individual member of those crowds.

He had decided that Nugent would be next best; but Frank Nugent had failed to play up; and Dicky Nugent of the Second Form had told Bunter, in the plain language natural to the Second Form, that he would burst him if he found him anywhere about at Christmas.

As it was settled that Johnny Bull, Hurree Singh, and Bob Cherry were going home with Nugent, they were useless to Bunter. Other fellows seemed equally useless. The Boulder had made it only too clear that Bunter was not going with him to Monte Carlo. Redwing wasn't going, but Smithy was obviously not disposed to fill the empty place with Bunter. Lord Mauleverer had been drawn equally blank. His good-natured lordship hated to say no; but his relative, Sir Jimmy Vivian, said no for him, and added thereby a kick to put the matter beyond doubt.

Squiff, the Australian junior, was going up to Scotland with Ogilvy; but when Bunter told Ogilvy that he was quite keen on a Christmas in Scotland, he found that the keenness was all on his own side. Ogilvy was not keen at all, and said so.

Bunter felt himself at a loose end, and it looked as if he would have to spend his Christmas at Bunter Court, in the delightful company of Sammy Bunter of the Second Form, and Bessie Bunter of Cliff House.

From Bunter's descriptions of Bunter Court, and the glorious revelries there, it might have been supposed that the Owl of the Remove would be quite content with the prospect.

But he wasn't! The magnificence of Bunter Court, somehow, failed to attract the heir of that magnificent establishment.

So the fat junior was at a loose end, and he felt that it was all Wharton's fault. Wharton, in his opinion, had let him down. The only solace was that Wharton himself was at a loose end, with nowhere to go. That was how

Bunter looked at it, and he delighted to "rub it in." Hence his remarks as he stood warming his fat and fatuous person before the log fire in the Rag.

"Aren't there any offers, you fellows?" went on Bunter, blinking round at the Remove fellows through his big spectacles. "Doesn't anybody want a wet blanket for Christmas? Is poor old Wharton going to be left on his lonely own?"

"You fat ass!" said Peter Todd. "If Wharton comes in and hears you calling him poor old Wharton, there will be a damaged porpoise lying about soon afterwards."

"Oh, really, Toddy—"  
 "Let Bunter alone," said Skinner, chuckling. "A cat may look at a king, and I suppose a fellow can speak about Wharton if he likes. Have his pals turned him down, Bunter?"

Bunter grinned.  
 "What-ho!" he answered. "Nugent's fairly dodging him to keep out of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Skinner and Snoop and Stott and Fisher T. Fish, and two or three more fellows.

"He actually kept out of the study for prep last evening," said Bunter. "I noticed that Nugent did his prep in Russell's study. He, he, he!"

"You notice too much, you fat, prying worm," grunted Peter Todd.

"You dry up, Toddy," said Bunter. "You can ask Wharton yourself, if you want to. He, he, he! I've quite determined not to take Wharton home with me, you fellows."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He put it as plain as he could," said Bunter. "Jolly civil all of a sudden, and all that. But I haven't asked him, and I'm not going to. The fact is, I can't stand Wharton."

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

"I say, you fellows, it's a fact, you know. But I've turned him down. If anybody's got to have him, Nugent can have him—he's his chum. I'm not going to take Wharton off his hands just because Nugent doesn't want him."

"Dry up, you fat idiot!" whispered Tom Redwing, as the figure of the captain of the Remove appeared in the doorway of the Rag.

There was a sudden hush in the room. Even Billy Bunter became serious, though he was too short-sighted to see the expression on Wharton's face—plain enough to all the other fellows there.

Wharton walked into the room. He came directly towards the fire where Bunter stood; and the Owl of the Remove blinked at him.

Wharton's face was pale with anger.  
 "I—I say, old chap—" stammered Bunter. "I—I— Oh! Ow! Yaroooh! Leggo!"

Wharton's grip was on his collar, and the Owl of the Remove was shaken like a rat in the jaws of a terrier.

Shake, shake, shake!  
 "Ow! Ow! Leggo!" roared Bunter, writhing in the muscular grip of the captain of the Remove. "Yaroooop! I say, you fellows, make him leggo! Oh, my hat! Ow!"

Shake, shake, shake!  
 "Whoooooop!"  
 "Let him alone, you bully!" called out Skinner.

Wharton dropped Bunter suddenly—so suddenly that the fat junior sprawled on the floor, puffing and panting. He turned on Harold Skinner, with a look that made Skinner wish that he had not spoken.

"What did you call me, Skinner?"  
 Skinner felt a deep tremor.

But he could not unsay his words, and he put the best face on it that he could.

"Bunter can't stand up for himself," he said sullenly. "All very well for you to handle a fat duffer who can't put up his hands."

"You can put up your hands," said Harry. "I'll trouble you to do it, too, here and now."

And he came at Skinner.

Skinner backed away.

"I—I'm not going to fight you—"  
 "You called me a bully," said Harry, his eyes flashing. "I've shaken Bunter for his cheek; if he could fight I'd give him the thrashing of his life. You can fight, and you're going to, or else take a licking, you cad!"

And with that the captain of the Remove came on; and Skinner had no choice about putting up his hands.

It was quite against Skinner's principles; it was his way to wreak his malice and envy by sly methods, without danger to himself—and generally he found the captain of the Remove contemptuously tolerant. Now he suddenly discovered that he had gone a step too far, and that it was not only scornful disregard he had to look for. Scorn Skinner could have stood with equanimity; but standing a whirlwind attack from an angry fellow was quite a different matter. Skinner backed away with a white face, putting up a feeble defence; and in a couple of minutes he was crashing on the floor.

He remained there, gasping.

Wharton eyed him scornfully.

"Are you getting up?" he asked.

"I'm done!" gasped Skinner.

"Rather under-done, I should say," remarked the Boulder, with a grin.

"You're not cooked yet, Skinner."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner picked himself up, glowering savagely at the captain of the Remove, and backed away.

"If you've had enough, all right," said Wharton. "But keep your tongue between your teeth, Skinner, and don't call fellows names."

With that the captain of the Remove walked out of the Rag. He passed four juniors in the doorway—the Co., just coming in after prep. Frank Nugent called to him.

"Harry!"

Wharton did not answer.

Nugent stepped after him and caught him by the sleeve.

"Harry, old man, aren't you coming into the Rag?"

"No."

"Then I'll come up to the study," said Frank. "I want to have a talk about Christmas."

"Nothing to talk about, that I know of."

"Well, it's settled, I suppose?"

"What's settled?"

"You're coming home with me."

"No."

"I was taking it for granted, of course," said Frank. "I thought it was understood, Harry."

"Well, it wasn't."

Nugent flushed.

"If there's somewhere else you like better, of course, I won't urge you," he said. "You can please yourself."

"I mean to."

Nugent bit his lip hard, and followed his friends into the Rag.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

## Left Alone!

LORD MAULEVERER sat in his place in the Remove Form Room the next morning, and glanced several times at Harry Wharton. His lordship seemed to be thinking.



He was not thinking about Latin verse or the section of the *Aeneid* he ought to have prepared the previous evening—and hadn't. On that topic his lordship's only hope was that Mr. Quelch would not call upon him to construe.

Mauls, as a rule, did not do much thinking. It was a fag and a bore; and Mauls dodged anything that was a fag and a bore, as he might have dodged the cholera.

Nevertheless, his lordship was thinking now; it was one of his lazy lordship's ways, that if he took the trouble to think at all, it was generally on some other fellow's account.

Now he was thinking about Wharton. Lord Mauleverer had a kind regard for the captain of the Remove, and for all the members of the Co. He liked them all; and he had observed—the last fellow in the Remove to observe—that there was a rift in the lute, and that all was not as it should have been in that usually happy and friendly circle.

It distressed his good-natured lordship.

Wharton had come into the Form-room that morning by himself. He was sitting in his place a good deal like a stone statue, without a glance at his friends. It might have been supposed, from Wharton's look, that he was a new fellow without a single acquaintance in his Form.

More than once his chums had tried to catch his eye and had failed, and they had grown impatient and given it up.

Somehow, they hardly knew how, a strangeness and coldness had grown up in the Co.; the Famous Five were not on their old terms. Wharton had a sense of wrong, which he did not cast aside, in his present mood, with his usual starchy common-sense. And his friends felt that their patience was running out. Why should they always be bearing with the uncertain temper of a passionate fellow who was ready to quarrel with friend or foe?

Unfortunately, the Famous Five filled a very prominent place in the Form; they were always in the limelight, so far as the Remove was concerned. Fellows like Skinner & Co. could have disputed from the beginning of the term to its end and nobody would have taken heed. Nobody would have cared, or even known, perhaps, if Bunter had ceased to speak to Snoop, or if Hazeldene had had a feud with Wibley or Micky Desmond.

But with Harry Wharton & Co. it was a different matter. The captain of the Form and his chief followers were the leaders of the Remove, and of importance. And Wharton had his enemies, increased in number and in enmity by his passionate temper of late. Even fellows who liked him soon grew "fed up" with gloomy looks and sharp words. There was always a section of the Form who would have been glad to "give Wharton a fall," could they have found an adequate leader—some influential fellow like the Bounder, or a great man at games like Squiff, or a keen and long-headed chap like Peter Todd. But these fellows backed up Wharton, as a rule, and the discontented Removeites were a small and ignored minority.

All the more because of that circumstance they were glad to make the most of anything that came their way, and the present trouble in the Co. was a windfall to Skinner and his comrades.

They made the most of it, and did their amiable best to widen the breach.

Skinner did his best to spread an impression that Wharton and Nugent were on ill terms because the captain of the Remove had "nowhere to go" that vac-

and Nugent was unwilling to take him home. Such tittle-tattle in the passage and the studies would have earned only Wharton's whole-hearted contempt and disregard in ordinary times; but now every echo of it that reached his ears stung him, and added to his passionate determination to go his own wayward way.

It was common talk in the Remove now that Wharton could not go home for the vac, and was not asked anywhere else—a painful position for any fellow—which led fellows like Bunter and Fisher T. Fish and Skinner to fish for invitations in the most brazen way. Nobody supposed that Wharton would descend to that; but, in the circumstances—or, rather, the supposed circumstances—it was not wondered at that he was moody and touchy; indeed, his moodiness and touchiness gave colour to the professed belief of the amiable Skinner.

As a matter of fact, Wharton was a little perplexed to know what to do.

He had turned Nugent down without hesitation, and he did not regret it; but had he regretted it, he could not have eaten his words.

That much was settled now. He was not going home with Nugent, who was taking Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Hurree Janset Ram Singh. That was as fixed and unalterable now as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

But he had to go somewhere, and Bournemouth did not attract him; moreover, he shrank from explaining to

his aunt that he was on bad terms with his friends.

Plenty of fellows would have been glad to take a hint from him, but Wharton was the last fellow in the world to give such a hint. He thought now of friends outside the Greyfriars Remove. Tom Merry of St. Jim's would have been pleased enough to have him, he knew; but naturally Tom Merry had no knowledge of how he was circumstanced, and the same applied to Frank Courteney of Highlife. The merest hint would have been enough, which Wharton would have died sooner than have uttered.

So Skinner's impression of the matter, false at first, became true. It was an actual fact that the captain of the Remove was, for the first time since he had been at Greyfriars, at a loose end for the vacation.

That much Wharton could have borne patiently enough; but the knowledge that the Remove fellows all knew it, and that most of them were discussing it, was bitter and galling to him. Why couldn't they leave his private affairs alone, was his angry thought. He forgot that in becoming captain of the Form he had become, so far as the Greyfriars Remove was concerned, a public character. He had to pay the penalty of prominence. Had he been a Skinner or a Bunter, certainly nobody would have bothered about his affairs.

It was upon this topic that Lord Mauleverer was thinking—to the utter exclusion of Latin verse—as he sat in the Form-room that morning. His kind-hearted lordship was distressed. Ho



The first act of "Rigoletto" was half-way through when Vernon-Smith's party tramped noisily into the box reserved for them. Angry glances from the auditorium were cast at the schoolboys, but little cared Ponsonby and his friends for angry glances from common mortals in cheaper seats. (See Chapter 12.)

hated to see his friends on bad terms with one another, being very far indeed from sharing Skinner's amiable views.

It was fortunate for Mauly that Mr. Quelch did not call on him to construe that morning. Certainly, had he done so, Mauly would have been given something else to think about.

But his lordship's luck was in, and when the Remove were turned out for morning break, Mauly trotted out, still thinking about his friends, and especially Wharton. He noticed that while Bob Cherry and the rest joined a merry crowd of juniors who were snowballing Coker of the fifth, greatly to Horace Coker's wrath and indignation, the captain of the Remove did not join in, but walked away under the frozen elms by himself.

Lord Mauleverer sauntered after him.

Headless of the unwelcoming frown on Wharton's face, his lordship joined him under the trees.

"Jolly cold weather, what!" said his lordship amiably.

"Yes."

"Don't you feel like snowballin'?"

"No."

"Same here. Fearful fag, like every-thin' else," said Lord Mauleverer amiably. "I say, we're pretty close on Christmas, now."

"I know."

"Breakin' up in a couple of days more."

Wharton nodded.

It was obvious that he was not in a mood for talk, even with the kind and inoffensive Mauly. But his lordship went on cheerily:

"Fixed up for the vac?"

Wharton flushed red.

"No," he said, in a low voice.

"Good! Will you come home with me, old scout?"

"What?"

"I'd like it no end, if you would," said his lordship. "Of course, I dare say I should bore you. But I'll do my best not to, if you'll come. Is it a go?"

Wharton stopped, and stood still in the snow, fixing his eyes upon the amiable, innocent face of Lord Mauleverer.

"No," he answered, "it isn't a go. I'm much obliged to you, Mauleverer. I suppose you mean to be kind."

"My dear chap—" protested his lordship.

"But you're not speaking to Bunter, you know," said Wharton bitterly. "You've forgotten that, haven't you?"

"My dear fellow—"

"It's like you, Mauly, to take compassion on a fellow; but, as it happens, I'm not in need of compassion. That's all."

With that, Wharton turned on his heel and walked away, leaving Lord Mauleverer staring after him blankly.

"By gad!" murmured Mauly. "Great gad! Seem to have put my foot in it—the whole giddy hoof, by Jove! Oh dear!"

And Lord Mauleverer walked disconsolately away, feeling sadly misunderstood, but bearing it with his usual placid equanimity. And he did not refer to the subject again. And so it came about that when the day dawned upon which Greyfriars School was to break up for Christmas, Harry Wharton—almost alone of all the Greyfriars fellows—did not know what he was going to do with the vacation.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

### Chumming with the Bounder!

"LAST time of asking, Reddy."  
"Smithy, old man—"

pleaded Tom Redwing.  
"Does that mean no?" interrupted the Bounder.

"I've said no all the time, Smithy; you know I can't help it," said Tom Redwing reproachfully. "I can't come, old chap. I'd like to, no end, but I can't! It can't be done!"

Vernon-Smith stared gloomily out into the quadrangle, white with snow, in the misty December morning. Greyfriars School was breaking up that day. A few hours more, and the old school would be silent and deserted.

Mist hung over the quad, and the old red roofs were hidden in snow. Through the mist the gaunt, leafless branches of the old trees loomed like dim arms of skeletons. Mist came thicker on the winter wind from the sea, that could be heard booming on the rocks a mile away.

Contrasted with that scene of cold and mist was another scene in the Bounder's mind—a shelving shore lapped by a laughing sea, graceful palms against a sky of deepest blue. Twenty-four hours in a railway train would effect that startling change of scene. It was as if the fortunate traveller by the Continental express possessed the magic carpet of the Arabian tale.

Tom Redwing was thinking of it, also, and his heart was heavy. But he would have been content enough if the black, discontented frown had only left Smithy's brow. It was painful to him to disappoint and wound his dearest chum—painful to him to refuse the favours the millionaire's son would gladly have heaped on him. But they had to be refused. Kindly as Smithy meant it, Redwing could not consent to become an expensive burden on his friend. He could not take money from Smithy's father. It was impossible, and there was an end, even if it led to an unfriendly parting with Smithy this Christmastide.

The Bounder's brows were knitted. He seemed to have entertained a belief that Redwing would give way even at the last moment, well as he knew Tom's resolute character.

"You won't come, then?" he said abruptly.

"No, old fellow."

"What are you going to do this vac, then?"

"I shall be at home."

"That little cabin at Hawkscliff—on your own?"

"My father will be there; he's home from a voyage, Smithy. And—and I've got friends in my village—good folk I knew before I came to Greyfriars. But I like them, and they like me. I shall have a happy Christmas enough, if—"

Tom Redwing paused.

"If what?" said the Bounder gruffly.

"If we part like good friends, Smithy, old man."

The Bounder did not reply for a moment.

"You're turning me down," he said.

"I've left it jolly late to ask anybody else, and a fellow doesn't want to go alone on a trip."

"Your father—"

"My father will be pretty busy in his own way. He's going to break the bank at Monte Carlo, with a gang of his City friends to back him up!" grunted the Bounder. "A jolly crowd, but too old for me. I want somebody with me; I want you, Redwing!"

Redwing did not answer, but his brow was troubled

"We could have some jolly good times," said the Bounder. "No end of things to be seen there. Nice, Cannes, Mentone, Grasse, Monte Carlo, and a trip across to Corsica in a boat, an automobile run across the Alps into Italy. Wouldn't you care for it?"

Redwing sighed.

"Wouldn't I just!" he said.

"Then come!"

"I can't!"

"Oh rats!"

Vernon-Smith tramped out of the House into the snow, savagely.

"Smithy, old man!"  
The Bounder did not answer or turn his Head. He was savagely annoyed and disappointed; and it was like Vernon-Smith to take a disappointment badly.

Redwing sighed again, and turned back into the House. He had his box to pack, and other preparations to make; but his usually sunny face was clouded; the Bounder could have brought back its contentment with a word, but he had not chosen to utter that word.

Herbert Vernon-Smith drove his hands deep into the pockets of his overcoat, and tramped down the path through the snow under the elms. His face was dark.

Plenty of fellows would have jumped at the invitation Redwing had refused. Skinner, Snoop, Stott, Fisher, T. Fish, Bunter, and others would not have cared who footed the bill, so long as they bagged the holiday. Possibly it was for that reason that the Bounder did not want them.

At the bottom of his heart he knew that Redwing was right, and respected him all the more for his steady resolution. But he wanted his friend with him on the vacation, and he was savagely angry and disappointed.

There were other fellows—fellows who could and would have paid their footing, who would have joined the Bounder on that Christmas trip; but he did not want them. Somehow or other he found himself at home in Redwing's company; he had never made another friend at Greyfriars, though many fellows would have been willing to chum with the wealthy Bounder, in other forms as well as the Remove.

Yet he was aware that he could not have respected Redwing, had Tom been willing to go with him as the needy hanger-on of a rich man's son. But the Bounder of Greyfriars was accustomed to having his own way, and he was sore and savage when he could not have it.

The House was in a buzz of talk and movement and laughter, and most hearts seemed light. There was hardly anybody out in the misty quad; the Bounder had the walks under the elms to himself, till suddenly he perceived another fellow tramping there, his hands in his pockets, his eyes moodily on the ground.

The Bounder smiled cynically as he recognised Harry Wharton.

Break-up did not seem to have brought much happiness to the captain of the Remove, to judge by his looks.

Wharton did not see the Bounder; and Vernon-Smith watched him for some minutes in silence. Then he joined the captain of the Remove, and Harry came to a stop, with a faint flush in his cheeks.

"You're not looking merry," said Smithy.

"I'm not feeling merry!" said Harry curtly.

"Don't bite a fellow's head off! I'm as ready for a row as you are, if you're

keen on one!" said the Bounder. "I'd just like to hammer somebody now—hard!"

Wharton looked at him. "I don't mind," he said. "If you want to wind up the term with a scrap, Smithy, you won't have to say much to have one on your hands!"

"You're at daggers drawn with your friends," said the Bounder, with a hard grin. "And I'm out with Redwing. So we're in the same boat."

"I'm sorry you've quarrelled with Redwing!"

"You think the fault's mine—what?" asked the Bounder, with a laugh.

"I've no doubt of it!"

"Quite so; and the fault's yours that you've rowed with your friends, I've no doubt, either!"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Redwing refuses to come abroad with me for the vac," said Vernon-Smith, after a brief silence. "He won't let my father pay his expenses on a trip to the South of France for Christmas."

"Quite right, too!"

"It leaves me in a hole."

Wharton smiled faintly.

"Ask Skinner! He won't refuse!"

"I don't want Skinner!"

"Snoop, or Fishy, or Bunter—"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders again, and walked on by the snowy path. The Bounder fell into step by his side.

"I've been thinking, Wharton," he said. "You and I are not exactly friends, but we can pull together fairly well. You can pay your footing as well as I can, so there wouldn't be any question of favours given or received—which would scare you off as fast as Redwing. How do you like the idea of joining me on the trip?"

Wharton started.

"I'm quite frank," went on the Bounder coolly. "I want Redwing, and he won't come. But after Redwing, you're the only chap in the Remove that'll care to chum with over the vacation. I'd like you to come, and my father will be much more pleased with you than with Redwing, of course. Is it a yes?"

Wharton did not answer immediately. He looked very thoughtful.

As a matter of fact, the suggestion appealed to him. He could not suspect the Bounder, as he had suspected Lord Hazleaver, of asking him because he was "left." Smithy was not that kind of a fellow; it was not his forte to help a lame duck. If he asked Wharton it was because he wanted him; if he had not wanted him, most assuredly he would not have asked him. On that point there was no room for doubt.

And Wharton was not insensible to the fact that dozens of fellows at Greyfriars would have jumped at the invitation. Fellows in the Fourth and the Fifth, and even in the Fifth, would have jumped at it. Smithy had singled him out, and it was a compliment, all the more because the Bounder was too hard and matter-of-fact to be anything but sincere.

In a few hours Wharton had to leave the school, and it was grimly resolved that he did not go with his own friends. The Bournemouth vicarage was a resource, but it was a very last resource; and even that was practically barred now, by the fact that Wharton had left the decision so late. He could scarcely butt into the place without letting the people there know that he was coming, excepting by a telegram at the last minute. The Bounder's

invitation, indeed, came like the right thing at the right moment.

Vernon-Smith waited for the captain of the Remove to answer. Redwing being unavailable, he would have been glad of Wharton's company; and he liked the captain of the Remove all the more, as a matter of fact, since he had become more unpopular with his own friends. A wilful and passionate temper was rather a recommendation to the Bounder of Greyfriars.

"Well?" he said at last.

"I like the idea, Smithy," said Harry Wharton, quite cordially. "If you really think we could pull together—"

"Why shouldn't we?"

"No reason why we shouldn't," said Wharton, with a nod. "I like the idea

"Good man!" said the Bounder.

And for some time the two juniors, once bitter rivals in the Remove, and never exactly friends, remained in amicable talk as they sauntered under the elms in the fluttering snowflakes. When they parted, the whole matter was definitely arranged, and Harry Wharton's brow was less clouded.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Breaking Up!

"SMITHY, old man."

Tom Redwing looked into Study No. 4 in the Remove, where Herbert Vernon-Smith was putting some things together, ready for packing.



"Come on," said the Bounder impatiently. Vernon-Smith & Co. reached the nearest table and stood in a row watching the game. "This is jolly," said Gadsby. "Oh, absolutely," grinned Vasour. "Something like," chuckled Ponsoby. (See Chapter 12.)

no end. A change of scene will do me good; it will help me to keep from worrying about things that can't be helped."

"Your uncle?" said the Bounder.

Wharton gave him a curious look.

"What makes you think I'm worrying about my uncle?"

"I happen to know you, you see," said the Bounder, with a grin. "I know what's the matter with you, and I sympathise. I know you don't want my sympathy, or anybody else's; but there it is."

"You seem a bit keener than my own friends, Smithy," said Wharton, with a touch of bitterness.

He paused.

"I'll come, and I'll be glad to," he said. "Let's fix it up now."

The Bounder glanced round.

"Hallo, Reddy!"

His cheerful tone brought a smile to Tom's face.

"I'm just off, Smithy. I'm walking up to Hawkscliff."

"Ten miles, in this jolly weather!" said the Bounder.

Tom laughed.

"That's nothing to me," he said. "I—I say, Smithy, you're not ratty now, are you? We're going to part friends, and meet friends next term?"

"Of course we are, fathead," said the Bounder, laughing. "Look here, I'm going to walk up to Hawkscliff with you."

"I'll be jolly glad, old man, but you'll get fagged—"

"Rats!"  
"Haven't you got to get home?"  
"Any time I choose."

Tom Redwing's face glowed.  
"Smithy, old man, I'm so jolly glad. It—it would have been a rotten Christmas for me if you'd gone off unfriendly."  
"More as you, to pal with a fellow like me," said the Bounder. "What do you stand my silly temper for?"

Redwing laughed, his handsome, sunburnt face very bright and happy now. Vernon-Smith's hand dropped on his shoulder—only for a second, but it was an affectionate gesture.

"I'm sorry, old man," he said. "I'm a crusty rotter—"

"Oh, ro, Smithy! I was sure you'd understand," said Tom brightly. "I say, it's jolly to have you come up to Hawkscliff before you go home. Have you fixed up with somebody else for your holiday? I know you'd only have to pick and choose among fifty fellows."

"Yes, that's fixed now."  
"Not Skinner?" asked Redwing, his face falling a little.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Bounder. "You think jolly old Skinner would lead me off the straight and narrow path without your fatherly eye on me, Reddy. No, it's not Skinner. It's Wharton."

"That's good," said Tom.  
"He won't go with his friends, and my friend won't go with me, so we've hit it off," said the Bounder, laughing. "Best thing we could both do in the merry circumstances—what?"

"Yes, rather," said Tom. "I hope you'll have a ripping time, Smithy; but I'm sure you will. Hallo, here's Wharton."

The captain of the Remove looked in.  
"What about getting off, Smithy? We can get away early if we ask leave—and I'd like to get off before the crowd, if you would."

"Good idea," assented the Bounder. "I'm walking up to Hawkscliff with Reddy—he's going early. Come along with us."

Wharton nodded.  
"You can fix it up with Gosling about your box," added the Bounder. "You've got to tip him, anyway. Cut off and ask Quelch for leave."

"Right-ho!" said Harry.  
He left Study No. 4 and went down to the Remove master's study. Billy Bunter met him on the staircase.

"I say, Harry, old man—"  
Wharton passed the fat junior without a word or a look. He was in no mood for Bunter.

"Beast!"  
Wharton was only a few minutes with the Remove master; and when he came back up the staircase he found William George Bunter waiting for him.

"Harry, old chap—"  
"Oh, don't bother, Bunter!"  
Harry Wharton went on to his study, where he had a few books and odds and ends to put together—his box was already packed. The Owl of the Remove followed him in.

"I say, Wharton—"  
"Cut off," said Harry impatiently. "It's rather important, Wharton. We shall be parted in a few hours, old chap. We sha'n't see one another again till next term, now you've let me down over the Christmas holidays. I'm sorry you're left out in the cold, old fellow, I really am—"

"Cheese it."  
"I mean it, old chap. I really think it's rather rotten of Nugent to throw

you over like this," said Bunter sympathetically.

"Will you dry up?" shouted Wharton. "Eh! You're not getting waxy, are you, just because I'm sympathizing with you?" ejaculated Bunter in astonishment.

Wharton burst into an angry laugh.  
"Oh, get out, Bunter! I don't want to kick you just before Christmas! But get out, and leave me alone."

"You see—"  
"I don't see! Buzz off!"  
"It's about my postal order—"

"What?" roared Wharton.  
Bunter blinked at him seriously.  
"I'm expecting a postal-order," he said. "You can't say you didn't know, Wharton—I'm sure I've mentioned it to you, more than once. It hasn't come, old chap. Looks now as if it will be hung up in the post over the vacation. What would you advise me to do?"

"Go and eat coke!" suggested Wharton.

"Oh, really, old fellow! Now, I believe you're generally in funds at Christmas-time," said Bunter. "I suppose it would be all the same to you if you handed me the pound, and took the postal-order next term? What?"

"Fathead!"  
"We're parting for a long time, old chap," said Bunter pathetically. "Don't be a beast! We may never see each other again."

"Why shouldn't we, you born idiot?"  
"Well, you're going with the Bounder, you know, and those Continental trains often have fearful accidents. You may be killed this side of Christmas, for all you know," said Bunter cheerfully.  
"You silly owl!"

"So, in the circumstances, Wharton, I really think you might let me have the pound, old chap—"

"Get out!"  
"Look here, Wharton, are you going to lend me a pound, or are you not going to lend me a pound?" demanded Bunter.

"Not. Good-bye!"  
"I think you're rather a mean beast, Wharton."

"Thanks! Now buzz off!"  
"I'm not surprised that Nugent has turned you down for the vac. It beats me how he can stand you all through the term," said Bunter. "Shows his sense, though, to turn you down for the holidays. He, he, he!"

Whiz!  
A Latin grammar crossed the study and caught William George Bunter on his fat chin.

"Whoop!"  
Bunter sat down in the doorway. As he sat, a dictionary landed on his well-filled waistcoat.

"Yarooop!"  
"Have some more!" demanded Wharton, posing an arithmetical volume in his hand.

"Ow! Beast!"  
Billy Bunter scrambled up and fled. There was a chuckle in the Remove passage as the Bounder and Tom Redwing came along, muffled up in their coats against the winter cold.

"Ready!" called out Vernon-Smith.  
"Yes!"  
Ten minutes later the three juniors were walking together out of the school gates. There was snow on the ground, and a few light flakes were still falling.

.....

**ANSWERS**  
EVERY MONDAY—PRICE 2!

As the trio left the gateway there was a tramping of hurried footsteps behind them, and a fat voice shouted breathlessly:

"I say, you fellows!"  
"Whiz!"  
Smithy stooped and gathered a snow-ball, and it flew with unerring aim. Billy Bunter roared, and collapsed.

And the juniors walked on cheerily in the frosty air, leaving the Owl of the Remove to roar.

## THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Gone!

**"ROTTE!"**  
"The rottenfulness is terrific!"

Bob Cherry ran his fingers through his thick, curly hair, rendering it a little more untidy than usual. He was perplexed and puzzled. His comrades shared his feelings.

The Co. had gathered together in Study No. 13, to discuss what was to be done.

For two or three days they had hardly spoken to Harry Wharton, if he had spoken to him at all. He had refused, almost rudely, Frank's invitation to pass Christmas with the Nugents. Yet the chums of the Remove could not make up their minds to leave Greyfriars without their comrade.

"It's rotten!" repeated Nugent. "I'm blessed if I quite know why Wharton's got his back up to this extent. But he has!"

"The backfulness is terrific!" said Hurree James Ram Singh, with a dismal shake of his dusky head. "The esteemed and ludicrous Wharton is on the high horse!"

Johnny Bull grunted.  
"Leave him there till he comes down," he suggested.

"He won't dismount, you know," said Bob Cherry, with a faint grin.

"We want him along with us for Christmas," said Frank.

"That's so," assented Johnny. "But if he won't come—"

"Bless him, he ought to come!" said Bob. "It's rotten! This Co. always sticks together."

"Hear, hear!"  
"The stickfulness is terrific!"  
"Look here," said Bob. "We've had a little trouble with Wharton; but that's nothing. We're not going to row, especially at Christmas-time, and when the old chap's in rather a hole. If the giddy mountain won't come to Mahomet, Mahomet must hike off to the jolly old mountain, that's all. Let's go and see him, and tell him he's got to come, and refuse to take no for an answer."

The chums exchanged rather dubious looks. In the present state of Wharton's temper it was doubtful whether their reception was likely to be an amicable one.

"It's the only way," said Bob. "Anyhow, we don't want to feel that we left anything undone, if we really have to part bad friends this Christmas."

"Let's try it!" said Nugent.

"Come on!" said Johnny Bull. "Anybody know where he is?"  
"Look in Study No. 1; if he's not there, we'll hunt him up," said Bob. "Time's getting pretty close now; we've got to clear pretty soon. Get a move on!"

And the four juniors proceeded to Study No. 1, to look for the captain of the Remove.

The study was empty.



Most of the Remove studies were empty now, and had rather a dismantled look. Hazeldene was seen in the passage, hurrying along with a package under his arm, and Bob hailed him:

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Seen Wharton, Hazel?"

"No; and don't want to!"

And Hazel was gone.

"Well, we'll find him all right!" said Bob. "None of the fellows has left yet, only Redwing, who goes early. Kim on!"

The quartette went downstairs, and hailed Temple of the Fourth, who appeared in sight.

"Seen Wharton?"

Temple glanced round.

"Wharton? I think he's gone!"

"Gone!" ejaculated Bob.

"Well, I saw him going out with Smyth and Redwing, and I suppose he hasn't just gone for a walk."

"Oh, my hat!"

Bob Cherry & Co. went out into the quad. A fat figure was coming towards the House.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's Bunter! Bunter will know; he knows everything! Where's Wharton, Bunter?" bawled Bob Cherry.

"Ow!"

"Where's Wharton?"

"Blow Wharton!"

"Look here, Bunter—" began Nugent.

"I've been snowballed!" howled Bunter.

"Serve you jolly well right!" said Johnny Bull. "Have you seen Wharton?"

"He's a beast!"

"Where is he?"

"He's a rotter!"

"Have you seen him, you fat dummy?"

"He's a rotten outsider!"

Bob Cherry grasped the Owl of the Remove by the collar, and shook him vigorously.

"Now, you silly owl—"

"I—I—Ow! Wow!"

"Where's Wharton?" roared Bob.

"We want him—see? Where is he?"

"Gone," gasped Bunter; "and a jolly good riddance, too! One of the beasts snowballed me as they went. Wharton's been buzzing books at me—all because I sympathised with him over Nugent turning him down for the vac—"

"You fat fool!" shouted Frank.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"I sha'n't be sorry if he does get into an accident in those Continental trains!" said Bunter ferociously.

"Serve him jolly well right—so there!"

"What?"

Bunter grinned, wrathful as he was. He could see that the Co. were quite ignorant of Wharton's plans and destination.

"You didn't know," he said. "Well, I generally get to know things, you know. Not that I'd listen, of course. It was quite by accident that I heard Wharton and Smyth talking."

"Do you want me to shake you till your fat head jerks off?" demanded Bob Cherry, in tones of concentrated wrath.

"Oh! Eh? No."

"Then tell me where Wharton's gone."

"He's gone with the Bounder. He's going to Monte Carlo with him for Christmas!" gasped Bunter.

"Oh, my hat!"

"And they're gone?" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"Yes, the rotters, and I was going to offer to go with them, you know, and

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THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder's Guest!

HARRY WHARTON sat on the side of his bed, and stared across at the fire that blazed in the grate.

Outside the mansion of Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, millionaire, a London fog brooded over the streets, and hid the light of the stars.

London was wrapped in fog and mist and winter cold. In Wharton's room in the millionaire's house all was bright and cheery.

It had been a long and fatiguing day, but Wharton did not feel sleepy.

His face was thoughtful as he stared at the crackling fire spreading a genial warmth through the large room.

He had walked up to Hawkskill with Tom Redwing and the Bounder, and then the two had walked to Lantham and taken the express. They had arrived in a foggy, dim London, and a handsome car had rolled with them to Mr. Vernon-Smith's mansion. It was perhaps the wealthiest house that Harry Wharton had ever visited. Wealth was, perhaps, a little too much in evidence there, but Wharton was not disposed to be critical.

The millionaire had given him a warm welcome. There was no shadow of doubt that Mr. Vernon-Smith was glad to see him—much more pleased than he would have been to see Tom Redwing. Mr. Vernon-Smith acquiesced in his son's friendship with the sailor's son, as his wishes and inclinations; but certainly he preferred to see him consorting with Colonel Wharton's nephew.

The plump, rather pompous millionaire welcomed Harry Wharton with great heartiness, and left no doubt as to the warmth of his welcome, which was pleasant enough to the captain of the Remove, feeling as he did that his own friends did not want him.

The Bounder, too, had been very agreeable. He had wanted Redwing to come with him, but he was very pleased to have Wharton. And Harry found the Bounder pleasant enough, and a kind

(Continued on page 17.)

one of the beasts banged a snowball at me, and—"

Bob Cherry released Bunter's collar. The four juniors returned into the House, with rather set faces.

"So he's gone!" said Johnny Bull grimly. "He's gone with the Bounder, and didn't take the trouble to tell us or to say good-bye!"

"The esteemed back of the excellent Wharton is terrifically up!" said Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh lugubriously.

Johnny Bull grunted.

"Well, I'm fed-up," he said.

"There's nothing to be done," said Bob. "He's gone, and I—I suppose he knows his own business best. It seems rather rotten; but, of course, he can go his own way if he likes."

Nugent drew a deep breath.

"Let him!" he said.

And no more was said on the subject. The Co. had done all they could, but it was clear that there was not to be a reconciliation now. And during the next hour or so they were too busy to give much thought to their wayward chum.

Then they left Greyfriars with a cheery crowd of fellows, and the gates of the old school clanged shut.

"It's all right, you chaps!" said Bob, in the train. Bob Cherry was never pessimistic very long. "It's all serene! Old Wharton will get over it during the holidays, and we'll all meet on the best of terms after Christmas, and we'll be the same jolly crowd next term as last—what?"

"Hear, hear!" said Johnny Bull.

"The hear-hearfulness is terrific!"

Frank Nugent nodded.

"It will be all right," he said.

Doubtless the wish was father to the thought; but the chums of Greyfriars, under the genial influence of Christmas, looked brightly on the bright side of things. They would have been glad to have their chum with them, but they hoped he would have a good time "on his own." And they quite made up their minds that by next term at Greyfriars the clouds would have rolled by.

# THE GREYFRIARS HERALD

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON

Supplement No. 204.

Week Ending December 20th, 1924.

## CHRISTMAS!

By DICK PENFOLD.



WHEN the fairy lamps are lighted, and the dancers are excited  
 As across the ball-room floor they wheel and whirl;  
 When the mistletoe and holly both combine to make things jolly,  
 And your partner is a gay and charming girl.  
 When the whole wide world rejoices, and the sound of merry voices  
 Gives the "knock-out" to depression and to care;  
 Life is good, and life is joyous, and there's nothing to annoy us,  
 For the Christmas spirit's reigning everywhere!

When the snowflakes fall with lightness in an avalanche of whiteness,  
 And a magic carpet covers all the earth;  
 When the air is keen and nipping, then a snowfight's simply ripping,  
 And you pelt the rival force for all you're worth!  
 When you slip and slide and slither, and you care not how or whither,  
 And the snowballs in their volleys whiz and zip;  
 It's a wonderful sensation, and you're filled with animation,  
 For the Christmas spirit has you in its grip!

When the wintry winds are howling, and the midnight ghost is prowling,  
 And his chains are clanking grimly in the gloom,  
 He will not dismay or daunt you; he will strive in vain to haunt you,  
 For you'll slumber safe and soundly in your room.  
 When his weird unearthly wailing proves distinctly unavailing,  
 And he cannot startle schoolboys from their sleep,  
 He will say, "There's nothin' doin'," I must haunt some ancient ruin,"  
 And to fresh domains the Christmas Ghost will creep.

When the dawn is slowly gleaming, Billy Bunter lies a-dreaming  
 Of the dinner he'll consume on Christmas Day;  
 Of the turkey he will swallow, and the rich plum-duff to follow,  
 And the dainties and the tarts in grand array.  
 Overnight he hung his stocking; but the sequel will be shocking,  
 For Santa Claus will surely pass him by.  
 When he wakes up with the linnin, he will cry, "There's nothing in it!  
 What a fearfully unlucky chap am I!"

When the Christmas bells are ringing, and the Christmas waits are singing  
 And the trumpeters salute the happy morn,  
 Then the heart of man is merry, and the hearts of schoolboys, very,  
 And we feel devoutly thankful we were born!  
 For there's sparkle, and there's magic, and there's nothing that is tragic  
 On the maddest, merriest morning of the year.  
 Then away with care and sadness, and with universal gladness  
 We will hail the happy season that is here!  
 THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 860.

## EDITORIAL!

By Harry Wharton.

BY far the happiest task of the year —so far as the Editorial Staff of THE GREYFRIARS HERALD is concerned—is the production of our Christmas Number. It means hard, glopping work, because we have to get the issue prepared for press before Breaking-up Day; but we fairly revel in the long evenings of literary labour.

And there is so much to write about! Christmas brings in its train all sorts of joys and jollities. We could easily fill a whole issue of THE MAGNET LIBRARY with stories and articles dealing with the festive season. The holidays, the Christmas dinner, the pantomimes, the snow-fights (weather permitting), are only a tithe of the Yuletide delights.

Some people are fond of telling us that the modern Christmas is a mere travesty of Christmas in "the good old days," when coaches-and-four ploughed their way through the snow, and frequently came to grief in a snowdrift.

Personally, I prefer the modern Christmas. I would rather go to my Hampshire home, Wharton Lodge, in a swift-running charabanc than in a prehistoric coach that was in danger of being held up by highwaymen.

The only fault I have to find with the modern Christmas is that the weather is usually too mild. Often there is neither frost nor snow, which means that there can be no skating or snow-fighting. But there are plenty of other joys to counter-balance these omissions.

As I sit in my cosy study, penning this Editorial, I can picture all my reader-chums making their Christmas arrangements. Most of them, of course, will spend the festive season at home, which is where it should be spent. It should be a time of family reunions and rejoicings. The wanderers and the rovers are happier by their own fire sides at Christmastide.

What a grand time we shall all have! Greyfriars is simply seething with excitement. There is an eager sparkle in every eye. Even that grumpy individual, Gosling the porter, is all smiles. Possibly he has visions of plenty of Christmas tips!

I will conclude my Editorial with the time-honoured wish, in which all my chums join:

"A Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year to all our loyal readers!"

HARRY WHARTON.

{Supplement i.



# Christmas Adventure!

A Thrilling Story of the Festive Season.  
By DICKY NUGENT

**R**EGINALD CLARENCE FITZROY DUPP—known to his schoolfellows at St. Sam's by the brief sobriquet of R. Dupp—was standing at his study window looking down into the quad.

Scenes of great animation were in progress. There were cars and cabs and charabangs—a constant stream of them—entering and leaving the school gateway.

Fellows kept staggering down the School House steps with portmanteos and gladstone bags and snot-cases and attaché-cases. And their faces were beaming with joy and rapture. For St. Sam's was breaking-up for the Christmas holidays!

R. Dupp surveyed the merry scene with a deep sigh. A couple of tears chased each other down his cheeks.

"Ah! If only I were rich!" he said, with a choking sob. "But alas! I shall always be R. Dupp!"

That was the tragedy of it, dear readers. R. Dupp had come to St. Sam's on a scholarship. He had no pater or mater; he was a poor orphan boy, without a penny to bless himself with. There was not a stick of furniture in his study. His eaten clothes were shabby, and there were signs that the moth had been at them. Here and there were large patches of material which didn't match the rest of the suit. R. Dupp had worn them on himself.

Poor fellow! Not for him the joys of packing up. He had nothing to pack. Not for him the glimmer and gaiety of Christmas. He had nowhere to go. He was nobody's darling. Small wonder that R. Dupp felt very broken-up on breaking-up day!

"If only I could get an invitashun to the ancestral halls of one of my schoolfellows!" sighed the miserable fellow.

But it was a vain hope. R. Dupp had made the painful discovery, which many people have made before and since, that nobody wants you if you've got an empty pocket. You might be a fine fellow—fizically, and mentally, and morally; but if your soul resources amount to a halfpenny with a hole in it, you must expect to walk friendless and alone.

While R. Dupp stood at the window a hansom limousine swung into the quad. And Jack Jolly & Co., the heroes of the Fourth, made their way towards it.

R. Dupp called to them.

"I say, you fellows, have pity on a poor old pawper! Take me with you to Jolly Manor!"

"Ratts!"

"Keep off the grass!"

"My pater duzzent want any poverty-stricken pawpers at his place!" said Jack Jolly.

And he clambered into the smart limousine with his chums.

Supplement it.]

With a sob of despair, R. Dupp sank down on the dusty window-sill.

"The heartless beasts!" he muttered. "They'll never see me next term. I shall starve during the Christmas Vack. Without munny, home, friends, what shall I do?"

And he rung his hands in helpless distress.

The scene of animation in the quad lasted quite a long time. But soon the last vehicle—a sugar-box on wheels, in which the Head sat majestically—rumbled out of gates. (I might remark, in brackets, that the Head couldn't afford a motor-car. During the term he had been in the habit of popping over to Monte Carlo for week-ends, and it had played ducks and drakes with his exchequer.)

The old school stood solemn and silent under the winter sky. R. Dupp was all alone in that vast building, which an hour before had re-eked with the sound of happy voices.

But he could not remain at St. Sam's. All the grub in the kitchen had been put into cold storage, ready for the next term.

He pulled himself together, and put on his faded school cap, and walked down to the gates.

Fossil the porter stood outside his lodge. He held out his hand for a tip. But R. Dupp shook his head.

"Sorry, old Fossil, but it can't be done!" he said. "I've only a ha'penny between me and starvation!"

Fossil gave an angry snort.

"Get hout, you perishin' pawper!" he shouted. "An' don't dare to show your face 'ere next term, unless your pockets are well-lined. This is a school for the sons of the wealthy—not for down-at-heel beggars! Get hout! That's wot I'm a tellin' yer!"

The pawper of the Fourth, with tears in his throat and a sob in his eyes, tottered through the school gateway. The bitter winter wind cut him like a knife. Snow and sleet and hail began to fall.



A copper seized him by the scruff of the neck and ordered him to move on.

soaking him to the skin. He had no overcoat—he had never been able to afford such a luxury. Setting his teeth, he battled his way against the fierce elements.

"What hopes of a merry Christmas?" he muttered as he plodded along. "Unless I can find food and shelter I shall be a goner before Christmas Day!" It was a terrible prospect—enuff to take the stuffing out of the bravest hart. But R. Dupp plodded on gamely.

When he reached the nearest town to St. Sam's he tried to earn an honest copper by singing carols. Instead of which he earned the displeasure of an honest copper, who seized him by the scruff of the neck and ordered him to move on.

Poor R. Dupp! With a sinking hart, he tramped on through the streets which were alive with Christmas shoppers.

"I'm finished! I can go no farther!" And finished R. Dupp would certainly have been had not his eyes alighted on a sheet of newspaper which blew towards him along the snowy pavement.

R. Dupp stooped and picked up the sheet. What made him do it he didn't know. But it was a jolly lucky thing for him that he did!

Holding the sheet of newspaper under the light of the street-lamp, R. Dupp's eyes fell upon the following:

## "UNCLAIMED LEGGACIES.

"DUPP, REGINALD CLARENCE FITZROY. 'Prezents whereabouts unknown. If the above-named will communicate with Messrs. Fusty & Musty, solicitors, Dulchester, he will hear of sumthing which won't half be to his advantage."

R. Dupp gave a violent start. His hart was beating like a hammer.

"Unclaimed leggacies!" he muttered. "Sumthing to my advantage! And I'm only a few miles from Dulchester! I'll go and see Fusty & Musty at once!"

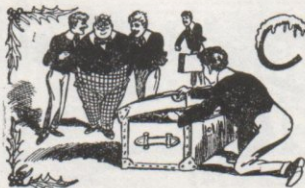
And he strode through the snow with a lighter step and a lighter hart.

On calling at the solicitors, R. Dupp received the cheering and comforting information that he was the air to vast estates, and a bumper fortune into the bargain. His poverty had slipped from him like a cloak, and he was now rich—rich beyond the dreams of avarice!

Need I pursue this story any further, dear readers? I think not. Suffice it to say that R. Dupp spent the Christmas Vack at his country seat, where he had the time of his life—batters and valleys to wait on him, nice food to eat, smart clothes to wear, and everything that his hart could desire.

What a shock will be in store for St. Sam's when R. Dupp, no longer R. Dupp, returns to the old school next term!

THE END.  
THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 280.



# Christmas Chat!

By  
Tom Brown.

**W**ELCOME to the cheery festival of Christmas! I am writing these notes on the eve of Breaking-up Day, and Greyfriars is humming like a human hive. The joyful task of "packing up" is in progress, and shouts keep echoing along the Remove corridor. "Where's my penknife?" "Chuck me a ball of string, somebody!" "My trunk's so full that it won't shut properly. Bring Billy Bunter here to sit on it!" And so on, ad lib and ad infinitum.

Where will the Greyfriars fellows spend their Christmas holidays? Not all of them will go where they would like to go. I was chatting to Hurree Singh just now, and he said: "An aeroplane! My kingdom for an aeroplane, to conveyfully carry me to my beloved India!" But methinks Inky will have to give India a miss. If he attempted to go there for the Christmas Vac, he would spend all his time travelling!

Billy Bunter was telling me he would like to spend Christmas in London, and make the Ritz Hotel his headquarters.

"They give you jolly fine feeds at the Ritz," said Bunter. "Have you noticed how slim and scraggy I've got just lately, Browney? If I spent a few weeks at the Ritz I should be as plump as a Christmas turkey when I came back to Greyfriars!" I fear that Billy Bunter's name will not figure among the roll of distinguished guests at the Ritz Hotel this Christmastide. He will probably spend the festive season at Bunter Court, which, I believe, is a small alley in the East End of London—not a magnificent mansion standing in its own grounds, as Bunter would have us believe.

Lord Mauleverer's notion of a Happy Christmas is a rather weird one. His lordship says he would like to go to bed on breaking-up day and stay there, wallowing in idleness, until the new term begins! How any fellow could enjoy Christmas in bed passes my comprehension. But I believe Mauly would sleep all the winter, if he was allowed to, like a dormouse! Mauly seems to me to be suffering from sleeping sickness, and I am seriously thinking of calling in a doctor!

Gosling, the porter, is one of the few persons who will not leave Greyfriars. He will remain at his post, and his Christmas Dinner will be devoured in the cosy parlour of his lodge. Gosling says he would like to accompany the Head to the South of France, where the blue skies and bright sunshine would cause him to forget his rheumatism, which at the moment are "crook bad." But the Head is not taking a companion. Even if he were, I hardly think he would select Gosling, the porter, to share his Christmas enjoyment on "the Continent." Gosling has the consolation of knowing that he will get plenty of tips to-morrow when we break up. I've decided to give him three-halfpence myself.

My own Christmas arrangements are not yet made. My home is in New Zealand, and if I were to pay a visit to "the old folks at home," I shouldn't return to Greyfriars till next April, which would be slightly oversteering my leave! However, I have heaps of uncles and aunts in England—too many of 'em, in fact—and they have all sent me invitations for the festive season. I sha'n't go to Aunt Clara, because she happens to be a vegetarian, and her Christmas dinner consists of an unsavoury dish called "vegetable pie." Groo! Give me the good old turkey, with bacon and sausages and stuffing! I sha'n't go to Aunt Muriel, either, because her domestic staff has gone on strike, and I'm not going to spend Christmas Day in the scullery, washing up dishes! Perhaps I shall decide to spend the Vacation with Uncle Bob, who is a good sport and lets me do anything I like within reason. He believes in feeding his guests well, and taking them to pantomimes, and all those sort of capers. Yes, Uncle Bob it shall be! I'll pop down to the post-office and send the old boy a telegram.

was as clean as a new pin when my brother frank reskewed me!

**HURREE SINGH:**

From the bottom of my heartfulness, I wish all my readerful chums a Merry Christmas. May the fun be fastfully furious, and may all be merry as a marriage-bell, as the poet Byron has it. I trust your motto for the festive season will be: "Let us gorgefully eat, drinkfully imbibe, and be gayfully merry!"

**WILLIAM GOSLING:**

"Wot I says is this 'ere—I 'ope as 'ow you'll all 'ave a real 'good time this Christmas, an' enjoy yourselves up to the 'ilt, as ever was! But in the midst of all your frivolity and fun-makin', spare a thought for the poor old porter wot's left lingerin' in 'is lodge, a-sittin' by 'is lonely fire, an' puffin' away at 'is favourite briar. When you're eatin' the Christmas goose, remember the Gosling! There won't be no Christmas geeses nor fatted calves for me. My Christmas Dinner will consist of tripe an' onions. I desay—unless some kind-hearted Good Samaritan telephones to Chunkley's Stores, at Courtfield, an' orders me a nice plump bird! Which I'm livin' in 'opes!"

**THE HEAD:**

A Merry Christmas to you all, my boys! And when the Christmas Dinner is brought in, steaming hot, "May good digestion wait on appetite, And health on both."

—SHAKESPEARE.  
Supper-time.

## GAY GREETINGS FROM GREYFRIARS!

Addressed to Readers of the "Greyfriars Herald."

**BOB CHERRY:**

A Right Merry Christmas to all our readers! May the red wine flow freely—ginger-wine, I mean—and may lots of tempting tuck adorn the festive board! May happiness and good-humour reign supreme, at this festival of sunny smiles and glowing faces!

**BILLY BUNTER:**

It is my pleasure and privilege, dear readers, to wish you a Happy New Christmas and a Merry Year. ("I'm getting mixed!" as Mrs. Mimble said when she reached down the biscuit-tin!) Mind you go steady with the grub, dear boys, and don't overdo it. Christmas is a glorious festival; but gluttony takes all the gilt off the jingerbread. I implore you not to make beasts of yourselves, or you will be getting Indigestion and nightmare—narsty things, as I can testify from personal experience! Eat and drink in strict moderation, like me, and you'll feel as fit on Boxing Day as you felt on Christmas Eve!

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**ALONZO TODD:**

"Permit me, my dear fellows, to extend to you, with deep sincerity and glowing cordiality, my warmest good wishes for the festive season. But I would utter a word of warning. Do not omit to wear your chest protectors and warm woolen mittens, thereby defying the monster—or, rather, the microbe of—Influenza. I once knew a fellow who was so excited on the morning of Breaking-up Day that he forgot to put his socks on. He spent Christmas Day in hospital, suffering from severe frost-bite in his extremities. Personally, I always wear three undershirts and two flannel shirts during the Christmas Vacation. My Uncle Benjamin believes— (No space to record his beliefs!—Ed.)

**DICKY NUGENT:**

a merry xmas to you all, dear readers, and i hope you won't be so eggaited on xmas morning that you forget to wash your nex! last xmas day i clean forgot to wash myself; but in the afternoon i went skating and fell through a hole in the ice, and that put matters right! i





(Continued from page 13.)

and attentive host. He was beginning to look forward to the trip to the South of France. He had accepted the Bouncer's invitation, in the first place, as the only way out of a difficult position. It was a case of any port in a storm. But now it came into his mind that he quite liked the idea.

As he sat on the edge of the bed, watching the leaping fire, he was thinking of his friends. They would be at Nugent's home now—probably a merry party. He might have been with them. At the bottom of his heart he was conscious that he wanted to be with them. Had he been too much swayed by angry resentment—by Bunker's tattling and Sinner's sneers? Had Nugent really wanted him to go? Now that the party was final, somehow he was taking a more kind and reasonable view of the matter.

And then his brow darkened again. They might have been a little more patient; they might have understood, and realised that it was his anxiety for his uncle that caused his moody impetuosity; they might have made allowances. No, he did not regret what he had done. He was not to blame. There was a set and obstinate look on his face as he came to this conclusion—an expression that marred a good deal his good looks.

Tap!  
Wharton started a little.  
The door opened, and Herbert Vernon-Smith looked in, with a smile on his face.

"Not turned in yet," he said.  
"No, Smithy."  
"I saw your light, and thought I'd look in. Not sleepy?"  
"No; come in."

The Bouncer came in, and sat down in the deep armchair by the cheerful blaze of the fire. He took a little tortoise-shell case from his pocket, opened it, and selected a cigarette.

He held the case towards Wharton, who shook his head.  
"Out of bounds now, you know," said the Bouncer, with a grin.  
"That makes no difference."  
"It does—to me!"

The Bouncer lighted his cigarette.  
"You don't mind?"  
"Oh, no!" said Harry.  
It was not for him to mind what Smithy did under his own roof.

"We're going to have a jolly time, old man," he said.  
"I hope so."  
"Bit of a change, from fog and gloom to the jolly old sunshine—what?"  
"Yes, rather!"

"And the life's as different as the climate," said Vernon-Smith, a gleam coming into his eyes. "Of course, we shall be under my father's giddy eye, but he won't bother us much. He will be busy with his own affairs and his own friends. We shall be able to go on our own, Wharton, and see life a little in our own way."

Wharton nodded.  
"No end of things goin' on out there," said Vernon-Smith. "If you feel disposed to kick over the traces, and go in for a little flutter, there's nobody to be shocked." He laughed. "England's a

dull old place. If a fellow wants a flutter there's nothin' but dingy horse-racin', with its crowd of seedy swindlers and yellin' bookies. They order these things better in France, as jolly old Sterne remarks somewhere."

Wharton's face became very grave. In his concern about his own affairs he had given little thought to the Bouncer. He had quite forgotten that side of Smithy's character.

Apparently the Bouncer was looking forward to what he would have called a "high old time" in a foreign country, with its freedom from restraint, and its easier code of morals.

"Smithy, old man," said Harry, after a long pause, "I think I'd better tell you, before we start, that I'm not thinking of anything of that kind. I've no right to interfere with you, and no wish to do so; but I certainly don't want anything like what you call a flutter for myself."

The Bouncer smiled.  
"My dear chap, you'll do exactly as you please! I wouldn't dream of influencing you," he said. "Don't worry

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about that. But while we're there we'll see what's goin' on, even if we don't take a hand in it—what!"

"Yes, no harm in that," said Harry.  
"The pater's goin' to break the bank at Monte—if he can!" grinned the Bouncer. "My opinion is that he won't."  
"But you—" said Harry hesitatingly.

The Bouncer laughed.  
"They wouldn't let me try, if I wanted to. Kids ain't admitted to the jolly old green tables," he said.

"Well, that's a good rule," said Harry.  
"Like most good things, very inconvenient, and rather a bore," said Vernon-Smith. "Never mind; lots of fun to be found outside the magnificent walls of Monte." He finished his cigarette, and threw the stump into the fire.  
"Well, I'll let you go to bed. We've got to turn out fairly early to buzz along with the pater to the passport office. Good-night!"

"Good-night, old chap!" said Harry.  
The door closed behind the Bouncer. Harry Wharton remained some time, staring at the fire, with a thoughtful brow, after the Bouncer had left him. He turned in at last.

He slept soundly enough, and his face was quite cheerful when he came down to breakfast in the misty morning.

It was a busy day for both Wharton and Vernon-Smith. There were many preparations to be made for the journey.

Harry Wharton had little time for thought, and he was glad of it.

The Bouncer, freed from the restrictions of school, was bent upon extracting the greatest possible enjoyment from every passing moment. As they were starting the following day, Wharton's idea was to get early to bed; but that was not the Bouncer's idea at all.

"We're not at Greyfriars now," he told his comrade, with a cheery grin. "No giddy masters or prefects to boss us now, old bean!"

"No," said Harry. "But—"  
"Wingate of the Sixth can't butt in at half-past nine, and shoo us off to the dormitory!" grinned the Bouncer.

Harry Wharton laughed.  
"No," he agreed. "Still—"  
"Leave it to me," said Vernon-Smith. "We're goin' to have a jolly evening—our last in this foggy old town."  
"Right ho!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith was occupied elsewhere that evening; but the millionaire's Rolls-Royce bore the two juniors, after dinner, to the theatre, where Mr. Vernon-Smith's private box was at their disposal. The Rolls-Royce was ready again when the play was over.

"Home, I suppose," said Harry, as they came out to the car.

The Bouncer smiled.  
He stood on the steps for a minute to light a cigarette, in the glare of bright illumination, with his coat open. The Bouncer was in evening clothes, with a diamond in his shirt-front. His face was merry and bright as he blew out a little cloud of smoke.

"What about supper?" he said.  
"Any old thing," said Wharton, with a smile. "I can see you're going to make a night of it."

"Why not? We're done with 'Yes, sir,' and 'Oh, sir,' and 'Please, sir,' and 'No, sir'—till next term!" chuckled the Bouncer.

The car rolled away with the two Greyfriars juniors, to supper in a crowded, glittering restaurant.

It was at a late hour that they arrived home at Mr. Vernon-Smith's house in Berkeley Square.

"Sleepy?" asked the Bouncer.  
"Well, a little," said Harry, suppressing a yawn.

The Bouncer chuckled.  
"I've let you off lightly. When we're down South among the jolly old Froggies we're goin' to paint the town red—what? But that will keep. Good-night!"

Wharton was asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow. The next day Mr. Vernon-Smith, with his son and his son's friend, left London in the Continental express, and soon the misty Channel rolled between Harry Wharton and his native land.

**THE TENTH CHAPTER.**

**On the Rapide!**

PARIS lay behind—the great express hummed on ever southward, towards brighter and more genial skies. Harry Wharton leaned back on the cushions and gazed from the window. He was alone in the carriage just then—Mr. Vernon-Smith had joined a party of friends farther along the train, and the Bouncer was strolling in the corridor. Harry Wharton had been reading a copy of the Paris "Daily Mail," but the paper had fallen on his knees, and he was thinking as he looked

out at the fleeting country passing by the windows of the Rapide.

A day in Paris had passed cheerily enough; but Wharton was thinking now of his visit to that city in the summer vacation, when his friends had been with him, and there had been no trouble in the happy circle of the Co.

He wondered whether they were thinking of him—at home in England, farther and farther off from him at every troth of the express.

Christmas was close at hand; and it was the first Christmas for Harry to pass outside his native land. With his old friends with him, on the old footing, he would have enjoyed a Christmas under a blue sky and genial sunshine. But he dismissed that thought from his mind. The estrangement was there—and it was not his fault; or, if it was his fault, he did not care to realise it.

His thoughts turned to his uncle. Would he ever see him again? While he was in Russia there could be no news from him; and the date of his return—if he returned at all—was quite uncertain. Wharton's brow grew darker with thinking of it.

"Penny for 'em!"  
It was the Bounder's light voice, interrupting his moody reflections. Wharton glanced up.

Vernon-Smith stood in the doorway of the carriage with a cigarette in his mouth, his hands in his pockets.

Smithy had long ago been nicknamed the "Bounder" at Greyfriars; and there was no doubt that there was something of the "bounder" in his make-up. Certainly he looked a good deal of a bounder now, with his hat on the back of his head, and the cigarette between his lips.

Wharton had a slight feeling of repugnance.

He liked the Bounder, in a way, but he had never felt disposed to chum with him; their ways and their thoughts and feelings were wide as the poles asunder.

"I was thinking," he said.  
"Throw it away," said the Bounder.  
"What's the good of thinkin'. I say I've met some fellows on the train—"

"Oh!" said Harry.  
"Highcliffe chaps," said Vernon-Smith.

Wharton's face brightened. He would have been very glad to see Courtenay, or the Caterpillar. Already he was beginning to feel that he had made a mistake in becoming the Bounder's comrade on that Christmas trip.

"You'd like to see them?" said Smithy. "No need to keep up old grudges in the holidays—what?"

"Oh!" said Harry. He realised that the Highcliffe fellows on the train were not his friends. "Who are they?"

"Old Pon."  
"Ponsonby?"

"Yes, and Vavasour and Gaddy. Fancy droppin' on them here," said the Bounder, who was evidently pleased by the chance meeting. "They're goin' down to Nice. Pon's uncle's yacht is at Villefranche; they're doin' the vap in style. I've asked them to come along here. You'll be civil, of course."

"Well, I can't say I want to see them," said Harry. "But if you've asked them here, I'll be civil, of course."

"Oh, they're rather jolly," said Vernon-Smith cheerily. "The fact is, Wharton, I was a bit of an ass to think of bringin' old Redwing with me—he would have been rather a wet blanket on a joy trip. He would be shocked at Pon & Co., and it would dash a fellow's

spirits to see a chap sittin' with a long face—what?"

Wharton did not reply.  
Apparently the Bounder did not expect him to be "shocked" at Pon & Co., as Tom Redwing would have been.

Vernon-Smith turned back into the train corridor, and a minute or two later ushered in the three Highcliffe fellows.

Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Vavasour greeted Wharton civilly enough. At school they were on terms of warfare with Harry Wharton & Co.; but they seemed prepared to forget all about that now, and Wharton could do no less than follow their example—though it went against the grain with him to shake hands with Cecil Ponsonby.

"Quite jolly to butt into you like this," said Ponsonby, with his most agreeable grin.

"Yes, rather," agreed Gaddy.  
"Oh, absolutely," said Vavasour.

Ponsonby handed round a cigarette-ette. Four cigarettes were soon gone; but Wharton declined. An ironical grin passed among the Highcliffe trio, which was not lost on Harry.

He coloured uncomfortably, and sat silent and constrained. He did not like his company, but there was no escape from it.

"Dashed bore, these long railway runs," said Ponsonby. "What do you chaps do to pass the time?"

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders. It occurred to Harry that the Bounder, as well as himself, was feeling that their journey together was rather a mistake.  
"What about a little game?" said Gadsby.

Ponsonby had already taken a pack of cards from his pocket.

"Good egg!" said the Bounder.  
"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"There's five of us—good number for a poker game," said the Bounder, with a rather curious glance at the captain of the Remove.

"Hear, hear!"  
Ponsonby shuffled the cards.

The smoke from four cigarettes filled the carriage with a blue haze. Harry Wharton sat silent, his brow growing darker. The Bounder was evidently taking it for granted that he would join in the game; and no doubt seemed to have occurred to the Highcliffians.  
"Cut for deal!" said Ponsonby.  
Harry Wharton rose to his feet.

"I'll take a turn in the corridor while you're having your game," he said.

Ponsonby raised his eyebrows.  
"You're not standin' out?" he said.

"Yes; excuse me."  
"Oh, rot!" said Gadsby. "E's pally, you know."

"Absolutely," said Vavasour.

"Look here, old fellow—" said Vernon-Smith.

"Thanks, I'd rather not," said Harry; and with that he moved out of the carriage into the corridor.

The Highcliffe juniors looked at one another and grinned. Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders.

The four young rascals were soon deep in their game, heedless of the junior in the corridor, who watched the scenery from the train windows in a far from cheerful mood.

Vernon-Smith, deep in his game, had forgotten his existence. But Cecil Ponsonby once or twice glanced in his direction, and winked at Gadsby. Pon, for all his polite manners, had by no means forgotten his old enmity towards the captain of the Greyfriars Remove, and he was pleasantly entertained by Wharton's present position of odd man out.

There was a heavy tread in the corridor, and Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, plump and rosy, came along, with a big black cigar in his mouth. The millionaire gave Wharton a smile and a nod, and glanced into his son's carriage.

Wharton wondered what he would say when he saw what was going on there. He could guess what Colonel Wharton would have said.

But Mr. Vernon-Smith's views were quite different. He gave a fat, indulgent grin, and shook his head at his son.

"You young scamp!" he said.  
The Bounder looked up and grinned.

"Hallo, dad! Comin' in?"  
"No," was only lookin' in to see how you were gettin' along," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "You seem to be amusing yourself."

And he rolled away along the train corridor again.

The poker game was still going on an hour later, when the express slowed into a big station. Wharton glanced into the carriage.

"Dijon," he said.  
The Bounder jumped up.

"Oh, gad! We get out here!" he exclaimed. "See you fellows later on, in the jolly old Sunny South."

"What ho!" said Ponsonby cordially.

The Bounder and the Highcliffe fellows parted on the most amicable terms. The Rapide rolled on, and Gadsby waved his hand from the carriage window to Smithy, standing on the platform with his father and Wharton. Smithy waved his hat back to the Highcliffians. Wharton made no sign.

## THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER. In the Sunny South!

"JOLLY, what?" said the Bounder.

Jolly, and no mistake," agreed Wharton.

It was a magnificent scene. It was difficult for fellows fresh from England to realise that this was December.

The party had spent a night at Dijon, and then the train the next day bore them on to Nice. Wharton had been glad enough to miss the company of the Highcliffe fellows. But the Bounder had been rather silent and dull, evidently wishing that Pon & Co. were on the train.

His manner to Wharton was not quite so genial as it had been.

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Wharton followed the others from the box. They descended the deserted staircase into the wide vestibule, now tenanted only by three fat men in evening clothes sitting at a high desk, and two or three of the ancient dames in black who haunt French theatres.

"Here's the car!"  
The juniors drew their coats about them as they came down the steps to the car. The day had been hot; but the night was cold, and a chill wind whistled round the corners of the streets.

Vernon-Smith spoke in French to the chauffeur, before he followed his companions into the car. Then they glided away.

"Whittier bound, O King?" yawned Ponsonby.

"Somewhere jolly, I hope," said Gadsby.  
"Absolutely," yawned Vavasour.  
"The Casino Oriental," said the Bounder.  
"No end of a jolly show there, and a little game in the intervals."

"Hear, hear!"  
Ponsonby & Co. brightened up visibly at the mention of a little game. Gadsby gave Wharton his sneering grin.

"Smitty, old bean, you're a good man," said Ponsonby. "You're just the nice little man a fellow likes to meet when he takes his little walks abroad. This is rather new to you, Wharton, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Harry.  
"Never mind; I'll lend you a tenner if you go broke at the jolly old green table!"  
"I sha'n't go broke at the jolly old green table," answered Harry quietly. "I shall not play."

"Why not?"  
"Yes, why not?" demanded Gadsby hotly. "You don't choose," answered Wharton coolly.

"Oh, gad! Are you always as merry and bright as this on a holiday?" yawned Ponsonby.  
"Hes, ha, ha!"  
"Cheese it," said the Bounder. "Wharton's guest, and he's going to do as he jolly well likes."

"My dear man, it's a good idea—no end of a good idea to have one upright character in a jolly party," said Ponsonby.

"Hes, ha, ha!"  
"Here we are!" said the Bounder, as the car stopped before a building that flashed with lights.

The party crowded out, and crossed the pavement into the Casino Oriental. Sounds of music came from within the building; the performance was evidently on. The Bounder took tickets for the party—the most expensive seats in the place, displaying a pocket-book that was fairly wadded with French banknotes. More than one greedy glance was turned upon him from lounging habitués of the casino.

An obsequious attendant showed the party into their places, the Bounder carelessly tipping him a fifty-franc bill.

A variety show was going on in the casino theatre, and, like most French variety shows, it was not exactly suitable for schoolboys to see—or for anyone else, for that matter. Ponsonby & Co., who had been bored stiff in the opera house, began to enjoy themselves now, and they joined in the roars of laughter from the audience.

But the first part of the performance was nearly over, and after a short time the audience crowded out for refreshment, and to pass the lengthy interval in the gaming-rooms. In an adjoining spacious apartment the green tables were set out for the entertainment of the casino's patrons during the intervals, and, incidentally, for relieving them of their loose cash.

"This way!" said the Bounder, with a deep breath.

"Oh, it's jolly!" said Gadsby.  
"Absolutely!"  
"This is certainly 'like life!'" said Ponsonby. "Nothin' in this kind in that dashed old foggy island we've got away from."

"Thank goodness for that!" said Wharton. He spoke involuntarily; he had not intended to express an opinion on the pursuits of his companions.

Ponsonby glanced at him with a sneer.  
"Come on!" said the Bounder impatiently.

A thick crowd poured into the long room with the green tables, where the droning chant of the croupiers was already heard.

The Bounder & Co. reached the nearest table, and stood in a row along the side, watching the game. In less than a minute all of them were tossing stakes on the table, an obliging "changeur" handing them counters in exchange for their paper money. Harry Wharton stood a little behind his companions, looking on.

The game did not appeal to him. The cool, cynical faces of the croupiers, who hardly troubled to conceal their ironical contempt for the punters who lavished money on the tables, the greedy faces of the punters themselves, the whirling of the roulette ball, the bow marked with numbers one to nine, the clatter of the counters on the green baize—all made up a scene that was "life" to Ponsonby & Co., but had a repellant effect on Wharton.

But there was some entertainment in watching the strange scene, and he found himself interested.

The clanging of a bell announced that the evening show was recommencing in the theatre, and there was a general crowding away from the tables. But the Bounder did not move.

He had dropped into a chair at the table, and had a stack of counters before him, representing a sum that made Ponsonby & Co. open their eyes rather wide. Wharton, looking at him, was struck—or rather shocked—by the change that had come over the Bounder's face. All the blackguard, all the gambler in Vernon-Smith's nature had come to the surface now; he was thinking of nothing but the game before him, of the whirling ball, and the green baize marked with yellow numbers.

Ponsonby tapped him on the shoulder. Fou had lost money, and he was not in a good temper.

"Comin' along, Smitty?"  
"No!" said Smitty, without turning his head.  
"I'm going."  
"Go, then!"

"Same here," said Gaddy. "It's rather a rotten game. I've dropped three hundred francs. They don't give you a chance!"  
"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.  
"Look here, Smitty—"

"Let me alone, confound you!"  
"Oh, come on!" said Ponsonby. "I'm fed up with this. Come on, you fellows!"  
The three Highlife fellows followed the crowd. They did not even look at Wharton, and he did not accompany them. He stood behind the Bounder's chair, waiting for Smitty to move.

But Smitty did not move.  
It was customary at the Casino Oriental for the game to close down when the theatre recommenced after the interval. But when high play was going on the tables were kept open.

The Bounder had been winning at first—a common experience with newcomers at a continental casino. Seen as he was, he did not know that he was allowed to win to encourage him to keep on and to play for larger stakes. But now the croupiers were coming down to business, and almost at every spin of the ball the Bounder lost, and his loss heavy. The stack of red and yellow counters melted away, and he changed more bills, and the new stack melted away in its turn. His face was set and savage now.

"Smitty!" whispered Wharton.  
"Don't worry!"  
"Hadn't you better come, old chap?"  
"Shut up!"

The Bounder had forgotten that Wharton was his guest; he had forgotten everything but the excitement of the game. He was the old Bounder now, with a vengeance—the "old" Bounder at his very worst.

Wharton compressed his lips, and made a movement to go. But he still lingered; it went against the grain to leave his companion there alone—alone in the midst of a crew of grinning, cynical swindlers.

Another batch of French notes changed hands, and the another stack of counters piled before the Bounder. He was playing with more and more recklessness now, and his stakes went fast. It was too fast to last, as a matter of fact.

"Faites vos jeux, messieurs."  
The Bounder threw on his last franc.  
It vanished under the croupier's remorse-

less rake. The Bounder was very still, as if stunned, for a moment or two. The ball spun again, and he placed no stake. Then he turned his head towards Wharton.

"Lend me some money."  
"Smitty, old man—"

"Are you afraid I sha'n't settle?" said the Bounder, smiling.

"No; but—"

"Will you lend me some money?"  
Wharton paused, and then he drew out his pocket-book and handed the Bounder a French note for five hundred francs.

Without even a word of thanks, Vernon-Smith held up the note to the changeur.

"Faites vos jeux!"  
"Rien ne va plus."

The Bounder fairly plastered the numbers with stakes, in a desperate effort to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. The croupiers grinned at one another as the long rakes drew them in.

The Bounder turned to Wharton again.  
"Give me some money."  
"I've nothing more to lend you, Smitty," said Harry Wharton coldly. "We'd better go."

The Bounder gritted his teeth.  
"You've got some money?"  
"Yes."  
"I'll take it to me!"  
"What's the good?" said Wharton angrily. "You've thrown away all you had—"

"That's no business of yours. Will you lend me some money?" said the Bounder, in concentrated tones.

"Not to throw away on those swindlers," said Wharton quietly. "I ought not to have given you any at all. Come away!"  
"You won't?"  
"No."

The Bounder rose unsteadily to his feet. His face was white and set. His eyes gleamed savagely.  
"I don't want any sermons from you!" he said dangerously. "I'm askin' you a favour, and I don't often ask favours. Will you—"

Wharton shook his head. He, too, was at the end of his patience, and only longing to escape from the blackguardly scene and his blackguardly companion.

"I'm going," he said quietly.  
"Then take that, hang you!" panted the Bounder furiously, and Wharton caught his wrist only just in time. He caught it with an iron grip that drew a gasp from the Bounder.

Wharton's eyes glinted at him.  
"That's enough!" he said. "That's the limit! Good-night, Vernon-Smith—and good-bye! That's the finish!"

He turned on his heel and walked away without a second glance at the Bounder. His face was pale with anger and shame; he was only anxious to get out of the place; he was done with the Bounder and his companions now—done with them for good.

The cool wind blew on his face as he came into the street. It refreshed him, after the heat and excitement of the casino. He walked down the street, glad to be alone. Where he was going, what he was to do, he did not know; only he knew that he was not going back to the Vernon-Smiths' villa—he was done with Vernon-Smith.

A little later a car passed him. He caught a glimpse of Ponsonby & Co. and the Bounder, sitting alert with a savage, sultry face. The Bounder stared at him in passing, but made no sign. Ponsonby & Co. grinned. The car was gone in a moment more. Under the glittering stars, in a sky of dark velvet, Wharton walked on—alone!

That was his Christmas, and it was his own fault, and he knew it now. In far-off England Nugent and Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh, were perhaps thinking of their absent chum, sorry for his absence, sorry for the headstrong temper that had carried it; wondering, perhaps, how he was getting on with the Bounder. And this was Harry Wharton's Christmas!

THE END.

(Be sure and read next week's grand *Greynarians* Story, entitled, "Friends or Foes?" Harry Wharton is fed up with the Bounder & Co.; he's determined to go back to the *Famous Five*. What sort of a greeting awaits him?)

MAKE YOUR PARTY A ROARING SUCCESS, BOYS!

Games for the Christmas Party!

"ENTERTAINER" tells of some good stunts to make things go with a swing.

BATH BOB APPLI.

FUN galore is guaranteed by this game. A bath or large pan is half-filled with water, and in it are floated two large apples. Members of the party now take turns to shove their hands tied behind their backs, and to endeavour to remove the apples from the bath with their teeth.

Place the receptacle on the floor so that competitors have to kneel. As soon as their mouths touch the apples the latter immediately bob beneath the surface, and wet faces result—much to the amusement of the onlookers.

Half a minute is given to each person, and the ones who succeed (if any) in removing an apple get a prize.

Another variation of this game is to string apples covered with treacle from a string across the room. But the hot atmosphere usually results in the treacle dripping on to the best Brussels carpet—which doesn't always provide much merriment to the host!

The competitors get treacle all over their faces. But the girls of the party, at least, might shy of attempting the trick, though they won't mind getting their faces wet in the least variety if a towel is handy.

TABLE "AUNT SALLY."

The ladies can oppose the gentlemen in this game.

On the faces of six matchboxes—the two corners of each may be used separately—draw "Aunt Sally's" face like those seen at fairs. Then give each a number, varying from one to six.

Stand these along the edge of the table, about two inches apart, then place a button on the edge opposite.

Each member of the party now attempts to knock over one of the matchboxes by hitting it with the button, which must be "flicked" with the finger and thumb.

Each side has the same number of attempts, and the scorer writes down the figure on the face of each box as it is knocked over. The side which totals the greatest number wins the game.

RAISING THE DISC.

With a sheet of stiff paper form a tube about twelve inches in length. Then cut out a disc a little larger than a penny from another piece of paper, which should be quite thin.

Place the disc on the table, and invite any member of the party to raise it by means of the tube.

Putting the tube to the lips and using suction is not allowed.

Let each person who wishes try his luck, and when all have failed—which is a foregone conclusion—show them how it is done.

Just hold a penny about half an inch above the disc, and the end of the tube half an inch above that. Place your lips to the other end and blow a steady stream of air through it. The disc will at once jump up from the

table and cling to the bottom of the penny until you have stopped blowing.

THE MAGIC BUTTON.

Arrange five buttons in the form of a domino five on the table, and on the other four rest an inverted tumbler.

Now challenge any member of the party to get the centre button from beneath the glass without touching tumbler or buttons.

Of course, not making it allowable to touch the button which has to be retrieved seems to put up a bar which turns the accomplishing of the trick into an impossibility.

But all one has to do is to scratch the tablecloth just at the edge of the glass, so that the button gradually moves towards the finger!

WHO IS IT?

One of the party is blindfolded and stood in the centre of the room. He then holds out his hand, and, one at a time, each other person touches it.

To each he gives a number—any up to ten—which means the number of steps allowed to be taken.

When all have received numbers, and taken a portion or all of their steps, the blindfolded member attempts to catch any of the others. The latter must try to escape, but they must not take more steps than they were originally allotted. Steps count from the first one made at the beginning of the game.

As soon as a person is caught, the blindfolded member says "Felix!" In reply, the other must make a noise like a cat. Three times "Felix!" must be answered by a cat-call, and then "Felix" guesses whom he has caught.

If he is right, the captured person is blindfolded, and the game begins again; but if he is wrong he tries to catch someone else.

PAN AND PENNY.

This is another game in which sides may be formed; or, if preferred, each person may count his own score.

At one end of the room tilt a washing-up pan (or a substitute) against the wall.

Members of the party then take their turn at standing ten feet away, and attempting to throw six pennies, one at a time, into the pan.

Each success counts one to the thrower or to the side he represents.

But it will be found that the great majority of the coins circle around the inside of the pan—and then shoot out!

KNOTTING THE HANDKERCHIEF.

Can you tie a knot in a handkerchief by using one hand only? You may succeed after many minutes' fumbling; on the other hand, you may fail entirely.

Invite the members of your party to have a shot. And when they have made their wrists ache with fruitless attempts, just show them how to accomplish the trick quite easily in about four seconds!

Roll up the handkerchief ropewise, and lay it across the palm of your right hand so

that about five inches hang down on the right. Then shake the left side so that it passes between the third and fourth fingers. Clench them tightly, and swing the left end towards the right, beneath the back of your hand and over the base of the thumb, so that you can catch the end between the first and second fingers.

Grip these tightly, release the other end (which was between the third and fourth fingers), and shake the handkerchief until the loop passes over the hand, thus forming a knot.

PARLOUR O'GRADY.

The old naval game of "O'Grady" can quite well be adapted for the parlour.

Confer the rank of "Drill Instructor" on to the smartest member of the party, and get him to stand before the rest.

In quite a military voice he must give various orders, all of which are to be ignored unless before then he has stated "O'Grady says—"

As soon as anyone obeys an order not given by "O'Grady," he is out of the game.

For instance, the instructor may say: "O'Grady says, 'Hands to shoulders!'"

All must obey.

Then he may order:

"Hands on heads!"

All who obey drop out of the game, because "O'Grady" didn't "say."

The one who remains longest wins the game.

Orders should be given smartly and artfully, and the instructor should use his ingenuity to "catch" the party.

SNATCH THE HANKY.

The party is divided into two, each section being given numbers, counting from one.

All take up positions around the edge of the room, and then a handkerchief is placed on the floor in the centre.

A leader—independent of either side—calls out a number, and the two people with that number (one from either side, of course) rush to the handkerchief, one trying to return with it to his seat without the other touching him.

Suppose Dick is No. 2 on one side, and Harry is No. 2 on the other side, and the leader calls out "Twos!"

At once Dick and Harry dart to the handkerchief. Now, if Dick picks it up, and Harry touches him while it is in his hands, Harry scores a point for his side. But if Dick can regain his seat with the handkerchief without being touched, his side gets a point. The same rules apply to each.

If one member isn't paying attention when his number is called, the other side gets a runaway victory, of course. But the fun comes when each meet in the middle and by feints and counter-feints attempt to snatch the handkerchief and get clear without being touched.

The leader should vary the numbers so that each gets a turn in time. The side with the most points at the end wins the game.

STORRYDENE V. THE PICK OF THE STATES! Line up for this thrilling footer match, boys, and watch the bombardment of the American goal.



**A "Common Pro."**  
**HARRY P. WANNIKER** was a hundred per cent American from the crown of his broad-brimmed Stetson hat to the bulging toes of his low-cut shoes, and his nasal drawl was pronounced without being unmusical. Tall, lean-limbed, and muscular, he had a long, horse-like face, fair hair, and light blue eyes, and his wide, thin-lipped mouth was the barometer that registered all his moods and emotions.

Harry P. had dabbled in many things during his thirty-five years of life, having been bartender in a Bowery "thick-eat" saloon, miner in the Montana goldfields, sports promoter, boxer, journalist, editor, mayor of Pawson City, and beachcomber.

Life to Harry P. Wanniker was an open book, and the fact that he was a millionaire at thirty-five suggested that the gods had helped the man who tried to help himself.

Wanniker was known all over the States as a man who was always ready to listen to a business proposal or a hard-luck story; but it went ill with the misguided individual who tried to get the better of him.

Harry P. was a "Big Noise" on his side of the Atlantic, but nobody took particular notice of him as, on Christmas Eve, he strolled down Northumberland Avenue and mounted the broad marble steps of the Imperial Sporting Club.

The Imperial Sporting Club, with its handsome facade and graceful Ionic columns, was the most exclusive club in London, and Harry P. Wanniker was one of the handful of foreigners who had the right of admission.

Passing beneath the imposing portico, the American strolled across the tessellated hall, and made his way to the smoke-room.

The room was pleasantly crowded as Harry P. strolled across to the big, open fireplace and dropped into an armchair beside Lord Lansdale, the doyen of British sport.

The two men were old friends.  
"Well, my dear fellow, and what of life?" asked Lansdale, his clean-cut face, with its "sideboard" whiskers and humorous grey eyes, beaming.

"Life ain't so pesky, old warrior," drawled the American, who was no respecter of persons—yet never offensive on this score. "But it's a darned pity that one of your scientific guys with chin whiskers can't invent a cure for your fogs. It's so blamed misty at the moment that a fencer can't find the way to his mouth!" Sure!"

Lord Lansdale chuckled.  
"We're comfortable enough in here," he said, "and the slight fog will have cleared by the morning. You're thinking about the Boxing Day match, of course?"

The American nodded.  
"Sure," he drawled, chewing reflectively at a long cigar. "We're up against a big proposition at Storrydene, but I guess my Stiffs will make the Britishers go all out!"  
"And why do you call your team the Chicago Stiffs?" asked Lansdale smilingly.  
"I thought 'stiff' was a term of er—opprobrium in America."

"So it is," returned Harry P. Wanniker, "and I call my boys stiffs because they ain't!" They're sure the dandiest, goal-gettingest, leather-chasingest bunch of live wires that ever booted a ball. It was because you Britishers thought we Americans couldn't play Soccer that I collected these fellers and brought 'em over!"

"You Britishers have got a wrong idea under your lid!" You thought we wore baseball caps and nothin' else, yet we're proved that we're the guys who put the pole in polo! What's more, old warrior, the Chicago Stiffs are goin' to clean up all your first-class professional teams! This ain't hot air, but a plain statement of fact. The Stiffs have played four matches and won 'em all, but the game against Storrydene will be the real test! Sure!"

"And you think you'll beat the Villa?" smiled Lord Lansdale.

"Sure!" drawled the American citizen complacently. "We shall eat 'em—goalposts and all!"

An unprescient laugh floated across the smoke-room, a laugh that was provocative and oily.

"What's your middle name, Wanniker?" asked a portly, over-dressed individual with a gold-rimmed monocle. "Modesty?"

There was a sneer in the tone, but Harry P. Wanniker's wide mouth lifted at the corners.

"Sure!" he drawled easily; and then he made a characteristic remark. "I can't remember havin' seen your map before, son! Who are you when you're lookin' through that window?"

He made a reference to the monocle, and the other man flushed.

"My name is Allen—Sir Aubrey Allen—and I happen to be chairman of Storrydene Villa," said the baronet, his manner pompous. "I have been a member of this club for some little time, but this is the first occasion upon which I have encountered ill-bred insolence!"

Allen, as a matter of fact, had been a member of the Imperial for less than nine months, and how he had managed to get elected was something of a mystery. Years before he had been the leading light of the Ninety-Four Club, and he might have been a member until that day had he not been mixed up in a card scandal.  
Leaning back in his deep armchair, Harry P. Wanniker studied the portly baronet, and

into the clear blue eyes there crept the light of tolerant amusement. Having graduated in the School of Life, he was a shrewd judge of his fellow-men, and he was quick to see that there was something about Sir Aubrey Allen that bred distrust. He did not like the fellow's dark eyes and offensive manner, and neither did he take kindly to the well-filled waistcoat.

"I repeat, sir," said Sir Aubrey, "that I happen to be chairman of Storrydene Villa!"  
"I heard you first time, old warrior," drawled Wanniker. "Do you happen to be a playing member, by any chance?"

The mere idea of the portly baronet playing football seemed to amuse the crowd in the smoke-room, and a chuckle reached Sir Aubrey's ears and made them burn.

"Of course I'm not a playing member!" snapped Allen. "Do you think it is my habit to hobnob with a crowd of common professional footballers?"

"I hope not," drawled Wanniker.

Allen grunted, thinking he had scored a point.

"It 'ud be rough on the pro's," murmured Harry P., and a deep rumble ran through the room.

Nobody liked Sir Aubrey, for he had proved himself to be a purse-proud bounder and an outsider, and the fact that he never missed an opportunity of disparaging professional footballers was a point that went right against him.

He returned to the attack, meaning to justify his words.

"It is all very well for you to sneer, Wanniker, but you know nothing of the conditions over here," he said. "The average professional footballer is an uncouth person of the lower orders, and he is sadly out of place in the company of gentlemen. After all, we of the upper class have to draw the line somewhere, and to hobnob with a football pro is to lose caste. I feel sure that you, Lansdale, agree with me?"

The fine old sportsman objected to Allen's air of easy familiarity, but he was smiling gently as he made reply.

"I have no wish to pass an opinion upon your somewhat original ideas, Sir Aubrey," answered Lansdale, "but perhaps I should warn you that I am expecting a 'common professional footballer' at any moment. Ah, here he is! Come inside, my dear boy!"

All eyes turned towards the door, and Peter Voyce, the Storrydene Villa centre-forward, walked into the smoking-room.

**The Bat!**

**SIR AUBREY AILEN** remained statue-like as Peter walked across to Lord Lansdale and took the peer's outstretched hand. It occurred to the baronet that the handsome youngster looked perfectly at home in the present exalted

company. There was something so calm and self-possessed about the footballer; he possessed that subtle, indefinable something that he—Sir Aubrey—would never have. It was the stamp of breeding, of course.

"Voyce's father has been a great friend of mine for years," explained Lord Lansdale, beaming up at the brown-eyed youngster. "Knowing Peter was in Town, I asked him to look me up and have a bite with me. By the way, this is Mr. Harry P. Wanniker, my boy."

The American, who had taken an immediate liking to Peter, shot out a lean, muscular hand.

"How do, son?" he drawled. "I've heard a whole heap about you! I suppose you think your side's goin' to win on Boxin' Day?"

"We shall do our best, sir," smiled the youngster, conscious that Sir Aubrey Allen was glowering at him.

"Do your best?" snapped the baronet. "Of course you'll do your best! That's what you're paid for!"

The eyes of the other members turned upon Allen, and in their depths was a light that was distinctly threatening. But Sir Aubrey, thoroughly disgruntled at Peter's arrival, would not heed the warning. It annoyed him to think that Peter—a "common pro"—would drop into the company so easily, whilst he, a member, so often felt ill-at-ease.

"And there's something I'd like to tell you, Wanniker," said the baronet, almost fiercely. "My team is going to lick yours in a fizzle! You've been lucky—that's all! You won your four games by a series of flukes!"

Turning very slowly, the American fixed his light blue eyes upon the speaker, and the thin lips came together and formed a grim, straight line.

"Perhaps you'd care to back your opinion, Sir Aubrey?" he asked, speaking with great deliberation.

As city smile creased the baronet's bushy features; Harry P. Wanniker was rising to the bait.

"You bet I would!" he answered. "But you mustn't forget that you're not dealing with a small punter. I'm a financier; I think in hundreds of thousands!"

Harry P. nodded. "Sure!" he drawled. "Now then, Mister Rockefeller, what do you say to a bet of a thousand pounds a side? I'll stake a thousand against your thousand that the Chicago Six will beat Storydene Villa."

"A thousand—in dollars?" sneered Allen. "No; in pounds."

The baronet snapped his pudgy fingers. "A thousand!" he scoffed, a pitying smile curling his full lips. "That's my wise bill for a year! I've always been led to believe that you Americans do things on a big scale; yet you suggest a bet of a paltry thousand a side! You should be tossing for coppers with a crowd of newsboys, Wanniker!"

The long, lean jaw of the American millionaire set in an inflexible line as Allen uttered the insult, and the other members flushed hotly at the baronet's offensiveness. After all, Wanniker was really an honoured guest at the club, yet this poisonous little bouncer was going out of his way to make himself objectionable. Many meaning glances were exchanged, and the baronet little guessed that he was standing on the edge of a precipice.

"Perhaps you would care to name a figure, Sir Aubrey?" drawled Wanniker, holding himself in check.

"Certainly!" grinned Allen. "Why not make it five thousand pounds a side!"

"But why not ten thousand?"

"Or fifteen?"

"Or twenty?"

The American's voice was even as he mentioned the sum; but Sir Aubrey showed a trace of excitement as he took a quick step across the floor and looked down into Wanniker's impassive features.

"Twenty-five thousand that Storydene Villa beat your team!" said the baronet, his voice trembling.

"Done!" drawled the American easily; and he felt for his cheque-book.

"And what about conditions?" put in Harvey Graine, the racing motorist. "What happens in the case of a drawn game?"

"Oh, I've given Wanniker the draw!" said Sir Aubrey. "I'm a sport every time!"

This arrangement did not suit Harry P. Wanniker, however.

"A draw," drawled the American, "is no

result, so if the score isn't decisive I guess we'll call the bet off."

"Then I suggest that you each give Lord Lansdale a cheque for twenty-five thousand pounds," said Captain Denny, the secretary.

"And who the blazes are you to suggest anything?" demanded the baronet, swinging round and glaring at the famous amateur rider. Allen wished to be in the middle of the picture all the time, and he resented interference. "One would imagine you were used to dealing in thousands of pounds every day!"

"Sorry!" smiled Denny. "It's usual to place the stakes with Lord Lansdale—that's all. Personally, Allen, I wouldn't touch your filthy cheque with a barge-pole!"

"Blamed pauperised subaltern!" growled Allen, his smouldering eyes upon the soldier's broad back; and the scathing words brought a low growl from various members.

The baronet had been given a fair amount of rope, but the supply was fast giving out, and there was not a person in the smoke-room who would not have enjoyed throwing the unpleasant bouncer out of the window.

Allen, however, could not see the red light.

The cheques having been signed and given into Lord Lansdale's charge, Sir Aubrey turned towards Peter Voyce, who was chatting with the Honourable Rolfo Dayton, the famous all-round athlete. Dayton was a young aristocrat, who had kept the newly created baronet at a distance, and that he should be talking affably with the Villa's centre-forward enraged Sir Aubrey. He regarded the incident as a deliberate slight—indeed, he felt certain that the young man were laughing at him.

"Voyce!" shouted Sir Aubrey sharply; and the youngster turned his fine head and glanced across at the inventor of "Ratto, the Rodents' Death-Knell."

"Sir?"

"It's time you cleared out of here!" said the baronet, his voice ringing through the room.

This dictatorial attitude brought a fust to the youngster's smooth cheeks.

"I beg your pardon, sir—" he began; and the baronet brought a pudgy fist down on the arm of his chair.



Unable to pull up, Frohmann went lumbering forward and cannoned into Gawton. Crash! Locked in each other's arms, the two players reeled over the touchline and crashed to the turf. (See page 25.)

"Don't argue with me!" he shouted, his little eyes blazing with anger. "You're paid to obey—any I tell you to clear out! This is a gentleman's club, so you've no right in here, anyway!"

Peter Voyce had not been slow to read the signs, and something told him that the baronet had at last gone a shade too far, and he was rising to his feet.

It was John Cobb, the Oxford three-quarter, who collared Sir Aubrey round the body and swung him off his feet. Bellowing and kicking, the baronet tried to free himself; but he was no more than a fractious baby in the mighty arms of the famous Rugby captain.

"You mustn't use those naughty words, Aubrey!" said Cobb severely. "And I warn you that if you kick my shins again I shall drop you on your head!"

"Put me down, you—you hooligan!" shouted the baronet, purple in the face and acutely conscious of his undignified position. "Landsdale, I call upon you—"

"I regret to say that his lordship is not at home!" smiled Harvey Graigne; and Allen shooting a wild glance across the room, saw that Landsdale's armchair was empty. His lordship, scenting a "rag," had made a discreet exit.

"What shall we do with the hounder?" asked Cobb, grinning down into Sir Aubrey's blazing eyes.

"I guess he owes Mr. Voyce an apology," put in Harry P. Wanniker.

"What!" blazed the baronet, struggling like a maniac. "Me—me apologise—"

"Yes," said Cobb soothingly, "you're going to apologise, like a well-behaved little chap that you aren't! It's either that or a ducking in the swimming-pool!"

Having been placed on his feet, Sir Aubrey glared round at the set faces of the other members, and he knew that the threat of a ducking would be carried out with joyous expedition if he did not make an apology to Peter Voyce. To climb down to a common professional went against the grain, of course, yet it would be less unpleasant—physically, at any rate—than being thrown into the icy water of the swimming pool.

Scowling and muttering, the baronet strode across the room and halted before Peter and Eolo Dayton. And he flushed hotly as the latter young man jammed his rimless monocle into position and regarded him as though he were a freak exhibit at the Zoo.

"H'm! Ha!" began Sir Aubrey, clearing his throat. "These—these gentlemen and sportsmen think that an apology is due to you, Voyce, so, under the threat of physical violence from these—gentlemen and sportsmen, I take back everything I said to you."

The apology was anything but gracious, but the youngster knew what it cost the pompous baronet to make it.

A sudden silence reigned as Sir Aubrey glared round at the other members before strolling out of the room. But Allen's black scowl gave place to a sinister smile as he pushed down the marble steps of the club and made his way towards the post-office. Entering the office, he wrote a telegram. It ran:

"Merritt, Marquis of Gandy, Little Smith Street, Storrordene.—Bet O.K. £25,000. Act at once.—A."

The Marquis of Gandy was the headquarters of the notorious Starlight Boys.

### The Game!

THE Chicago Stiffs played all their games in the sweet case of charity, so the City of London Hospital hoped to reap a rich harvest from the game between Storrordene Villa and the Americans.

The match was to take place on the new Chelsea United ground, the most up-to-date enclosure in the South, and the newspaper critics declared that at least fifty thousand "wonder" fans would throng the turf.

Boxing Day came round cold and dry, and for a full hour before the time for the kick-off the ground was filling steadily, special train and bus services bringing sportsmen from all corners of the metropolis.

The Chicago Stiffs, having won their first THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 680.

four games in England, proved a great attraction, and there were hundreds of "fans" who would have paid the price of admission just to see Peter Voyce, "Hoppy" Hawkins, and other members of the famous Villa team in action.

The kick-off was timed for three o'clock, and the ground was packed when Storrordene Villa moved off at two minutes to the hour. The well-known black jerseys of the famous Midland side brought a yell of welcome from all parts of the enclosure, and Hoppy Hawkins, the one-legged custodian, came in for a special ovation, and caused much amusement by removing his green Homburg hat and bowing graciously to the laughing crowd. Peter Voyce was also singled out, as were "Hefty" Hebble, the skipper, and little Battie.

Taking up his position between the sticks, Hoppy Hawkins began to deal with all types of shots in a workmanlike manner that brought roars of delight from the "fans"; and so interested was the crowd in the display that it did not notice that the Stiffs were some minutes late in turning out.

It was seven minutes past three when a leading-lung gentleman in the stand raised his voice and called attention to the unusual state of affairs.

"Nah, then, America! What abah! it!" The shout was taken up at once, of course, and soon the vast ground was rocking with sound.

"Look a jerk into it, you big Stiffs!"

"Say, you guys, look slick!"

"Up, the States!"

The din increased with the passing of seconds, and the enclosure was in a state of mild pandemonium when Cyrus Schmidt, the Chicago captain, led his men across the weather-lung track and on to the field. The Americans came in for a wonderful reception, all kinds of musical and unmusical instruments being pressed into service.

"Here they are!"

"Bravo, the Stiffs!"

"Now, then, you bunch of boobies!"

Most of the players were of medium height and build, only two being upon the heavy side and five of the eleven struck an original note by wearing big horn-rimmed glasses. They looked a businesslike side, however, and the tireless manner in which they moved their jaws suggested that they were all addicted to the gum-chewing habit.

Mr. Morecroft was the referee, and as was his custom, he lost no time in getting down to business. The three-cornered handshake over, the coin was flicked into the frosty December air, and the American skipper grinned broadly when the luck of the foot moved his way.

"Say, that's as good as a goal to us," he drawled, looking up at Hefty Hebble.

"Glad to hear it, lad," granted the burly back. "Hoppy will be pleased!"

Ten seconds elapsed, and then Peter Voyce set the game in motion, the teams being as follows:

**STORRODENE VILLA.**  
Goal: Hawkins; Backs: Grace, Hebble (capt.); Half-backs: Denning, Thirbyro, Caye; Forwards: Sceptre, Coyne, Voyce, Noyle, Battie.

**CHICAGO STIFFS.**  
Goal: Kelly; Backs: Berry, Grebb; Half-backs: Maddenburg, Frohmann, Gawton; Forwards: Doss, Gluckenheimer, Clancy, Schmidt (capt.), O'Donovan.

Noyle took the ball from Peter, slipped by Schmidt, and pushed a ground pass out to the bowlegged Battie, and the feet-footed little winger gave the "fans" an early thrill by sending a wry howl, the touchline and putting over a perfect centre from the corner flag, Gawton's clumsy tackle having come to naught.

"Kelly was on the spot, however, and the terrific punch he aimed at the ball brought a wild yell from the crowd. A punch may be applied to the ball, it is said, and the present was an occasion on which the fact was proved to the hilt.

Glancing off Kelly's gloved fist, the ball shot away at a tangent and dropped at Coyne's feet, and the inside man took a sporting drive and made no mistake. Tearing forward at an awkward angle, the ball passed within three inches of the goalkeeper's bullet head, and the next second it was twirling madly in the back of the net.

"Goal!" The shout broke involuntarily from the lips of the "fans," and the raucous sound, ear-splitting and discordant, was an exquisite music in the ears of the portly, over-dressed man who was standing in the window recess of the clubhouse.

Sir Aubrey Allen appeared to be very pleased with life at that moment, for his glossy silk hat was thrust back from his forehead, and his inevitable cigar was jutting jauntily from a corner of his full-lipped mouth.

Allen turned to Lord Landsdale. "Sir Aubrey, in the first half-minute, Landsdale, my boy!" he chuckled throatily, his coarse familiarity making the old peer wince. "I'm not sorry Wanniker isn't here. I expect he'd want to call the bet off."

"You must not judge other men by your own peculiar standards, Sir Aubrey," said Landsdale blandly. And the gentle rebuke brought a hot flush to the baronet's fleshy features.

"What do you mean—?" he began, attempting to bluster. And the other man waved the words aside with a dignified gesture.

"Mr. Wanniker has, unfortunately, been called to Paris on business," said Landsdale, "but I have instructions to surrender his cheque to you in the event of his team losing against the Villa. Wanniker, as usual, has behaved like a gentleman and a sportsman."

"And when do you part with the cheque?" asked Sir Aubrey.

"In the event of your winning the bet," answered the peer. "I shall hand it to you to-night. I shall be in the club at eight o'clock."

"And so shall I, old man!" chuckled the baronet. "It looks like being a stone ginger certainly for me!"

Landsdale nodded his fine head.

"I am inclined to agree with you," remarked the sporting peer. "And now, if you don't mind, will you kindly address your remarks to somebody else? Your somewhat plebeian voice has a tincture that jars unpleasantly upon my sensitive ear!"

"Seldom was Sir Aubrey Allen at an utter loss, yet those quiet words took all the wind out of his sails and left him speechless. He was grinning once more, however, as he turned abruptly and in his way to the refreshment table in the corner, and helped himself to a generous brandy-and-soda.

Yes, life looked very rosy at that moment.

The Villa, meanwhile, were pressing hard, the Americans being run off their legs; and had it not been for some excellent work by Kelly, who had learnt his lesson by the way—the score would have been increased by at least another goal.

Play was confined to the Chicago half of the field, and it did not take the "fans" long to see that the visitors were being outplayed. And at the end of fifteen minutes Peter Voyce darted towards the corner flag, puzzled the towering Grebb with the speed of his movements, and attempted a tricky drop-shot that came off occasionally. And he caught Kelly napping! Not being quite sure whether the ball was going over the bar or not, the goalie thrust out his great hands and clutched. But the cunning twist beat him, and the sphere slipped between his arms and bounced into the net.

Storrordene Villa were two goals up.

### The Rout!

AT TABOY!" "Oh, you Stiffs!" There was a certain amount of playful derision in the wild yell that greeted Peter's goal, for the crowd did not forget that Harry P. Wanniker, writing the sporting darts, had deserted the Villa; was not a side in England that could hope even to draw with the redoubtable Chicago Stiffs. Yet now, after fifteen minutes' play, Storrordene Villa were leading by two clear goals! The "fans" therefore had good reason to be pleased, and the Americans, and if they had a laugh at the Americans' expense—well, it was to be expected.

Harry P.'s words had been so much "hot air."

The Stiffs had certainly trounced four first-class clubs, yet they were still far from against Storrordene that one found it difficult to believe that such Soccer giants as Newcastle Invicta, Manchester Town, and Sheffield Athletic had fallen easy victims to the team from Chicago.



Half-time was still ten minutes distant when the Americans showed unmistakable signs of being tired and disheartened, so nobody was the least bit surprised when Peter Voyce took a pretty pass from Thrilby and set off on one of his individual excursions into the enemy's country.

Covering the ground in effortless fashion, he outwitted Clancy and Schmidt and came up against Frohmann. And the crowd roared its delight when the burly centre-half tore straight at the slim youngster—and missed him by inches. Unable to pull up, Frohmann went lumbering forward and smashed into Gawton. And, locked in each other's arms, the two players reeled over the touchline and crashed to the turf.

Peter, meanwhile, went on his way rejoicing. But Grebb looked anything but joyous as he sought to stop the brown-haired youngster with a ferocious charge.

Keeping remarkably cool, the Villa centre-forward swerved round the clumsy back and took an unexpected shot at goal, and again he caught Kelly napping. There was something almost sinister about the action of that cunning drop shot. Yet it seemed incredible that a goalkeeper could repeat a bad mistake. But again the ball slipped between Kelly's uplifted arms and bounced into the net.

Seldom had such enthusiasm been known on the Chelsea United ground, and the reason is not far to seek, for Peter Voyce had an easy, effortless style that amounted to genius, in addition to which he was leading the much-lauded Americans off his own hat.

"Go-al!"  
"Well done, Voyce!"  
Peter, new to London, became the hero of the hour, and his name was upon thousands of lips as the teams lined up for the fourth time that afternoon, the Americans looking grim and tight-lipped.

Storreryne did all the pressing for the remainder of the first half, but no further goals were scored, Kelly making amends for past blunders by bringing off a series of spectacular saves, and it was obvious that the new players from the States welcomed the success. The pace had been hot, and there was not one of the Stiffs who did not look used up.

"Never mind, boys, better luck next half!" shouted a score of voices. And Schmidt, breathless and dishevelled, grinned ruefully and waved his hand.

"I guess these fellows have got us where we want us!" he drawled, turning to Clancy.

A number of newspaper men were waiting for the Americans, and the sight of the scores brought a savage grunt from big Frohmann. Placing his great hands to his hips, he came to a halt.

"Say," he growled, glaring through his horn-rimmed glasses, "what the heck do you come want, anyway?"

His manner was bullying and offensive, and the newspaper men exchanged surprised glances.

"I thought—" began a tall, fair-haired man, "Fesco," of the "Sporting News." And the fellow thrust him roughly aside and slipped into the dressing-room.

"You fellows 'ad better be goin' while the goin's good," said Frohmann, turning sharply. "Go, chase yourselves!"

And the door closed with a bang. The newspaper men looked at each other in bewilderment, for the average American is usually only too willing to be "written up"; so this self-effacing modesty on the part of the Chicago eleven came as something of a shock. It was unheard-of—implausible.

"Hang it all, we'll get a story out of them," said the fair-haired reporter. And he turned the handle of the door and walked into the room.

The sequel to the bold intrusion happened with dramatic suddenness, for the intimate scribe was seized in strong hands, whipped bodily off his feet, rushed across the room, and dropped out of the window. And then big Frohmann and his scowling companions turned upon the knot of wide-eyed men in the doorway.

"Any more of you ink-slinging boneheads 'akin' for trouble?" asked the swarthy. Head back pleasantly; and, not waiting for an answer to his question, he slammed the



The unfortunate reporter was seized in strong hands, whipped bodily off his feet, rushed across the room, and dropped out of the window. (See this page.)

door with a vicious force that shook the whole building.

Everything pointed to the fact that the Americans were taking their defeat badly, no other construction could be put upon their amazing behaviour; yet not a word about the unpleasant incident appeared in the evening papers.

Even PESCO, who had made the precipitate exit through the window, did not dip his quill in acid and sear Frohmann and his compatriots.

The visitors were looking comparatively fresh again when they turned out for the second half. But ten minutes' play found them blowing hard and looking much distressed. They could not stand the pace set by Peter Voyce and the other Villa forwards, and the last thirty minutes of the game was almost farcical. Peter and his partners had matters all their own way, and Sir Aubrey Allen, standing in the window recess of the clubhouse, chuckled throatily as he saw the ball enter the net for the seventh time.

Jamming his monocle into position, he turned to Lord Lansdale, and his flushed face suggested that he had made frequent excursions to the refreshment table in the corner.

"What do you think of my boys, old man?" he asked, his manner more offensive than usual. He clapped the other man on the shoulder as he put the question. "Don't you think you might cough up Wanniker's cheque at once? It'll save me a journey to the club, you know."

Lansdale nodded.

"I much regret that I haven't the cheque with me," he said, "for I should like to save you the journey. Why not let me send the cheque by post, Sir Aubrey?"

An unpleasant laugh broke from Allen. Suspicion glowed in his dark eyes.

"It's likely, isn't it?" he sneered. "No, I want to get my hands on that slip of paper, old man. I'm taking no risks even with a peer of the realm!"

Lord Lansdale flushed.

"Are you suggesting that Wanniker—"

"I'm not suggesting anything," put in

Allen; "but experience has taught me that my fellow-men are just as honest as they can afford to be! Wanniker will find it difficult to back out of this business once I get my hands on his cheque. Also, old man—"

"Goal!"  
The roar of thousands of voices rumbled through the room; and another short laugh broke from Allen.

"I sha'n't wait any longer," he said, his gait somewhat unsteady as he moved towards the door. "The rout is too painful—I might burst into tears! Hee, hee! I'll be at the Imperial on the stroke of eight, old man. So-long, boys!"

Lord Lansdale and his friends seemed to breathe more freely after the baronet had taken his departure.

"Poisonous fellow!" muttered his lordship, turning his eyes towards the field of play. "It'll soon be over, won't it, Harvey?"

Harvey Graine, the racing motorist, consulted his watch.

"Five minutes to go, sir," he said. "It's— My only hat! Here's old Wanniker!"

Lean-limbed, tanned, and smiling, the American strolled into the room and loddled to the company; it was impossible to tell whether or no he knew of the rout. He made no comment as he opened the door and passed on to the balcony, and Lansdale and the others watched him with interested eyes as he followed the play. He stood perfectly still for less than a minute, and then he turned abruptly and joined his friends.

"I reckon this beats the band, old warrior," he drawled, turning puzzled eyes upon Lord Lansdale.

"It certainly is a most decisive score," agreed his lordship; "and I am bound to say that the Villa deserve every goal they have scored. Young Voyce is—"

"Aw, shucks! I wasn't thinkin' about the score," smiled Wanniker. "Where's Allen?"

"He left a minute or so ago," said Harvey Graine.

"H'm!" The American rubbed his lean chin. "That's a pity, brothers, for there

are one or two things I'd like to say to him—strictly in confidence!"

"There was a wealth of meaning in Wanniker's tone.

"What's the trouble, old man?" asked Graine. "You're jolly mysterious all of a sudden."

"Aw, it's nothin' much," drawled Harry P. "By the way, who are those fellers?" He nodded, in a vague kind of way, towards the playing-field, and his companions looked at him in amazement. It was obvious that he was either drunk or mad.

"Why, Storrydella Villa—" began Landsdale.

"No; I mean the others," broke in Wanniker; and his hearers almost gasped.

"Who are they?" asked Captain Denny. "You should know. They are your own team, my gentle idiot!"

"Was guess not, old warrior!" grinned Harry P. Wanniker. "I've never seen 'em before in my life! They certainly aren't the Chicago Stiffs!"

### Sir Aubrey Gets a Shock!

IT was on the stroke of eight o'clock when a bright yellow car purrrred down Northumberland Avenue and came to a standstill outside the Imperial Sporting Club; and the gentleman who alighted looked well-fed and festive as he nodded genially to the giant commissionaire, swaggered up the broad marble steps, and passed into the most exclusive institution in London.

A tight-fitting evening-suit enshrouded Sir Aubrey Allen's portly figure, and the tilt of his glossy silk hat was equalled by the jaunty angle of the fat cigar that protruded from a corner of the full-lipped mouth. The gold-rimmed monocle was in position, and the little black moustache had been waxed to rapier-like points.

Entering the tiled hall, the baronet surrendered his hat and coat to a small boy in buttons and strolled across to the smoke-room; and the fact that all eyes were upon him as he entered made him swell visibly—a pouter pigeon.

The place was unusually full as he swaggered across to Lord Landsdale. The fine old sportsman was sitting in his usual arm-chair by the open fireplace, and he nodded quietly as Sir Aubrey approached.

"I'm dead on time, old man!" cried Allen, producing a massive gold watch. "It's a pity Wanniker isn't here!"

"Yes, isn't it?" smiled Lord Landsdale.

"Still, he left instructions that I was to touch the money, so I may as well have the cheque at once," grinned Sir Aubrey. "Twenty-five thousand of the best isn't picked up every day, is it?"

"No, Sir Aubrey," agreed Landsdale, "twenty-five thousand is not picked up every day. However, there are one or two questions I should like to put to you before you—er—touch this sum!"

Allen's grin vanished as he glared down at the leer.

"Rh? What's that?" he demanded, his manner almost truculent. "No tricks, old man! That bet was between two gentlemen—"

"Of course it was," put in Landsdale soothingly, "and it is because you are a gentleman, Sir Aubrey, that I want you to be only too willing to satisfy my curiosity upon certain points!"

"There was something delightfully suave about the fine old sportsman, and the members exchanged smiling glances.

Allen, however, looked anything but amused at the expense of his credit, and he said: "I've come here for my cheque—not to answer a lot of idiotic questions!" he snapped. "Come on; hand it over! I've got an appointment in ten minutes! There's something blamed fishy about this affair, Landsdale, and I don't like it!"

This was not the usual manner in which poor Allen addressed the British sports, and many an eye held a threatening light as the members closed in upon Allen.

"Would it interest you to know that your team did not play the Chicago Stiffs this afternoon!" asked Landsdale, at length.

And a sudden silence settled upon the mellow old smoking-room.

"Would—would what interest me?" gasped the baronet, his monocle slipping out of position.

"Would it interest you to know that your team did not play the Chicago Stiffs this afternoon?" repeated Lord Landsdale.

Another tense silence fell upon the company, and it was Sir Aubrey's throaty laugh that broke the dramatic stillness.

"What are you getting at?" he asked. "The sort of thing might be worth trying on some people, but you can't bluff me! Oh, no! I thought Wanniker would try to wriggle out of this bet; but if he thinks I'm going to fall for this cock-and-bull story, he's made a mistake!" Allen turned to the other members. "This looks like a put-up job, to me, gentlemen; it's an important and bare-faced attempt to rob me of twenty-five thousand of the best! I appeal to you to see that I get fair play! Landsdale is suggesting that a strange team defeated the Stiffs this afternoon! Is it feasible? Is it possible? Ask yourselves, as men of the world! Who ever heard of such a thing? No, gentlemen; it's a bit of bluff, and it's so fantastic that it is an insult to our intelligence!" He looked down at Lord Landsdale. "By the way, old man, why didn't you mention the matter this afternoon?"

"I did not receive certain—er—information until you had gone, Sir Aubrey," returned his lordship.

"Oh! And who gave you this precious information?" asked Allen.

"A gentleman named Wanniker—Harry P. Wanniker," answered Landsdale blandly.

"But Wanniker's in Paris!" cried Sir Aubrey.

"I guess you're barking up a wrong tree this journey," drawled a voice. And the lean-limbed American strolled into the smoke-room.

### The Ultimatum!

TAKING up a position before the quaking Allen, Harry P. Wanniker pulled thoughtfully at his long black cigar; then, in leisurely fashion, he produced two ugly squat-nosed revolvers and jammed them against the baronet's generous waist-line.

"But you've got your son," he drawled, "or I shall look you up to bits and make a plumb nasty mess! Look sick!"

Almost gibbering with fear, Sir Aubrey shot his pudgy hands above his head and stared fixedly at the gleaming guns.

"Put—put those things down, you madman!" he stammered. "They—they might go off!"

Harry P. nodded.

"That's so," he agreed, "and they're likely to go off the moment you lower your paws. I'm considered a fair shot, and I reckon I couldn't miss your waistcoat even if I tried. No; sir! Don'tidget, durn you, 'cause you've got to listen to a Boxing Day bed-time story by Uncle Wanniker. Sure!"

A laugh broke from the other members, but Wanniker's horse-like face remained impassive as he pulled at his cigar.

He began his story.

"Once upon a time there was a real bad man named Allen, and this said Allen figured on lifting twenty-five thousand pounds off a poor simp named Harry P. Wanniker, of New York City. Well, a bet was made over a Soccer match between the Chicago Stiffs and the Storrydella Villa, and on the morning of the game the poor simp—Harry P. Wanniker—received a wire from Paris, France. The wire said that Harry P. had to be Johnny-on-the-Spot, otherwise he stood to lose a whole heap of dollars.

"The guy who sent the bogus wire knew quite a bit about the poor simp's business affairs, so the said poor simp—Harry P. Wanniker—beat it for Folkestone and made for the burg of Paris, France. It didn't take the poor simp long to smell a large size in rodents, and an association of ideas made him think of Sir Aubrey Allen, the Bad Man.

"Allen thought he'd got the poor simp out of the way, but the poor simp was not such a simp as Allen imagined, for he hired a plane and flew from Paris to Croydon. Yes,

sir! Harry P. gave the white-faced Allen a playful dig. "What do you think of that, son?"

"I—I don't know what you're talking about," stammered the baronet. "And don't waggle those rods!"

"Don't let the guns worry you, son," drawled Wanniker. "I ain't going to shoot you up—yet. I want you to hear Part Two of the Bed-time Story. You're a sick cuss, Allen, and I hand it to you, but you weren't quite slick enough over this job. Having noted the bed-time I've got an idea that you went out of your way to land me—you arranged to kidnap my team. What's more, you did it! Also, you substituted the crowd of boobs who made an unholly mess of things this afternoon.

"Seeing that I fell for the wire, you reckoned that I would have to stay in France until Monday morning, by which time you'd have got your thieving-irons on my cheque and passed it through my bank. Having made the poor simp poorer by twenty-five thousand pounds, you would have told him to do his worst. You'd have denied that knowledge of the deception, and vowed that you were in no way going to do with the kidnapping of the Stiffs."

"And you might have got away with it, Bad Man!"

"But things haven't panned out according to plan, so you've got to pay the penalty. Yes, sir! I don't know anything about your British law, but I believe that it's blamed long-winded, and I haven't got time to kick about in this little old country for more than week or so; so, Bad Man, I'm going to take the law into my own hands!"

Allen shuddered and groaned as the automatics bored into his waistcoat.

"I—I don't understand!" he stammered.

"I'm going to hit you where it hurts you most—in the pocket," explained Wanniker.

"Listen, Bad Man! I give you until half-past to-morrow afternoon to find the missing player and lay it into my own hands; and see them on the Chelsea United ground on the stroke of time. Fail to produce those leather-chasers, Bad Man, and I go straight to the police and spill the whole yarn!"

Allen knew that the game was up. Bluffing would avail him nothing. But he was thinking about his twenty-five thousand, all the same.

"And—and what then?" he asked, his dark eyes fixed upon the guns.

"There's going to be a charity match between your team and the Chicago Stiffs," drawled the American, "and there's going to be twenty-five thousand aside on the game."

"I won't agree!" shouted Sir Aubrey, forgetting his panic for the moment. "I'll instruct my bank—"

"Say, Graine, do you mind phoning the cops?" asked Harry P. Wanniker.

"Wait! Wait, man!" cried Allen, as Harry drawled away with a short nod, I walked across to the telephone. "What is the idea, Wanniker? I may be able to fall in with it!"

"Say, you're cool, Bad Man!" grinned Wanniker. "The idea is simple. You bet the Villa and I back the Stiffs, and the fellow who loses gives twenty-five thousand to the City of London Hospital. That's all! You see, I'm still giving you a sporting chance, Bad Man!"

"Yes, so you are," put in Sir Aubrey, his cunning brain working at top speed. "I agree!"

"Good!" drawled Wanniker, pocketing his guns. "I'll see you to-morrow at half-past two."

Sir Aubrey Allen nodded, strutted across to the door, and passed out of the smoke-room, and his throaty chuckle floated back to the American's ears.

"Now, what the heck has that fellow got to laugh about?" asked Harry P. Wanniker, rubbing his lean chin. And his question was to be answered in less than twenty-four hours.

THE END.

(Look out for next week's long complete footer yarn, entitled: "Playing to Lose!"—and take the precaution of ordering your MAGNET early!)

To and from  
**Your Editor**

**MERRY CHRISTMAS TO MY CHUMS ALL OVER THE WORLD!**

ONCE again it is Your Editor's privilege to extend the time-honoured greeting to his myriad of loyal friends in every quarter of the globe. May you all enjoy the merriest Christmas of your lives, and may good health and prosperity attend you in the coming New Year! Let the fun be sweet and furious; let young and old participate in the joyful festivities of Yuletide.

Your Editor has made an honest endeavour to celebrate the present occasion by giving you a really top-hole Bumper Number, and you must agree that the programme is a particularly strong one. At Christmas it is customary to propose toasts; well, I would suggest one in advance: Fill your glasses to the top, raise them on high, and pledge the health of your favourite paper—the MAGNET! Eight hundred and eighty weeks have rolled by since this paper saw the light of day, six thousand one hundred and eighty-nine have set, and the good old MAGNET has appeared with the regularity of clockwork. A colossal achievement, you must admit, and worthy of the names of men like Frank Richards & Co.

**TO BEAT ALL RECORDS!**

In the coming year the MAGNET is out to beat all records. We are going to double the circulation; we are going to make the MAGNET the most-talked-of paper in the universe. I say we, for the deal depends upon my loyal readers. I want them to remove the wonderful reputation of the MAGNET, talk about its seventeen years of popularity, seventeen years! Why, any boy's paper with an A1 life like that speaks for itself! All your non-reader pals must be introduced to those delightful characters, Harry Wharton & Co. And if they don't take to them at first I'll forgo next year's Christmas pudding! Rally round, boys! Let us make a concentrative effort to bring the MAGNET into every cottage!

Next Monday—

**"FRIENDS OR FOES?"**

That is the title of the next long complete story from the pen of Mr. Frank Richards. The principal roles are taken by Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent. These one-time firm friends are fast becoming apart. Misunderstanding upon misunderstanding widens the gap between them. And, strangely enough, both these juniors are in the right—from their own individual point of view. For each character writing this story cannot be beaten. Mr. Richards has gone right down to rock bottom in his delineation of Nugent and Wharton's character. In the background of the yarn stands William George Bunter, highly pleased at a certain amount of attention he has received. But perhaps W. G. B.'s unisical cachinnations will make a sudden death. Who knows? Mind you read next week's ripping story, boys!

**PRESENTATION ART PLATE!**

With every copy of next week's MAGNET there will be given away a wonderful photograph plate of a torpedo-boat destroyer. Vivacious makes No. 9 of the superb series of MAGNET Free Gifts. This coming Art Plate is a real beauty, boys, adding yet another "good mark" against your collection of warships. Don't miss it!

**"PLAYING TO LOSE!"**

The next Storydrive footer yarn sees a stirring tussle between the Villa and the Chicago Stiffs. Whether it will be such a walk-over for the British team as Sir Aubrey Alien imagines remains to be seen. Sir Aubrey is beginning to appreciate the old saying, "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and lip." He can talk, he can throw his money about like water, but money can't accomplish everything. I rather fancy that the pompous baronet will hardly come back upon this Christmas with any feelings of pleasure. Look out for this coming Soccer yarn, chums. It's bang in the net!

**"A KNIGHT OF THE ROAD!"**

By way of a change, a special story of the famous highwayman, Dick Turpin, will take the place—for one week only—of the "Bard" Supplement. We hear a lot of the "good old days," and I rather fancy that Magnetites are more than partial to stories dealing with these stirring times. Well, here's a page from the past, as it were, on the programme for our next issue. Stand—and order your order for next Monday's MAGNET now!

**LONDON READER WINS AN £8 BIKE!**

Result of Magnet "Characters" Competition (Mark Linley).

In this competition a prize of a GENT'S "ROYAL ENFIELD" CYCLES has been awarded to—

CHARLES W. WILKINS,

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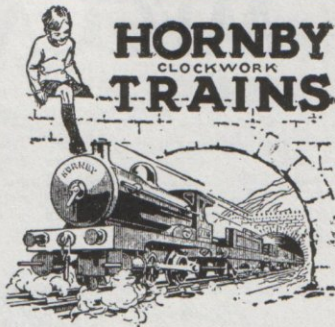
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This is a splendid new book that tells all about Hornby Trains and all the other Meccano Products. A copy will be sent post free to those boys who show this advertisement to three chums. Send us their names and addresses together with your own. Address your letter to Dept. U.



**MECCANO LIMITED  
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# MECCANO

ENGINEERING FOR BOYS

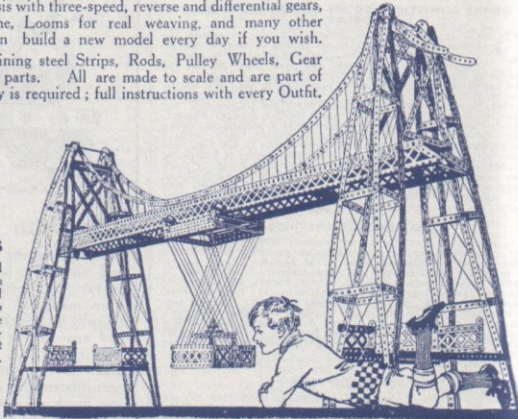
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No. 6	Wood	14/0
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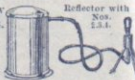


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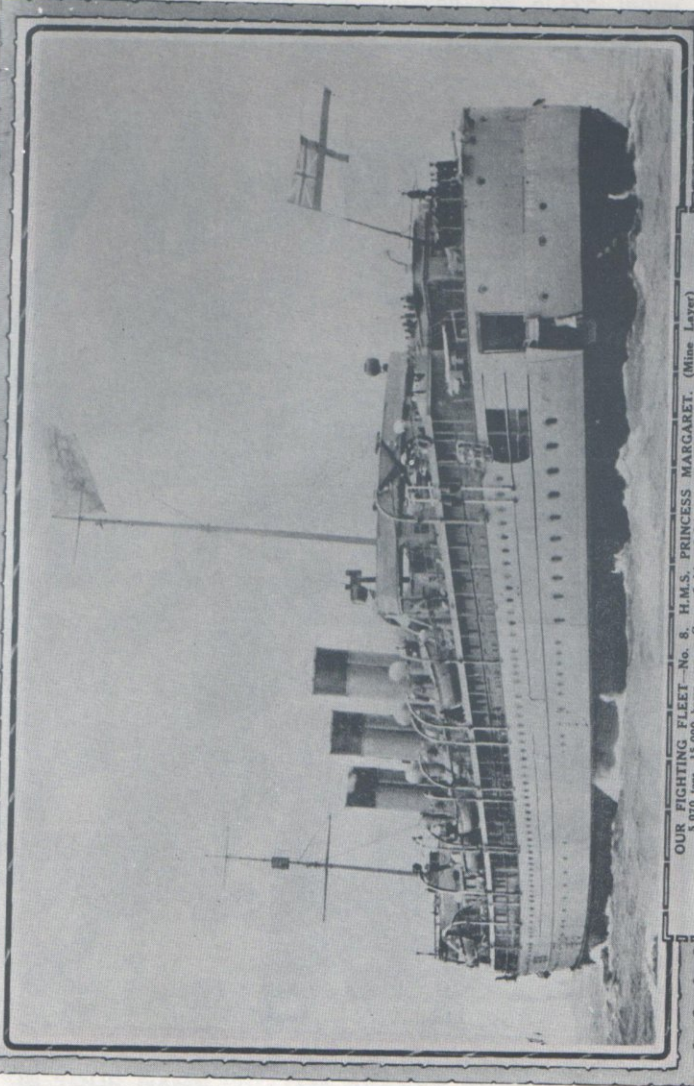
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