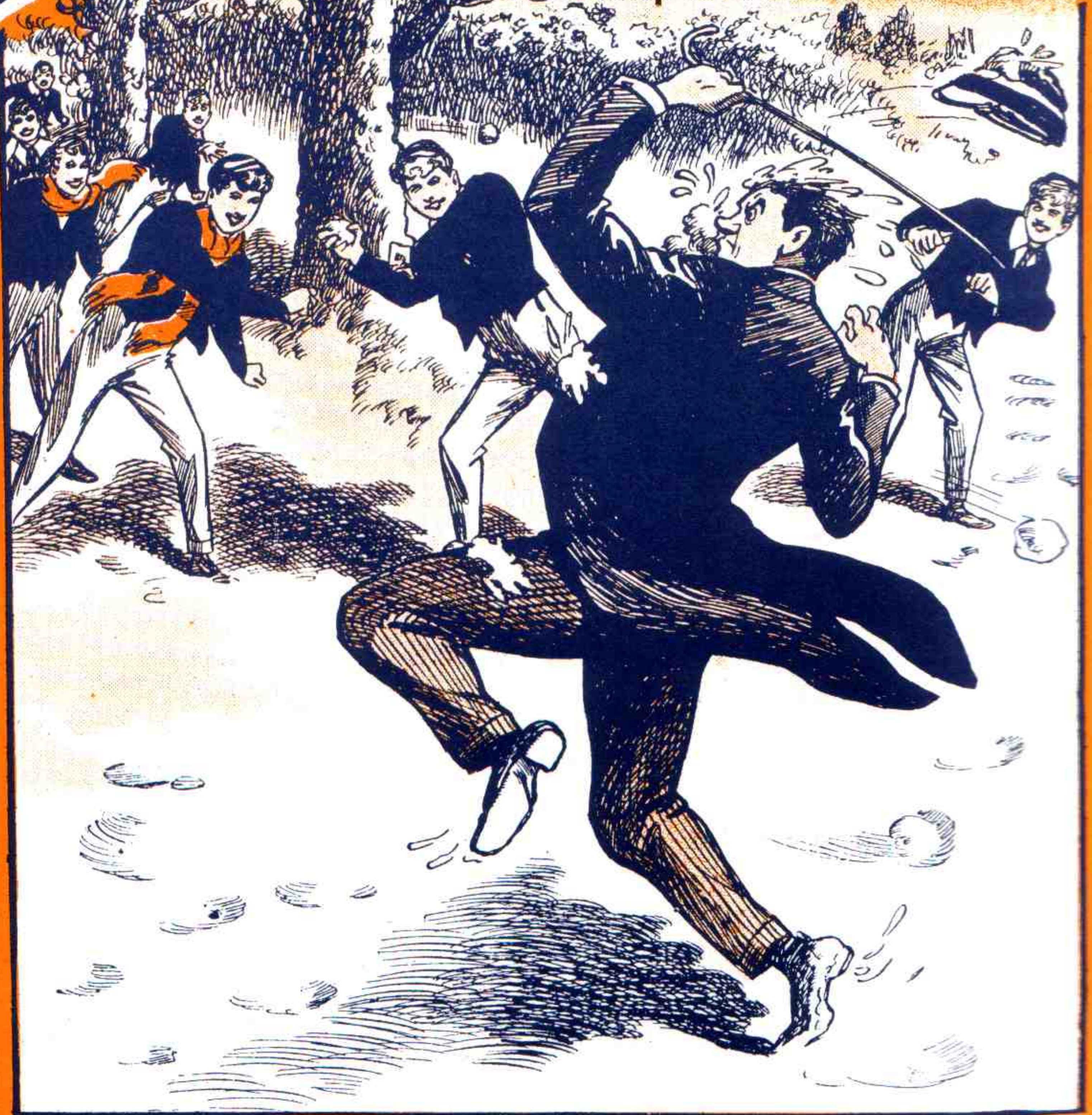


SPECIAL · CHRISTMAS · NUMBER

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A CHRISTMAS BOX FOR THE TYRANT OF THE SIXTH!

FOUND WANTING! *Gerald Loder has attained his ambition—he has, by decidedly shady means, become captain of Greyfriars. But Loder is to be compared with the round peg in the square hole: they don't fit! Neither does Loder shine to advantage in the captaincy!*



A New Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars, dealing with their adventures during the Christmas Holidays. By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Unexpected!



SNOW!" "Good!" Second lesson was drawing to its close in the Remove Form-room at Greyfriars. Harry Wharton, the captain of the Form, was going along the desks collecting papers to be handed in to Mr. Quelch, sitting in state at the Form-master's high desk.

All that morning the sky had been overcast, and the Remove fellows hoped that it meant snow. Evidently it did, for now the snow was coming down in thick flakes which the December wind dashed against the panes of the Form-room windows.

"Snow!" Bob Cherry looked round at the windows with great satisfaction. "Good egg!"

"The snowfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with much less satisfaction. Snow was not quite so welcome to the dusky junior from India's coral strand.

Bob looked at the Form-room clock. It was close on time for morning break, and in Bob's opinion Mr. Quelch might very well have advanced the time for dismissing his Form by a few minutes. It was the first snow of the winter; the first outward and visible sign that Christmas was coming. But Mr. Quelch did not even seem to notice it; and certainly he gave no sign of intending to dismiss his Form before the hour struck. Mr. Quelch's snowballing days were long over.

"Four minutes more!" yawned Bob. "Four jolly long minutes! And it's coming down in tons!"

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"We'll look for the Fourth as soon as we get out!" murmured Johnny Bull.

"Yes, rather—or for Loder of the Sixth!" grinned Bob. "What price snowballing the jolly old captain of Greyfriars?"

"Why not?" chuckled Nugent.

"Dash it all, I really think Quelch might let us off a few minutes early," grunted Bob. "The old scout must have been a boy himself once upon a time!"

"Cherry!"

"Oh!" Bob Cherry had been speaking in subdued tones. But Bob's voice was so powerful that it had great carrying powers, even when subdued. Indeed, it had been said that when Bob was whispering it was hard to tell any difference between his whispering and another fellow's shouting. That was an exaggeration; but certainly Bob's voice had reached the ears of his Form master.

"You were speaking, I think, Cherry."

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"I think I have told you several times—in fact a great many times—that I do not permit chattering in the Form-room," said Mr. Quelch severely.

"Oh, yes, sir!" murmured Bob meekly.

Mr. Quelch was frowning; and that frown might mean detention. The bare thought of being detained over morning break, when the first snow of December was falling in the quad, dismayed Bob. He looked as meek and repentant as he could; indeed, his expression indicated that butter would not have melted in his mouth. But the Remove master's gimlet-eyes fixed on him grimly.

"The Form will be dismissed in a few minutes, Cherry! You should have

reserved your remarks, howsoever important, until then."

This was sarcasm; Mr. Quelch was often sarcastic. Bob Cherry groaned inwardly. "Quelch's sarc" might, or might not, mean detention over morning break. Sometimes Mr. Quelch was content with scarifying a junior with his sarcastic tongue. Sometimes he was not.

"You were speaking to Nugent, Cherry?"

"Yes, sir."

"On a matter so very important that it could not wait until the Form was dismissed?" inquired Mr. Quelch.

This was more "sarc," and some of the Removites grinned. Bob Cherry's ruddy face was growing ruddier.

"N-n-no, sir!" he stammered.

"Kindly repeat what you said to Nugent, Cherry, and I will judge of its importance," said Mr. Quelch.

"Oh!" gasped Bob.

His face was crimson.

Mr. Quelch had heard his voice, but had not caught the words he had uttered. Those words were quite harmless in themselves; but not exactly words that he could repeat to his Form master. Really, Bob wished that Mr. Quelch had taken up the case instead of indulging in sarcasm.

"Did you hear me, Cherry?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Bob.

"I am waiting!"

"Oh!"

Many eyes in the Remove turned curiously on Bob Cherry. His reluctance to repeat what he said to Nugent was obvious. Fellows who had overheard his remark grinned; other fellows stared at him, wondering what on earth he could possibly have said.

Mr. Quelch's look grew grimmer as Bob remained crimson and tongue-tied. His gimlet-eyes glinted.

"Cherry!" His voice resembled the rumble of distant thunder now.

"Yes, sir!" groaned Bob.

"I have directed you to repeat what you said to Nugent."

"I—I know, sir."

"Are you unwilling to repeat that remark, whatever it was?"

"Ye-e-es, sir!"

"Cherry!" The thunder was quite near now. "Cherry! Am I to understand that you made a remark to a Form-fellow which you cannot venture to repeat in the hearing of your Form-master?"

"Oh, dear!"

Mr. Quelch stepped from his desk. He was no longer sarcastic; he was wrathful.

"Cherry! I order you to repeat what you said to Nugent!"

"I—I——"

"It—it was quite a harmless remark, sir," stammered Frank Nugent.

"If it was a harmless remark, Nugent, Cherry need have no hesitation in repeating it to me. I am waiting, Cherry."

"I—I——" stuttered Bob.

"You force me to the conclusion, Cherry, that you made an observation which you are ashamed to repeat!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

Bob Cherry's crimson face grew, if possible, more crimson. His dismayed countenance had a complexion resembling that of a freshly-boiled beetroot.

"Oh, no, sir! Nothing of the kind," he stammered.

"I give you one more opportunity, Cherry, of repeating to me your words, whatever they were! Otherwise I shall take you to the Head."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Do not utter ridiculous ejaculations in speaking to me, Cherry."

"Oh! Oh, no, sir! Certainly not," stammered the unhappy Bob. "I—I—I——"

"For the last time, Cherry, will you or will you not repeat your words?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"I—I will if—if you wish, sir!" gasped Bob. "I—I said——"

"Well, what did you say?"

"I—I said that Quelch really might let us off a few minutes early, sir, and—and that the old scout had been a boy himself once upon a time," gasped Bob Cherry.

For a moment there was silence in the Form-room. Then from all the Remove came a howl of merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Silence! Silence, I say! The next boy who laughs will be caned."

The merriment ceased as if by magic.

"Cherry! You—you alluded to me—to your Form master, as—as an old scout!"

"I—I—I—— You see, sir, it's snowing!" stammered Bob.

"Snowing!" repeated Mr. Quelch. "I see that it is snowing. What has that to do with the matter?"

Really, it was a long time since Mr. Quelch had been a schoolboy—so long that he seemed to have forgotten all about it.

"I—I was thinking of—of snowballing, sir," said Bob. "That's why I said what I did, sir. You made me tell you, sir."

Mr. Quelch gave him a fixed look.

"You spoke of me as—as—as Quelchy!"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"You alluded to me as an old—an old scout?"

"Oh dear! Yes, sir!" groaned Bob, losing his last hope of participating in a snow-fight in morning break.

There was a pause. Harry Wharton laid the papers he had collected upon the Remove master's desk. All eyes were upon Mr. Quelch, and the Remove fellows wondered whether Bob was to be caned, or reported to Dr. Locke for a flogging, or given detention for the remaining half-holidays of the term. When Mr. Quelch opened his lips at last the Remove hung on his words.

But he uttered only one word. The hand of the Form-room clock pointed to eleven.

"Dismiss!"

Mr. Quelch went back to his desk. Bob Cherry stared at him, dumbfounded. It really seemed too good to be true.

But it was true. The matter was closed. Possibly some recollection of his ancient boyish days had percolated into Mr. Quelch's scholastic mind as he gazed at Bob's crimson, rueful face. He bent over the papers at his desk as the Remove filed slowly out; and some of the fellows, stealing glances at him as they passed, were amazed to see a smile on his face. In the corridor outside the Form-room Bob Cherry fairly gasped with relief.

"Quelchy—I mean, Mr. Quelch—isn't a bad sort, you fellows," he said. "He's quite a decent old scout—I mean, old gentleman!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "The Fourth are out, and there's lots of snow! Come on!"

And with a joyous whoop the Removites rushed out into the falling snow.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Lesson for Loder!



"I SAY, you fellows!"
"Bow-wow!"
"But, I say——"
roared Billy Bunter.
"Don't bother, old fat man," said Bob Cherry. "Can't you see we're busy? Lend a hand in whopping the

Fourth."

"Go it, Remove!" shouted Johnny Bull.

"Back up, Remove! Give 'em beans!"
"Hurrah!"

Morning break was a lively time at Greyfriars that morning. The heroes of the Remove were making the most of the first snow-fall of the season.

The snow had ceased to fall for a time. It had been brief, but it had been thick. The quadrangle was powdered with white, the leafless trees stretched out gleaming white branches against the steely sky. Roofs and ridges and window-sills gleamed with it. And there was plenty of ammunition for a snowball scrap, which was the important point.

Temple, Dabney, & Co. of the Fourth had not been averse from a scrap. In fact, they looked upon this as a good opportunity for licking the Remove, so they met the Removites more than half-way. But victory did not smile on them—they were driven back before the Lower Fourth attack, under showers of whizzing snowballs, and penned up in the corner by the school shop, where they rallied and stood at bay. The Removites closed in on them with loud shouts, raining snowballs.

Bob Cherry had just landed a missile upon the lofty nose of Cecil Reginald Temple, captain of the Fourth, when Billy Bunter grabbed at his sleeve. Bob had no time to waste on Billy Bunter. He whizzed another ball at Cecil Reginald Temple, and caught him under the chin, and Cecil Reginald sat down with a heavy thump and a gasp, and Fry of the Fourth, staggering under a volley, stumbled over him and sat down.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "Give 'em beans! Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's Coker of the Fifth! Give Coker some!"

Horace Coker of the Fifth Form came out of the school shop. He stared disdainfully at the hilarious juniors.

Whiz! Whiz!
"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Coker of the Fifth.

Whiz! Smash! Crash!
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Horace Coker sat down on the step in the tuckshop doorway.

"I say, Bob Cherry——"
"Chuck it, Bunter!"

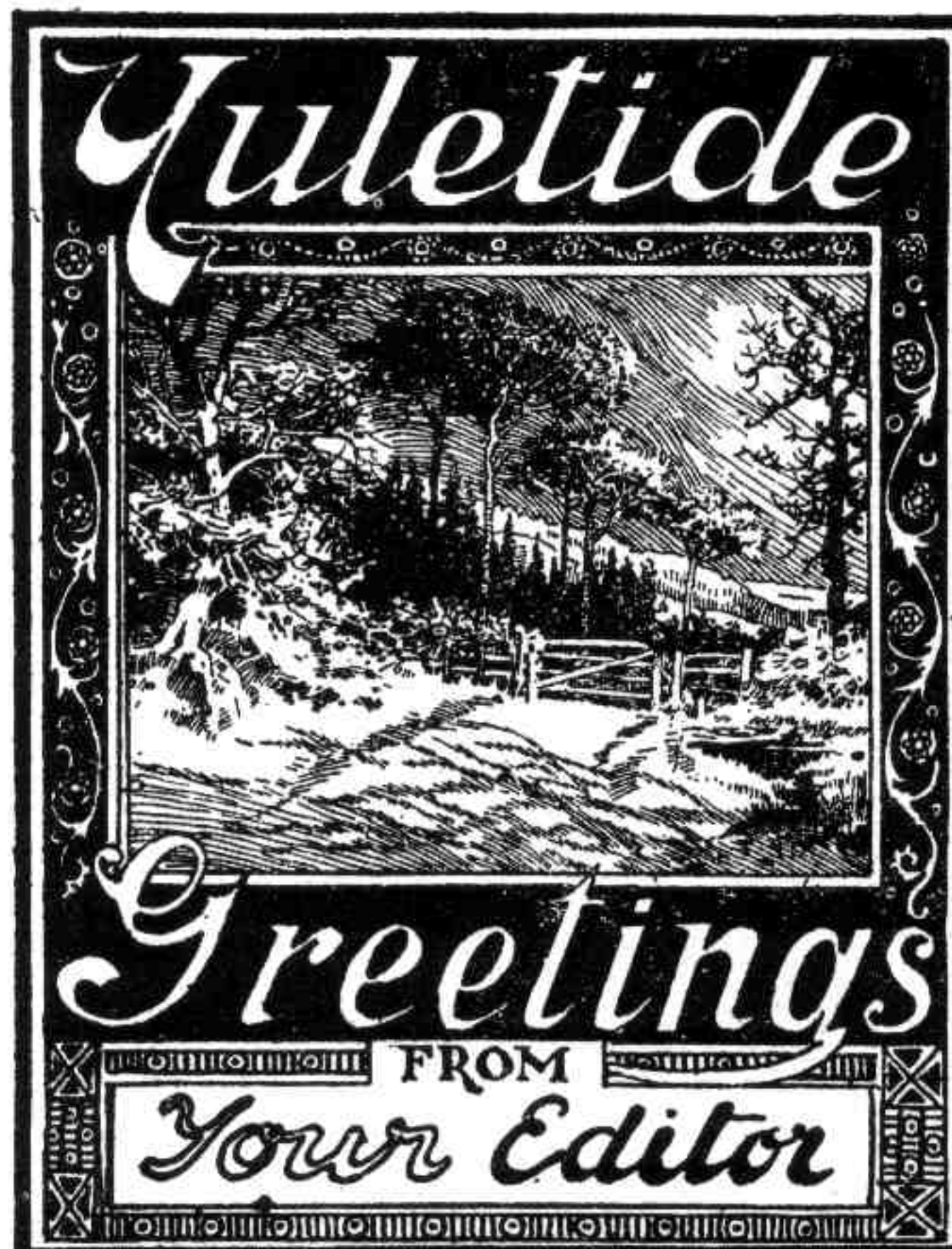
"That cad Loder——"

"Blow Loder!"

"I've been kicked!" yelled Bunter indignantly.

"All the better—you need kicking! Don't bother!" And Bob, grabbing up handfuls of snow, continued to bombard the Fourth-formers.

But the Fourth had had enough by this time, and they scattered and rushed for cover. Coker of the Fifth, recovering his breath, charged at the Removites, heedless of whizzing snowballs, and was not satisfied till he had been collared by a dozen pairs of hands,





and rolled in the snow, and left for dead, as it were.

Then Temple, Dabney & Co. having been put to full flight, and Coker of the Fifth placed hors de combat, the heroes of the Remove, like Alexander of old, looked round for other worlds to conquer. And then it was that the indignant William George Bunter was heeded at last.

"What about Loder?" asked Bob Cherry. "It will be the first time in history that a captain of Greyfriars has been snowballed by juniors, but a lot of new things have happened since Loder became captain of the school. Let's give him a turn!"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"He's chucked up ragging and fagging us," he said. "So long as he's letting us alone, let's let him rip."

"He's kicked Bunter."

"Bunter! Well, anybody can kick Bunter. Bunter was born to be kicked."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!" roared William George Bunter indignantly. "Beast! I say, you fellows, Loder kicked me, and I wasn't doing anything! Just because I wouldn't fag for him the other day, of course! Just reached out with his boot as I was passing him, and kicked me."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, Bunter belongs to the Remove, though he doesn't do it any credit," he said. "Remove men can't be kicked. Let's give Loder some!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I say, you fellows, he's walking under the elms. He was rowing with Carne and Walker, and he's in a jolly bad temper!"

"We'll give him something to cure that," chuckled Bob Cherry. "Come on, you fellows!"

There was a rush of the Removites with snowballs in their hands. The feud between the Greyfriars Remove and the new captain of Greyfriars had slumbered, but there was no love lost on either side.

Loder of the Sixth seemed to have given up his attempt to fag the Remove. He had found that unruly Form a little too much for him. He had even refrained of late from a too liberal use of the ashplant, he had not distributed cuffs with his accustomed freedom. Still, he had kicked Bunter—letting his evil temper go for once, once more. If Loder of the Sixth wanted trouble, the Remove were prepared to hand it out in any quantities desired. So they rushed under the elms to look for Loder of the Sixth.

Gerald Loder undoubtedly was in a bad temper that morning.

He had had hot words with his pals, Carne and Walker, who till late had backed him up through thick and thin. He was on the worst of terms with most of the Sixth Form, and the Fifth loathed him. As for the junior Forms, they always had loathed Loder, and, if possible, they loathed him a little more since he had become captain of the school and it had got into his head.

Loder's star seemed to be on the wane. He was still captain of Greyfriars, but the power was going from his hands. A captain and head prefect who "backed down" in a contest with a junior Form was not the kind of man to keep permanent authority at Greyfriars. It was dawning even upon Loder's obstinate and conceited mind that he was not making a success of his captaincy. He had succeeded in ousting George Win-

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gate and supplanting him—that kind of trickery was quite within his powers. But to fill Wingate's place as Wingate had filled it—that was far beyond the powers of Gerald Loder. And even Loder himself was beginning to be uncomfortably conscious of what all the rest of Greyfriars had long been.

He was tramping under the elms, with his hands in his pockets and a dark scowl on his face. In his present mood it was no wonder that he had given Billy Bunter a kick in passing in return for a cheeky grin, or a grin that Loder chose to consider cheeky.

But even Billy Bunter, insignificant and unimportant person as he was, could not be kicked with impunity in the present frame of mind of the Remove. Loder glanced round as he heard a rush of footsteps and a shout; and he turned his head just in time to catch a snowball with his nose.

"Ooooch!"

Whiz, whiz, whiz!

Crash! Smash!

"Give him beans!" roared Bob Cherry.

Loder fairly staggered under the rain of snowballs from all sides.

He was the only prefect at Greyfriars whom the juniors would have ventured to snowball; but Loder's authority had lost its terrors. Now he was fallen from his high estate, and great was the fall thereof.

"You young rascals!" gasped Loder. "Oh! Ooooch! You young scoundrels! Groogh! Oh, my hat! Why, I'll smash you—Yooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him some more!" yelled Peter Todd. "Keep it going!"

Loder made a fierce rush at the juniors. Vernon-Smith was nearest him, and he collared Smithy.

"Rescue!" roared the Bounder.

"Pile in!" bawled Bob Cherry.

In a moment the Removites were collaring Loder on all sides, and he came down with a bump in the snow.

"Roll him!" shouted Harry Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groogh—oooch! Gug-gug! Oh—Ow!" spluttered Loder, as he was rolled headlong in the thick snow.

The Removites roared with laughter as they rolled him. Loder's hat disappeared, his collar flew open, his coat split up the back. The juniors were not handling him gently. He was smothered with snow, almost suffocated with it. He struggled wildly in the grasp of numberless hands, gasping and panting and spluttering.

"Stop that!"

It was a sharp voice, and the juniors looked round in surprise from the spluttering Loder at Wingate of the Sixth.

— —

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Finger of Scorn!



GEORGE WINGATE hurried up.

"Stop that!" he rapped out a second time.

"Oh, draw it mild, Wingate!" exclaimed the Bounder warmly.

"You're not captain of

Greyfriars now, you know!"

"You're jolly well not!" exclaimed Skinner. "You're not even a prefect. Mind your own bizney!"

"Shut up, Skinner!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Wingate was no longer in authority; but he was still "old Wingate," and most of the Removites were willing to render him the obedience they obstinately refused to the fellow who had supplanted him.

"Cheese it, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton. "We don't cheek Wingate, you know. Wingate's all right."

"But what are you butting in for, Wingate?" demanded the Bounder. "What the merry dickens does it matter to you how we handle Loder?"

George Wingate frowned.

"It does matter," he said. "Loder is captain of Greyfriars. There's such a thing as respect for a fellow's position, if not for the fellow himself. Let Loder alone at once!"

"That's all very well——"

"I'm not a prefect now," said Wingate quietly. "I can't give you orders as a prefect. But as a Sixth Form man I can't see juniors handling one of the Sixth. Chuck it, and cut off!"

There were rebellious looks among some of the Removites. Any other Sixth Form man, not a prefect, would certainly have been disregarded—probably rolled in the snow along with Loder. But the cheekiest junior at Greyfriars would never have dreamed of handling Wingate.

"Oh, any old thing, dear man!" said Bob Cherry. "After all, I dare say Loder's had enough for kicking Bunter."

"I say, you fellows, he hasn't had enough!" howled Bunter. "Give him some more. Let a fellow get near enough to kick him. Blow Wingate!"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Blow Wingate, I tell you! Who's Wingate, I'd like to know? I don't give twopence for Wingate! I—Groooooogh!" spluttered Bunter, as Bob Cherry stopped his too-active mouth with a snowball.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All serene, Wingate!" said Harry Wharton cheerfully. "Come on, you chaps. It's only a minute to the bell now, anyhow."

And the Removites trooped off, leaving Gerald Loder sprawling and spluttering breathlessly in the snow.

Wingate stooped, and gave him a hand to rise.

There was contempt in his face as he did so. A captain of Greyfriars who was handled like this, by a mob of Lower boys, was not a fellow whom George Wingate could respect.

Loder staggered to his feet, and shook off Wingate's helping hand savagely.

His eyes gleamed at the ex-captain of Greyfriars.

He was glad enough to be rescued from the ragging Removites. But it was gall and wormwood to him to be rescued by George Wingate. Captain of the school, head prefect, his word had no weight with the raggers; and Wingate, invested with no authority whatever, had had only to speak a word to be immediately obeyed.

"I never asked you to meddle, Wingate," said Loder, in a choking voice. His rage and chagrin were almost too great to allow him to speak.

Wingate shrugged his shoulders.

"You looked as if you needed help," he said.

"You rotter!" hissed Loder. "You're responsible for this! You've been against me ever since I became captain of Greyfriars. You rotter!"

Wingate looked at him with cool contempt.

"That's not so," he said, "you got into the captaincy by dirty trickery. But I would have backed you up if you'd

a young brother here who haunts pubs and plays cards with beery loafers."

Wingate's eyes blazed.

"And who led him into it?" he said.

"You—a Sixth Form man and a pre-

"Hallo, Loder, old bean! Had a rough time?"

Loder did not answer that question; he hurried on. Hobson and Hoskins and Stewart of the Shell passed him and grinned at him. Loder affected not to observe the cheeky grinning of Hobson & Co.

He hurried into the House, and sounds of laughter followed him. Gwynne of the Sixth met him in the hall with a smiling face.

"Still fagging the Remove, Loder?" he asked.

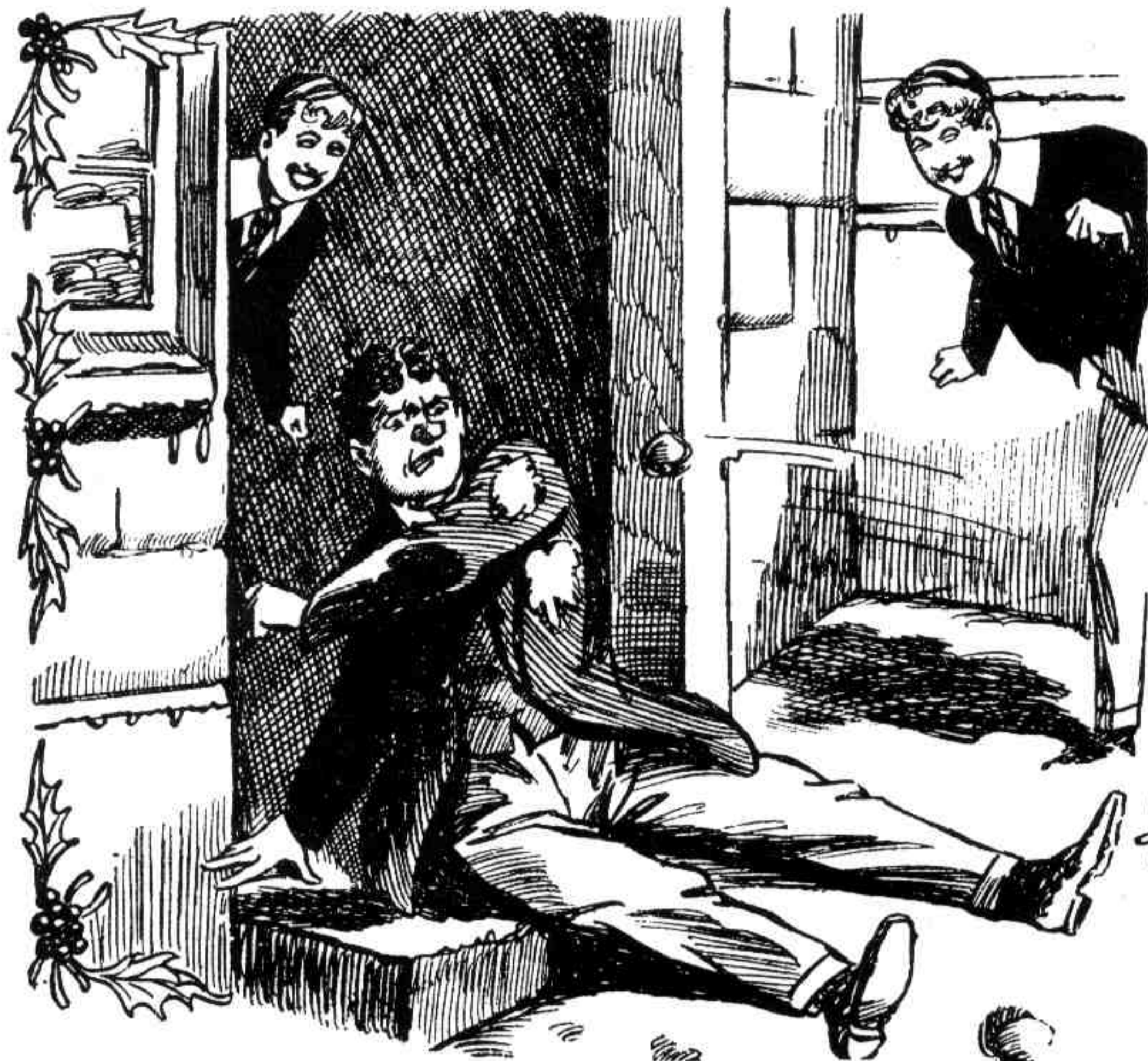
Loder gave him a look of hatred and passed on, leaving Gwynne laughing. When he turned up in the Sixth Form-room a little later he found many smiling faces in the Sixth.

After class he went out with his friends, Walker and Carne, and, with suppressed fury, noted the lurking smiles on their faces.

"I suppose you're reporting those cheeky young cads to the Head, Loder?" asked Carne.

"No!" snapped Loder.

"Head rather fed-up with your reports?" asked Walker blandly. "You've given him a good few since you've been captain! More in a few weeks than Wingate gave him in three terms."



been fit for the job. You weren't. You've made enemies in every form; you've set the whole Lower School into an uproar—you've provoked the Remove into resistance—you've done everything you shouldn't have done, and done it rottenly. You've brought the captaincy into contempt. Who ever heard of a captain of Greyfriars being mobbed in the quadrangle by a crew of Lower boys? That's what you have brought it to."

Loder gritted his teeth.

It was true enough; he had stretched his new authority too far, and it had broken in his hands.

"The whole school knows it," went on Wingate bitterly, "the Head knows it, too—he's learned, by this time, the kind of captain you make. You've worried him with so many reports and complaints that's he's found that you cannot maintain authority—to such an extent that you dare not go to him again when the Lower boys mob you in the quad. If you reported these kids the Head would flog them for handling the captain of the school, as he's done before. And he would very likely ask you to resign the captaincy—and that's what you fear."

Loder panted.

"At any rate, you would never get it back," he said, with a savage sneer. "You had to resign yourself, and do you think I don't know the reason? You'd have had to report your minor for pub-haunting, if you'd remained a prefect and captain of Greyfriars. And if the Head knew what you ought to have reported to him, your minor would be sacked from Greyfriars. I may not have made a success of the job, so far; but at any rate I shall never have to resign for a reason like that. I haven't

fect—you led him into that, to make him serve your turn against me!"

"Tell that yarn to the Head!" sneered Loder. "Do you think he is likely to believe anything of the kind?"

"No—even if I would tell him," said Wingate. "But you know it is the truth; and you know that that is why I thrashed you in the prefects' room! Pah! You make me sick!"

Wingate turned and swung away.

Loder of the Sixth brushed the snow from his clothes as well as he could, and picked up his hat and brushed it. From various directions he could see fellows looking at him and smiling at one another. That ragging under the elms had had plenty of witnesses.

Loder's face burned as he hurried away to the House.

"And that's the captain of the school!" he heard Blundell of the Fifth say contemptuously to Potter. "That's the captain of Greyfriars—mobbed by a gang of fags! What is the school coming to?"

"And he lets them do it!" grinned Potter.



"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "There's Coker of the Fifth! Give him some!" Whiz! "Yaroooooh! Yowp!" A carefully aimed snowball found its billet, and Coker sat down heavily on the step in the tuck-shop doorway, roaring! (See Chapter 2.)



"Mind your own business."

"Well, really, 'old bean, it is a fellow's business, you know," said James Walker in an argumentative tone. "You're making the captaincy a regular laughing-stock; and you're letting down the Sixth! How the thump are we to make the juniors toe the line and obey orders when they rag our head prefect? I put it to you, Loder?"

"Keep clear of the Remove, at any rate," advised Carne, rubbing it in, as it were. "The Head's too fed for you to drag him into your rows any more, and you can't make them respect you yourself. Give them a miss, Loder—that's a friend's advice."

Loder almost choked.

He was getting this from his own familiar friends, and he could judge by it what the rest of Greyfriars thought of him—fellows who were not his friends.

"You see——" went on Walker, evidently in a lecturing mood.

But Loder was not in a mood for lectures, if James Walker was. Lectures are on the list of the many things which it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Loder turned on his heel and walked away, turning his back on his candid friends.

"Some captain!" yawned Walker.

"I believe you!" said Carne.

And they laughed as they walked on. Gerald Loder had reached the summit of his ambition—he had "downed" his old rival and taken his place—but his triumph seemed to be turning to ashes in his mouth. Even his own familiar friends mocked him, and in all Greyfriars there was none so poor as to do him reverence.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Jack Wingate's Secret!



THAT little rotter!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Well, you see——"
Grunt!

"I suppose he's rather a little rotter," admitted Harry Wharton. "But he's Wingate's minor. And I've

noticed a lot of times lately that he's been looking awfully down in the mouth."

Another grunt from Johnny Bull. Johnny did not approve of Jack Wingate of the Third Form—and when Johnny Bull did not approve he never hesitated to make the fact known.

"Oh, let's ask the kid to tea!" said Frank Nugent good-naturedly. "There must be some good in him, or old Wingate wouldn't think so much of him as he does."

Grunt!

"My belief is that that young cad had something to do with old Wingate resigning the captaincy when he did," said Johnny Bull. "We know that he took to pub-hunting—we saw him once ourselves at the Cross Keys—and there's a yarn that Coker of the Fifth caught him there and walloped him."

"Like Coker's cheek! He's not a prefect. Fifth Form ass!" said Bob Cherry.

"Coker's a cheeky ass, I know; but that young rascal wanted a hiding, if a young rotter ever did," said Johnny Bull. "I know he gave old Wingate no end of trouble; he was thick with Loder of the Sixth for a time, too; and decent kids don't suck up to Sixth Form prefects. The Third used to rag

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him for bragging about his friend in the Sixth."

"Well, I can't say I like the young sweep much," confessed Harry Wharton. "But he's Wingate's brother, and we might be civil to him on that account. Christmas is coming, too—and at Christmas a fellow is supposed to hand out peace and good will and so on. Let's ask him."

"Oh, I don't mind!" said Johnny Bull. "Most likely he will give you some cheek, and tell you that he's been asked to tea in the Sixth, and wouldn't dream of teeing in a Lower Fourth study."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, if he hands out any cheek a fellow can always kick him," he said. "But the fact is young Wingate seems a bit changed to me. Loder dropped him like a hot brick after he got the captaincy; he was only keeping up with the young ass to bother old Wingate. And I haven't seen him smoking cigar-

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ettes for a long time; he seems to have chucked it. Anyhow, improving society does a kid good when he's inclined to kick over the traces—and our society is no end improving, isn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, ask him!" said Johnny Bull. "If he cheeks us in the study we'll boot him out!"

"Done!" said Harry.

And, leaving his four chums making preparations for the spread in Study No. 1, the captain of the Remove went down the staircase and proceeded to the Third Form room, where he expected to find Wingate minor.

There were a good many of the Third in the room when Wharton looked in, but he did not observe Jack Wingate among them.

"Where's young Wingate?" he called out.

Tubb of the Third looked round.

"Mooching about somewhere by himself, I suppose," he answered carelessly. "He generally is."

Paget of the Third chuckled.

"The dear youth hasn't been so merry and bright since he lost his friend in

the Sixth," he remarked. "Sad end to a friendship, you know."

And the fags chortled.

"Well, I'm looking for him," said Harry. "Hasn't anybody seen him?"

"I saw him mooching in the quad a while back," said Bolsover minor. "He wasn't looking bright. I asked him whether he'd made any more friends in the Sixth, and he looked quite savage."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton smiled as he walked away from the Third Form-room. It was likely to be a long time before Jack Wingate heard the last of his "friend in the Sixth." Since the sudden end of his friendship with Gerald Loder the Third had received him back into the fold, as it were; but they chipped him unmercifully. The foolish fag had to pay for his folly.

Wharton left the House and looked round in the quad. The December dusk was falling, and most fellows were in the House. Wharton called to Hazeldene of the Remove, who was coming over from the gates.

"Seen Wingate minor?"

"No, and don't want to," answered Hazel, walking on.

"Here, young Bunter!" Sammy Bunter, of the Second Form, loomed up in the gathering gloom. "Seen young Wingate?"

Sammy Bunter grinned.

"Yes, I saw him under the elms. He was blubbing."

"Blubbing!" repeated Harry.

"Yes. He, he, he! I asked him whether he had been licked, and the cheeky young beast chucked a snowball at me. I suppose he's been licked, as he was blubbing. He, he, he!"

Sammy Bunter rolled on, chuckling a fat chuckle, apparently much entertained by the circumstance that Wingate minor was "blubbing" in the shadows under the leafless old elms in the winter dusk.

Harry Wharton frowned a little. He wondered whether Loder had been "taking it out" of Wingate minor. He more than suspected that Loder had made some use of the foolish fag in bringing about the downfall of Wingate major; and certainly since Loder had become captain of the school he had been very severe with the scapegrace of the Third. Possibly that was the way Loder's conscience worked—if he had a conscience.

Wharton crossed over in the deepening dusk, and peered among the old trees. The shadows were deep there, and his footsteps made no sound on the soft carpet of snow.

A sudden sound came to his ears from the darkness under the elms.

It was a sob.

Wharton started. The sound touched his heart strangely, as it came to his ears from the deep shadows.

He stepped in the direction of the sound. In the gloom he made out a diminutive figure sitting, half-crouched, on an old oaken bench under one of the trees.

"Wingate minor!" he exclaimed.

The figure moved suddenly, as if startled. A white face was turned quickly towards Wharton, and even in the gloom he could see that it was tear-stained.

"Who—who's that?" stammered Jack Wingate.

"It's I—Wharton! I was looking for you, kid," said the captain of the Remove, gently enough.



Wingate rushed across to the door and dragged it open. "Jack!" he cried. But the Sixth-Form passage was empty. His minor had gone to make a confession to the Head!

Jack Wingate drew a hard, sobbing breath.

"We want you to come to tea in the Remove," said Harry.

"Thanks! But I—I won't come."

"Has Loder been licking you?"

"Loder? No."

"I know he's been pretty hard on you lately," said Harry. "Look here, if he goes too far, we'll jolly well take the matter up! We've stopped him bullying and ragging the Remove."

"I don't care what Loder does," muttered the fag. "It—it isn't that."

"You're in trouble, kid?"

"Yes."

"Can't you tell a chap?" asked Harry. This pitiful little figure was strangely different from the cheeky, consequential young rascal who had bragged of his "friend in the Sixth," and Wharton's heart was touched. "Look here, young Wingate! If you're in a scrape I'll help you if I can, if only for your brother's sake. Have you been playing the goat again? Is that it?"

"No, no."

"Well, I'm glad of that, at all events," said Harry. "You gave old Wingate no end of trouble on that score, kid."

"I—I know."

"Well, what's the trouble, then?" asked Harry cheerily. "Two heads are better than one, you know. Perhaps I can help you out."

"You can't," said Jack Wingate huskily. "Nobody can help me! What I've done can't be undone."

"But you can't have done anything very bad," said Harry, in wonder. "Dash it all, young Wingate, aren't you making a mountain of a molehill? You don't mean to say that the Head's found out about your going down to the Cross Keys, after all this time? That was a good while back."

"No. He hasn't found me out," muttered Jack Wingate. "But—but I

should tell him, if I had the pluck, and—and I haven't!"

Wharton looked at him hard.

"Why should you tell him?" he asked. "It's over now, and if you've made up your mind to go straight, least said the soonest mended. It's over and done with now, anyhow."

"It's over, but it's not done with!" groaned the fag. "I—I'll tell you if you like. I'd be glad to tell somebody, and I know you won't shout it out. It was through me that my brother had to chuck up the captaincy of the school and give up his prefectship. It's through me that Loder's got the upper hand of him, and makes his life not worth living at Greyfriars. He's lost everything through me, and—and all the fellows are saying that there must be a new captain's election next term. But my brother can't put up for it—because of me! I've done for him."

"But how because of you?" asked Harry. "Was it through you that old Wingate resigned?"

"Yes," whispered the fag miserably.

"I've thought something of the kind," said Harry. "But—"

"He had to report me for pub- haunting. He found me at the Cross Keys, and he knew I'd been there often," faltered Jack Wingate. "He couldn't keep it dark, so he resigned, so as not to have to report me to the Head. He gave it all up to save me."

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

It was light at last. All Greyfriars had wondered why George Wingate had so suddenly and unaccountably resigned the captaincy of the school. Many had been the surmises on the subject, many the curious speculations, and Wingate had said no word. And now Wharton knew. It was the scapegrace of the Third who had brought about his brother's downfall. And Wharton's glance was dark and scornful as it turned on the wretched figure huddling on the shadowed bench under the elm.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

His Brother's Burden!



HARRY WHARTON stood silent. He was wondering.

More than once the suspicion had crossed his mind that Wingate minor had been the cause of his brother's downfall; that some-

how the wretched fag, in his wilful folly, had played into Loder's hands. He was not surprised by Wingate minor's confession. But what surprised him was the evident remorse that the fag was feeling now. Jack Wingate had gone on his own wilful, perverse way, regardless of his brother, till the catastrophe had come. Was it that catastrophe that had brought him to a better frame of mind, too late to undo the harm he had done? That, and the contemptuous indifference with which his "friend in the Sixth" had dropped him, when he was of no further use? No doubt that was it. But Wharton felt that there was something else. No doubt the scapegrace of the Third repented of the injury he had done his brother, repented of his unfeeling ingratitude. But Wharton felt that that would not account for all. He stood looking at the troubled, tear-stained face in the gloom of the December evening.

"And he's goin'!" Wingate minor said, in a choking voice. "I could have stood the rest, but he's going! That's what I've done."

Wharton started.

"Who's going—old Wingate?"

"Yes."

"Leaving Greyfriars?" exclaimed the captain of the Remove blankly.

"Yes. He's not coming back after the Christmas holidays."

"Oh!"

It was a shock to Wharton; and yet, after a moment or two of reflection, he was not surprised. There was no reason for surprise. George Wingate had been captain of the school, head prefect, head of the games, football captain—all the honours that could fall to a Sixth Form man had fallen thick upon him. Now he was deprived of all, and, under the orders of the fellow who had taken his place, a fellow he despised from the bottom of his heart. Already he had been awarded a "prefects' beating"—a deep and bitter humiliation for one who had held so high a position—already he had been turned out of the football.

His position was too humiliating for him to have any desire to keep on at Greyfriars. Every petty indignity that Loder's new position gave him the power to inflict, he inflicted on his fallen rival, and the passage of time did not lessen Loder's malice. Rather, it intensified as he heard every day disparaging comparisons made between his captaincy and that of his predecessor.

It was a shock, but it was not surprising that George Wingate had made up his mind not to return to Greyfriars after the Christmas vacation.

It was fairly certain that in the next term there would be a new captain's election. The whole school was fed-up with Gerald Loder. But Wingate was not free to make a bid for his old place. He could not do so so long as he had his wretched brother's secret to



"I've come to confess," said the fag. "It was through me my brother resigned the captaincy. I've ruined everything for him—and I can't stand it!" Dr. Locke's eyes fixed grimly on Wingate minor. (See Chapter 8.)



keep. He could not use his official position to shield his brother's wrongdoing. That was why he had resigned, and the same reason barred him from recovering what he had lost. No wonder he had decided to cut the whole thing; but it was a wonder to Wharton that the miserable fag, who had brought all the trouble on him, should stand by and let him do it. At least, Jack Wingate had the grace to be thoroughly wretched at the prospect.

"So that's it," said Harry, and he could not keep the scorn out of his voice. "No wonder you feel a bit cut up—if that's the outcome of what you've done. Old Wingate going. You awful young rotter!"

Then his heart smote him as the fag whined.

"It's no business of mine, of course. But look here, young Wingate, you know what you ought to do. Old Wingate's going. Can you let him go? If either of you had to get out of Greyfriars, surely it isn't your brother."

"I—I know."
"It wouldn't be easy to go to the Head and tell him what you've told me," said Harry. "But that's what you ought to do."

"I know."
"If you confessed to Dr. Locke it would see your brother clear. If he was free to act, he could put up for election next term, and Loder wouldn't have a dog's chance against him."

"I know."
"He would be captain of Greyfriars again, and the whole school would be jolly glad of it. Even Loder's friends would be glad to vote for Wingate. Loder's made such a muck-up of everything. No need for him to leave Greyfriars."

"But—" breathed the fag.
"But you can't do it, I suppose," said Harry, with contemptuous compassion. "It's you that have done the wrong, and your brother who has to pay for it. You won't go to the Head?"

"It's the sack if I do."
"I—I suppose so."
Wharton's heart smote him again. Wingate of the Sixth had made great sacrifices for his brother; but he was of different stuff. It was futile to expect the same from the spoiled, wilful, selfish fag. And it was no light thing to face the headmaster of Greyfriars with such a confession.

"I can't do it!" muttered Wingate minor—"I can't! I can't be expelled, and that's what it would mean!"

"It mightn't," said Harry, after a pause. "If you'd been found out, and reported by a prefect, the Head would have expelled you, I suppose. But it will be a bit different if you confess without being found out. That's bound to make a difference."

"I—I've thought of that. But—" The fag faltered.

"You could stand a flogging?"
"Yes. If it was only that I wouldn't care. But—but suppose it was the sack? Suppose I'm sent home in disgrace to face my people—" The hapless fag's voice trailed away.

"I suppose you couldn't face it," said Harry. "You're not built that way, I suppose."

"I couldn't."
Wharton was silent. It was too much to expect of the scapegrace of the Third. He realised it.

"It was all Loder, too!" muttered Wingate minor. "He sent me to the Cross Keys in the first place. He used

to give me cigarettes. He was fooling me all the time—"

"The awful cad!"
"But if I told the Head that he wouldn't believe it—he couldn't believe it of a Sixth Form prefect!"

Wharton looked at him sharply.
"Is it true?" he said.

"You don't believe me?"
"Well, yes," said Harry. "I believe Loder is rotter enough for anything, and I—I believe you. But it sounds awfully thick, and you couldn't expect the Head to take any notice of such a story. You couldn't prove it in any way, I suppose?"

"Is it likely?" said Wingate minor bitterly.
"I suppose not. Loder would deny it, true or false, and—and it sounds like a silly slander," said Harry. "You can't expect the Head to take any notice of such a thing if you told him. Besides, since Loder's been captain he's been down on you; you've been caned for smoking, and so on. That doesn't look as if he was encouraging you to play the goat."

"That was his game, of course. As soon as he was done with me he threw me over."
"Well, I suppose he would. But—" Wharton eyed the fag very dubiously. He had the worst opinion of Gerald Loder, and he suspected, he knew that Loder had somehow made use of the fag's dingy blackguardism to bring about old Wingate's downfall. He remembered, too, a story Bunter had told of having heard Loder of the Sixth giving the fag a message for some sporting loafer at the Cross Keys. But—

Wingate minor peered at him in the gloom, and gave a bitter laugh.

"You don't like Loder, and you know what a rank outsider he is, but you don't believe that of him," he said.

Wharton hesitated.
"Well, yes, I do," he said at last. "But it's awfully thick. Loder must be a worse blackguard than anybody ever thought him. But—"

"But you don't believe it?"

"Well, I suppose Loder made use of you and your rotten tricks," said Harry; "but he couldn't have led you into anything you didn't care for. I suppose he just let you go your own way, and made use of you. He couldn't have led you into anything if you hadn't been a blackguardly young rascal."

"Pile it on!" said Wingate minor bitterly.
"Well, I don't want to do that. I believe you've chucked up playing the goat now, and I don't want to rub it in. If you haven't the nerve to go to the Head and confess, for your brother's sake, you'll feel pretty rotten when old Wingate's left Greyfriars. Think it over, kid."

"I—I've thought it over. I daren't confess, and—and it was a good bit Loder's fault, at least, and I should only make matters worse for myself if I mentioned Loder. I can see that. I can't go to the Head."

Wingate minor dragged himself from the bench.

"It's no good talking. I can't do it. You won't say anything about what I've told you?"

"Not a word, of course!"

The wretched fag moved miserably away.

Harry Wharton followed him more slowly to the House. His face was clouded when he came back to Study No. 1 in the Remove.

"All ready!" said Frank Nugent cheerily. "You've been a jolly long time, Harry!"

"I had to look for young Wingate."
"Is his lordship coming?" asked Johnny Bull sarcastically.

Wharton shook his head.
"Well, we sha'n't miss him," said Bob Cherry, with a laugh.

And the Famous Five sat down to tea. But the cloud did not soon leave Harry Wharton's face. He could not help thinking of the fag's faltering confession, and of the fact—known as yet to no one else—that "old Wingate" was leaving at Christmas. Only a few more days, and Wingate of the Sixth was to say his last farewell to Greyfriars. He was going when the school broke up, and he was not coming back.

Unless—
But there was no "unless." Wingate minor would never confess to the Head—it was futile to think of it. It was the only way, but it was a way that the scapegrace of the Third would never take.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Problem!

"I SAY, you fellows!"
William George Bunter, seated by the fire in the Rag, had been thinking deeply. Harry Wharton & Co., standing in a cheery group, were chatting about the coming holidays in a cheerful mood, when the Owl of the Remove proceeded to impart the outcome of his deep cogitations.

"I say, you fellows, about the holidays at—"

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Are you standing an enormous Christmas party at Bunter Court?" he inquired. "Have you telephoned to your butler to get the state apartments ready for a hundred guests, old fat man?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Bunter blinked seriously at the Famous Five through his big spectacles.

"The fact is, Cherry, we sha'n't be doing much in the way of festivities at Bunter Court this Christmas."

"Not really?" ejaculated Nugent.
"No. You see, the pater and mater will be spending Christmas with some of our titled relations—"

"Lord Bunter de Bunter, or the duke?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"
"The titled relation who keeps the pub, or the one that keeps the fried-fish shop?" asked Bob Cherry.

William George Bunter disdained to answer that frivolous question.

"Sammy will be going with them," he said, "and Bessie will be with some of her numerous friends from Cliff House. So, as the matter stands, there won't be a Christmas party at Bunter Court."

"You couldn't get another furnished house, and spoof the estate agent, as you did in the summer vac?" chuckled Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"
"And won't your titled relations have you, along with the rest of the tribe?" asked Johnny Bull. "If the duke turns you down, try the marquis."

"And if the marquis doesn't pay up put it up to the viscount," said Bob Cherry. "If the viscount declines to be drawn there's the earl and the baron, not to mention all the knights and baronets."

Billy Bunter grinned feebly. "The fact is, a fellow gets a bit fed up with high society," he said. "I don't mind spending my Christmas with quite common people, if you come to that. So I thought of you fellows."

"Oh, my hat!" "You put it so nicely," said Nugent. "I mean it," said the fat and fatuous Owl. "I've got a lot of invitations, as usual. But the fact is I prefer to stick to my old pals. Is anything going on at Wharton Lodge this Christmas, Harry, old man?"

"Nothing worthy of you, Bunter—nothing I could ask a fellow with so many titled relations to share in," said the captain of the Remove. "Stick to Lord Bunter de Bunter, and let me off."

"Mauleverer wants me to go to Mauleverer Towers with him," said Bunter meditatively. "Vernon-Smith is having a holiday abroad, and he wants to drag me off to Mentone. Ogilvy's asked me up to Scotland. Still, I don't mind giving you the preference, Wharton, as we've been such pals ever since you came to Greyfriars."

"Dear man, I'll give Ogilvy a chance," said Harry.

"Oh, really, Wharton—" "The fact is, that the best thing about the vacation is that a fellow doesn't see you again till the next term," explained Bob Cherry. "That's how the matter stands, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Cherry—" "Now, if Bunter's finished—" said Harry.

"I haven't finished, old fellow. I shall have to fix up the holidays, as we break up in a day or two," said Bunter. "It's a bit of a worry picking and choosing among a lot of invitations. That's the penalty of being really popular, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. There's Coker, of the Fifth," said Bunter thoughtfully. "He's got lots of money. But, on the whole, I don't think I could stand Coker."

"Not to mention that Coker couldn't stand you?" remarked Bob.

"Then there's old Wingate—" "Oh, my hat! Wingate, too!"

"Yes; I'm rather friendly with Wingate. I've made it a point to be decent to him since he's been down on his luck."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

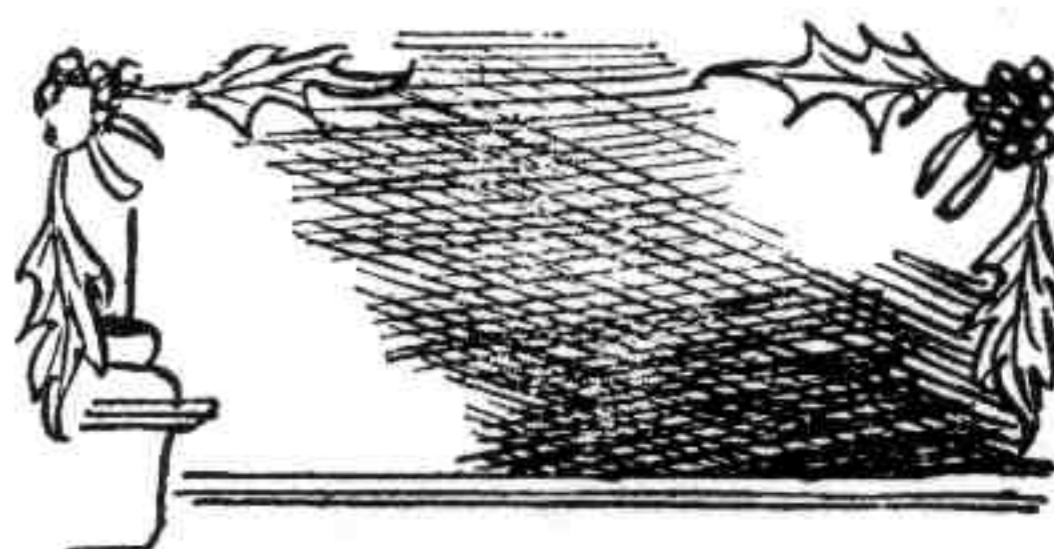
"But I couldn't stand his minor," said Bunter, shaking his head. "Cheeky young cad, you know. Besides, Wingate's place isn't far from yours, Wharton, so I shall see something of him if I want to when I come home with you."

"When!" said Harry.

"The whenfulness is terrific," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Then there's Loder," went on Bunter. "He's a bit of a bad hat; but then, he's captain of the school. He's planning some excursion or other with Carne and Walker over the hols—I heard them. I've no doubt they'd be glad for me to join the party." Bunter seemed to reflect deeply, and shook his head. "No, it wouldn't do. I can't stand Loder. I'm sticking to you, Harry!"

"You're not," said Harry, cheerfully. "If you try to stick to me, old fat man, you'll come unstuck awfully sudden."



NOTICE BOARD



There was a laugh from the fellows crowded round the notice board as Gerald Loder shoved his way through the crowd. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Loder!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Let Loder take a squint at it! It will interest him!" "Good news for you, Loder!" exclaimed the Bounder. "You won't be mucking up school matches next term." "Ha, ha, ha!" Loder did not heed the mockery, his eyes were glued on the paper on the board. (See Chapter 9.)



"Oh, really, Wharton—" "Nothing doing, old bean," said Bob Cherry, chuckling. "Better make the most of some of these invitations."

Bunter blinked at the Famous Five.

"Is Cherry coming home with you, Wharton?" "Yes."

"Then I'm sorry I can't come." "Eh?"

Bunter rose from the chair. "Sorry, and all that, but it can't be done," he said firmly. "I can't stand Cherry. Too much of him at school; it would be altogether too thick to have him planted on me through the vac, as well." "What?"

"No good saying any more, Wharton. It can't be done. Sorry, and all that, but there it is."

And Billy Bunter turned and walked away loftily, leaving the Famous Five staring. He rolled over to the corner where Vernon-Smith was chatting with Tom Redwing.

"Smithy, old man—" "Cut it out," said the Bounder tersely. "You've asked me six times, Bunter, and there's nothing doing. Roll off!"

"Why, you cheeky ass—" "Oh, really, Smithy—" "Chuck it!" said the Bounder impatiently.

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Bunter eyed him with great dignity.

"I was going to say, Smithy, that I am sorry, but I couldn't possibly give you any of my time this Christmas. I'm not a snob, I hope, but I have to be a bit particular about the company I keep in the vac. So I'm turning you down, Smithy. Sorry!"

And Bunter rolled off, rather hastily—just in time, in fact, to escape a lunge from Herbert Vernon-Smith's boot.

He rolled out of the Rag and made his way to the Remove passage. Bunter was at a loose end, as he generally was at the end of the term. The usual question was, upon what hapless victim was he to plant himself for the holidays; and that was the question to which the Owl of the Remove was now trying to find an answer.

He rolled into Lord Mauleverer's study.

"Mauly, old man——"

"No!"

"Oh, really, Mauly——"

"No!"

"You don't know yet what I was going to say!" roared Bunter indignantly.

Lord Mauleverer grinned.

"Whatever it is, don't say it," he said. "The answer is no. Shut the door after you."

"About Christmas——"

"No!"

"I think I could manage to give you a few days——"

"Think again!" suggested Mauly.

"Look here, Mauly——"

"Shut the door after you!"

Billy Bunter did not shut the door after him; but he rolled away, having drawn Mauleverer blank. He rolled away to his own study in a very thoughtful mood. Peter Todd was there, and Bunter gave him a blink.

"Toddy, old man——" he said.

"Don't talk, Bunter. I'm busy. I've got lines."

"About Christmas——"

"Never mind Christmas!"

"Well, I've got to settle the matter," said Bunter. "Wharton's rather keen for me to go home with him, and I've just seen Mauly, and he's very pressing, too. But on the whole, Peter, you're my study-mate here, and I think I ought to stick to you."

"Do you?" asked Peter, looking up.

"That's really kind of you, Bunter."

"The fact is, I mean to be kind," said Bunter fatuously. "I know you haven't much of a place to ask a fellow to, Peter. I know your father's a sort of shabby solicitor, and you have a dismal sort of a show, somewhere in Bloomsbury. But, dash it all, I'm not a snob! It's not quite my style, but I can stand it!"

"Sure you can stand it?" asked Peter, pleasantly.

"Yes, old chap; I'll stand it," said Bunter. "After all, being in London, we can do the pantomimes. That's something. And I can dine out a good deal with my fashionable friends in the West End. If I take you with me, Peter, you'll try to dress a bit decently, won't you? And don't mention to my friends that you live in Bloomsbury, or that your father is in the law. Have a little tact, you know."

Peter Todd gazed at him.

"I can stand it," said Bunter. "I sha'n't expect too much of you and your

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rather poor home, Peter. It will give you a leg-up with your people to show them that you're in the best set at Greyfriars by taking me home with you. It's settled!"

"Not quite," said Peter cheerily. "There's one thing you have left out of the giddy calculation."

"What's that?"

"That if you come near enough to me on the day the school breaks up I shall kick you—hard," said Peter. "And as a tip of what you'll have to expect I'll kick you now."

"Oh, really, Peter——"

Peter Todd jumped up.

Bunter jumped too—for the door. But he did not jump quite fast enough. Peter's boot landed, and the Owl of the Remove travelled into the Remove passage at express speed.

"Yaroooh!"

"Come back and have another, Bunter."

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter rolled away, with the important question of his Christmas vacation still unsettled. It looked like remaining unsettled.

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THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Shock for Loder!



"I AM not satisfied, Loder."

"Dr. Locke!"

"I have no desire whatever to wound your feelings, Loder, or to express want of confidence in any way," said the Head of Greyfriars. "But now that the term is drawing to an end, I must speak plainly. I cannot regard your captaincy of the school as a success."

Loder stood silent.

He had been called into the headmaster's study, and he had gone in trepidation. By more than one sign, he had known already that the Head was disappointed in him. He had done all he could; he had ceased to trouble Dr. Locke with reports of rebellious and insubordinate juniors; he had even checked his high-handed tyranny, which had led to so much rebellion and insubordination.

Yet he feared the keen observation of the Head; he had a feeling that a keen eye was upon him, noting his progress, taking heed of his shortcomings. To most of the Greyfriars fellows, the Head seemed to dwell apart, in lofty and unapproachable majesty, like a god on high Olympus. But the prefects of the Sixth Form knew better; they knew that Dr. Locke was observant when

observation was needed that he considered and judged; and Loder was painfully aware that he had been weighed in the balance and found wanting.

Even to Loder himself it was becoming clear that his captaincy was not a success; that something was amiss somehow and somewhere. He did not yet realise that he was totally unfit for so responsible a position; he was never likely to admit that to himself. But he could not help seeing that all Greyfriars thought so.

He explained his failure in many ways to himself—juniors had been cheeky and mutinous, his friends had failed to back him up, Wingate had worked against him, Wingate's friends had opposed him—any and every explanation was good enough for Loder, rather than the admission that he had taken on a job to which he was not equal.

But such explanations were not good enough for the Head. And now Gerald Loder was on the carpet, facing his headmaster, aware that the position he had gained by so many efforts, by so much unscrupulous trickery, was in danger of passing from him.

"I need not go into details, Loder," said the Head, not unkindly. "But I cannot fail to be aware that there is general dissatisfaction with your captaincy."

"A good majority voted for me at the election, only a few weeks ago, sir," said Loder.

"True; and for that reason you were given every opportunity to make good, and supported by all my authority," said the Head. "If I doubted the wisdom of the school in electing you for such a post, Loder, I did not say so—I was resolved to give you every chance."

So the Head had had his doubts from the beginning, had he? Loder suppressed his feelings with difficulty. He could not venture to say to his headmaster what he would have liked to say.

"Of course, I'm rather new to the position, sir," said Loder, "and I'm afraid that Wingate hasn't quite forgiven me for taking over the captaincy, and has rather encouraged some fellows to give trouble."

Dr. Locke raised his hand.

"I do not think so for one moment, Loder."

"Oh, sir!"

"I am afraid that that belief shows a carping and suspicious mind," said the Head. "I am sorry to hear you make such a statement, Loder. I have the very highest opinion of Wingate, though he was certainly guilty of one very serious outbreak after you became captain. Since then I have observed him very closely, and I am assured that he has stood loyally by the decision of the school."

Loder bit his lip hard.

"I—I may be mistaken about that, of course, sir," he stammered.

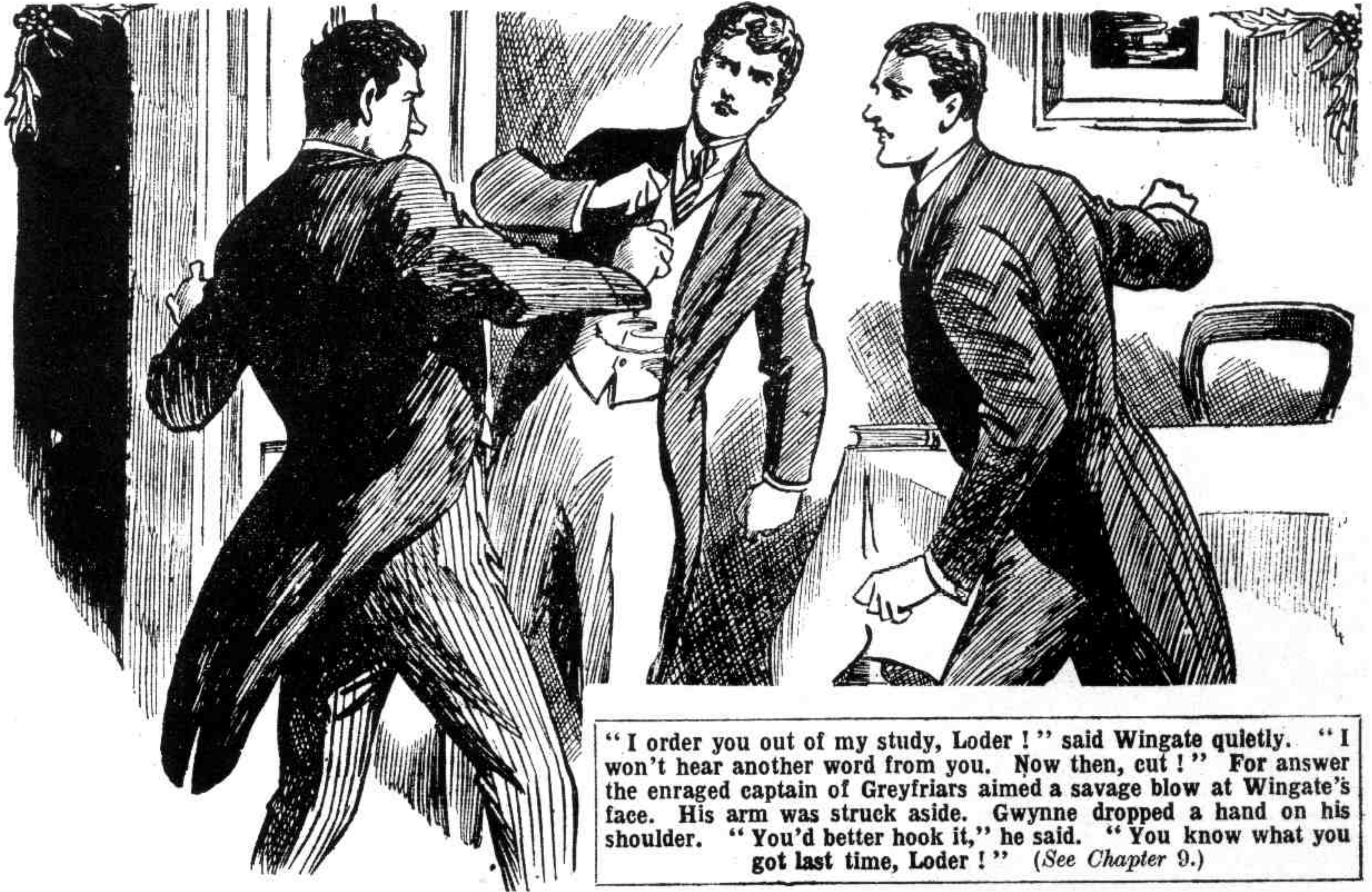
"I am sure of it, Loder. Now, Loder, tell me frankly, if the election were held over again, do you suppose that a majority of the school would vote for you?"

"I—I hope so, sir."

"But do you not think so?"

"It's difficult to say, sir. I've tried to do my duty, and a captain who does his duty isn't popular with everybody, sir," said Loder meekly.

"No doubt. But the dissatisfaction with your leadership is so general,



"I order you out of my study, Loder!" said Wingate quietly. "I won't hear another word from you. Now then, cut!" For answer the enraged captain of Greyfriars aimed a savage blow at Wingate's face. His arm was struck aside. Gwynne dropped a hand on his shoulder. "You'd better hook it," he said. "You know what you got last time, Loder!" (See Chapter 9.)

Loder, that I am bound to take heed of it. I have therefore decided to order a new captain's election next term."

"Oh, sir!"

"Wingate's motives for resigning the captaincy I am unacquainted with. But I shall ask him to stand for election when the new poll is taken, and I hardly think he will refuse me. Then the school will make its choice; and if you are re-elected, Loder, you will be loyally supported by me in exercising authority."

Loder breathed hard.

He had made more enemies than he could count, in his term of office, brief as it had been; and in a new election, he doubted whether even Carne and Walker would vote for him.

If the election should take place, his captaincy was a thing of the past. He knew that.

But there was one gleam of hope. He knew as the Head could not know, that it was impossible for George Wingate to stand for re-election. Wingate's reason for resigning still held good.

"But if Wingate refuses, sir—"

"I do not think he will refuse a request from me, Loder," said the Head stiffly.

"He should not, sir, certainly; but if he should refuse, may I conclude that in that case a new election will not be ordered? If I am given another term in which to make good, I hope, sir, that you will have cause to be satisfied with me. I admit freely that I have made some mistakes; but I hope, sir, that I have learned something from them, and profited by experience."

Loder spoke meekly and respectfully, very carefully concealing the seething rage in his breast.

Dr. Locke reflected.

He was a just man, and he desired to give the new captain of Greyfriars full justice. And Loder was making the best possible case for himself. A fellow

who admitted having made mistakes, and hoped to profit by experience, was a fellow to be given a good chance—if he was sincere. And the Head, though a keen observer, was far from knowing Gerald Loder's real character, and he had no doubt of his sincerity.

There was a pause.

"Well, yes, Loder," said Dr. Locke, at last, "I cannot believe that Wingate will refuse a direct request from myself; but should he do so, I shall certainly not think of him again as a possible captain of the school. In that event, I shall postpone the new election, and you will be given another term in which to profit, as you say, by experience, and make good."

"Thank you, sir. I shall do my best," said Loder meekly.

"No one can do more, Loder," said the Head, with great kindness. "Perhaps you will be kind enough to tell Wingate that I desire to speak to him."

"Certainly, sir."

Loder left the Head's study, with bitter rage in his breast. His captaincy trembled in the balance now; once the Greyfriars fellows had a chance of turning him out, he knew how the whole school would jump at the chance. He had offended the Fifth with his lofty, dictatorial airs, and they were against him to a man; he had made enemies of all the Lower School; he had fagged the Remove, and turned the whole Form into foes. The Sixth Form did not conceal their contempt for his management of affairs, especially in games; even his own pals had turned against him. He stood alone, with only the authority of the Head behind him; and now that was to be withdrawn. All was lost, if Wingate chose to put up for the captaincy again. But there, at least, was hope—Wingate could not and would not, when his first duty, in his return to authority, would be to give his brother up to justice.

He strode away to the Sixth Form passage and knocked savagely at George Wingate's door and threw it open.

The dusk was falling, and the fire glowed red in the grate, but the light was not yet on. Wingate of the Sixth was standing by his window, and, in the dusk of the study, Loder did not observe a diminutive figure in the armchair by the fire.

"Wingate!" Loder's voice was harsh and bitter. "The Head wants to see you!"

"Very well."

Loder gave him a look of hatred.

"I may as well tell you that he's going to ask you to put up for re-election next term."

Wingate did not speak.

"You'll refuse?" said Loder.

"That is my business."

"If you accept," said Loder bitterly, "are you going to do your duty as a captain and prefect, and report your precious minor for pub-haunting?"

"That is my business, too."

"And mine," said Loder, "for if you take on the captaincy again and don't report Wingate minor, I shall do so, as a prefect. Take on the captaincy if you can, and see your brother expelled from Greyfriars!"

And with that Loder swung out of the study and slammed the door after him.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Right Thing!



JACK WINGATE rose from the armchair as the door slammed on the captain of Greyfriars.

He looked at his brother.

Wingate of the Sixth was frowning thoughtfully. But he smiled slightly as he caught his brother's glance.



"Nothing to be afraid of, kid," he said. "I shall have to see the Head; but, of course, I shall tell him that I cannot stand for re-election next term. I shall tell him at the same time that I'm leaving at Christmas, and that will clinch the matter."

Wingate minor caught his breath.

"You can't leave, George!"

"We've been through that, kid," said Wingate patiently. "The pater won't object—that's all right. I can't keep on here in this state of affairs, you see. I don't want to—and it's growing impossible. I'm sure of one thing now—that you'll keep straight after I've gone."

"But for me you'd be captain again next term."

"Never mind that."

"But I do mind," muttered the fag. "I—I can't stand it. You've done too much for me already, and now there's a chance of setting it all right, and I can't let you lose it. I'm—I'm not such a funk as you think. Wharton was right—"

"Wharton! What has a Remove kid to do with it?"

"He told me I ought to go to the Head and own up. He knows! And—and I'm going to do as he advised me."

Wingate smiled pityingly. He had heard that before, but he heard it without much heed. Jack Wingate was not of the stuff of heroes and martyrs.

The fag's eyes flashed.

"You don't believe I've got the nerve! I tell you I'd rather be bunned from the school than keep this up. You'll see."

He ran to the door.

"Jack!" shouted Wingate.

The door opened, and slammed again. Wingate minor was gone.

The ex-captain of Greyfriars stood staring blankly at the closed door. Was it possible—was it possible that the wretched fag at long last had screwed up his courage to the sticking-point, that he was going to the Head with a confession?

Wingate did not think so, but he feared it. And if the sentence of expulsion fell upon his minor, all that he had done had been done in vain. He would be saved, but his brother would be lost. He rushed across to the door and dragged it open.

"Jack!"

But the Sixth Form passage was empty—the fag was gone! Had he gone to the Head?

With a slow step, with a deeply troubled face, Wingate of the Sixth made his way in the direction of the Head's study. If his brother was there— But surely he was not there!

He was there. As if doubting his own resolution, as indeed he had too much reason to do, Jack Wingate had not allowed himself a moment for reflection. Breathless, panting, he arrived at the Head's door, and knocked. He opened the door without waiting to be told to come in.

He almost ran into the study.

Dr. Locke turned his head. He was expecting Wingate of the Sixth, and he stared in surprise at Wingate minor of the Third.

"What is this?" he said. "What do you want, Wingate minor?"

For a second, under the calm clear eyes of the Head, the hapless fag faltered in terror.

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He dared not—he dared not speak! And then, as if in a torrent, the words came.

"I've come to confess, sir! I want to confess! I know I shall be expelled, and I—I don't care!"

His voice broke, and he stood trembling before the Head.

Dr. Locke gazed at him in astonishment.

"To confess?" he repeated. "What do you mean? What can you mean, Wingate minor? You cannot have done anything to merit expulsion from the school. What do you mean, you foolish boy?"

"I've got to tell you why my brother resigned the captaincy—why he gave up being a prefect!" Wingate minor panted. "It was through me—because he would have had to report me, sir."

"For what?"

"Going out of bounds! Going to—to—to—" The fag faltered miserably.

"Where?" The Head's face was growing stern as he began to understand.

"The Cross Keys, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

"I—I confess, sir!" panted the fag. "My brother's going to leave Greyfriars—I've ruined everything for him—I can't stand it! I—I don't care if I'm sacked, sir."

Dr. Locke's eyes fixed grimly on the fag.

"You visited that disreputable place, strictly out of bounds for all Greyfriars boys?"

"Yes, sir."

"More than once?"

"Yes, sir."

"You confess that you have acted in a shameful way calculated to bring disgrace upon the school to which you belong. You—a boy in the Third Form! What else have you done?"

"I—I played cards with the—the men there! I—I made bets on horse races—"

"You!"

"I—I know they were only making a fool of me, but I didn't know it then!" muttered the fag. "They got my money, and I knew afterwards they were only laughing in their sleeve."

"No doubt," said the Head dryly. "A boy of your age can scarcely have been taken seriously by such characters. But this precocious rascality—bless my soul! I could never have dreamed— And you say that your brother knew this?"

"He found me there, sir. And—and he gave up everything so—so as not to have to report me."

"I understand. And is this still going on, Wingate minor?"

"Oh, no, sir! No! I—I could see afterwards what a fool I'd been, and—and after I'd done so much harm to my brother I—I was sorry. I—I'd have undone it all if I could. I—I—"

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" said the Head.

Wingate of the Sixth entered the study. His face paled as he saw his brother there. He knew that the fag had spoken.

"Your brother has just made an astonishing confession to me, Wingate," said the Head. "Am I to believe that you found this Third Form boy consorting with disreputable characters at a low resort?"

"If he has told you so, sir—"

"He has told me so."

"It's true, sir."

"It was your duty to report him to me."

"If I had remained captain and prefect, yes, sir," said Wingate quietly. "As an ordinary member of the Sixth Form, with no official authority, it was not my duty to report him."

The Head was silent.

"You placed your regard for your brother before your duty to the school and your duty to me," he said at last.

"He's my brother, sir."

"And if his rascally conduct had continued—what then?" exclaimed the Head. "Am I to understand that you would have shielded him in wrongdoing?"

Wingate crimsoned.

"Certainly not, sir! The lesson was enough for him; I knew that he was going straight. If he had not, I should have explained the matter to my father, at home, and left him to deal with my brother."

"I understand."

There was another long pause.

Dr. Locke made the fag a sign to leave the study, and Jack Wingate crept away.

He almost limped down the corridor. At the corner, two Remove fellows were standing. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry looked curiously at the white-faced fag as he came by.

"What's up, kid?" asked Bob.

"The game's up, for me here, that's all!" muttered Wingate minor.

Wharton understood.

"You've confessed to the Head?"

"Yes."

"Good man!" said the captain of the Remove. "However it turns out, kid, you won't be sorry in the long run, for having done the right thing."

Wingate minor nodded, and went on his way, with a white face and a heavy heart. He had little hope; but he was to learn that the captain of the Remove had judged well, and that, after all, he had done wisely when he had done the right thing.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Back Number!



JAMES WALKER, of the Sixth strolled into Loder's study, with a peculiar smile on his face.

The captain of Greyfriars was stretched in his armchair, with a cigarette between his lips. He removed the cigarette hastily as his door opened; and then replaced it, as he saw that the newcomer was Walker.

"Heard the news, Loder?"

"No. Anything up?"

"Well, yes." Walker smiled genially. He was Loder's pal, but he had had a great deal to tolerate from Loder since the new captain of Greyfriars had been invested with authority. He was quite pleased to bring Gerald Loder the news—startling news for Loder. "Yes, old man, the school's buzzing with it. There's a notice on the board."

"Well, what's happened?" grunted Loder.

"There's going to be a new captain's election next term," said Walker cheerily. "The Head's letting the fellows know it before we break up for Christmas."

Loder sprang to his feet.

"It's a lie!" he shouted.

"Eh?"

"You rotter, Walker! I tell you it's a lie!" shouted Loder furiously.

James Walker shrugged his shoulders.

"You can walk along to the notice board, and see it for yourself," he answered carelessly.

Loder stared at him almost wildly.

"It's impossible! The Head told me plainly that he would not order a new captain's election, unless Wingate consented to put up as candidate."

"Did he?" yawned Walker. "Then it means that Wingate is going to put up, for it's a dead cert that there's going to be a new election. It's the Head's own list, old man."

He was brushed savagely aside the next moment, and Loder rushed from the study.

mucking up school matches next term."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anybody going to vote for Loder next time?" roared Coker of the Fifth.

"No jolly fear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Loder did not heed the mockery of the Greyfriars fellows. He stared for one moment at the paper on the board, and then strode furiously away. It was true—he could hardly believe it, but it was true. The Head had told him that the new election would not be ordered unless George Wingate consented to stand as candidate! It followed, then, that Wingate had consented. He had dared—he had dared to do this!

Loder staggered.

"He—he's confessed—that cowardly little rotter confessed!"

"Not so cowardly as you seem to have supposed. He's confessed everything to Dr. Locke, and I haven't any secret to keep!" said Wingate scornfully.

"Then he's sacked from Greyfriars?"

"Sorry to disappoint you—no," said Wingate ironically. "Dr. Locke has made allowance for the fact that he confessed of his own accord, and for a jolly good motive. And he's satisfied, too, that the silly kid was led into making a fool of himself, and that he's sorry for it."

Loder caught his breath.



Crash! George Wingate's bicycle went over suddenly, and the Sixth-Former went over in the snow. It was risky riding in the snow, but Wingate was too pressed by haste to think of walking. A dozen times he had skidded as he pedalled fast across the snowy heath, but he had not come down. He would not have fallen this time had not something whizzed suddenly and crashed into the rear wheel of his machine. (See Chapter 13.)

"Dear man! He doesn't seem to like it!" murmured Walker. "Rather a drop, after all his jolly old airs and graces, ridin' the high horse over his old friends. I wonder who will vote for Loder in the election—or if anybody will! I know I jolly well won't!"

Loder was rushing breathlessly to the school notice-board.

A crowd of fellows had gathered round it.

The news had spread like wildfire through Greyfriars, causing satisfaction on all sides. Loder, smoking in his study, was indeed almost the last fellow in the school to hear it.

There was a laugh as Loder shoved his way through the crowd.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Loder!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Let Loder take a squint at it. It will interest Loder."

"Good news for you, Loder!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith. "You won't be

Loder strode to Wingate's study in the Sixth.

He hurled the door savagely open.

Wingate and Gwynne of the Sixth were in the room, talking cheerily. They stared round at Loder.

"Wingate!" shouted the captain of Greyfriars. He was too enraged to care who heard him, and he did not heed Gwynne.

"Hallo! What's the trouble, Loder?" asked Wingate, with a smile.

"Are you standing for election next term?"

"Yes."

"You dare!" hissed Loder.

Wingate laughed.

"Dear man," said Gwynne, with a chuckle, "have you been counting up your supporters? I fancy you've got only one at Greyfriars, and his name is Gerald Loder!"

Loder did not heed him.

His eyes were fixed furiously on George Wingate. The ex-captain of Greyfriars smiled contemptuously.

"You dare!" repeated Loder. "You think you can keep it dark about your brother, then! I'm going straight to the Head to report him."

"You can't tell the Head anything he doesn't know," said Wingate. "My brother has already told him everything."

"If he dared to make any accusation against me—"

"He has not mentioned you," said Wingate icily. "He has taken a flogging, and the matter's ended. Anything more to say? I shall be glad to see the last of you, if you're done!"

"You rotter, you—you—"

Loder stuttered with rage. He was defeated all along the line; the power he had held over Wingate was gone. Jack Wingate's secret was a secret no longer. There was nothing now to prevent Wingate of the Sixth from resuming his old place as captain of Greyfriars, if the fellows chose to vote for him in the new election ordered by the Head. And none knew better than Loder how all Greyfriars would roll up to record their votes for "old Wingate."

The game was up!

In his rage Loder shook his clenched fist at Wingate.

"You've done me!" he muttered thickly. "You and your precious brother—you've done me!"

"You've done yourself!" said Wingate, with cool contempt. "Get out of my study, Loder! I'm more than fed-up with you!"

Gerald Loder stood panting. Wingate's eyes were fixed contemptuously



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CHRISTMAS CHIMES!

By
BOB CHERRY.

CHRISTMAS is in the air, and Greyfriars is all agog with excitement. Everybody is busy packing up for the holidays; in fact, I am perched on the top of a pyramid of trunks in the box-room as I pen these notes.

THIS is going to be the greatest Christmas ever! It is going to lick all previous Yuletides into a cocked hat. That is everybody's firm conviction. There will be gay doings at Wharton Lodge and Mauleverer Towers, and Billy Bunter tells me that Bunter Court has had the decorators in—the Christmas decorators he means, not the whitewashers and plasterers! Billy's pater has engaged a special staff of butlers and footmen to cope with the Christmas rush. Over a hundred guests are expected, and there is to be a masked ball on Christmas Eve. I shall NOT be there! Wharton will not be there. Nugent will not be there. Neither will Billy Bunter. Neither will anybody else for that matter. For the simple reason that there is no such place as Bunter Court!

AT Wharton Lodge the fun will be fast and furious. Colonel Wharton is one of the jolliest hosts that ever threw open his doors to a crowd of merry schoolboys. He has arranged a topping programme of dances and banquets and footer matches, and the lucky ones who are invited to spend Christmas at "Arry Wharton's 'appy 'ome," as Gosling would call it, will have the time of their lives.

MAULEVERER TOWERS will also be the scene of gay festivities. But I cannot picture his noble lordship exhausting himself in the whirl of Christmas pleasures. Even a gentle fox-trot is too much like hard work to suit the Tired Tim of Greyfriars. Mauly will be polite and considerate to his guests, of course; but if he gets half a chance he will curl up on the hearthrug like a comfortable cat, and slumber before the blazing Yule logs. Mauly is so fond of doing the Rip Van Winkle stunt that he would cheerfully go to sleep on Christmas Eve, and not wake up until Boxing Night—if that were possible!

MICKY DESMOND is off to far-away Tipperary for his Christmas holidays. Donald Ogilvy will travel on the night express to Scotland. Napoleon Dupont will be popping over to Paris. And David Morgan will be making merry in Wales, look

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you! Hurree Singh would doubtless like to spend Christmas in his beloved Bhanipur, and Wun Lung would appreciate a holiday in China. But even in these days of swift travel, such journeys for such a short holiday spell are out of the question.

BUT what of Alonzo Todd, commonly known to all of us as the duffer of Greyfriars? Rumour has it that he is going to the Googly Woogly Islands in a canoe laden with provisions. It has always been Alonzo's wish to present a Christmas pudding to Gogo Wogo, the woolly chief of the islanders. We would strongly warn our tame duffer against this enterprise. Thin as Alonzo is, Gogo Wogo will soon be after his blood. And think what a splendid Christmas that would be for Gogo—Alonzo simmering in a steaming-hot cauldron hanging over the glowing embers! Urgh—urgh!

GREYFRIARS will be like a place of the dead at Christmas-time. No merry shouts will echo through its corridors. The only sign of life will be in the porter's lodge, where William Gosling will be spending Christmas on his lonesome. But Gossy will have a happy time, for it usually rains "tips" on breaking-up day. In his own quiet way, our venerable porter will enjoy as happy a Christmas as any of you.



SANTA CLAUS!

By
DICK PENFOLD.

OUR Santa Claus is old and grey, With a long and snow-white beard, they say. His face is ruddy, his eyes are bright; He walks on the winds of the winter night, Rushing through space with never a pause, For an active gent is Santa Claus.

At the season of peace and right good will, When the stars grow pale, and the night is still;

And the ghosts go gliding to and fro, And darkness hovers above, below— That's the very time, by all the laws, You may hope for a visit from Santa Claus!

When I was a youngster of seven or eight, In my warm, snug bed I'd lie and wait, Peering intently through the gloom And the shadows that filled the silent room. I'd wait for hours in a worthy cause— I wanted to see old Santa Claus!

But the jolly old man with the bulging sack Of toys and trinkets upon his back, Would wait for me to dream and doze Ere he glided in on his nimble toes To fill my stocking's gaping jaws. (Oh, a stealthy gent is Santa Claus!)

And when I awoke to the morning's prime, And the Christmas bells with their mellow chime, I'd find my stocking with playthings stored: 'Twas sweeter to me than a miser's hoard! And I'd raise a whoop of delight, because I'd been specially favoured by Santa Claus!

But now that I've come to man's estate (I've turned fifteen, at any rate!) Old Santa's bounties I can't receive, Nor hang my stocking on Christmas Eve, But whether it freezes or snows or thaws, He's still at his job, old Santa Claus!

EDITORIAL!

CHEERY CHRISTMAS GREETINGS TO ALL.

By HARRY WHARTON.



AMERRY CHRISTMAS, everybody! The same old wish, expressed in the same old way, but none the less hearty and sincere, for all that.

Plenty of fun and jollity; lots of lively larks; a feast of good cheer; and all that goes to make up a thoroughly enjoyable Christmas! That is what I wish my thousands of reader-chums; and my staff echoes the wish with a hearty "Hear, hear!"

We are taking old Father Time by the forelock, and publishing our Grand Christmas Number a little in advance of the Yuletide festivities. It would never do to postpone the publication of this number until the holidays. Even the most energetic of us wouldn't feel like writing stories and articles amid the giddy whirl of gaiety and excitement at Wharton Lodge.

Even at this early stage, we are working under difficulties, for it is the eve of breaking-up, and there is all the hurry and bustle of packing in progress. No. 1 Study in the Remove passage has the appearance of a railway cloak-room, at the moment. There are trunks and portmanteaux and gladstone-bags crowded together on the floor; and there is hardly room to swing a cat. Not that we wish for one moment to indulge in such a callous sport! Felicia, the kitchen cat, got in through the window during the night, and raided our sardine supply; but we shouldn't dream of making her "swing" for it—though she richly deserves to, the furry thief!

Our Christmas features are few in quantity, but first-rate in quality. We simply had to prevail upon Dicky Nugent to give us one of his masterpieces of St. Sam's; and you will love to read of the antics of that senile and utterly impossible Headmaster, Dr. Birchmall. Bob Cherry has contributed a column of Christmas gossip, and Dick Penfold has weighed in with a poem on Santa Claus.

There was something else I wanted to say, but the crashing and banging and hammering which is going on all around me has driven it out of my head. Pity the poor editors who have to work under such a handicap! But just let me repeat what I said in the beginning. A Merry Christmas, everybody, and may you sail gaily on the flood-tide of the season's festivities, and enjoy yourselves to the full! That is the sincere wish of your friend and editor,

HARRY WHARTON



CHRISTMAS EVE!

The wind shrieked and howled around the old turrets and chimneys of Jolly Towers, a magnificent mansion which dated right back to the time of Edward the Seventh.

Jolly Towers was the country seat of Sir Jovial Jolly, the pater of that dashing young hero, Jack, of the Fourth Form at St. Sam's.

The fine old mansion, which had withered the storms of centuries, stood in a wooded park. It also stood in need of repair. There was something wrong with the left wing, as a footballer would say. And the centre half of the house was beginning to crumble, too. But it was a grand and stately citadel, for all that.

Fiercely the storm raged without. The wind roared and blustered, and loud peels of thunder rolled across the sky, blotting out the face of the moon.

Inside the mansion, however, all was merry and bright.

Jack Jolly had brought down a big party of pals to spend the Christmas Vack with him. Merry and Bright were there, and Tubby Barrell and half a dozen others. They had just arrived, and Sir Jovial Jolly, a stout old gentleman with a face like a boiled beetroot, greeted them in the hall.

"Welcome home, Jack!" he roared in his deep base voice. And he gave Jack Jolly a resounding thump on the back, which sent him staggering across the hall. "Welcome to your friends also! It's a treat to see your cheery faces, by George! But you are dooeld late! I began to think you were never coming!"

"It's the Head's fault, pater," said Jack Jolly. "The old tirant never lets us break up for the holidays till the last minnit. He actually made us swot at lessons till dinner-time. On Christmas Eve, too! If he hadn't been in a hurry to get away for the holidays himself, he'd have kept us mugging at Lattin and Greek all day!"

Sir Jovial frowned. "Confound the man!" he shouted. "Duzzent he realise that it's Christmas-time?"

"He hates Christmas," said Merry. "He said that if he had his own way, he'd keep all the fellows at the school for Christmas. His motto would be 'Bizziness as usual.' He wouldn't even give us a half-holiday on Christmas Day!"

"The old toad!" snorted Sir Jovial. "Well, never mind, my dear boys. You are out of his clutches for a while till the new term starts."

"Thank goodness!" said Tubby Barrell fervently. "I say, Sir Jovial, is it dinner-time yet? Travelling always gives me a fearful appytite!"

"Dry up, you fat glutton!" growled Jack Jolly. "You've been stuffing in the train all the way down!"

"Oh, really, Jolly, you know perfectly well that I've had nothing to eat since we left St. Sam's!"

"Don't tell fibs, Tubby! I distinctly saw you bolt the carriage-door!"

"And I saw him shift a portmanto!" said Merry.

"And I saw him devouring the 'Holiday Annual'" chimed in Bright.

Sir Jovial larfed in his bluff, harty manner. "Ho, ho, ho! Come along, my boys! This way to the dining-room! Dinner will be served in a brace of shakes. I have engaged a special waiter for the occasion. Huggins! Where are you, Huggins?"

A croaking voice came up from the regions below.

"At your serviss, Sir Jovial!"

"Buck up with the dinner, there's a good fellow! My gests are famnished!"

"Coming up right now, sir!" said the croaking voice.

And Sir Jovial ushered his schoolboy gests into the spashus, oke-panelled dining-room.

In spite of the assurance of Huggins, the new waiter, dinner was a long time coming.

Jack Jolly & Co. sat round the big table, where Jack's four-fathers had sat in days gone by, with their brimming bowls of punch, and they began to get very impatient.

Tubby Barrell feasted his eyes on the fine old oil-paintings which hung on the wall; but that sort of feast failed to satisfy Tubby's appytite.

At long last, the man Huggins came in with a laden tray. The juniors looked at him curiously. He was a lean, scraggy individual, with a wrinkled, clean-shaven face and a very mournful expression. The way he carried the tray suggested that he had had no previous eggperience of waiting, for he carried it on his head like a muffin-man!

"My hat!" ejaculated Jack Jolly. "The fellow seems to think he's a perfessional juggler!"

When Sir Jovial caught sight of the waiter he gave a thunderus bellow.

"Huggins! How dare you, sir!"

The new waiter gave a startled jump as if he had been shot. The tray gave a sudden lurch, and, with a fearful crash and clatter, a duzzent plates of soop shot on to the floor. There was also a thirteenth plate—the unlucky one, so to speak. Sir Jovial Jolly got the bennyfit of that. It crashed on the table in front of him, and a shower of scalding soop splashed up into his face.

Instantly Sir Jovial was on his feet, dancing like a cat on hot brix.

"Yaroooooo!" he yelled, mopping at his streaming face with a Soviet. "You—you clumsy villan! Look what you've done!"

"You seem to be in a fearful stew, pater!" mermered Jack Jolly. "You're in the soop, at any rate!"

As for Huggins, the waiter, he looked agast at what he had done. He rung his hands, and a feeble appology oozed from his lips.

"I—I'm awfully sorry, Sir Jovial!" he stutted.

"Fool! Dolt!" stormed Sir Jovial. "How dare you come into the dining-room ballancing a tray on your head like a cirkus clown! Go and fetch some more soop, and try to comport yourself with diggnity and decorum!"

"Very good, Sir Jovial!"

The old waiter shuffled away. He caused further amusement by tripping over a peace of broken plate, which sent him sprawling.

Jack Jolly larfed as he thrust a toasting-fork into the waiter's collar, and thus levered him to his feet.

"Of all the clumsy asses!" said Jack. "Where did you dig up this spessimen, pater?"

"He came to me this afternoon," explained Sir Jovial, "and begged me to give him some employment over Christmas. You see, he was without visible means of sport. I therefore gave him this temperry job; but he will have to mend his ways if he eggpects me to retain him over the holidays."

Instead of improving, however, the behaviour of the man Huggins grew worse and worse. The clumsy old buffer caused quite a startling chapter of accidents in the dining-room of Jolly Towers. He poured a pint of boiling coffy down the back of Jack Jolly's neck; he gave Tubby Barrell a baptism of thick yellow custerd, and he sent Sir Jovial's wineglass flying. Sir Jovial was simply furious, for the glass had been full of the famous champain called Hild-and-seek (1925 vintidge).

The antics of the new waiter threatened to mar the pieciful serennty of Christmas-time. Jack Jolly & Co. were gratefully annoyed with Huggins. He had spoilt their dinners and ruined their toggs through his clumsy behaviour.

However, when the meal was over, Huggins

was banished from their minds. As a novelist would say, he was rellygated to the lingo of forgotten things. And the St. Sam's juniors settled down to enjoy themselves in a quiet tranquil manner. They chased each other all round the vast old mansion; they rushed out into the park, where the snow lay inches thick, and proceeded to take part in a wild and wirling snowfight. Their merry shouts rang out over the snowy fields.

Presently a dark figger emerged from the house, and came hobbling down the drive.

Jack Jolly clutched his companions' arms. "That's Huggins, the waiter!" he whispered. "Let's give him a volley of snowballs!"

"Good egg!" said Merry. "We owe him something for spoiling our Christmas Eve repast!"

The next minnit the air was thick with flying snowballs. They reigned upon the unforchunitt Huggins from all angles.

"Ow! Gug-gug-gug! Ooooooh!"

Uttering wild mutterings and splutterings, the unhappy Huggins toppled over backwards in the snow. And Jack Jolly & Co. came running up, pelting him all the harder.

The waiter was beside himself with rage. His voice—no longer the feeble croak which the juniors had first heard—came thundering through the night.

"Jolly, you young scamp! You're at the bottom of this, I'm sure! Just you wait till we get back to St. Sam's, you young munky! I'll birch you till you're black and blew!"

Jack Jolly & Co. halted in blank amazement. The snowballs fell from their nerveless hands.

For it was not the voice of Huggins, the waiter, which addressed them. It was the fearful and familiar voice of Dr. Birchmall, the headmaster of St. Sam's!

"My only Aunt Jemima!" gasped Jolly.

The Head realised that he had given himself away. He scowled savagely as he staggered to his feet. And he was in the act of shaking his fist at the astonished groop of juniors when Sir Jovial Jolly came striding on the scene.

"Huggins," he thundered, "how dare you shake your fist at my gests in such a threttening manner!"

"It—it isn't Huggins at all, pater!" said Jack Jolly. "It—it's our Head!"

"I will not deny it, sir," said the Head horsely, as he turned to Sir Jovial. "I am Dr. Birchmall! Being in a state of—cr—temperry impeccuniossity, and having nowhere to go for the Christmas holidays, I thought it would be a good wheeze to come to Jolly Towers, and get a job as a temperry waiter. For this purpuss, I removed my beard, which, although the boys do not know it, has always been a false one. But the game is up now. And I suppose you will kick me off the premises, Sir Jovial?"

"Not at all—not at all!" said Sir Jovial. "I should not dream of plauting my boot behind so distingwished a person! If I did so, you would only take it out of my son when the new term begins. No, sir! So far from kicking you out, I am going to ask you to stay, as my honnered guest, and join in the Christmas sellybrations."

The Head flung his arms round Sir Jovial's neck.

"Thank you, sir, for those kind words!" he said, his voice horse with commotion. "I shall be delighted to stay!"

And the Head stayed. He seemed to throw off the burden of his years, and to become a happy, care-free schoolboy again. He threw himself hart and sole into the festivities, and romped around the old mansion like a two-year-old. And it turned out to be a right Merry Christmas for the gests at Jolly Towers!

THE END.

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(Continued from page 13.)

upon him. Gwynne of the Sixth watched him with a slightly amused smile. Loder's rage was deep and bitter, but it had no terrors for them. He panted as he stood there, too enraged to speak again for a few moments. Wingate pointed impatiently to the doorway. He did not want more trouble with Loder. He did not want to handle the captain of the school, but it looked as if trouble was inevitable. Loder came on a step.

"You rotter—you rotter—"

"That's enough!" interrupted Wingate. "Get out, Loder, and don't play the fool! Your rotten schemes have been knocked on the head, and your game's up. You've got yourself to thank. Now clear."

"And you think you'll get back the captaincy?" said Loder, between his teeth.

"I think it's very likely."

"I rather think it's a cert," said Gwynne of the Sixth, with a grin. "I rather fancy that Greyfriars will vote as one man, and that if a hand goes up for you, Loder, it will be your own and nobody else's."

"We shall see," muttered Loder.

"We shall see, Wingate. You think you've beaten me—you and your precious blackguard of a young brother—but the game's not finished yet. Who'd have thought that the old fool would let that young scoundrel hang on at Greyfriars after what he's done—"

"Are you calling the Head an old fool?" asked Wingate grimly. He stepped towards Loder. "That's enough, Loder! Leave my study!"

Loder gave a savage laugh.

"You haven't ousted me yet; I'm still captain of the school," he said. "You don't give me orders yet, Wingate."

"I order you out of my study," said Wingate quietly. "I won't hear another word from you. Now then, out!"

For answer the enraged captain aimed a savage blow at Wingate's face. His arm was struck aside.

Gwynne dropped his hand on his shoulder.

"You'd better hook it," he said. "You know what you got last time, Loder; and if you force Wingate into a fight, you can't blacken him to the Head again. Chuck it, old man. You're giving yourself away, you know."

Gwynne pushed Loder out of the study. He resisted for a moment, his face set with rage. But he decided to go. The door closed on him, and Loder strode away to his own study, with hatred and revenge and every savage feeling running riot in his breast.

Gwynne shrugged his shoulders when the captain of the school was gone.

"It's the wind-up for Loder," he said. "He can play at being captain of the school till we break up, not that a single fellow in Greyfriars will take orders from him. I never believed that even Loder would make such a hash of

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the job, such an absolute muck-up. It's more above his weight than anybody ever supposed."

Wingate nodded.

He, too, had been surprised by Loder's abject failure as captain of Greyfriars. He had not expected much of the black sheep of the Sixth, but he had expected better things than Loder had been able to perform.

"Thank goodness it's over!" said Gwynne. "You'll romp home at the next election, old man, and you'll be kept rather busy next term undoing pretty nearly everything that Loder has done, and setting matters right. Loder's a back number now, and no mistake."

Loder, brooding savagely over the matter in his study, realised it, too. He was a back number. Only a couple more days remained of the term, in which to "play" at being captain of the school, as Gwynne expressed it. Then came the Christmas vacation. After that the new term and the new election, and George Wingate's absolutely certain triumph. He turned the matter over and over in his mind, and he could see no way out. Unless something happened in the Christmas holidays to keep Wingate from returning to Greyfriars, Loder was down and out—a hopeless back number. And what could happen?

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Home for the Holidays!



"GOOD-BYE!"

"Merry Christmas!"

"I say, you fellows

"

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were off for the Christmas holidays. It was a hard, frosty day,

with a sky of steel, and hedges and trees gleaming with frost. In coat and scarf, with ruddy, cheery faces, the chums of the Remove packed themselves in the brake for the station in the highest of spirits. The brake was starting when Billy Bunter rolled along and gesticulated wildly to the Famous Five, who waved their hands to him and chortled. Bunter had lost the first brake in a desperate effort to wedge into the car which bore Lord Mauleverer away from Greyfriars. He had not succeeded in wedging into Mauly's car, and he was too late for the first brake, and he rolled after it in frantic pursuit.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

"Stop for me!" roared Bunter.

"Merry Christmas, old fat man! Remember us to the dukes and viscounts at Bunter Court!" bawled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, I'm catching your train."

"Looks as if you're not. Good-bye!"

The brake rolled on. Bunter rushed after it desperately, slipped in the snow, and sat down.

He was left sitting and gasping as the brake rolled on to Courtfield.

"Dear old Bunter! He will have to accept some of those invitations that were raining on him," said Bob Cherry. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Ogilvy! You've left Bunter behind, Ogilvy. I heard that you were taking him up to Scotland."

Ronald Donald Ogilvy chuckled.

"First I've heard of it," he said.

"Mauly's left him behind, too," said Bob. "His car's gone. What about you, Smithy? Aren't you taking Bunter to the sunny South?"

"I don't think!" grinned the Bounder.

"Toddy, old man, you've overlooked Bunter. Bunter was going to honour you, among others."

"I know!" assented Peter. "I had a boot all ready for him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Still, he's got dozens of invitations to fall back on," said Bob. "At least, so he said. And, as a last resort, he can go to Bunter Court—if any."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In great spirits the juniors crowded out of the brake at Courtfield Junction.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's old Wingate! Merry Christmas, Wingate!"

George Wingate nodded and smiled.

His minor was with him, his face very bright and cheerful. Jack Wingate's troubles had rolled away at last. A bright Christmas was before him. After that, the new term, in which he was resolute to avoid the mistakes and faults of the last troubled term.

Harry Wharton & Co. packed themselves in the train. Wingate and his brother were in another carriage. They were going to a destination near that of the Famous Five. Greyfriars fellows were arriving at the station, crowding the platform, when the train was full. In the crowd the chums of the Remove caught sight of Loder and Carne and Walker together.

"Loder isn't looking merry and bright," chuckled Bob Cherry. "Shall we give him a yell? No, we won't. We'll forgive even Loder at Christmas-time—what?"

"Yes, rather!"

"The forgiveness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Let us wish him a merry and ridiculous Christmas."

Bob Cherry leaned from the window.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, Loder!"

Gerald Loder stared round angrily as his name was bawled.

"Merry Christmas, old bean!" roared Bob.

"You cheeky young sweep!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Loder, at all events, did not seem to be in a forgiving mood under the genial influence of Christmastide.

The train rolled out of the station.

It was a long run for Harry Wharton & Co., but they were in a cheery mood throughout the journey, and voices were raised in song in the carriage crammed with juniors. It was a merry party that turned out at last at the little station of Wharton Magnus, and packed into the car for Wharton Lodge. Colonel Wharton himself was driving the car, and he greeted his nephew and his friends with cordial geniality.

The car drove by the road across the heath towards the Lodge. Winter mists hung over the heath; the hollows were stacked with snow. Snow had begun to fall again in light, powdery flakes.

ANSWERS

Every Saturday — PRICE 2:

The lights of Wharton Lodge gleamed at last through the falling December dusk.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here we are!" said Bob.

Miss Wharton greeted the merry party in the old oak-panelled hall, glistening with holly and mistletoe. Harry Wharton & Co. were home for the holidays at last, and it was going to be a merry Christmas.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
An Unexpected Meeting!

HALLO, hallo, hallo!"
"What—"
"Loder!"
"Oh, my hat!"
It was a couple of days later.
Harry Wharton & Co. had almost forgotten the existence of the bully of Greyfriars by that time. They were thinking in the Christmas holidays of much more pleasant things than Gerald Loder of the Sixth Form

at Greyfriars. And they were surprised to see him there.

The Famous Five had gone for a tramp across the frozen heath, which stretched for miles beyond the park wall of the Lodge. On the farther side of the heath lay the home of the Wingates, and "old Wingate" had telephoned an invitation to lunch to the heroes of the Remove. At Greyfriars between the Lower Fourth and the Sixth there was a great gulf fixed; but in vacation it was a different matter. Harry Wharton & Co. tramped cheerily across the misty heath, under a leaden sky heavy with snow-clouds; and the red chimneys of Wingate's home, the Gables, were in sight in the distance when they suddenly came on Loder.

The Greyfriars Sixth-Former did not see them for the moment.

He was tramping along by the same path across the heath with his head bent and his hands shoved deep into his overcoat pockets. They overtook him and were passing him when Bob recognised him.

Loder's face was dark and clouded. The festive season apparently had not had a cheering effect on him.

Perhaps he was thinking of the near future of his return to Greyfriars to find that he had lost all that he had gained to witness George Wingate's reinstatement in his old position as captain of the school. That, certainly, could not have been an inspiring reflection to Loder.

The juniors looked at him rather curiously.

Where Loder's home was, they did not know; but they were tramping on the heath between Wharton Lodge and Wingate's home. It was possible, of course, that he was staying for Christmas somewhere in the neighbourhood. But certainly they had not expected to see anything of Loder during the Christmas holidays.

They were undecided whether to speak to him in passing. That matter was settled by Loder himself. He glanced carelessly at the schoolboys, and then started, as he recognised them.

A black look came over his face.

"You lot—here!" he exclaimed.

Harry Wharton smiled.

"Naturally—we're here, Loder," he said. "We're staying at my uncle's house a couple of miles back."

"Enjoying life, old bean?" asked Bob Cherry, with a grin.

Loder smiled.

"I didn't know you lived about here, Wharton. Are you hanging on here all through Christmas?"

"Yes, till near the end of the vac."



Wingate rolled over breathlessly and sat up in the snow. With his hands tied behind him he was utterly helpless. Loder's eyes gleamed down at his victim. "What will you be like after a night in this?" he asked. "If it meant death I would not give in!" said Wingate. "And it may mean that, if you are mad enough to do as you say." "That's your risk," said Loder between his teeth. (See Chapter 13.)



"Oh!" said Loder, and his look grew blacker.

"No need for us to meet at all, Loder," said Harry. "If you're staying about here, we needn't keep up Greyfriars rows in the holidays. Come on, you chaps—we don't want to keep Wingate waiting."

Loder started again.

"You're going to see Wingate?" he asked.

"Yes; that's his show yonder," said Harry, with a gesture towards the red chimneys of the Gables looming up in the wintry mists in the distance.

"I know that," grunted Loder.

"I say, you're not calling on Wingate by any chance?" asked Harry, struck by a new thought. "If so—"

"Of course not, you young fool!" said Loder harshly.

"Same old, polished manners!" grinned Frank Nugent. "Come on, you fellows—we have enough of Loder at Greyfriars."

The juniors tramped on. Loder had stopped, and he did not follow them. He stood staring after them, with a black brow; and he was still standing there, when Wharton glanced back in the distance.

Wharton's face was very thoughtful.

"It's rather odd meeting Loder here," he said. "He didn't know we were about here, but he knows that Wingate lives yonder. I—I wonder—"

He paused.

"What?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Loder can't be here looking for trouble, surely?" said the captain of the Remove. "He wouldn't be ass enough to keep up Greyfriars troubles with old Wingate in the hols."

"Not likely," said Nugent.

"The likefulness is not terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the esteemed and ridiculous Loder looked very savage."

"He wouldn't be such an ass," said Bob. "Of course, he knows that he's going to be turned out of the captaincy next term. I suppose he feels pretty sore about it. But it wouldn't help him in any way to kick up a shindy with old Wingate. May as well mention to Wingate that we've seen him, though, so that he can keep an eye open."

And when they were seated at the lunch-table at the Gables the juniors mentioned to George Wingate that they had seen Loder.

Wingate was surprised, and evidently not pleased.

But he dismissed the matter carelessly.

"I dare say he's staying about here somewhere," he said.

"A friend of yours, George?" asked Wingate's father.

Wingate smiled.

"No; a Greyfriars man I'm on rather bad terms with," he answered, and Jack Wingate coloured and kept his eyes on his plate. The fag wondered what his father would have said had he known the precise character of Gerald Loder, and that at one time the scapegrace of the Third had boasted of him as his "friend in the Sixth." But of that unhappy episode, now over and done with, nothing had been said at home by either of the brothers.

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The dusk was falling when Harry Wharton & Co. left the Gables, and started to walk home.

The snow, which had long threatened, was beginning to fall; and the mist was thick on the heath.

"We'll go by the road," said Harry Wharton. "It's a bit longer, but when the mists come thick a fellow is liable to miss the path. No joke getting lost at night there."

"My hat! No!" said Bob, looking into the snowy mists.

The juniors followed the road instead of the footpath. A mile from the Gables the lights of a lonely wayside inn gleamed out into the snow.

In the doorway of the inn a fellow was lounging, smoking a cigarette, and looking out into the dusk.

With the light behind him, he was quite clearly to be seen; and Bob Cherry uttered a startled ejaculation.

"My only hat! That's Loder."

"Loder!"

"Look!"

The Famous Five stared at Loder as they passed. It was clear that he was staying at the inn, a little wayside place where a fellow like Loder would certainly not have been expected to put up.

On the shadowy road, the juniors were not to be recognised, and if Loder saw them passing, he did not know them. But they saw him clearly enough against the light.

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## No Xmas is Complete Without THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL.

GET YOUR COPY TO-DAY!

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"I say, this is jolly queer, you fellows," said Bob Cherry, as they tramped on. "Loder's at that inn—not staying at some place round here. What on earth can he be putting up at a show like that for?"

"Goodness knows!" said Harry, with a troubled brow. "That isn't the way Loder would spend a Christmas holiday, that's a cert. I can't help thinking that his being here has something to do with old Wingate."

"But if he means mischief, what can he possibly do?"

"I can't imagine."

It was strange enough, and all the juniors felt troubled and disturbed, as they tramped on through the December darkness. What did Loder's presence mean—what thoughts were passing behind that black, scowling brow? They could not guess; but they had a foreboding that there was trouble to come.

They were not likely to guess the thoughts that were passing in Gerald Loder's mind, as he stood at the inn door, smoking cigarette after cigarette, staring out into darkness that was not so dark as his bitter and revengeful thoughts.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Treachery!



"THICK, and no mistake!" "The thickfulness is terrific."

"It comes on suddenly like that," said Harry Wharton. "I hope there's nobody out on the heath to-night!"

The chums of Greyfriars stood in the big doorway of the Lodge. It was Christmas Eve, and there was a hum and a buzz of gaiety all through the house. Every window gleamed with light; great log-fires burned and sparkled, and diffused cheery warmth; in the old oak hall the red berries of the hollies, the white of the mistletoe, gleamed and glistened amid the lights. Harry Wharton & Co. wore very bright faces, Miss Wharton smiled and beamed, the old bronze-complexioned colonel unbent, and was almost boyish. Guests had arrived, and were still arriving, in spite of the cold, the snow, and the mist. Hazeldene of the Remove was there with his sister Marjorie, and Clara Trevlyn and Barbara Redfern of Cliff House School; Peter Todd had come with two of his sisters, who, if they were not as pretty as Marjorie and Clara, were very merry and bright and mirthful. Other merry young faces crowded the old house.

Lights gleamed on the drive, as cars and carriages came up. They came at almost a crawl. The afternoon had been fine, only a little misty, with a gleam of winter sunshine; but soon after dusk the mist had swept thickly over the moor. Harry Wharton & Co. looked out into the misty evening; the old trees of the park loomed up like dim spectres.

"Thick, and getting thicker," said Bob Cherry. "But what's the odds, so long as you're happy? Anybody care for a stroll on the heath?"

"Ha, ha! Not this evening."

"The strolfulness would be frigid and ludicrously damp," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The indoorfulness is the proper caper."

Even Bob Cherry admitted that indoors was preferable to outdoors that evening.

A telephone-bell buzzed somewhere in the house.

"Harry!" called out Colonel Wharton.

The captain of the Remove hurried to the telephone. He expected to receive a call from an intended visitor, who had decided not to venture out in the thickening mist. But it was Jack Wingate's voice that came over the wires.

"Is that Wharton?"

"Yes. That young Wingate?"

"Yes, Wharton! I suppose George got over all right?"

"George?" repeated Harry.

"It was fine and clear when he started," said the fag. "But the mists have come on suddenly, and I thought I'd ring you up and ask, as he came over by the path on the moor. It's jolly thick on this side."

"It's thick over here," said Harry. "Has your brother started to come over, kid?"

"Eh? Yes, of course—long ago!" came the fag's reply, in surprised tones. "You knew he was coming?"

"No."

"I don't understand. Is Cherry all right?"

"Bob! Of course!"

"I don't understand. My brother started as soon as he rang off the phone,"

said Jack Wingate. "I thought he would have got over by the time the mist came on; but I rang up to make sure. Wasn't Cherry much hurt, after all?"

Wharton blinked at the transmitter in bewilderment.

"What are you driving at, kid? Bob Cherry is all right—there's nothing the matter with him. Was your brother coming over to see him?"

"What! Hasn't Cherry had an accident?"

"Eh? No."

"Then I can't understand it. Who was it telephoned here from the Lodge?"

"Nobody, that I know of."

"Oh, my hat! There's a spoof on somehow, then—somebody's playing tricks. Hold on while I call the pater."

Wharton held on, in deep perplexity. A minute later there came a deep voice over the wires:

"Wharton!" It was Mr. Wingate speaking. "This is a very strange affair. Nearly two hours ago my son received a telephone message, presumably from your house. It stated that Robert Cherry had fallen from a car, and was in a serious state, and was asking to see Wingate—my son. George started at once across the heath."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Harry, aghast.

"Am I to understand that the message was false?"

"Certainly it was," said Wharton. "Bob Cherry has had no accident of any kind, and nobody telephoned from here."

"Upon my word! Then my son has been the victim of some foolish practical joke!" exclaimed Mr. Wingate.

"It looks like it, sir," said Harry. "But the practical joker isn't here, I assure you."

"No, no, I am sure not; but it is very extraordinary. I cannot think of anyone who would be likely to play such a foolish trick. You told Jack that my son had not arrived?"

"Not yet, sir. I suppose he will get here, as he has started," said Harry. "But if he started two hours ago, he should have been here before this. Which way did he come—the footpath or the road?"

"The footpath, as it is so much shorter, and, of course, he was in a great hurry to reach you, in the circumstances—the supposed circumstances, I mean. If he has not reached you, he must have been caught in the mist—and yet that is strange, as he had ample time to reach Wharton Lodge, I think, before the mists came on. He was on his bicycle."

"Then he ought to have been here long ago," said Harry. "Perhaps he has had a spill; but he's really had time to walk it."

"It is somewhat alarming," said Mr. Wingate. "It would be very serious to be lost on the heath when the mists are on. There must have been an accident of some kind. I shall go in search of him from this side."

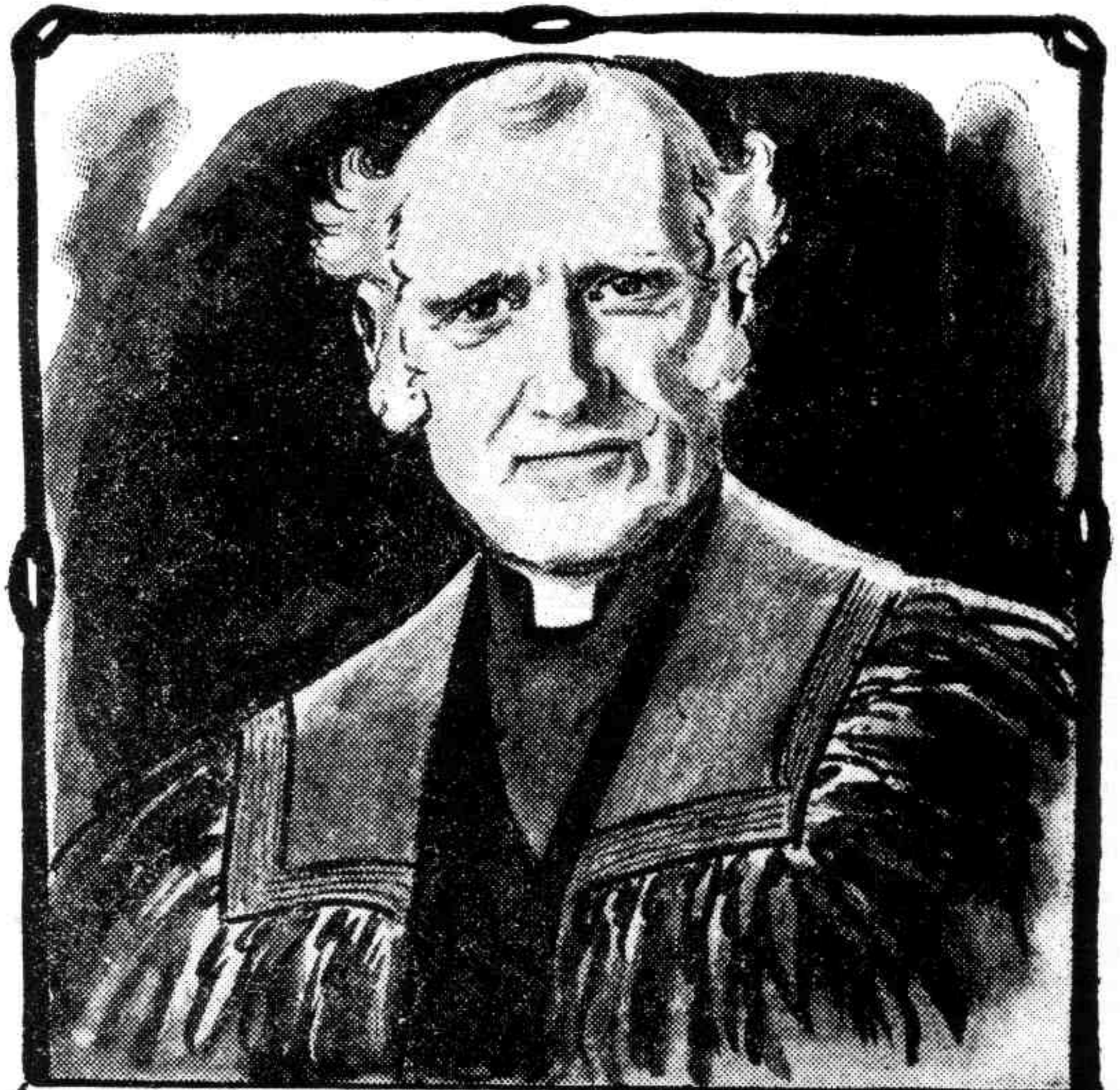
"And we shall look for him at once from this side," exclaimed Harry Wharton.

After a few more words, he rang off, and hurried to find his uncle. Colonel Wharton listened in astonishment to what he had to tell.

"A foolish practical joke, and a very unfeeling one," said the colonel, knitting his brows. "It was kind of Wingate to set out at once to see Cherry, but simply brutal of some foolish fellow to give him such an anxious journey. He must be searched for at once."

"MAGNET" PORTRAIT GALLERY.

No. 15—The Reverend Herbert Henry Locke, D.D.
(The Head of Greyfriars).



One of the best headmasters Greyfriars has ever known, and perhaps the most popular, it is fitting that the portrait of this "grand old man" should appear in our special Christmas Number. When he errs in judgment 'tis generally on the side of mercy, although, of course, occasions have arisen where he has "come down heavy" on the innocents. But every one of us makes mistakes at some time or another, and Dr Locke is, above all things human. A clever scholar, a good reader of character, a disciplinarian, but never a tyrant, "Old Locke," as his pupils refer—not disrespectfully—to him, has endeared himself to all. Next to books he has a passion for gardening. But his affection for the boys under his charge is undoubtedly his greatest "hobby."

"Poor old Wingate!" said Bob. "He may have had a tumble on the heath—it was pretty thick there even before the fog came on. May be lying somewhere with an injury, waiting for help."

"I will go, and take some of the men," said Colonel Wharton. "You had better remain with your guests, Harry."

Wharton shook his head.

"They'll excuse me, in the circumstances," he said. "I must come with you, uncle. Let's make up a good party—the more there are, the more likely we are to find Wingate. We shall have to shout for him, and we may be hours finding him on a night like this."

"Very well!"

No time was lost. A change came over that merry Christmas party, as the news of Wingate's danger was spread. Almost all the fellows volunteered to join in the search party. Shoes were changed for thick boots, overcoats and mufflers donned, lanterns lighted, electric-torches sorted out. The party numbered more than a dozen when they started out, headed by the colonel, carrying a glaring acetylene lamp.

There was a deep cloud on Harry Wharton's face.

"What does this mean, you fellows?" he muttered, as the Famous Five tramped down the foggy drive after the tall figure of the colonel. "Who sent that spoof message to Wingate to fetch him out on the heath?"

Bob Cherry breathed hard.

"Loder!" he said, in a low voice.

The same thought had occurred to all the juniors. That Loder was in the vicinity, bent on trouble, they had already been convinced; and now this trick had been played. It was natural that they should think of the bully of Greyfriars at once.

"But why?" whispered Nugent.

"Why?"

"The whyfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed rotten Loder would not play a silly trick like a fag merely to give old Wingate a walk in the snow."

"Something more than that!" said Harry.

"But—but what?"

"Goodness knows! We've got to find Wingate. Something's happened, or he would have reached the lodge."

What had happened?



The juniors asked themselves that question, with deep disquiet in their hearts. What had happened to George Wingate on the lonely, misty heath? What had Loder done?

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Loder's Last Blow!



CRASH!

The bicycle went over suddenly, and George Wingate sprawled in the snow.

He had been riding hard.

The wide, lonely, misty heath was covered

with snow, the footpath was caked with it. It was risky riding in the snow; but Wingate had been too pressed by haste to think of walking. The false message had told him that Bob Cherry, lying seriously injured at Wharton Lodge, was asking for him, and that was more than enough to make Wingate hurry. A dozen times he had skidded as he pedalled fast across the snowy heath, but he had not come down. And now he would not have fallen had he not fallen into a trap. From the dusk something whizzed suddenly and crashed into the rear wheel of his machine, and he was down in the snow before he knew what was happening.

He crashed headlong, dazed by the sudden fall. A shadowy figure leaped from the gloom, and closed in on him. A knee was planted on Wingate, in the small of his back, as he sprawled in mud and snow, pinning him down.

He gasped and struggled.

It was amazing to him. The sudden attack had taken him utterly by surprise. Of his assailant he could see nothing. Even as he twisted his head to look up only a shadow was visible in the early darkness of the December day.

"You rotter, whoever you are," panted Wingate, "let me up! Let me up, you scoundrel!"

There was a low laugh.

"Not yet, George Wingate!"

The Greyfriars Sixth-Former started violently. Vague thoughts of some desperate footpad had been in his mind. But he knew that voice.

"Loder!"

Loder of the Sixth laughed again.

"I've surprised you," he said.

"You scoundrel! Let me up and I'll smash you!" roared Wingate. "Is this a game for a Greyfriars man to play, you rotter?"

He struggled furiously. But he was half-buried in snow, and Loder's knee jammed like iron in his back, Loder's hands were gripping him. He was utterly at a disadvantage, and he had no chance. The ex-captain of Greyfriars was at his enemy's mercy.

"I've something to say to you before I let you go, Wingate," said Loder, in a low, bitter voice.

"You rotter! Listen to me!" panted Wingate. "I'll overlook this. I won't touch you, if you'll let me go at once. I'm in a hurry—a fearful hurry! A kid has had an accident. I'm on my way to see him—"

"You needn't worry about Bob Cherry," said Loder coolly. "Cherry is all right, so far as I know, at any rate. That message came from me."

"From you?"

"Yes. I telephoned from the inn," said Loder coolly. "You can guess

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why—to bring you out on the heath in a hurry by the shortest path—and the loneliest. There won't be anyone crossing the heath by this path to-night, Wingate."

Wingate panted.

"You awful rascal! So it was a trick?"

"Exactly!"

"I'll make you sorry for it. What's your game, you rotter, if you are in your right senses!" exclaimed Wingate. "As soon as I'm on my feet, I'll give you the hiding of your life!"

"You're not on your feet yet," said Loder, in the same low, bitter, tense voice. "I've planned this carefully, Wingate, and I've got the upper hand at present, and I'm keeping it. Before I let you go you've got to make me a promise."

"I will promise you nothing!"

"I think you will. You've got to promise not to stand for re-election at Greyfriars next term."

Wingate laughed scornfully.

"Are you mad? I will promise nothing of the kind!"

"You'd keep your word, if you gave it," said Loder.

"I should keep my word, if I gave it—but I shall not give it! Do you think you can threaten me, you hound?"

"Yes, I think so," said Loder coolly. "Either you'll give me your word to keep out of the new election at Greyfriars, and leave me captain of the school, or you won't be able to return to Greyfriars for the new term!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"You won't be fit to return," said Loder, in cool, deadly tones. "After a night passed on this open heath, in the snow, you won't be in a state for school, or anything else, for a long time to come. More likely to be an invalid for six months."

"Are you mad?"

"You've driven me to the wall," said Loder. "I've won the captaincy of Greyfriars, and I'm keeping it, by fair means or foul. You'd better think before you refuse. It's going to be a wild night. The mists are coming down thicker already, and the snow's falling again. You'll make me that promise, or I swear I'll leave you here in the snow for the night, tied up so that you can't get away. Take your choice!"

"You're mad!" panted Wingate.

"Take your choice!" repeated Loder.

Wingate's answer was to renew the struggle. At a terrible disadvantage as he was, he gave Loder plenty of trouble. But the bully of Greyfriars had the upper hand, and he kept it. Wingate sank deeper and deeper into the snow-bank as he struggled, till he was almost buried, and still Loder's knee was driven into his back, Loder's hands grasped him and held him down. Spent, exhausted at last, Wingate ceased to struggle, and he was still, a helpless prisoner.

"You scoundrel!" he breathed.

Loder panted. He had had to exert all his strength. But he still had the whip-hand of his enemy.

"Take your choice!" he said, with savage coolness. "I'll tie you hand and foot, and leave you here to freeze. You've driven me to this, Wingate. It's the only way left. I mean business!"

"And do you think after that, that you'll remain captain of Greyfriars—that you'll remain at Greyfriars at all?" panted Wingate. "If you dare do as you say, you'll go to prison instead of Greyfriars School!"

"I'm risking that. You won't find it easy to prove," said Loder coolly. "If

you talk too much, you'll succeed in bringing plenty of disgrace on Greyfriars; but it will be your word against mine. There are some sporting men at the inn where I'm staying, who will be ready to swear that I never left the inn at all. I've taken all the precautions I can, Wingate—and, for the rest, I'm willing to take the risk. If I have to leave Greyfriars—if I have to face ruin—at least I'll beat you at the finish!"

Loder's voice was savagely determined.

"Will you give me that promise?"

"No!"

"That does it!"

Wingate struggled again, but he struggled unavailingly. His arms were dragged up over his back, and his wrists bound together by a strong whipcord. Then Loder left him, and Wingate rolled over breathlessly, and sat up in the snow. With his hands tied behind him he was utterly helpless.

Loder stood in the falling flakes. Thick and thicker mists were lowering on the heath, and the snowflakes flew ghost-like in the shadows, covering the ground as with a white, velvety carpet. All trace of the footpath had disappeared. The last footprint had vanished. Wingate's bicycle was already hidden by snow. It seemed as if the two Sixth-Formers of Greyfriars were alone in a world of mist and snow.

Loder's eyes gleamed down at his victim.

"What will you be like after a night in this?" he asked.

"If it meant death, I would not give in!" said Wingate. "And it may mean that if you are mad enough to do as you say."

"That's your risk," said Loder, between his teeth. "At dawn I come back and untie you. Who's going to prove that I ever saw you at all? A spill on the bicycle, a night in the snow, and the rest of the story a delirious fancy. Anyhow, I'm chancing it."

He peered down at Wingate in the thickening mist.

"Will you give your word now?"

"No."

"Have your own way, and repent it."

Loder drew a second whipcord from his pocket, and Wingate's feet were bound. He lay helpless in the snow, the flakes settling on him thickly as he lay.

But there was no surrender in his face. Suffering from exposure, a long illness, and perhaps a dangerous one, lay before him if Loder carried out his threat, as evidently he meant to. But death itself would not have forced Wingate to surrender.

"For the last time!" said Gerald Loder hoarsely.

"Scoundrel!"

"Then take your chance."

And Loder turned away.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

To Save His Enemy!



WINGATE lay panting in the snow. The flakes settled more and more thickly upon him. After the exertion of the struggle, the reaction had set in, and the cold was penetrating his limbs. A

shiver ran through him as he watched Loder turn from him in the snowy mist. But he did not speak. A minute more and Loder would be gone, and he would be left alone—to cold, and

darkness, and suffering—perhaps, it might be, to death. Loder was risking more, in his dastardly scheme, than he realised—than he was calm enough to realise. His mind, poisoned by hatred and malice and revenge, seemed to have lost its old cunning, cool calculation.

He was going, and Wingate did not speak. But Loder stopped again. Had he repented?

He did not look back.

He was staring before him, into the darkness and whirling snow. He seemed to be looking for a path—for a landmark. But the ever-thickening fog on the heath hid all but the snowy earth from his sight, and the earth was a spotless sheet of white.

Loder stood and stared, and peered. He turned this way, and he turned that way, and still he hesitated.

He came back to where Wingate lay at last, with a sudden movement that had something of fear in it. Where Wingate lay there was the footpath, though it could not be seen under the mantle of snow.

Still, he did not look at the silent figure lying there in the snow. He was searching for the path. He stumbled over the half-buried bicycle, and muttered an imprecation. He swung back towards Wingate at last, and stood staring down at him, with a black and bitter look.

"Hang you!" he muttered thickly. "Hang you! I've done myself, as well as you!"

Wingate looked at him.

He understood.

Loder had followed the paths easily enough before the snow fell and the mists thickened. He had not counted on this. Slowly but inevitably the truth had forced itself upon Loder's scared mind. He was lost on the heath. Miles away lay the inn that he had left behind—miles, in other directions, lay the habitations of men. But for miles the barren heath extended, white, trackless, untrodden, endless white, looming eerily through the mist. And Loder's face, too, was white as he realised that he was lost—that he had not one chance in a thousand of finding his way from that desolate spot in the heart of the lonely heath.

Wingate smiled grimly.

"Hang you!" repeated Loder. "Hang you! I never foresaw this. I never thought of this. We're both in it!"

Wingate did not speak.

Loder moved restlessly about again, peering, searching, seeking. His footprints, almost as fast as he made them, disappeared under the thickening flakes. And always he hurried back to where Wingate lay, as if fearful of losing sight of him, of finding himself alone on the wild heath, without even his victim's presence to break the terrifying solitude.

He stopped by Wingate again at last, staring down at him.

"Hang you! If I let you loose could you find your way out of this horrible place?" he muttered hoarsely.

"I don't know."

Loder started.

"You don't know!" His voice had a ring of terror. "You know this part of the country. I am a stranger here. You must know how to find your way back to a road, at least."

"Nobody knows a way across this heath when the snow is falling and the mist rising," said Wingate quietly. "No man in the villages hereabouts would leave the road for a dozen yards on a

night like this. I'm lost here, as much as you are—now."

"Good heavens!" breathed Loder.

He stood for some minutes, quite still. It seemed as if the mist of hatred and malice and revengeful excitement had passed from his mind, leaving it clear. He stared round into the black night, and again looked at Wingate. There was fear in his face.

"We're both in this," he said. "Good heavens! Why, it may mean death! I could never find my way out of this! And you—"

He shuddered.

"It's your fault, Wingate. You've driven me to the wall," he muttered. "But—but I never realised that it might have been death for you to leave you here. I never thought of that. But I—"

He broke off. It was the realisation of his own danger that had made him realise the rest. He spoke again, in a husky voice.

"If I let you loose will you do your best to help us both out? We can scarp afterwards, if you like. This isn't the time or place for it."

"I know that," said Wingate. "I'll do my best to find a way out of this, and I should not think of deserting you here, even after what you've done. If we don't get out of it alive—"

"You think there's a doubt?"

"There's more than a doubt," said Wingate dryly.

"Good heavens!" muttered Loder.

He fumbled at the cords that bound Wingate, and then opened his pocket-knife and cut them through. Wingate of the Sixth rose to his feet.

"Now—" muttered Loder.

Wingate looked round him. But the falling snow, the sweeping fog, baffled him, as they had baffled Loder.

He looked at his enemy's white face, and there was no animosity in his look.

"I'll try," he said. "I think the snow's easing off, and that's something. The footpath runs by here; if we can keep to it we shall come out on the

road near the Gables—only three miles, if we could do it. Come on, Loder!"

Wingate started to tramp through the snow, and Loder followed him. Not a word more was spoken as they tramped on.

Darkness and snow—snow and darkness!

The flakes ceased to fall at last. But deep snow blotted the earth from sight, and the mists swirled round them, even thicker and thicker. Again and again Wingate paused, and stared, and scanned, and started again; and close by him tramped the silent, white-faced Loder, fearful of losing him in the darkness.

Wingate struck matches again and again. There was no wind on the heath—the matches burned clear.

"Footprints!" exclaimed Loder suddenly.

"Thank heaven!"

Wingate struck matches again. The track was clear—of two pairs of boots that had tramped closely together.

Loder panted with relief.

"Follow this track, and it will lead us out," he said hopefully. "Someone else is on the heath, after all, to-night. What are you staring at, Wingate? Why don't you speak?"

Wingate breathed hard.

"These tracks won't help us out," he said in a low voice.

"Why not? Why not?"

"Because they're our own tracks," said Wingate quietly. "We've been wandering in a circle, and come back to very nearly where we started, I think."

Loder looked at him wildly and groaned. For two hours they had been tramping, with growing weariness. And they were still in the heart of the desolate heath, far from help.

Loder groaned.

"It's all up! I can't go much farther," he said thickly.

"We know now what we've done, at any rate," said Wingate, as cheerfully
(Continued on page 26.)

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THE GREEN SPIDER! For the possession of this weirdly constructed ring, resembling in shape a spider, the Wolves would seem to be prepared to adopt the most desperate measures. What is its secret?

The Mystery of Lone Manor

(Introduction on page 23.)

The Man In The Dark!



"HEAR that?" muttered Tom Travers.

The three stood listening. But the faint, ghostly cry that had risen to them out of the darkness of the stone stairway at their feet did not come again.

They could hear the rush of water, but all else was silent as the grave. Outside, the Wolves had opened the sluice-gate, were emptying the moat in their search for the hiding-place of the mysterious green spider. But these three in the old tower knew now that

Silva and Drood and Scaramanga, the Greek, were on a false trail.

The bright ray of the electric torch shone vividly down into the gloom as Locke stepped on to the winding stone stairway. Jack Drake followed swiftly, with Travers on his heels.

The air was damp and heavy. Mildew made the steps slippery, and thick leathery fungi grew upon the walls.

"Crumbs!" muttered Jack. "This sort of place is enough to give anyone the creeps!"

He shivered.

From Ferrers Locke came a sudden exclamation. The detective halted, peering down the beam from the torchlight to some object on the steps below them. Jack, staring over the detective's shoulder, drew a sudden sharp breath.

A man's hand could be seen, clawed upon one of the steps, and half an arm. The rest of the motionless figure was hidden by the twist of the stairs.

"So there is someone down here!" said Travers, and his voice held a startled tremor.

Locke hurried on. A few moments later he was stooping over the man who lay on the steps, eyes closed, face deathly white—an elderly man dressed in black. Travers' startled face lit up with recognition.

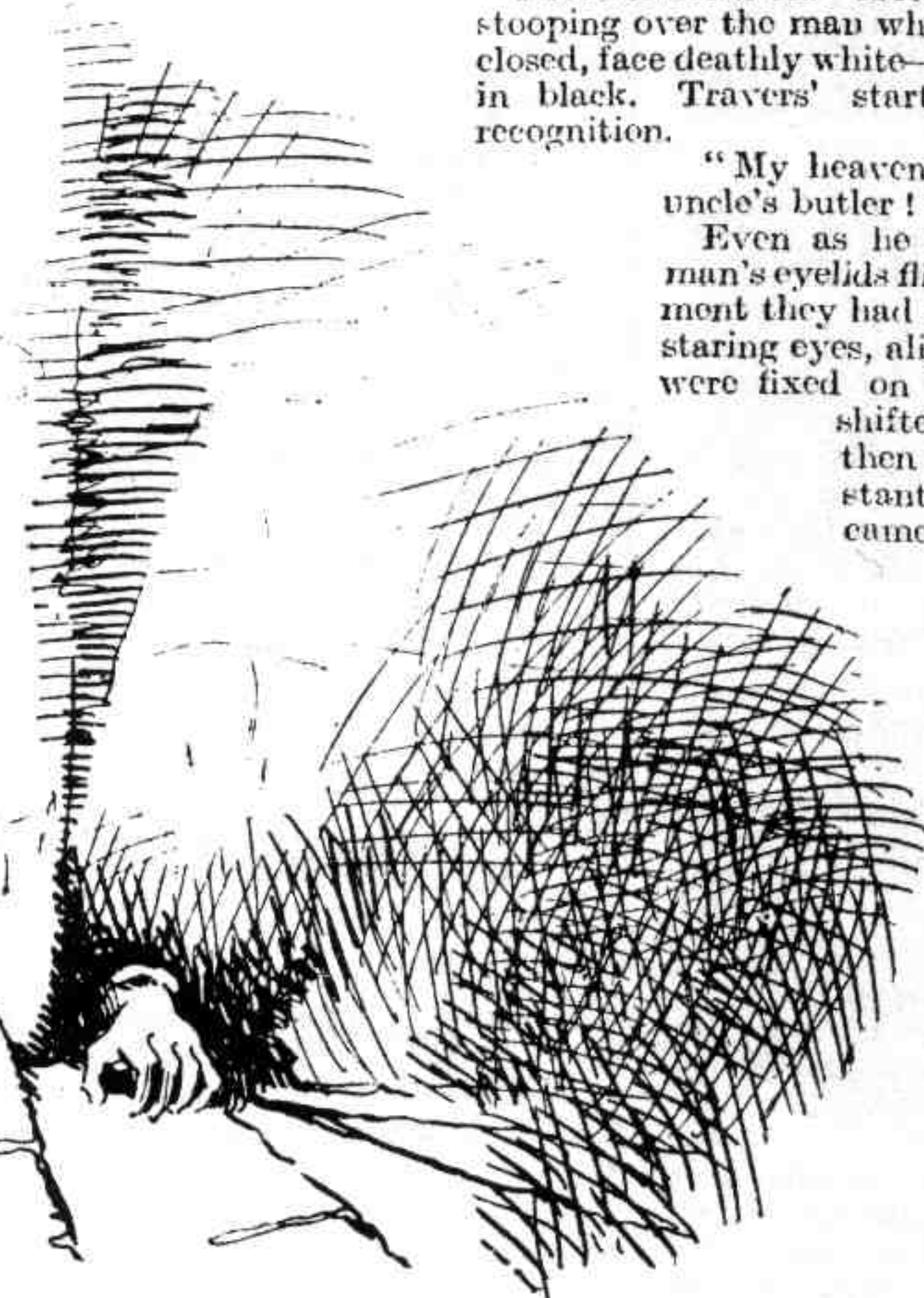
"My heavens! It's Armitage—my uncle's butler!"

Even as he spoke the unconscious man's eyelids flickered. The next moment they had quivered open. Wide-staring eyes, alight with an odd terror, were fixed on Ferrers Locke. They shifted to Jack Drake and then fell on Travers. Instantly from the old butler came a hoarse cry.

"Mr. Travers! Oh, thank Heaven! I thought I had been left to perish, down here, in the dark—"

The wild cry broke into a shaking sob. Clearly the man's nerve had gone utterly. Jack shuddered as he thought of all the man must have gone through.

Ferrers Locke spoke soothingly. The butler raised himself into a sitting



posture, with Locke's arm supporting his shoulders.

"Armitage, tell us, how did you get here?" asked the detective.

"It was on Saturday. How many days have passed since then? It seems like many weeks to me. I'm starving!"

"To-day is Monday," said Locke. "It is now late on Monday night."

"Monday!" The quavering voice held a note of disbelief. "Oh, but that can't be! It is later than that. I know it is. It must be—"

He broke off, passing a hand across his eyes. He was trembling now from head to foot. The sunken cheeks and the deathly pallor of the face told only too well the tale of those ghastly hours spent in the darkness. Ferrers Locke waited patiently for the butler to speak again.

"It was on the Saturday, at night," went on the faint, unsteady voice. "The Wolves were coming—I found that out. I warned my master, and then I hurried here to the tower to get the green spider, lest the Wolves should find it. But while I was down here, as I can only suppose, my master came here to the tower, too, and, without dreaming I was down here, he lowered the flagstone into place, and I was trapped! I shouted, I screamed—"

He broke off, to whisper hoarsely: "He never heard me—of course, he never heard! And I—I have been here ever since, wondering how long it would be before my mind broke down."

"You are all right now," said Locke soothingly. "But tell us, what is this green spider?"

The old man glanced hesitatingly at Travers. The young man nodded.

"You can speak safely, Armitage. We are all friends of my uncle here."

Still the butler hesitated. His hands clenched and unclenched nervously.

"Best tell me the truth!" muttered Locke. "You see, it is like this, Armitage. Your master fell into the hands of the Wolves, and as a result he is lying ill with brain-fever, unable to tell us anything. We are fighting the Wolves on his behalf. They are in possession of this house now. If the green spider is to be saved from their hands, we must get it away!"

Clearly the news was a staggering blow to Armitage. Fresh terror showed in his face.

One of his trembling hands went to his breast-pocket. He took out a small box of green leather and handed it to Travers without speaking. The young footballer pressed the catch, and the box clicked open. Jack, who was holding Locke's torch, flashed the light upon it, and gave a gasp.

The leather box held a strange ring, fashioned in the shape of a spider, with a huge emerald set in its back, vivid green. The eyes were formed of tiny emeralds, while the creature's legs were drawn under it to form the circle for the finger. It was so lifelike that there was something vaguely repellent in it to Jack's eyes.

The three crouched beside Armitage with their eyes riveted on the strange thing in Travers' hand.

"But why should my uncle and the Wolves set such amazing value on this weird ring?" muttered Travers, in bewilderment. "In itself it is not worth more than a few pounds, comparatively speaking!"

"I can tell you that!" whispered the old butler. "Mr. Guelph confided in me a little while ago. I saw that he was in a dreadful state of nerves and fear, and I dared to ask the reason. I think he

was glad to share his secret. He told me that the ring of the green spider carries with it the secret of a vast hoard of jewels. Where they are hidden he did not say. I do not know if he knows that himself. How the ring came into his possession I do not know either; but in some way these men, who call themselves the Wolves, knew he had it, and were hunting him and it! It was the coming of the Wolves to Lone Manor that he feared so terribly."

Jack stared with gleaming eyes at the emerald spider. The secret of a vast hoard of jewels!

A skinny hand came out and gripped Travers' arm.

"But all the time the spies of the Wolves were in the house!" Armitage whispered hoarsely. "Mr. Guelph had cut the servants down to three, as you know, and the other two were members of the Wolves, underlings of the leaders of whom Mr. Guelph told me—Silva, and Drood, a blind man, and a strange-named Greek, and Strovoloski, the Russian, and the others, all unscrupulous and cruel—"

INTRODUCTION.

TOM TRAVERS, a clever goalkeeper who plays for Larkham City, receives an urgent message—"Come at once"—from

ADAM GUELPH, his uncle, an old miser, residing at Lone Manor, a gloomy old house, complete with moat and draw-bridge. Fearing the worst, Travers confides in

FERRERS LOCKE, the world-famous detective of Baker Street, and

JACK DRAKE, his clever boy assistant, who, after many thrilling experiences, discover that Adam Guelph has been kidnapped by a secret society calling itself "The Wolves."

SILVA and DROOD, a blind man, members of the society.

Adam Guelph is rescued from the Wolves, but Locke learns from the doctor into whose care the old miser is placed that Guelph is in such a serious condition that the detective need not expect any help from him.

Although hindered in their quest, Silva and his band of ruffians lose no time in showing that they mean business. Determined to force their way into the house, they lay siege to the place. Ferrers Locke, Drake, and Travers hold them off for a time, but in the end Silva & Co. force an entry through the barricaded windows, and the trio are captured. It is then that Locke learns that Silva is in quest of a little green spider which apparently holds the clue to the great mystery.

While the captors are emptying the moat, Locke and his assistants manage to free themselves of their bonds. They are wending their way through the darkened tower when they see a stone figure, the fingers of which point to a ringed flagstone giving access to a cellar below. Locke, remembering a letter which had been found in a tin box floating in the moat, is pulling at the ringed flagstone when he is startled by a ghostly cry coming, it seems, from the ground directly beneath him.

(Now read on.)

"The other two servants were members of the Wolves?" put in Locke swiftly. "So that is how it is that all the servants had disappeared from Lone Manor with their master when we came here that night?"

"Yes. Both were spies, who had managed to get my master's trust. They were here to find out where the green spider was hidden. They failed, and so the wolves tried force. That night—the night the others came here—I heard the two spies talking, and knew who they were. I did not get a chance of speaking to my master without their knowing, but I pricked a warning message on a playing-card, and handed it to him in his napkin at dinner. When he found that card he realised at once that it was a message, and beneath the unsuspecting eyes of the footmen—the two spies—he read that warning with his fingers beneath the table! And then—then I came here to get the green spider for—"

Armitage broke off with a shudder. Ferrers Locke drew a deep breath. One by one the mysteries of the old house were being solved, but leaving now a new and greater mystery! What could it be, this vast hoard of jewels of which the green spider, in some strange way, held the secret? And where were these jewels hidden?

Suddenly Jack turned his head, listening. His face had gone startled.

"What's up?" muttered Travers swiftly. Then he, too, heard what Jack had heard—faint above their heads the sound of creeping footsteps!

"They've found out that we've escaped!" said Locke incisively. "They're searching for us; and, by Heaven, they have found the raised flagstone in the tower, at the head of these secret steps!"

In silence the four listened. The footsteps were coming lower. Someone was stealing down the stairs!

"Trapped!" breathed Travers, and his face was grim. "We're trapped!"

Below the Moat!

JACK peered upward. Everything above was pitch blackness. But out of the dark the sound of those nearing footsteps was growing louder.

Travers clenched his fists.

"On these narrow stairs," he whispered, "we can put up a good fight. Only one of 'em can get at us at a time!"

Old Armitage's shrivelled hand plucked at Locke's sleeve.

"Follow me!" whispered the butler. "Quick!"

He tried to stagger to his feet, but the effort was too much for him unaided. Locke's strong arm went round the man's shoulders, and together they descended the winding stairs, Travers and Jack upon their heels.

Through a bewildering series of passages, dank and musty and foul with fungus, the tottering figure led them. Then Armitage halted suddenly and flung out a pointing hand.

"See there! There's a secret stone there that moves. Mr. Guelph found it, and it was in there that he had hidden the green spider! See!"

His thin fingers spread themselves upon the stonework in the light of Jack's torch. Even the old man's feeble pres-



sure was enough to work the stone. It swung back, revealing a dark hole.

"In we get!" cackled old Armitage. Then he held up his hand. "Hark, sirs!"

From out of the darkness behind them came the sound of footsteps, hurrying. A sudden voice, vague and muffled, came to their ears.

"They're somewhere down here, that's a cert!"

Swiftly the four filed in, bending double through the low opening. Again Armitage moved the stone, and they found themselves in a low, narrow cell, with water lying in dank pools on the floor.

"We're below the moat here!" muttered Armitage. "It'll be clever of 'em to find us!"

With the closing of the stone, all sound of their enemies had been shut out. An unearthly stillness reigned. Locke drew out a pipe and his tobacco-pouch. Then he thought better of it.

"The air's none too good down here to add smoke to it!" he laughed cheerfully. He glanced at his watch. "Midnight!"

"How long are we going to give 'em to give up the search?" asked Jack, settling himself on a stone shelf that ran down one side of the underground room, with his back to the wall and his hands in his pockets. He had set the torch on the shelf beside him. It was a special long-service battery, and there was no danger of the light giving out yet awhile. The bright beam shone across the stone cell to the opposite wall, gleaming on the puddles of the floor.

"Half an hour," said Locke calmly.

"Half a giddy hour!" cried Jack. "My hat, I don't fancy half an hour in here!"

"Neither do I," said Locke. "But we can't afford to run risks. We know now what the Wolves are after—this hoard of jewels of which the green spider gives the secret. Well, when a bunch of unscrupulous and desperate men are after such a thing as that, they aren't going to give up quick!"

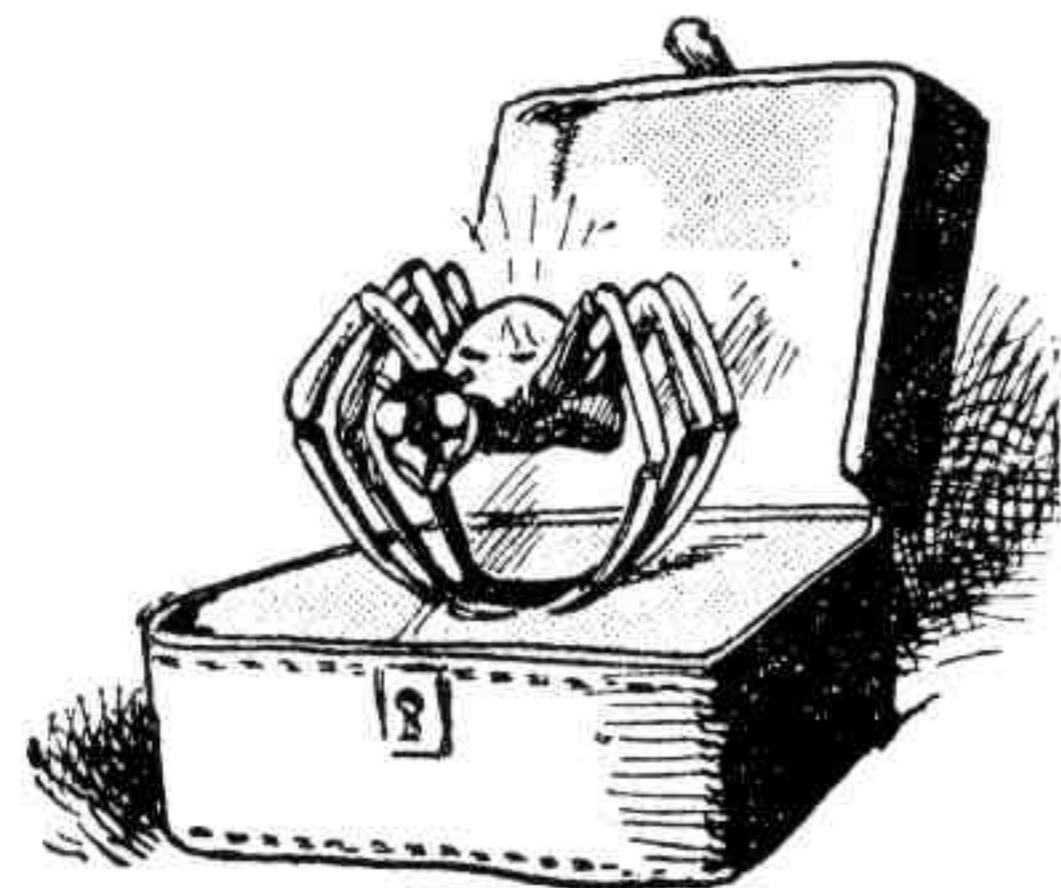
Travers took the mysterious ring from its case, and examined it curiously.

"Hanged if I can see how this can tell of anything!" he murmured at last. "There's no marking on it anywhere that I can find."

"Let me look," said the detective.

For some minutes Locke examined the ring, even taking a lens from his pocket.

WHAT IS THE SECRET OF THE RING?



The eyes of the green spider were formed of tiny green emeralds, while the creature's legs were drawn under it to form the circle for the finger.

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But in the end he returned it to Travers, with a shake of the head.

"I can't find anything either," he admitted. "It's a mystery. But I don't think there can be any doubt about its genuineness. There's something, only we've not found it yet. Perhaps we shall tumble upon it suddenly."

The long minutes dragged by.

"What about a move, guv'nor?" said Jack at last.

But Ferrers Locke shook his head.

"Not yet."

That was the longest half-hour of Jack's life. But at last Ferrers Locke rose to his feet.

"Time's up!" he said laconically. "We'll get moving. But we must go cautiously. The beggars may have left an ambush for us!"

Armitage worked the stone, and they crept out into the passage beyond.

They stood listening. Not a sound of anyone! Led by the old butler, they retraced their steps cautiously to the foot of the stone stairway. Up this they stole in single file, Locke leading the way. Still they could hear nothing of their enemies.

"Aren't we at the top yet, guv'nor?" muttered Jack, following on the detective's heels.

Locke had halted. They were in the darkness, for the detective had thought it safer not to use the torch when they could do without it. But now there came a click in the darkness, and a vivid beam of light leapt out, directed upward. It fell on a flat stone above Locke's head.

"Thought so," said the sleuth coolly. "Jack, the beggars have replaced the flagstone. They've got us like mice in a trap!"

Flight!



LIKE mice in a trap!

Locke put his hands against the stone and pushed upward with all his strength. The flagstone above his head scarcely moved.

"This is luck, I don't think!" said Jack

Drake, with a rueful grin.

The eyes of Armitage, the old butler, were wide and scared.

"Caught!" he groaned.

Again the detective exerted all his strength. The heavy stone slab lifted the fraction of an inch. Beads of sweat stood out on Ferrers Locke's brow. Then the flagstone sank back into place.

"We can't get at it!" he muttered. "From above, with a ring to hold, we only just managed to lift it aside. But from beneath—"

Suddenly Jack gripped his arm.

"But, guv'nor, all four of us—our combined strength would do it!"

"The stairs are too narrow for that, young 'un."

Jack nodded. When he spoke again his voice was excited.

"I know, guv'nor! Down in those passages there was a long wooden bar. Do you remember? With that we might be able to do the trick!"

"By Jove, yes!" exclaimed Travers. "Give me the torch. I'll go down!"

He vanished into the darkness, leaving them crouching beneath the stone slab.

It was some minutes before Travers returned to them. He was dragging the long, thick pole which Jack had remembered having seen lying in one of the passages. The end of it was passed up towards Locke, who set it against one corner of the flagstone.

"Catch on everybody!" murmured Locke. "Are you right? Then shove!"

Straining on the pole, staring up by the light of the torch set on the top step, Jack gave a delighted cry to see the heavy flagstone move. Slowly it rose higher on its side; then, with a crash, it fell back on to the floor of the tower. In a moment Ferrers Locke was through the opening.

"Quick!" he muttered. "They'll hear that, and be round us like flies in a minute or two!"

Jack scrambled through after him, and heard the pole go sliding back down the steps, to jam at the end. He reached down, helping Armitage through. Then Travers sprang out of the opening into the tower.

Locke made for the doorway near them and swung it open. A narrow path lay before them, running between the walls of the house and the edge of the moat. At the farther end could be seen the dark outline of the boat-house.

They ran out into the open. As they did so, there came a shout from somewhere round the corner of the house, behind the tower.

"They've heard us!" gasped Jack.

"I'll go on and get the boat out!" muttered Tom Travers swiftly, and he raced away down the path.

As they hurried after him, as swiftly as old Armitage's tottering footsteps would allow, they saw Travers swing himself down into the shadow of the boathouse. Already the level of the moat was very low, with the current running swiftly towards the sluice.

"There they are!"

The rasping voice came from somewhere above their heads. Glancing up, Jack saw a head protruding from one of the windows of the first floor—one of the Wolves!

Already Travers had sent the boat gliding out along the wall of the moat. He called up to them:

"You'll have to jump!"

"We must lower the old man," whispered Locke in Jack's ear, and they seized the butler and swung him down, legs waving and face scared, towards the boat. As they did so, a sharp crack came from the window above, and a bullet splashed menacingly into the water. Jack jumped for the boat, and it rocked dangerously.

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MONDAY'S GRAND
STORY OF
GREYFRIARS

ENTITLED:

"FACING THE
WORLD!"

By FRANK RICHARDS.

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in Good Time, Boys!

"Look out!" came the voice of Locke, and the next moment the detective was in the boat, too, and Travers was pulling desperately for the farther side.

A second time the automatic in the hand of the man in the upper window spoke, and the spurt of flame stabbed the darkness. But clouds were obscuring the moon, and the boat was hidden in shadow. The bullet went wide.

The current helped them, as the boat crossed diagonally towards the steps upon the farther side. At last the sides of the little boat scraped against the wall.

"Catch on, Jack!" cried Travers.

The youngster's fingers clutched at the wet steps, tearing the skin. But he held on. From somewhere along the moat came the sound of running footsteps.

"Here they come!" breathed Travers.

As Ferrers Locke sprang up the steps, two dark forms loomed up through the gloom. Without hesitating, Locke hurled himself at the foremost. A moment later Jack was at grips with the other.

Locke's steely fingers wound round the automatic gripped in the hand of the man he had seized. There was a gasp of pain from his adversary, as the detective twisted back the other's wrist. An instant later the weapon clattered to the ground.

Ferrers Locke's strong arms wound round the struggling man, lifting him like a sack of feathers. Then, with a quick twist, the detective sent the other hurtling clean over his head into the moat.

Travers had leapt to Jack's aid, and as he did so the plucky lad's assailant's automatic barked suddenly.

Travers felt the lead whine within two inches of his ear. Then Jack had twisted his adversary round and flung him down. The automatic went flying, and splashed into the moat, where the first man was striking out for the bank.

Distant shouting could be heard from the house and from the dark gardens. Travers swung towards Ferrers Locke.

"Follow me!" he cried. "Let me lead the way! I know the ground—"

Locke glanced hesitatingly at the old man at the top of the steps, who had been a wide-eyed spectator of the struggle with the two armed men. Then the detective made up his mind. He sprang for the old butler, and his powerful arms gripped him, swinging him into the air as though he had been a child. There was a protesting cry from Armitage, but already Locke was racing with him through the gloom, with Jack at his side, on the heels of Travers.

A bullet came singing after them. They could hear the trampling feet of their pursuers.

It seemed to Jack Drake that night that they could not hope to escape from Lone Manor. But he did not realise how Travers' intimate knowledge of the grounds could utterly baffle the men behind.

Twisting and turning, their feet noiseless on the soft grass, the fugitives wound round to their right, away from the moated house. Constantly doubling on their tracks, it was not long before they had left their pursuers mazed and bewildered.

When at last Travers halted, he had brought them to the edge of one of the muddy creeks that wound through the marshes around the house. He pointed down the stretch of dark water.

"There ought to be a boat down there," he muttered. "That's what I've been making for."



Jack stared back. Above a line of trees, the twisted chimneys of Lone Manor rose against the clouded sky, dark and mysterious. He chuckled breathlessly.

"A strategic retreat!" grinned the youngster. "We've left the place in the hands of the enemy, but we've got the giddy old green spider, so I fancy the laugh's on the Wolves!"

"Yes, I think we score," laughed Ferrers Locke.

Travers moved off down the edge of the creek.

"Will you wait here?" he said. "I'll see if there is a boat, and if there is I'll bring it along."

Three minutes later the faint splash of oars came to their ears. Travers came rowing through the gloom, drawing in towards the bank. The other three climbed on board, and the boat was turned.

Swiftly the mud-banks went sliding by as Travers pulled hard down the dark creek. The black outline of Lone Manor grew smaller as the creek widened towards the main water. Travers rested on his oars.

"Where shall we make for?" he said. "I know these creeks inside out. Shall I take you to the village? Or shall we land and go there by road?"

"I vote we go by water," said Jack Drake, and the others agreed.

The boat slid on.

It was an hour later that the nose of the little boat dug into the mud at the side of the creek that ran up to the village of Sharn. They landed, and Locke pointed across the field.

"There's a barn over there," he said. "I vote we turn in there and make ourselves comfortable. It's too late—or, rather, too early in the morning to try and get a room. Do you know, I don't think I shall even bother to knock up the village policeman here. He's a good chap in his way, but his head is dis-

Ferrers Locke's strong arms wound round the struggling man, lifting him like a sack of feathers. Then, with a quick twist, he sent him hurtling clean over his head into the moat.

tinctly wooden. It'll do no good spoiling his beauty-sleep. Single-handed he can't arrest all the bunch up at Lone Manor. Besides, now they know that we've got away, they'll be clearing out pretty soon, I expect, in case we've got any C.I.D. reinforcements in the neighbourhood."

"Me for the barn, then!" chuckled Jack. "Jove, I can do with a spot of sleep, gov'nor!"

Old Armitage was nearly done, and Locke half carried the old man to the barn. Inside, they settled themselves on the hay, and Travers laughed grimly.

"What a night! If old Hutchins, the trainer, could see me now, he'd have half a dozen fits!"

"Plenty of time to get fit by Saturday," murmured Jack Drake drowsily. "Playing the 'Spurs, aren't you, Tom?"

"Yes; at White Hart Lane. Coming to see it?"

"You bet!" said Jack. "It ought to be a tophole match, the Larks against the 'Spurs!"

But Jack would have been amazed had he known what was to happen at White Hart Lane—could he have foreseen the startling turn of events in connection with the green spider that was to happen at the match between Larkham City and Tottenham Hotspur!

(Don't miss the next instalment of this amazing detective story, boys. There's a shock in store for Ferrers Locke.)



LODER'S LAST CHANCE!

(Continued from page 21.)

as he could. "If the snow hadn't stopped we should not have found it out, and we should have gone on walking in a circle. Come on! Let's try again."

"I tell you I'm nearly done!" groaned Loder.

"Buck up, old man."

They tramped on again wearily.

Wingate's legs were heavy with fatigue, but his spirit was indomitable. Loder limped after him in the deepest gloom and misery. It was borne in upon his mind that they never would escape from the desolate snow-driven heath; that they would tramp on and on and on, blinded by the mists, till they sank down from sheer exhaustion, and then—

It was death! Loder knew it now—knew it only too clearly. If they sank down in the snow and the freezing cold, it was with lifeless faces they would greet the dawn, when it came.

That fearful thought drove Loder on. But he was exhausted. His steps dragged, he stumbled like a drunken man as he tramped in the slippery snow. He stopped at last, shuddering.

"I can't go on! I'm done!"

"Lean on me," said Wingate quietly. "If we stop we're done for, Loder. It's no use disguising it—we've got to fight for our lives now. Lean on me."

Loder groaned.

"And I—I was going to leave you—"

"Don't think of that now."

"I was mad—mad!" muttered Loder hoarsely. "Wingate, if—if this is the finish—I'm sorry! I never intended—at least, I never understood what I was doing! You'll believe that?"

"Yes, yes! Lean on my arm."

Wingate tramped on again, with Loder leaning heavily upon him. More and more heavily Loder leaned, slower and slower grew his dragging footsteps. And now the snow was falling again, thick and heavy and white. And still the blinding mists encircled them, and no sound came through the winter night, no light gleamed to give them hope.

Wingate's iron strength was going now, but he kept on doggedly. Whether he was heading for escape, or wandering blindly, he could not tell, but he knew that it was death to stop. Loder staggered, and Wingate grasped him as he fell. The wretched, exhausted fellow slid from his grasp into the snow.

"I can't go on! I'm done!"

"Loder—"

"I'm done! Save yourself if you can," breathed Loder. "I'm done! My senses are going, I think. Leave me here. I'm done! I'm sorry for what I did, Wingate! Save yourself!"

"Not without you."

Wingate stooped, and, exerting all his strength, drew Loder upon his shoulder. Loder did not speak—he was losing consciousness now.

Burdened with the heavy weight of his enemy, George Wingate stumbled on. He tramped like one in a dream, knowing dimly that this could not last long—that the end was coming. Soon he

must sink down—to be covered by the thick falling flakes.

From the distant darkness there was a flash of light.

He started.

What was that sound that came echoing strangely, eerily, through the echoing mist?

A shout—a human voice! The light flashed and disappeared—and flashed again. There were searchers on the heath.

Wingate gathered all his strength and shouted.

"Help!"

But it was only a faint, hoarse cry that came. Almost spent, he staggered up again. Lights flashed—more than one light—voices shouted, but he did not hear.

And then, as in a vision of a dream, he realised that lights were gleaming round him, that faces were looking at him, that helping hands were relieving him of his burden.

"Wingate!" It was Harry Wharton's voice. "Wingate, old man."

And then darkness rushed on George Wingate, and he knew no more.

Christmas day dawned—and it dawned on George Wingate in a bed at Wharton Lodge, with his father beside the bed. Wingate opened his eyes and stared about him.

"Father!"

"My dear boy!"

"Loder—where is Loder?"

"Loder is safe, my boy. He is in the next room."

"Thank Heaven for that!"

And Wingate's eyes closed again.

That Christmas there was an unexpected—a very unexpected—guest at Wharton Lodge.

It was Gerald Loder.

Wingate of the Sixth was quickly himself again, but Loder lay for days in the room at the Lodge, receiving nothing but kindness. Harry Wharton & Co. seemed quite to have forgotten the feud at Greyfriars.

Of what had happened on the heath Wingate had said nothing, and Loder was silent. The Famous Five had their suspicions, but they asked no questions. If there had been foul play Loder had repented of it. The fellow he had injured had saved his life, and even Gerald Loder could not be insensible to that. During those Christmas days it was a changed Loder that Harry Wharton & Co. saw—a Loder they hardly seemed to know. And when he left they parted from him kindly enough.

The change, perhaps, was not likely to last, but it did not soon pass away. When Greyfriars gathered for the new term, and the captain's election took place, it was seen that the old rivalry between the rivals of the Sixth was at an end—for the time, at least. For the first hand that went up to vote for George Wingate was that of Loder of the Sixth, and Loder's voice joined cordially in the roar of cheering that greeted Wingate's return to his old place as captain of Greyfriars School.

(Don't miss next week's grand tale of Greyfriars, entitled: "Facing The World!" by Frank Richards, featuring Vernon-Smith, the Bounder!)

HEARTY GREETINGS

FROM

FRANK RICHARDS

I THINK this is the first occasion that I have had the pleasure of talking to you fellows via the columns of the Chat, and the novelty of it appeals to me. But first let me wish you all a Jolly Christmas! I wish I could shake each one of you by the hand, but that, of course, is out of the question. We shall have to imagine that it is done—anyway, the spirit is there. I want to thank you all for the nice things you have said about me during the past year; the Editor has forwarded these messages on to me with clockwork-like regularity. He tells me that there is no other body of readers in the wide, wide world so appreciative, so full of that wondrous spirit of good fellowship, as Magnetites, and he is proud of you. I quite believe him, but I don't envy him, for I feel just as firm friends with you all as he does. There are just a few readers who label themselves with the nom de plume of "Critics." Some of their criticisms, doubtless, have been justified, for none of us are without fault. Some fellows, too, have been rather bitter in their denunciations of my stories. Well, I'm not easily riled, and can still appreciate their bitterness, although perhaps I could not find sufficient cause for it. But to them all, critics and otherwise, I repeat—a Jolly Christmas!

A FEW YEARS BACK.

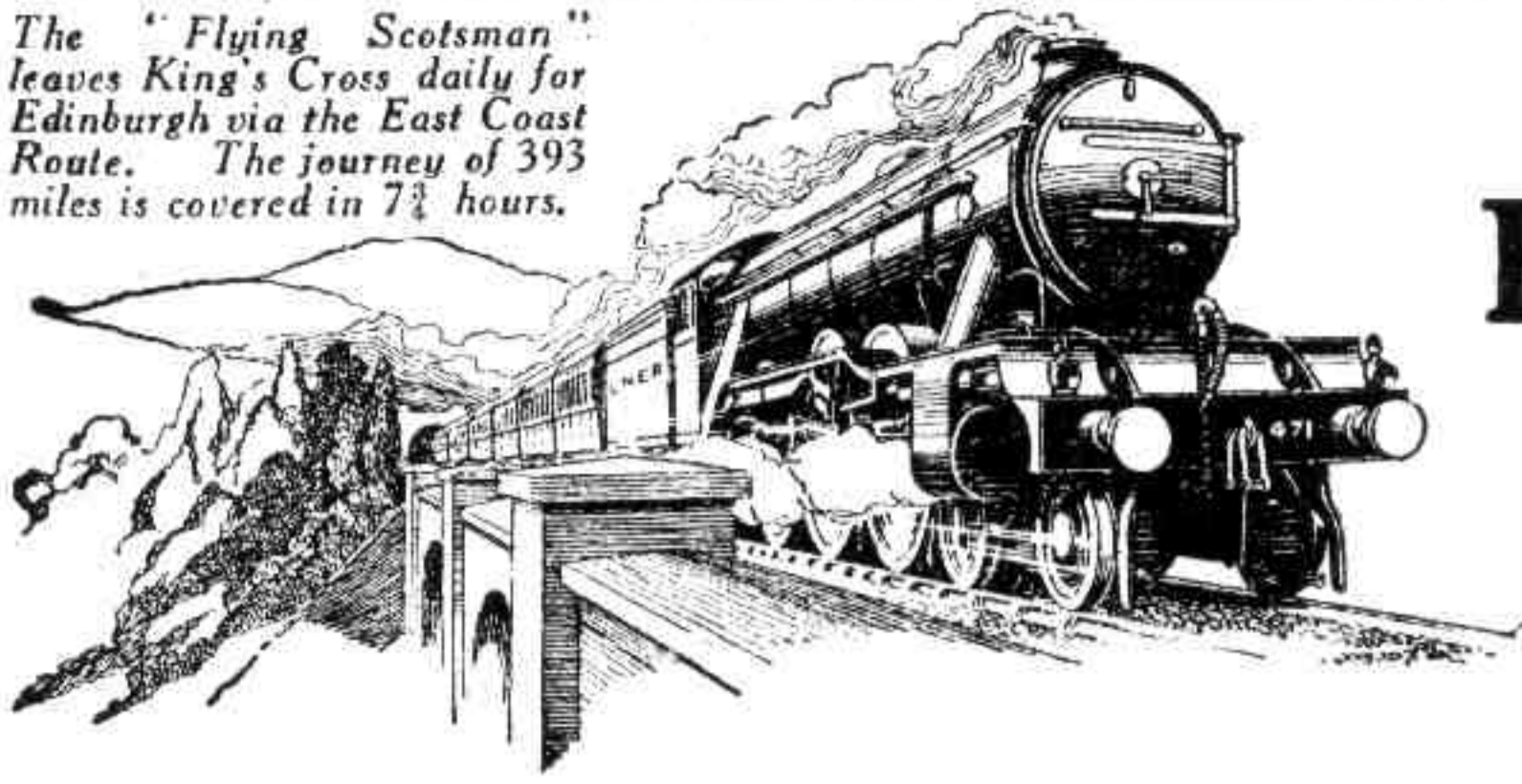
When I was a boy I always used to look forward to Christmas with great gusto. Well I remember the week before the great day—the week when kind aunts, uncles, cousins, sisters, and brothers thought of little me; not only thought of me, but wanted to buy me something for a present. Alas! those days did not produce such sterling books as the "Holiday Annual," but, all the same for that, the presents were extremely welcome. It was a regular joy week. The hanging up of the stocking in those days was a recognised custom even by those entering their teens. Of course, we didn't believe in Father Christmas—leastways, not the gentleman who was alleged to come down the chimney. I could never imagine him coming down our chimney, anyway, for my mater was a stickler for cleanliness and tidiness, and the displacement of soot which would undoubtedly follow Father Christmas down the chimney would have been sufficient to bring my mater on the scene to send him up the chimney again, a jolly sight quicker than he came down it!

THE DINNER—AND AFTER—!

How I used to look forward to that Christmas dinner! I verily believe, as I glance back along the years, that I starved myself beforehand to make room for the luscious things that the cook produced on that day of days. And the games—musical chairs, sitting on the bottle, the basket trick—oh, and heaps more—used to keep us in roars of laughter! That part of Christmas, at any rate, hasn't changed. I can see you all—in imagination, of course—doing the things that I did, and—let me whisper it—the things that I shall do myself this year! But my work—or, rather, shall I say my weekly labour of love, for work is a harsh name to bring before you jolly chaps?—shall not suffer through too youthful indiscretion on my part when that Christmas pudding comes along. Not for all the Christmases in the world would I miss serving you up, piping hot, those Greyfriars stories of which, on your own statements, you are so fond. Your Editor is tapping me on the shoulder, which signifies that I have got to call a halt in my chat with you. But I shall not forget you—shall not forget what sterling chums you are. That you will all enjoy the happiest Christmas of your lives is the sincere wish of your friend,

FRANK RICHARDS.

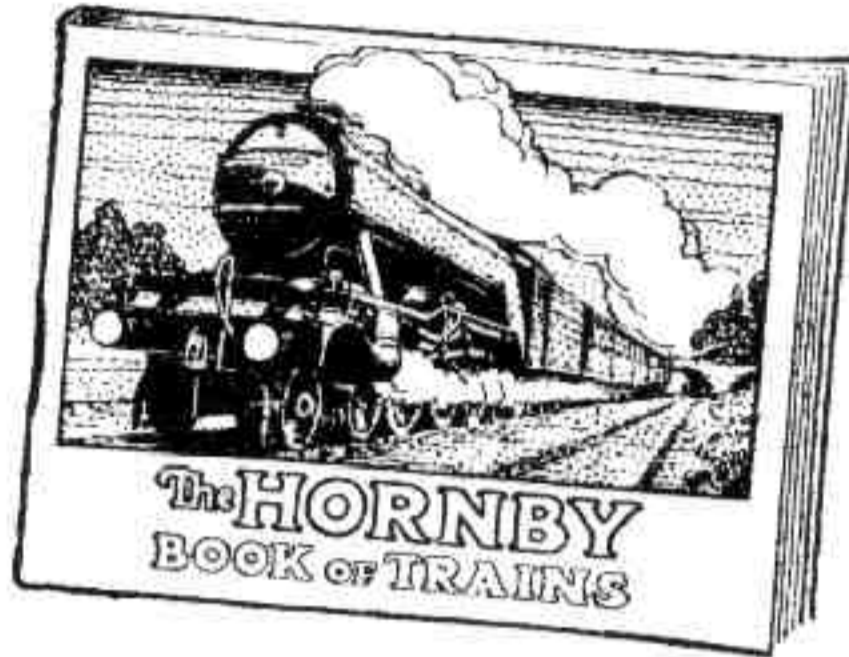
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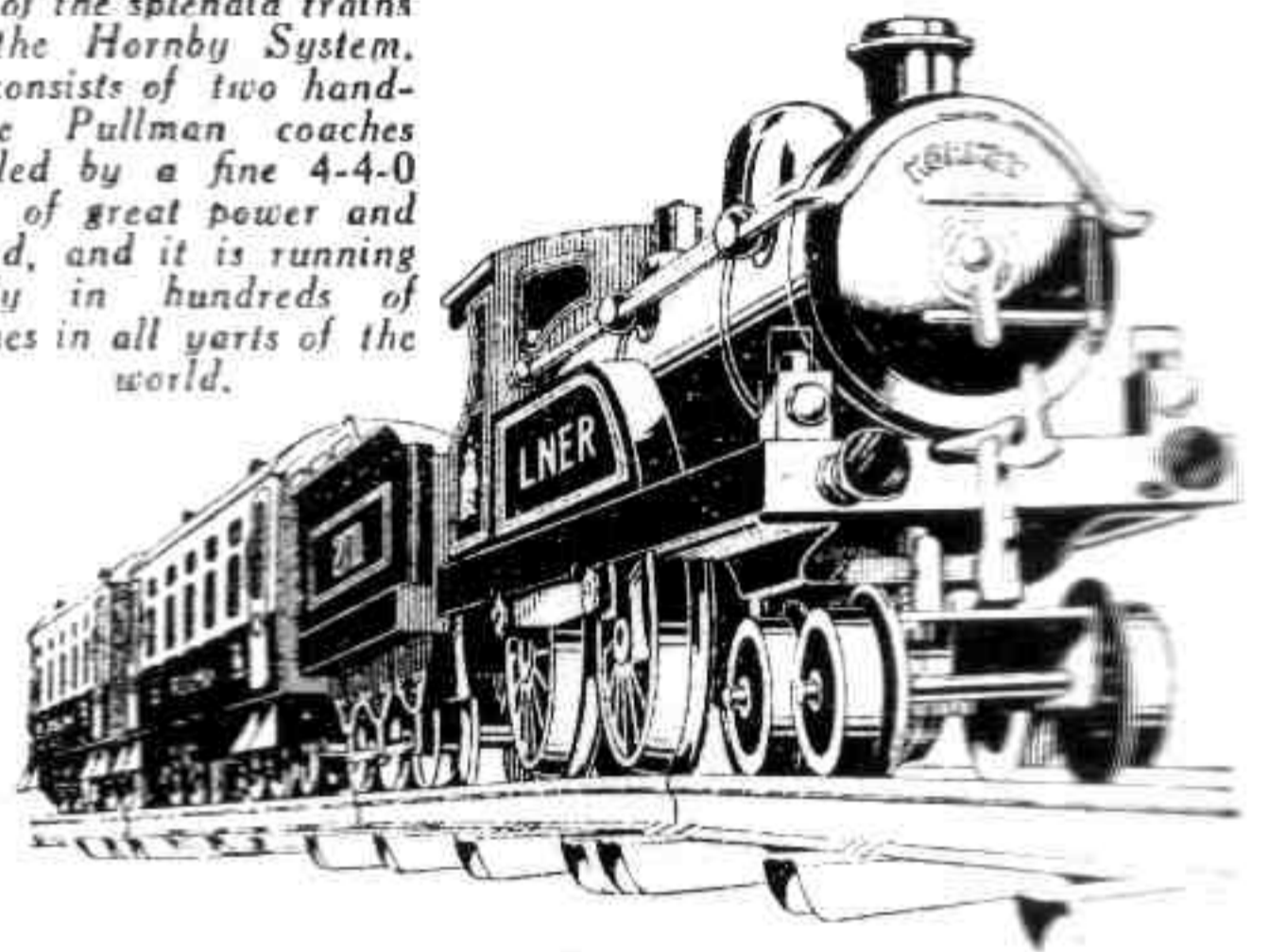
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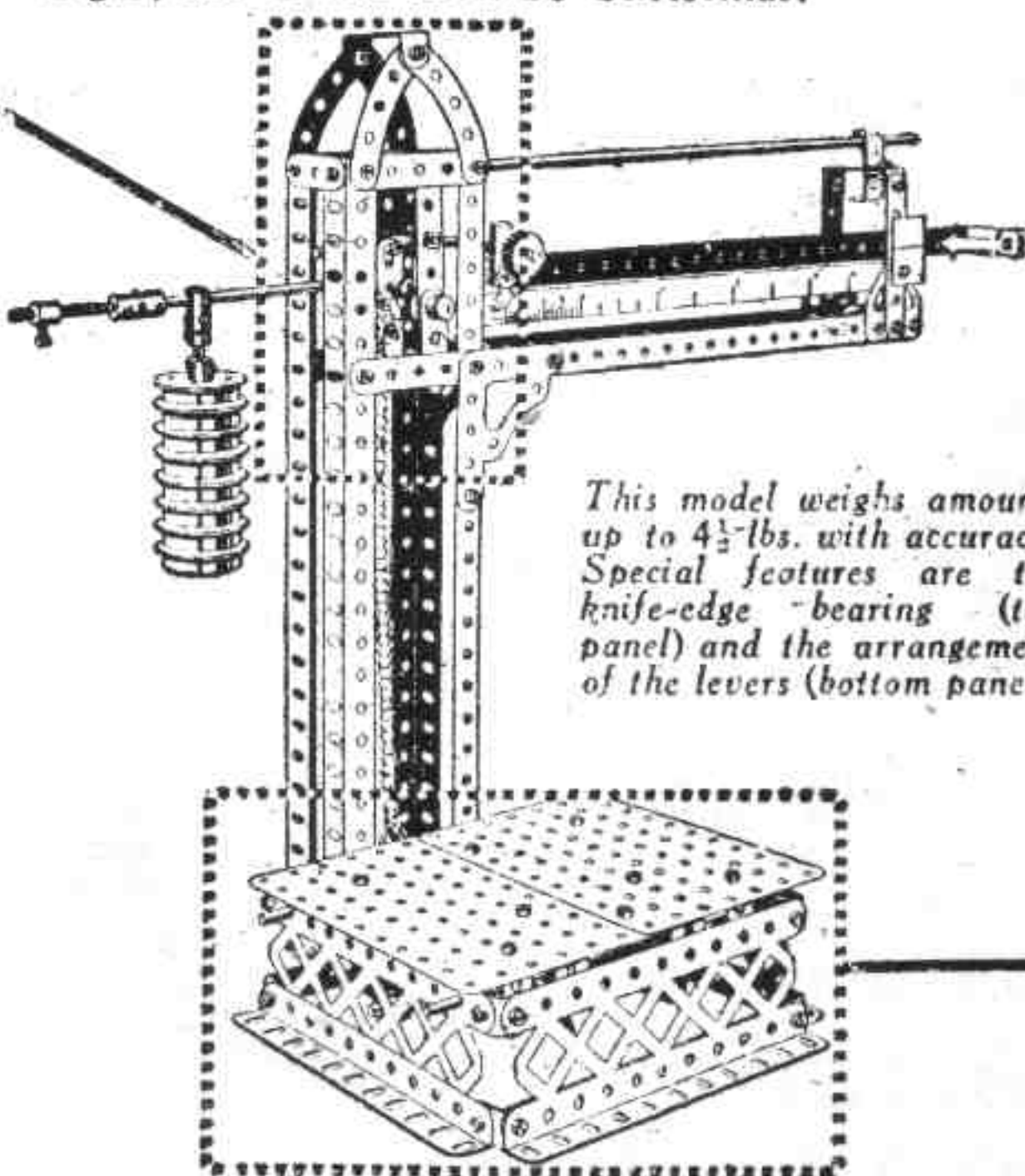
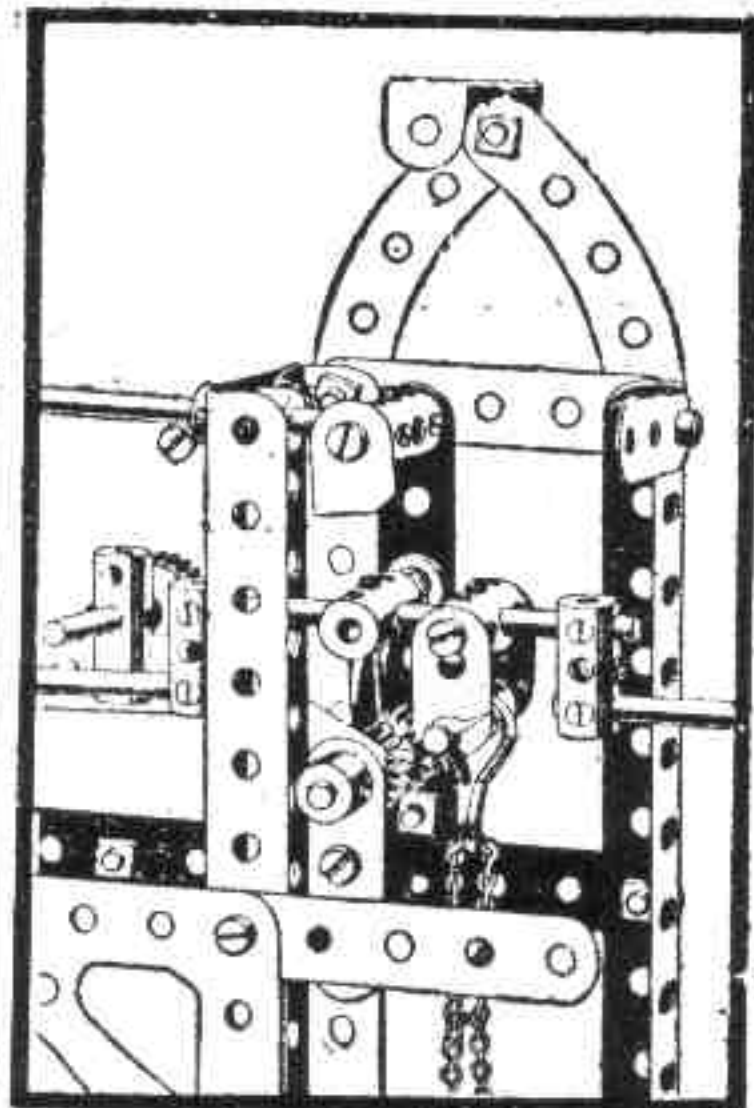


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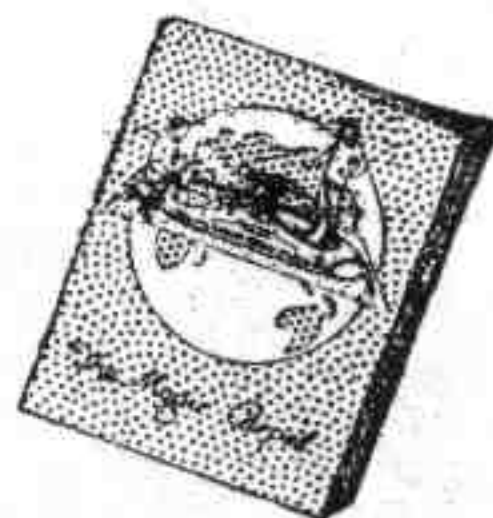
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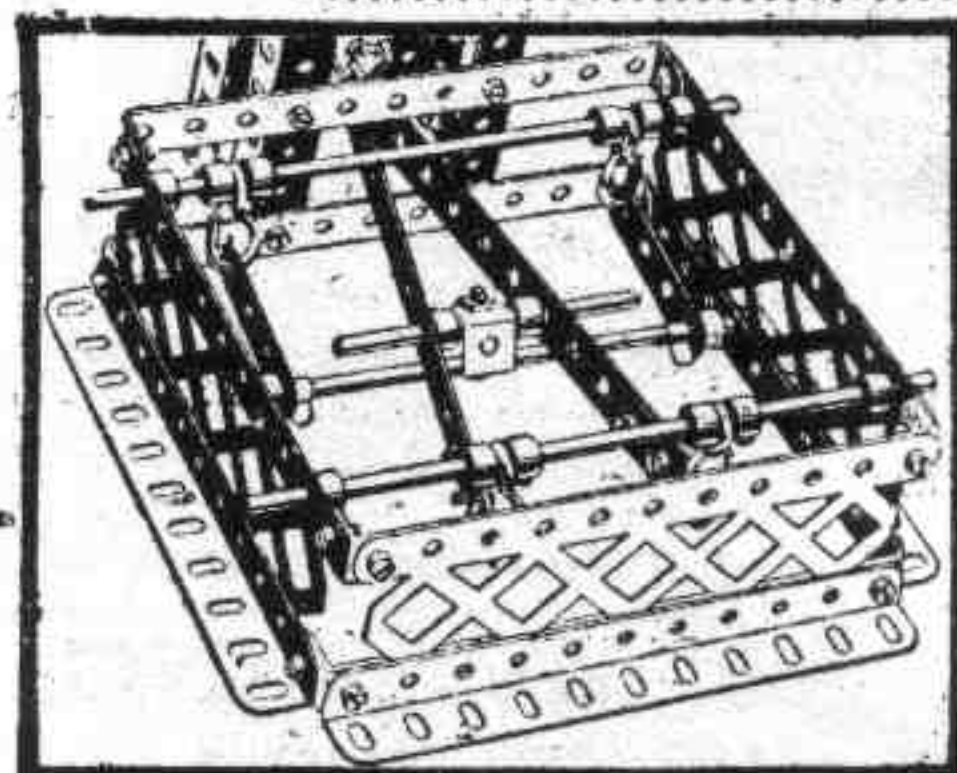
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