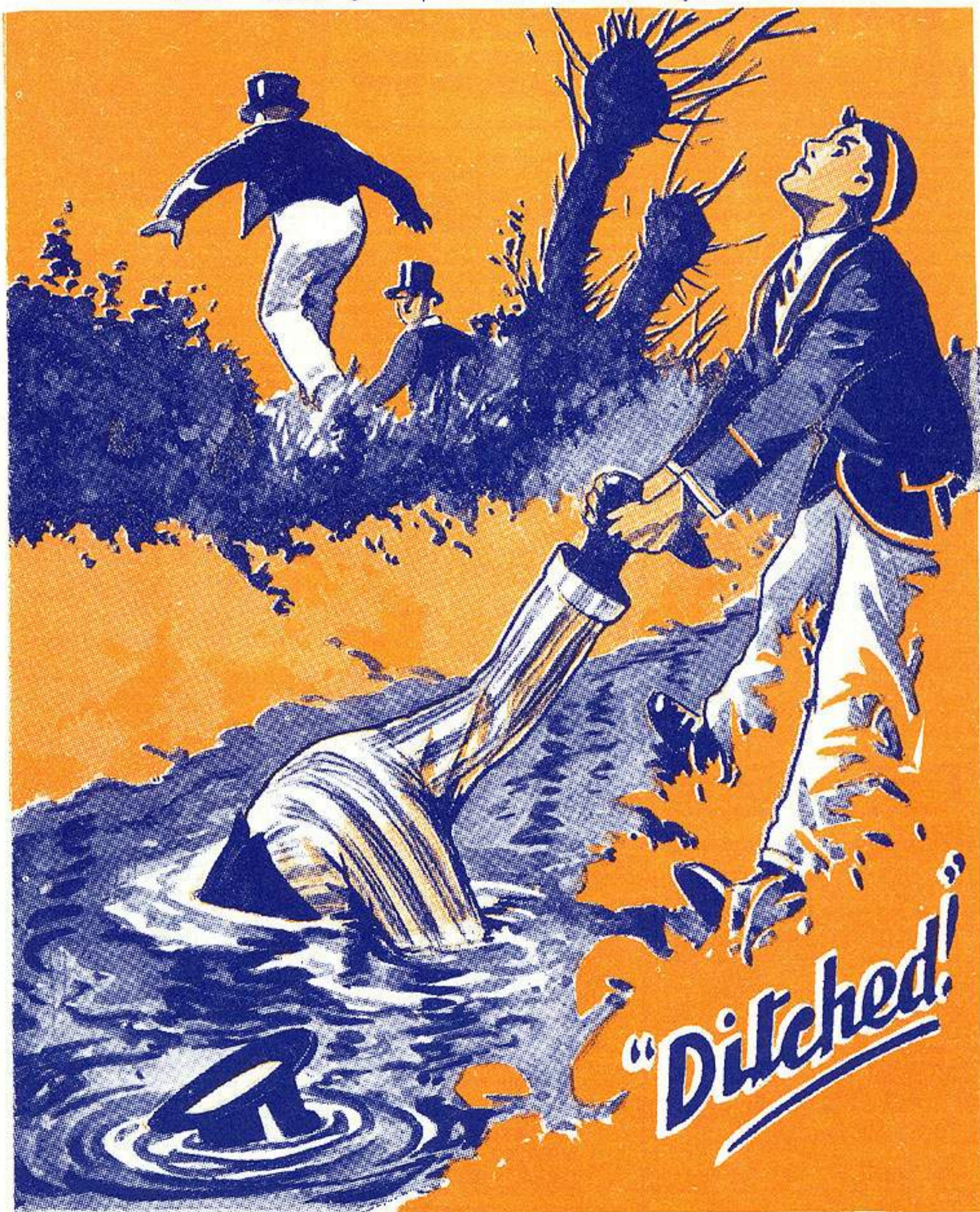


"LAND OF LOST PLANES!" Amazing and Thrilling Yarn
of Flying Adventure, inside.

The **MAGNET** 2^D





Come Into the Office, Boys!

Always glad to hear from you, chums, so drop me a line to the following address:
The Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HAVE you fellows ever heard of **BURNING WITH ICE?** Sounds almost unbelievable, doesn't it? A chum of mine who hails from Grimsby tells me that he has been reading an account of some cinema cameramen in the Antarctic in which it was stated that they were badly burned whenever they touched the metal parts of their cameras. He wants to know how this could be when the temperature was so much below zero!

It may interest my chum to know that if he touches a block of ice of a sufficiently low temperature he will get a bad burn! Immediately upon contact with the ice the heat of the body rushes out with such a force that a burn results—just the same as a burn would result if the heat was running into the body as a result of touching a red-hot poker. It is only a question of the difference of temperatures, and a new kind of ice, known as "dry ice," has recently been evolved of such a low temperature that it cannot be touched by the naked hand without a burn resulting!

Ever heard of

HOBSON'S CHOICE?

When a person has no other choice but "take it or leave it," he is said to be faced with "Hobson's choice," and John Greenwall, of Carstairs, wants to know why we say this. Four hundred years ago there lived a carrier at Cambridge who was called Thomas Hobson. He made a great deal of money by hiring out horses to the undergraduates at the University, but if any of them dared to object to the horse he offered them he simply answered: "This or none!" Many people have said similar things since then, but few of them have been handed down to history in such proverbial form!

THE next question, which comes from one of my girl readers—Miss A. F., of Twickenham—is a "bit of a teaser." She wants to know who was

THE CLEVEREST PERSON WHO EVER LIVED!

I must admit that question stumped me, so I handed it over to Mr. X. Do you think he was beaten by it? Not a bit! Here is his answer:

Undoubtedly the cleverest person who ever lived was a child called Christian Heinecker, who was born at Lubeck in 1721. At the age of ten months he could speak and repeat every word which was said to him! By the time he was a year old he knew all the principal events which are related in the first five Books of the Old Testament. At the age of three he knew Biblical history and also most questions of universal history and geography, and he also learned to speak Latin and French. But, alas for his knowledge, he died at the age of four years!

Just imagine any boy being able to speak three languages at the age of
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three, to say nothing of his other accomplishments! I don't think his record is ever likely to be beaten.

Here is a bloodthirsty question for you! Alec Brown, of Wolverhampton, wants to know

WHO INVENTED THE GUILLOTINE?

He has heard that the man who invented it was the first to die by it, and asks if this is true. No, it isn't! The guillotine was named after its inventor—a Doctor Guillotin, of Paris—but as he did not die until long after the French Revolution, you can see that a large number of victims made the acquaintance of his instrument before his death. As a matter of fact, he died quite peacefully in 1814.

It is a common fallacy to believe that the men who have invented certain death-dealing instruments have met their end by their means, but it is certainly true that men who have condemned others to death in this manner have met their own fates in the same way—as the records of the French Revolution show.

After that somewhat grisly subject, it is time we had something a little brighter. What do you think of this yarn?



Patient: "Doctor, what I need is something to stir me up—something to put me in fighting trim!"

Doctor (after a moment's thought): "Um!

Well, maybe I had better send in my bill!"



It was sent in by Leo McGuire, of 70, Frederick Avenue, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, who wins a topping book for his trouble. Have you won a prize yet? If not, send along a limerick or a humorous story. I have plenty more penknives, pocket wallets and ripping adventure books to distribute among my readers!

BOOKS, PENKNIVES and POCKET WALLETS offered for storyettes and Greyfriars limericks. All efforts to be sent to:

c/o MAGNET,
5, Carmelite Street,
London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

DON'T MISS THIS OPPORTUNITY OF WINNING SOMETHING USEFUL!

Here is

A CURIOUS PROBLEM

which a Liverpool reader has set me. Three men were in a boat off the shore when someone a mile away fired a shot in their direction. The first man, whom we will call A, heard the shot fired. The second, B, saw the smoke of the discharge. The third, C, saw the bullet strike the water. Which of them first knew the shot had been fired?

If you can't puzzle this out for yourself, you will find the answer at the end of this chat.

Now for a few

RAPID-FIRE REPLIES.

A book on film-making (Harold Ellis, of Baildon, Yorks): You can get a cheap book on the romance of the "talkies," explaining how the different types of films are taken, from Messrs. Foyles, of 55, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4. I will make a note of your suggestion for the "Holiday Annual."

Reader's address wanted (D. R. Stanley-Adams, of The Elms, Spring Grove, Isleworth): I am afraid my Huddersfield reader only gave his initials when he wrote to me, so I cannot say if it is the boy you know or not.

Who invented umbrellas? (B. P., of Heaton, Newcastle.) No one knows for certain, but they are of great antiquity, and are known to have been in use in ancient Egypt!

Card-tearing (K. C., of Newhaven): I believe Sandow holds the record for this feat. He could tear four packs of cards in halves at the same time! I wouldn't advise you to try to emulate him!

Just before we finish, have a chuckle at this limerick, which well deserves the prize of a pocket wallet which has been sent to its author, Reginald How, of 22, Trajan Street, South Shields:

Dicky Nugent, of literary fame,
As an author has made quite a name;
His spelling—ah, well,
It's so hard to tell
Whether Dicky or Twigg is to blame!

READY for next week's programme? Right! Then here it is:

"UNMASKED!"

By Frank Richards,

is one of the finest yarns this popular author has ever given us. Frank R. is never so happy as when he is retailing the adventures of that popular Greyfriars character, Billy Bunter; and you'll find that Billy Bunter is featured a great deal in next week's story. I don't intend to tell you much about the yarn, because that might spoil your enjoyment of it. So I'll simply content myself by telling you that there are several surprises in store for you in this fine tale—and I advise you not to miss it!

There are plenty of thrills in next week's instalment of our fine new serial, "Land of Lost Planes!" and there is any amount of fun in the "Greyfriars Herald." Our new cricket feature is bound to please, too! Altogether you'll find next week's number a really tip-top issue.

Gosh! I nearly forgot to give you the answer to that puzzle. B, who saw the smoke, would be the first to know that the shot was fired. C, who saw the bullet strike the water, would be the second; and A, who only heard the report, would be the last.

So long until next week, chums!

Your
EDITOR.

THE GREYFRIARS PRETENDER!



Featuring the popular
schoolboy characters—
Harry Wharton & Co.



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Amazing!

HENRY SAMUEL QUELCH jumped. He jumped clear of the ground.

Harry Wharton & Co. stared. It was enough to make the Remove fellows stare, to see their Form master jumping like a kangaroo.

Mr. Quelch was a serious gentleman. He was a sedate gentleman. He was almost a solemn gentleman. He was the last gentleman in the wide world to be expected to perform sudden and remarkable gymnastic in public.

But that was what he did.

And the chums of the Remove could only stare, amazed.

Mr. Quelch was walking along Friardale Lane towards the village, after classes at Greyfriars. Harry Wharton & Co. were walking up the lane from the village towards the school. So they were face to face, though still separated by a considerable distance, when Quelch jumped.

When the eyes of his respectful pupils first fell on him, Mr. Quelch was progressing sedately along the leafy lane, the May sunshine reflected in a genial smile on his rather crusty countenance.

Then he jumped.

It was amazing.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

"What the thump—" stuttered Bob Cherry.

Quelch, having jumped like a kangaroo, landed on the solid earth again. The expression on his face was extraordinary. He swung round towards the leafy wood that bordered the lane on his right, and stared at the green masses of foliage, at the same time clapping a hand to his cheek, as if something had stung him there.

"What's up with Quelch?" murmured Frank Nugent.

"Can't be a wasp—the first wasp of summer!" murmured Johnny Bull.

"Great pip! There he goes again!"

"My only esteemed hat!" gasped Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

The Famous Five of the Remove

stared in amazement, almost in awe. It was simply astounding to see their Form master doing physical jerks in this way.

Quelch jumped—or, rather, bounded. This time his voice, in a loud, startled ejaculation, reached the juniors.

"Ooooooh!"

His other hand was clasped to his other cheek now. He looked as if he had a bad attack of toothache, both to port and starboard, as it were. His eyes gleamed at the leafy bank of greenery along the lane.

"How dare you!" shrieked Mr. Quelch, apparently addressing the old oaks and beeches that grew along Friardale Lane.

"Is—is—is he off his rocker?" stammered Nugent.

"Looks quite potty!" murmured Bob.

"Oh crumbs! There he goes again!" gasped Harry Wharton.

Mr. Quelch gave a third convulsive bound. His hands, which had been

a mystery to the juniors; but he was in need of aid, that was clear.

They rushed forward, and reached him in a few moments.

"Mr. Quelch!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Oh! Ah! Upon my word!" gasped the Remove master dizzily. "Bless my soul! Help me up, Wharton! Oh dear!"

The juniors helped Mr. Quelch to his feet.

He panted for breath.

Rolling down the steep, grassy bank and landing in the lane had rather shaken the Remove master. He stood unsteadily, panting.

"What—what—what is it, sir?" gasped Wharton. "What—"

"I am hurt—my face is cut! I—I—" gurgled Mr. Quelch. "There is someone—oh dear!—some wretch with a catapult in the trees—"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bob Cherry. The mystery was revealed now.

Now that they were close at hand, the juniors could see deep red spots on their Form master's cheeks and on the tip of his nose, evidently where he had been struck.

No wonder Quelch had jumped! Whizzing missiles from a catapult at close quarters were enough to make

the most sedate, elderly gentleman jump.

The juniors gazed at him almost in horror.

Apart from the brutality of the thing, it amazed them that anyone should have the nerve to catapult so formidable a personage as the master of the Greyfriars Remove.

Mr. Quelch rubbed his injuries.

"Some wretch—some rascal—" he panted. "It cannot be a Greyfriars boy. I am sure of that! Some lurking ruffian—"

"Yaroooooh!" roared Bob Cherry, suddenly clasping his hand to his ear.

He jumped, just as Mr. Quelch had done.

"Cherry—what—"

"Ow! Wow! Ow!" roared Bob in anguish. Evidently a pellet from the hidden catapult had caught Robert Cherry in the ear.

"Ow!" shrieked Frank Nugent, hopping suddenly.

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To the boys of Greyfriars, Lancaster of the Sixth is a sportsman to the finger-tips. To those in the underworld, he is better known as the Wizard—a notorious cracksman!

pressed to his cheeks, now suddenly clasped his nose, as if a sudden pain had seized upon that member.

"Wooooooh!" came his voice, in a wild howl.

"Great Scott!"

"Villain!" roared Mr. Quelch, still apparently addressing the trees beside the lane. "Wretch! Rascal! Ruffian! Who are you? How dare you?"

Under the amazed eyes of his pupils the Remove master made a rush at the high, grassy bank, and clambered up it to reach the trees and thickets.

Then for the fourth time he gave a wild jump.

This time he missed his footing on the sloping bank, rolled down it, and sat in the lane, with a bump and a howl.

"Come on!" breathed Harry Wharton, and the chums of the Remove ran forward to the assistance of their Form master.

What Quelch was doing this for was

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

Harry Wharton stared round, his eyes gleaming. Catapulting was not only painful, but it was dangerous. Had one of those whizzing missiles struck an eye, sight might have been destroyed. The fellow who was using the catapult was obviously a reckless rascal.

"This way, you men!" shouted Wharton.

He clambered up the steep bank, and the other fellows followed him.

There was a rustle in the wood.

The hidden assailant, apparently, thought it time to go. The Greyfriars fellows heard the hurried rustling in the thickets as he went.

"After him!" yelled Johnny Bull.

"Get hold of the rotter!" panted Wharton.

"My boys——" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

The juniors did not wait to hear what Henry Samuel Quelch had to say. There was not a second to lose if they were to get to close quarters with the enemy. Already he was retreating rapidly through the wood, and among the trees and thickets it was not easy to track him.

Mr. Quelch was left rubbing his nose in the lane.

Harry Wharton & Co. scrambled swiftly up and plunged into the wood. From a distance came a rustling sound, and the juniors tore through the thickets in that direction. Two of them were hurt, and all of them were excited and wrathful. There was a hectic time in store for the catapulter if they laid hands on him.

"There he goes!" yelled Bob Cherry suddenly.

Through an opening of the trees there was an instant's glimpse of a running figure.

"Ponsonby!" shouted Johnny Bull. "That Highcliffe cad!"

The figure vanished the next moment. "Come on!"

The Famous Five, with set teeth, rushed in swift pursuit. A few minutes later they came through the thick wood into a footpath. In the distance, running like a deer, was the figure they had glimpsed before.

"There he is——"

"After him!"

And the Famous Five of the Remove ran as they had never run on the cinder-path.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Putting It On!

CECIL PONSONBY, of the Highcliffe Fourth, glanced back over his shoulder.

His face was crimson with exertion, and his feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground as he ran.

The winding of the footpath hid the pursuers from his sight for the moment, but the thudding of swift feet came to his ears.

"Oh gad!" panted Ponsonby.

He ran his hardest.

The cad of Highcliffe realised that he was "for it" if he did not escape. Catapulting a schoolmaster was a serious matter, and it meant a flogging if he was reported to his own headmaster at Highcliffe. Indeed, the result might be more serious than even that, for what he had done was an offence against the law.

Catapulting was a favourable entertainment of the estimable Pon. He had been finding a cruel amusement in catapulting birds in the wood when Mr. Quelch came along the lane, and Pon had not been able to resist the temptation to give him a few.

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A middle-aged gentleman could not possibly have pursued him successfully through the wood, and Pon had considered it safe, not being aware that the Famous Five were at hand. And so long as he was safe, Pon did not bother about any other consideration.

Prudence counselled instant flight as soon as the juniors appeared on the scene. But once more Pon had been unable to resist the temptation to give his old enemies a few.

Then he fled; nothing doubting that he would vanish from sight in the thick wood, and leave the Greyfriars fellows in ignorance of his identity.

Now he wished that he had not stopped for that last couple of shots. He realised that he had cut it rather fine.

He ran on desperately.

Had the path been straight and clear nothing could have saved Ponsonby. But the winding hid him from the sight of his pursuers, except for occasional glimpses.

There was a chance yet of dodging away. And if he escaped, he was prepared to deny the whole thing later, if accused. A few falsehoods mattered very little to a fellow like Pon.

But the pressing matter was to escape. If the Famous Five collared him, they were not likely to give much heed to his denials.

Pon was a slacker of the first water; but he could run hard when he liked. He ran hard now.

Again he glanced back as he reached a spot where the footpath branched into two. The Greyfriars fellows were hidden from sight by the winding way, though he could hear them plainly.

He dashed along the right-hand path and vanished. Less than a minute later the Famous Five reached the fork in the path, panting.

Which way Ponsonby had gone they could not tell, for he was already out of sight. But they did not halt.

Harry Wharton rapped out a word or two, and it was enough. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull raced along the left-hand path. Wharton and Nugent and Hurree Singh took the right-hand one. They sped on breathlessly.

Another minute and the three sighted Ponsonby, in a straight stretch of the footpath ahead.

"There he is!" panted Nugent.

"Put it on!"

Bob and Johnny Bull were out of the chase now, on the wrong path. But three fellows were hot at the heels of Ponsonby.

The fugitive vanished again, hidden by winding turns. Again the pursuers came to a fork in the path, and again separated. Nugent and Hurree Singh taking the left, Wharton the right.

It was Wharton who kept to the right track, as it turned out, for a few minutes later the path ended on the edge of the wood towards Courtfield Common. And Wharton, as he came sprinting out from the trees, sighted Ponsonby on the open common.

There was no more cover for Pon; no more trickery. He was in full view now, and his only comfort, as he looked back, was seeing that only one pursuer remained on his track. Four of the Co. had been thrown off the scent.

But Ponsonby did not think of stopping. Not unless he was driven to it was the cad of Highcliffe likely to face the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

He ran across the grassy common. In ordinary circumstances he could not have stood against Wharton in a foot race. But he was desperate now. Harry Wharton was as good at running

as any junior at Greyfriars, but he failed to gain on the fugitive. But he did not lose sight of Ponsonby again, and he kept on hard, watching for the slacker of Highcliffe to crack up under the strain.

The long, white road that crossed Courtfield Common could now be seen in the distance. Cars were humming along the road; and the Redclyffe motor-bus appeared in sight, a red blot on the landscape. In the far distance was the town of Courtfield. Ponsonby was heading desperately for the road. And Wharton could guess that he was hoping to fall in with some of his friends from Highcliffe School. With three or four other fellows to help him, Pon would have been glad to turn on his pursuer. And it was likely enough that Gadsby or Monson or Drury, or some of them, would be in the offing.

A rather tall, athletic figure appeared on the road, sauntering from the direction of Greyfriars School.

Wharton recognised Lancaster of the Sixth, the new man at Greyfriars. He saw Lancaster stop and turn his head, watching the chase across the common, with a faintly amused smile on his handsome face.

Wharton waved his hand to the senior.

"Stop him!" he shouted.

Lancaster stared at him.

It was quite against all laws at Greyfriars, written and unwritten, for a junior to shout to a senior, above all to request him to intervene in a fag row. But in the circumstances Wharton felt that he could stretch a point. It was not merely a fag row this time. His Form master had been attacked and injured, and serious damage might have been done. Ponsonby had to be brought to book.

Whether Lancaster would have intervened did not transpire. Ponsonby, seeing the Greyfriars senior directly ahead of him, and hearing Wharton's shout, turned desperately from his course, to keep clear of Lancaster.

He was barely keeping his lead, and could not afford to lose an inch. By changing his direction he lost a good many yards.

Wharton cut across, and drew close behind him.

"Now, you rotter!" panted the captain of the Remove.

Ponsonby panted and stumbled on. But he could hear Wharton close behind him now. The Greyfriars junior put on a desperate spurt, and his outstretched hand touched Ponsonby's shoulder.

The Highcliffe fellow swerved, stumbled, and rolled on his knees. The next moment Wharton was stumbling over him.

And the next they were grasping one another, rolling in the grass, and fighting furiously.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Painful for Ponsonby!

RICHARD LANCASTER, of the Sixth Form at Greyfriars, strolled across the grass, a smile on his face.

He stood for some moments looking down at the two juniors. Ponsonby was fighting like a wildcat to get free; and Wharton was holding on to him, determined that he should not get away again.

"My hat!" murmured the Sixth-Former.

He stooped, and grasped the two juniors by their collars. There was an unusual strength in Lancaster's slim,

graceful frame. With scarcely an effort he jerked the two juniors to their feet, jerking them apart at the same moment.

"Oh!" gasped Wharton. "Let go, Lancaster!"

"My dear kid——"

"Let go, hang you!" yelled Ponsonby.

Lancaster looked at him. Ponsonby's face, full of rage and terror, was not pleasant to look upon at that moment. Lancaster released Wharton, but he kept a grip on the Highcliffe junior's collar.

"Will you let go?" howled Ponsonby. "I'll hack your shins if you don't let go my collar, you Greyfriars cad!"

"I think not," smiled Lancaster. "Now, what's the row about, Wharton?"

If you fags want to scrap there's such things as gloves and rules, and all that, you know. This sort of thing won't do."

"Pon doesn't want to scrap," said Harry, "but he's going to. You can let him go, Lancaster. I'll jolly well see that he doesn't get away now."

"Hold on," said Lancaster quietly. "I don't know who this fellow is."

"He's Ponsonby of the Highcliffe Fourth."

"Well, whoever he is, if he doesn't want to scrap it's not cricket to pitch into him. What has he done?"

Harry Wharton restrained a hot reply. Lancaster was not a prefect of Greyfriars, though he was in the Sixth. Still, a Sixth Form man was a Sixth Form man, and had to be treated with respect. Wharton liked Lancaster; all the Co. liked and admired him. Indeed, even such a hero as old Wingate was almost put in the shade by the splendid new man who had carried everything before him at the school. Wharton eyed Ponsonby savagely; but he restrained his anger, and answered Lancaster with the respect due to so great a man.

"I'll tell you what he's done! He's catapulted Quelch——"

"Your Form master?"

"Yes."

"And you're so jolly fond of your Form master?" sneered Ponsonby.

Wharton's eyes glinted at him.

"I'd thrash any cad who catapulted a man," he said. "You hurt old Quelch because you knew he couldn't get after you, you worm. And you let fly at us too, and ran for it, like the rotten coward you are. If Quelch reported you for this at Highcliffe, you'd be flogged."

"So that's it, is it?" said Lancaster.

"Not at all!" said Ponsonby. He was recovering his coolness now, and feeling rather glad that Lancaster had intervened. "I never catapulted Quelch—I've not seen him for weeks."

Wharton gasped.

"Why, you—you—you rotter——"

"You'll have to spin a better yarn than that, if you want to get me into trouble with my headmaster," sneered Ponsonby.

"You deny it?" gasped Wharton.

Even in Ponsonby of Highcliffe, such effrontery as this surprised him.

"Certainly I do. It's a lie," said Ponsonby coolly.

"What did you run for, then?"

"I cleared off, of course, when a gang of Greyfriars cads started after me," said Ponsonby. "I wasn't looking for a ragging."

Wharton clenched his hands hard.

"You don't expect me to believe that?" he exclaimed.

"I don't care a straw whether you believe it or not. If Mr. Quelch thinks I catapulted him, he can go to Dr. Voysey about it."

"You know he never saw you do it—you kept in hiding, like the sneaking cur you are."

"I suppose that's the sort of language you use at Greyfriars," remarked Ponsonby. "It's not quite the thing we're used to at Highcliffe. Keep off,

"You can see fair play—let that rotter put up his hands——"

"We're not allowed to scrap like hooligans, at Highcliffe," said Ponsonby, with a curl of the lip. "I dare say a Greyfriars man can go in with a black eye, and nothing said. That doesn't do at Highcliffe."

Wharton trembled with anger. He was not in the mood to endure lofty superciliousness from Ponsonby.

"Lancaster! Will you stand aside?"

"No!" said Lancaster. "Not in the least! Keep your temper, kid! Man who swears never catches any fish, you know!"

"Look here——"

"Shut up, and listen to me," said the Sixth Former calmly. "This fellow,



Mr. Quelch jumped suddenly and clapped his hands to his cheek as if he had a bad attack of the toothache. "Ooooch!" he gasped. "There's some rascal lurking in the trees armed with a catapult!"

you rotter!" added Ponsonby, as Wharton made a movement towards him.

Lancaster interposed.

"Hold on, Wharton! The fellow says he never did it——"

"I know he did!"

"Did you see him?"

"No, but I know——"

"Keep your temper, kid," said Lancaster. "You can't hammer a fellow for what he may not have done."

Wharton breathed hard.

"Keep out of this, Lancaster," he said. "What!"

"I don't want to be cheeky, but you're not a prefect, and I'm not going to let that cad go for his lies."

Lancaster eyed the captain of the Remove.

"Quite!" he drawled. "But I happen to be a Sixth Form man, and the Sixth have some little authority in the school, Wharton. Apart from that, I'm going to see fair play."

Ponsonby, as you call him, denies having done what you say he did. A fellow is entitled to have his word taken."

"Not a lying cad like Ponsonby."

"You say you never used a catapult on Mr. Quelch, Ponsonby?"

"Certainly not."

"Had you a catapult with you?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"Do you ever use one?"

"Never!"

"I've seen him, a dozen times at least," roared Wharton. "The miserable worm catapults birds and rabbits——"

"It's a lie!" said Ponsonby cheerfully. "No Highcliffe man ever used a catapult, that I know of. It's the sort of thing they might use at Greyfriars, perhaps. Decent men don't touch such things."

Lancaster eyed him curiously.

"Greyfriars is my school, as well as Wharton's," he remarked.

"Sorry!" said Ponsonby politely. "I forgot that!"

"I don't think you forgot it," said Lancaster. "You seem to me to be a cheeky, impudent young rascal. All the same, I'm not going to let this kid hammer you if he's made a mistake."

"Look here—" roared Wharton. "That will do, Wharton! We're going to get at the facts," drawled Lancaster. "Turn out your pockets, Ponsonby."

Ponsonby started.

"What? What for?"

"Just to let us see whether you have a catapult, or any ammunition for one," said Lancaster placidly. "That ought to settle the point."

A hunted look came over Cecil Ponsonby's face.

"I—I refuse to do anything of the kind! You've no right to give me orders! I'm going—"

"You're not going yet," said Lancaster, compressing his grip on Ponsonby's collar. "You'll turn out your pockets first."

"I won't!" yelled Ponsonby, "and I dare you to do it, either!"

Lancaster laughed.

"I've no intention of doing it," he said. "I've no right to do so. Only if you refuse to do it of your own accord, I shall take that as proving that you've got a catapult, and a supply of stones, in your pockets."

Ponsonby panted. The catapult was hidden in an inside pocket of his jacket; another pocket contained his ammunition. Turning out his pockets would not have helped Ponsonby; but refusing to do so came to much the same thing.

"Let me go!" he panted. "You

rotter, let go my collar! I'll complain to my headmaster about this."

"You'll have something else to complain of before I've done with you," said Wharton grimly.

"The matter seems to be settled," drawled Lancaster. "It's taken as proved. Ponsonby, you are a sneaking, cowardly, measly young scoundrel, and what you seem to want is a thumping good hiding. I leave you to it."

The Greyfriars senior released Ponsonby's collar, turned, and walked away. Ponsonby made a bound to escape.

Wharton's grasp was on him in a twinkling, and he was dragged back.

"Now, you cad!" said the captain of the Remove, between his teeth. "Put up your hands. You're going to be licked, anyhow!"

And Ponsonby, in desperation, put up his hands, as there was no help for it.

The next five minutes were wild and whirling ones.

There was no escape for Ponsonby, and he put up a fight. Harry Wharton, for several minutes, had his hands full.

But the Highcliffe fellow went down at last, and lay panting and gasping in the grass.

Wharton looked down at him, breathing hard.

"You're not licked yet!" he snapped. "Get up!"

"I'm done!" muttered Ponsonby, glaring up at him from the grass, with deadly hatred and malice in his glinting eyes.

"You'll get up, or you'll get kicked."

Ponsonby gritted his teeth and scrambled up. The scrap was resumed, the Highcliffe fellow fighting like a wild-cat. But he was knocked right and

left, and he went down again heavily. This time he was allowed to remain in the grass.

"You're not licked," said Wharton contemptuously, "but you can let it go at that, if you like, you crawling funk. Hand over that catapult—I'm going to break it up before I leave you."

Ponsonby gave him a deadly look. But he was at the end of his tether now, and he had to obey. In silence, he drew the catapult from an inner pocket, and handed it over. Wharton smashed it under his boot, and turned away, leaving the Highcliffian panting in the grass.

He had disappeared in the direction of Greyfriars School before Ponsonby crawled to his feet and limped away towards Highcliffe.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

No Luck for Loder!

BILLY BUNTER grinned.

The fattest junior at Greyfriars was adorning the House doorway with his podgy person when Harry Wharton came in. He blinked at Wharton through his big spectacles, and a fat grin wreathed his plump countenance.

"He, he, he!" cachinnated Bunter.

Wharton gave him a glare. He had had the better of the fight with the cad of Highcliffe, and had left Ponsonby pretty thoroughly licked. But he had taken a good deal of punishment, and it showed very plainly. His nose was bruised, there was a dark mark under one eye, his collar was rumpled and soiled, and he was dusty and a little untidy. The most casual glance would have discerned that the captain of the Remove had been in the wars.

William George Bunter seemed to find it amusing.

"He, he, he! Been under a motor-car, Wharton?" he asked. "I say, you'd better not let Quelch see you like that. He, he, he!"

"Has Quelch come in, fathead?" asked Harry.

"Yes, and he looked frightfully ratty," said Bunter. "I don't know what's happened; he looked quite good-tempered, for him, when he went out. But he's come back looking like a Tartar. Take it from me, something's happened to upset old Quelch while he was out."

Harry Wharton smiled. He was quite aware of that already.

"Keep out of his sight," grinned Bunter. "He will take it out of you if he sees that chivvy. I say, Loder's about—"

"Bother Loder!"

"Well, if he sees you with a face like that—" chuckled Bunter.

"Oh, rats!"

Harry Wharton went into the House. He was anxious to get his face bathed and his hair brushed and his collar changed. Wharton was rather particular in these matters, and he detested slovenliness. He was feeling dusty and dishevelled after the scrap.

But he would have done well, all the same, to heed Billy Bunter's warning. A sharp voice hailed him as he went towards the stairs.

"Wharton!"

It was Loder of the Sixth.

Wharton stopped, reluctantly, and turned round. His old enemy of the Sixth was not missing this chance.

"Yes, Loder."

Loder came striding towards him.

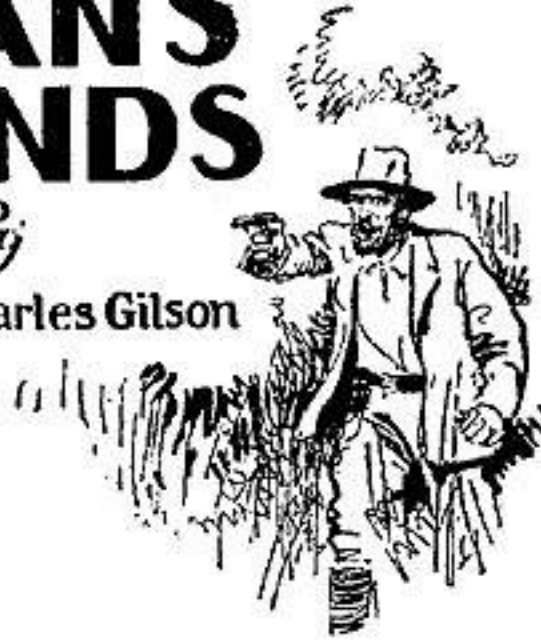
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the House in that disgraceful state, Wharton?" demanded the bully of the Sixth.

"I've been in a scrap——"

"You needn't tell me that," sneered Loder. "You young sweeps are always scrapping with somebody or other. Who was it this time?"

"Highcliffe man."

"I dare say you picked a quarrel with him."

Wharton did not answer that. It was useless to argue with the bully of the Sixth.

Loder was in an unpleasant temper. When Loder was in an unpleasant temper somebody had to bear the brunt of it. All that dutiful prefect needed was an excuse; and the battered state of Wharton's face was excuse enough.

"You know perfectly well," went on Loder, "that the Head is down on these incessant rows with Highcliffe. Your Form master has warned you on the subject as head boy of the Remove."

Harry Wharton grinned. It was true enough; but he thought that, in the present circumstances, even Mr. Quelch would not blame him for having hammered Ponsonby.

"Oh! You think it a laughing matter, do you?" said Loder, compressing his lips. "Well, you'll follow me to my study, Wharton, and take six."

"I appeal to my Form master," said Wharton coolly.

Loder stared at him.

A junior was within his rights, in appealing to his Form master; but as a rule that was not likely to make his punishment lighter. The masters supported the prefects as a matter of course.

"Follow me!" said Loder. "I'll take you to Quelch."

As a matter of fact, Loder preferred to take the junior to Quelch. The Remove master was not likely to approve of a bruised nose and a darkened eye; and, above all, of another "row" with Highcliffe. Loder would not have cared to bother him with so trifling a matter, but Wharton left him no choice, and the Sixth Form bully was rather glad of it. He grinned as he walked the junior off to his Form master's study.

Loder tapped at the door.

"Come in!" rapped out the sharp voice of Henry Samuel Quelch, with a sharper edge than usual on it. The Remove master evidently was not in a good temper that afternoon. Which was all to the good, from Loder's point of view.

Loder opened the door and marched Wharton in.

Mr. Quelch was standing before a glass dabbing his nose. He turned from the glass, his nose catching the gleam of the May sunshine at the window, and shining. Apparently Mr. Quelch had been rubbing it with ointment. There was a distinct pain where the pellet from the catapult had landed on the majestic proboscis of Henry Samuel Quelch.

"What is it, Loder?" snapped Quelch. His eyes, like a pair of gimlets, turned from the prefect to the junior, glinting. The glint grew more pronounced as he noted the signs of damage in the countenance of the captain of the Remove. "Wharton, have you been fighting?"

"Yes, sir!" answered Harry.

"I should have dealt with this junior, sir, but he demanded to be taken to you," said Loder. "This incessant quarrelling with the Highcliffe boys——"

"Have you been fighting with a Highcliffe boy, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir."

"After all my warnings on that subject?" rumbled Mr. Quelch.

"Ye-es, sir. I——"

"And you are the head boy of my Form, whom I expect to set an example to the others!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "However, I will allow you to speak. If you can tell me truthfully that the Highcliffe boy attacked you—I am aware that there have been such occurrences, and——"

"No, sir!" said Harry.

"He did not? Then I am to conclude that you began the conflict?" exclaimed the Remove master.

"Yes, sir."

"Loder, will you have the kindness to hand me my cane? Thank you! Wharton, you will bend over that chair."

Loder of the Sixth stood back, suppressing a grin. Wharton did not seem to have improved matters for himself by appealing to his Form master.

Six from Loder would have hurt; but six from Quelch, in his present state of irritation and annoyance, was certainly not likely to be less severe. And Quelch looked as if lines and gatings might be added.

"If you please, sir——" began Harry.

"Not a word, Wharton! You have

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admitted that the Highcliffe boy did not begin the conflict. You are aware how extremely the Head is displeased by these incessant disputes and encounters between the two schools. There is no excuse for you, Wharton."

"But, sir——"

"You will take five hundred lines, Wharton, you will be gated for two half-holidays, and you will bend over that chair!" said Mr. Quelch, swishing the cane. "And if you keep me waiting another moment I will report you to your headmaster for a flogging."

"Very well, sir," said Harry. "But I'd like to tell you why I pitched into the Highcliffe man, sir."

"It would scarcely interest me, Wharton. Bend over that chair."

"It was because——"

"Bend over at once!"

"Because he catapulted——"

"Eh?"

"Because he catapulted my Form master, sir!" said Wharton meekly.

Mr. Quelch lowered the cane. He stared at Wharton blankly. Loder stared, too, in surprise and derision. Mr. Quelch seemed speechless for the moment, and it was the bully of the Sixth who spoke.

"You young rascal! What do you mean? Mr. Quelch is your Form master

—he knows whether he has been catapulted or not."

"Quite!" agreed Wharton demurely.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "As a matter of fact, Loder, I was struck by missiles from a catapult in Friardale Lane a short time since—that is why I returned from my walk. I remember now that Wharton was one of the juniors who came up——"

"Oh!" murmured Loder. He began to realise that Wharton had been well-advised, after all, in appealing to his Form master.

"Wharton, you followed the—the

person——"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you overtake him?"

"I did, sir."

"And it was a Highcliffe boy?"

"Yes, sir."

There was a pause.

"I will not ask you to give me his name, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch, at length. "Had I seen him, I should undoubtedly have reported his conduct to his headmaster at Highcliffe. I will not, however, ask one boy for information against another. You—you overtook the—the young scoundrel who had the audacity, the impudence, to pelt me with a catapult, and—and chastised him——"

"Yes, sir."

There was another pause.

"I cannot approve," said Mr. Quelch, "of your taking the chastisement of this young hooligan into your own hands, Wharton. Nevertheless, I can understand your feelings—your indignation—your just indignation. In the circumstances, I shall certainly excuse you."

"Thank you, sir!" murmured Wharton, with the corner of his eye on Loder. Gerald Loder was not grinning now.

"You will not do the lines, Wharton! You will not be gated. I shall not cane you." Mr. Quelch threw down the cane. "Loder!"

Loder looked at him with set lips.

"You might really have inquired into this matter, Loder, and ascertained that there were—were extenuating circumstances, before troubling me with it," said Mr. Quelch. "Certainly I do not regard it as a matter for punishment." Mr. Quelch rubbed his shiny nose. "Certainly not!" he repeated.

Gerald Loder muttered something indistinctly, and left the study. Harry Wharton kept a serious face, though his eyes were glimmering.

Mr. Quelch turned to him again. There was quite a benevolent expression on his face.

"Wharton! I cannot—h'm!—approve of this! But you may go."

"Thank you, sir." Harry Wharton turned to the door. His hand was on it when the Remove master spoke again.

"One moment, Wharton."

"Yes, sir." The junior turned back.

"Did you—h'm!—did you administer a severe castigation to the—the Highcliffe boy, Wharton?"

"Yes, rather, sir. I mean, certainly, sir!"

"I cannot, of course, approve of anything of the kind," said Mr. Quelch, coughing. "But you are sure that the castigation was severe?"

"I left him nursing his face in the grass, sir," said Harry demurely. "It didn't look much like a face, after we were done."

"H'm! H'm! I disapprove, of course—I disapprove very strongly. But in the circumstances—h'm!—you may go, Wharton."

"Yes, sir!"

Harry Wharton left the study. He grinned as he passed Loder of the Sixth at the end of the passage. Loder did not grin; he scowled.

Mr. Quelch resumed rubbing ointment on his damaged nose. But there was a faint smile on his crusty visage now. Probably Mr. Quelch derived consolation from the news of the severe castigation inflicted on the Highcliffe fellow—in spite of the fact that he could not possibly approve of anything of the kind.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Man in the Car!

LANCASTER of the Sixth walked away, without turning his head, after leaving Wharton and Ponsonby on Courtfield Common. There was a slight smile on his face as he went; but it quickly faded. In a few moments the Sixth-Former had forgotten that little scene; the juniors passed entirely from his mind. Other matters, of weightier import, were on the mind of the handsome senior of Greyfriars, as the thoughtful, moody frown on his brow indicated.

He had been walking along the high-road from the school when he sighted Wharton and Ponsonby. But when he left them, he struck across the wide common, walking with lithe, long strides towards the wood that bordered it in one direction. He was out of sight of the juniors he had left behind, when another junior came running out of the wood in front of him, and Lancaster recognised Bob Cherry.

Bob seemed in haste. He stared round over the gorsy common as he broke from the wood; sighted Lancaster, and ran towards him. The moody frown left the senior's face. He gave Bob a smile and a nod. Bob's ruddy, cheery face was rather like a tonic.

"I say, Lancaster," exclaimed Bob, "seen Wharton or Nugent, or—"

"I've seen Wharton."

"Oh, good! Mind telling a chap where?" asked Bob.

Lancaster made a gesture in the direction from which he had come.

"A mile back, across the common, near the road," he said. "I left him scrapping with a Highcliffe fellow."

"Ripping! Then he got Ponsonby!" exclaimed Bob. "Fine!"

"Oh, you were after Ponsonby, too, were you?" asked Lancaster, laughing.

"What-ho!" said Bob. "He's catapulted our Form master! Worse than that he catapulted me—got me in the ear. I suppose Wharton won't have left much of him by the time I get there; but I'll get on." Bob turned back towards the wood, and bawled. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Johnny!"

Johnny Bull came running from the trees.

"This way!" shouted Bob.

And the two Removites started at a run, and speedily disappeared from Lancaster's sight.

The Sixth Form man resumed his way, which lay by the footpath through the wood. The moody frown darkened his face as he went. The contrast between his own dark thoughts, and the cheery carelessness of the Remove juniors, struck him strangely and painfully. He strode on by shady, tangled paths, and suddenly came near a collision with a Removeite who came trotting round a winding turn. He stopped, and stared at Frank Nugent.

Nugent halted breathlessly.

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"Seen any of the fellows, Lancaster, or a Highcliffe chap—"

Lancaster burst into a laugh.

"You after that Highcliffe man, too? My hat!"

"The cad dodged us—the other fellows are rooting after him," gasped Nugent. "If you've seen any of them—"

"A mile and a half from here, on the Courtfield road," said Lancaster.

"Oh, my hat! Wharton—"

"Yes, and Bull and Cherry."

"Well, I shan't catch them up now; I may as well get back to the school," said Frank. "Thanks!"

"Not at all," said Lancaster, smiling. "Any more Chingachcooks in the wood hunting for Ponsonby?"

"Yes, there's old Inky—I left him taking another path some time back. If you see him, you might tell him—"

"Certainly."

Frank Nugent cut off towards Greyfriars, it being evident that he would be too late to be in at the death, as it were. Lancaster resumed his way, which led on by the footpath towards a lane that ran down to the Redclyffe main road.

When he reached that narrow, ruddy lane, shaded by great branches of oaks, beeches, and elms, Lancaster stopped, and looked swiftly about him.

Almost hidden from sight by drooping branches and foliage, a little two-seater was halted in the lane. In the driving-seat sat a portly man with a shiny, greasy complexion.

Lancaster hurried towards the car.

The greasy-faced man glanced round at him.

"You're late, Dick!" he said.

"Any hurry, Sugden?" drawled Lancaster.

The man in the driving-seat looked at him long and hard, without replying. His keen, glinting black eyes, like black beads in his fat, greasy face, seemed to narrow to pin-points as he scanned the Greyfriars senior.

Anyone who had observed the two would have wondered what there could be in common between the greasy-faced, lynx-eyed Sugden, and the handsome, athletic senior schoolboy.

A sardonic smile came over Richard Lancaster's face.

"Well?" he rapped.

"Get into the car, Dick! We'd better not talk here, so near to the school," said Sugden.

"We're well over a mile from the school."

"You can't be too careful—if you're going to keep on at Greyfriars, Dick!"

Lancaster started. There was something like a veiled threat in the tone of the greasy-faced man.

"If!" he repeated.

"I said 'if,' and I mean 'if!'" answered Sylvester Sugden coolly. "Get into the car."

As Lancaster paused, there was a

rustle in the thickets, and a dusky-complexion junior came out into the lane breathlessly. The Sixth Form man glanced round.

He compressed his lips at the sight of Hurree Janset Ram Singh of the Remove. He remembered what Nugent had told him.

Hurree Singh came quickly to him. "My esteemed Lancaster—" he began.

The Indian junior hardly glanced at the man in the car. But he saw the hard, cold, greasy face before it was turned away from him. After that one glimpse, all he saw of Slimy Sugden was the back of his head.

"What do you want?" rapped Lancaster.

"The excusefulness is terrific my esteemed Lancaster," purred the Nabob of Bhanipur apologetically. "I have lost my esteemed friends, and if you have seen them with your ridiculous eyes—"

The smile returned to Lancaster's face. Perhaps Hurree Janset Ram Singh's remarkable English helped to bring it back.

"Oh, you're another Chingachcook, hunting for Ponsonby?" he said.

"The answer is in the absurd affirmative, my estimable Lancaster. If you have seen that ridiculous rascal—"

"I've seen him, and your friends. You'll find them across the common, on the Courtfield road—if they're still there," said Lancaster. "Hold on a minute, though! This gentleman wants to know the shortest cut to Redclyffe, and I dare say you know all these lanes, kid."

"The knowfulness is terrific," said the nabob.

"I'm almost a stranger here myself," said Lancaster, addressing Sugden as if he were a perfect stranger. "But this lad knows the way."

A peculiar glimmer came for a moment into the nabob's dark eyes.

Hurree Singh's dusky face was innocent and placid; but the junior from India's coral strand was one of the keenest and most astute fellows at Greyfriars. He had seen Lancaster in talk with the motorist as he came through the trees, and though he had heard nothing he had seen easily enough that they were not speaking as strangers. That Lancaster knew the man, and that he was now seeking to give an impression that he did not know the man, was as plain as daylight to the observant nabob.

But Hurree Singh's dusky face told nothing of his thoughts. He was not curious; and he had a great capacity for minding his own business. He played up, as it were, taking Lancaster's words at face value.

"The esteemed sahib has only to drive straight up this lane, my excellent Lancaster, and take the first to the left, and he will reach the absurd high road to Redclyffe," he said. "That ridiculous place lies to the left after reaching the road."

"Right-ho!"

Hurree Janset Ram Singh raised his cap politely to the motorist, who did not turn his head, however, and trotted away. Like Nugent, he headed direct for the school, giving up the chase.

Out of sight of Lancaster, there was a curious expression on the nabob's dusky countenance.

Lancaster of the Sixth had as good—or as bad—as lied to him. He knew the man in the car and pretended that he did not know him. But that was not all. That glimpse of the greasy face had been enough for the nabob—that greasy, shining face, with its glinting black eyes, tallied with Billy Bunter's

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description of the man he had seen Lancaster meet at an inn at Woodend—the man Lancaster had called Sugden, and whose name, he had told Bunter, was “Robinson.”

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh knew that Lancaster of the Sixth, in that lonely spot screened by the woods, was meeting his mysterious acquaintance, Sugden, whose existence he seemed anxious to conceal from all Greyfriars.

And the Nabob of Bhanipur, as he trotted back to Greyfriars, wondered.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Brought to Heel!

DICK LANCASTER watched the nabob out of sight and waited till the last rustle in the wood had died away before he stepped into the car. He sat down, and Sugden drove away up the lane. He did not turn to the left to reach the Redclyffe



“Bend over that chair!” ordered Mr. Quelch. “Very well,” said Wharton; “but I’d like to say that I pitched into that Highcliffe man because he catapulted my Form master, sir!” explained the junior meekly.

road, however. He turned to the right, following a lane that led between Courtfield Common and the park walls of Hogben Grange.

Lancaster sat silent and moody by his side.

But as they passed Hogben Grange the Greyfriars senior cast a quick glance at the old red chimneys rising into view in the distance over the high palings of the park wall, and set his lips.

Sugden gave him a sarcastic smile.

“Put it on, Slimy,” muttered Lancaster. “I’m known at this place, I don’t want to be seen with you here.”

The car was racing along. Lancaster stared back moodily at the high chimneys of Hogben Grange as they disappeared behind.

It was less than a week since he had been a guest under the roof of Sir Julius Hogben.

The colour came into his cheeks as he thought of it.

An “accident” to his motor-bike at the gates of Hogben Grange had been enough. The kind-hearted and hospitable baronet had taken him in and he had stayed the night.

How had he repaid that kindness and hospitality?

His cheeks burned.

He had repaid it, as he had often, in earlier days, repaid unsuspecting hospitality, by searching the house in the small hours, when all others slept, and drawing up a plan of the interior, to be sent to Slimy Sugden.

In earlier days the schoolboy crook had done such things with scarce a pang of remorse.

Trained as a crook, in a gang of crooks, from his earliest years, he had followed crooked ways; and when conscience woke it was always stifled by the dreary thought that there was no help, no escape, that once a man was a crook he was always a crook.

In his most impressionable years he had been trained by Slimy Sugden, and he had grown an Ishmael, his hand against every man’s, and every man’s hand against him.

But he was older now, and he had learned to think for himself, to reflect more deeply. And then Greyfriars had come into his life.

To Slimy Sugden it had seemed that the “Wizard,” the light-fingered cracker

of safes, would be more useful to him as a Public school man.

That was true. But he had not allowed for the influence of his new surroundings on the boy.

The keen black eyes of the older crook did not fail to note that flush of shame in the face of his young companion.

He understood what it meant, and his fat, fleshy jaw set grimly.

He drove on in silence.

The flush faded from Lancaster’s face, leaving it pale. He sat in dull silence, with knitted, dark brows.

The two-seater ate up the miles. It was twenty miles from the school that Sugden stopped the car at last, on a track that ran across a lonely stretch of pasture-land.

He shut off the engine and alighted. Lancaster stepped from the car and stood with his hands driven deep into his pockets, his eyes smouldering at the crook.

“We can talk here,” said Sugden. “I’m listening.”

“We’ve got to have it out, Dick.” Sugden’s tone was quiet and calm, but his black eyes were hard as flint.

You've weakened since you went to the school. You've changed."

"I know that."

"You know what you've done. You chipped in when the Weasel was after the school safe—"

"I'd do it again."

"You chipped in again when the Weasel and Ratty the Rogue held up the bank at Courtfield. They lost the loot and the car, and barely got away. They might not have got clear if I had not been waiting in another car to pick them up—"

"I helped Ratty to get clear, but I knocked him down with a spanner when he threatened a Greyfriars man with a revolver. I'd do it again."

"That's not all: I admit you played up at Hogben Grange. You sent us the plan of the house, and the way you obtained it was quite in the Wizard's style—his old style. But—you did not turn up on the night fixed to crack the crib. The Weasel was on the spot, waiting for you. He waited till near dawn, and you did not come."

"I was seen leaving the school. It would have been madness to crack the crib that night."

"But afterwards?" said Sugden sharply. "That's a good many nights ago, and there's been no word from you."

Lancaster did not answer.

"What does it mean, Dick?" Sugden compressed his lips. "Old Hogben keeps bonds and other securities in his safe worth five thousand pounds to us. Do you think we are going to lose a haul like that?"

"I suppose not."

"Fix your own time, and the Weasel will be ready."

Lancaster was silent again.

Slimy Sugden waited for him to speak. But he dared not speak. He stood with his handsome face growing paler.

The greasy-faced man, moneylender, thief and trainer of thieves, watched him, his fleshy jaw setting harder and harder.

"I'm waiting, Dick."

Lancaster drew a long, deep, almost sobbing breath.

"Slimy, I want you to let me off! I—I can't do it. I can't!"

"You can't?" repeated Slimy, with a bitter sneer.

"I can't! It's too foul. Old Hogben took me in, he treated me decently—he looked on me as a Greyfriars man—I can't do it."

Sugden's thick lip curled.

"Is it new to you, Dick?" he asked. "A new thing for the Wizard? Haven't you been trained as a cricketer, under the best coaches, to give you an entree to such places? Haven't you been placed at Greyfriars School for the same reason? Did you not crack the crib at Danby Croft when old Danby asked you there out of compassion for the orphan son of an officer killed in the War? Did you not—"

"Stop!"

"Well?" snarled Sugden.

The schoolboy crook looked at him. There was a passionate appeal in his eyes.

"Slimy, try to understand. It's different now. You needn't rub it in that I'm not at Greyfriars like the rest, that I'm with them but not of them. I know that only too well. But—but—Oh, haven't you a human heart in your body, Slimy? Can't you understand?"

"I think I do." Sugden's tone was bitterly sardonic. "You're at Greyfriars now; in the swim with the rest. You'd

like to throw over the man who trained you; the man you depend on to pay your fees at the school; the man who holds you in the hollow of his hand. You want to throw over the gang. You want to fancy that you're a Public school man, and not a crook. You want to forget that you ever were a crook. And you seem to fancy that you can get away with it."

"You've been a friend to me, Slimy, in your own way," said Lancaster huskily. "Can't you be a friend now? I tell you, I'm ashamed to the very marrow of my bones, among the fellows who trust me, when I remember what I am. I should never have gone to Greyfriars—I see that now."

"You want to leave?" asked Sugden, eyeing him narrowly.

"No, no, no! The few weeks I've had at Greyfriars are the only weeks of peace I've ever had. Even with the gang in the background, even knowing what I am, I've been happy there."

"Do you think I've ever been happy before—an outcast, a liar, a pretender, a deceiver, a scoundrel, biting the hand that fed me, betraying the people that trusted me? Oh, heaven! I'd rather break stones on the road!"

"It may come to that, Dick!" said Sugden icily. "Where does the money come from that pays your fees at the school? It passes through the hands of a respectable firm of solicitors—but where does it come from?"

Lancaster shuddered.

"Sir Hilton Popper, a governor of Greyfriars, placed you at the school. Why? Because he was in the grip of a moneylender and dared not kick. Where did the money come from that I lent the old fool?"

"Don't!" breathed Lancaster.

"I'm reminding you of facts you seem to have forgotten," said Slimy Sugden. "You can't get away from facts in this world, Dick. You're not at Greyfriars like the rest. You're there to serve the interests of the gang you belong to."

Lancaster passed a hand over his brow. His fingers came away wet with perspiration.

"Can you stay there if you break with the gang?"

"I'll leave then—I'll find work of some kind."

Sugden laughed.

"You work? What can you do? You've been trained for a gentleman's life—the life of a gentleman crook. You can crack safes; you've a magician's hand on a safe. You can play cricket. Are you going to earn a living playing a schoolboy's game? What else can you do?"

"Nothing!" muttered Lancaster. "Heaven knows, I'd rather you had trained me to be an honest workman."

"You don't mean that, Dick; and if you did, it's too late," said Sugden. "Hard and honest work wouldn't suit your delicate hands—poverty would not suit your expensive tastes, Dick. And it's in your blood. Your father—"

"My father was a soldier, and he died for his country. What would he have thought if he had lived to see me what I am?"

"Your father was a penniless officer and died in debt, and the debts were never paid," answered Sugden coolly. "If he had survived, he would have gone to the bad, as plenty of other penniless ex-officers went; after the War."

"Your uncle was a ne'er-do-well, who died a swindler—and would have died in the workhouse if the gang had not seen him through. The Wizard has only followed in their footsteps."

"Put it how you like, Slimy, I can't

stand it! Turn me out of Greyfriars if you choose—I can't go on!"

"You'd leave the school you've grown so fond of?" sneered Sugden.

"Yes, rather than stay there a thief and a villain," said Lancaster hoarsely. "Yes, a thousand times, yes! So long as I leave respected, unsuspected; so long as they never know—"

"I thought that was coming! But they will know."

"Why should they know? There have been rumours and suspicions—Loder of the Sixth was at Danby Croft that time, and he suspects; some of the juniors saw the man who drove the car in the bank raid at Courtfield, and know that I knew him; but they're my friends; and Loder is under my thumb. I hold my head high there; if I leave, no one need know—"

"You think they will not be told?"

Lancaster started as if a serpent had stung him.

"Slimy, you'd never—"

"Cut that out, Dick. If you betray the gang, the gang are done with you. You've tried our patience pretty hard already since you've been at Greyfriars. Break with us, and we break with you—and break you in the process!"

"Every boy at Greyfriars will know who and what Lancaster of the Sixth Form was and is."

"You villain!" breathed Lancaster.

Sugden shrugged his shoulders.

Richard Lancaster leaned on the side of the car. The strength seemed to have gone out of the athletic frame. It was as if he had crumpled under this last unexpected blow.

Visions danced before his eyes—of the kind face of the old Head, whose favourite pupil he was; of the rugged face of Wingate of the Sixth, who liked and trusted him; of Harry Wharton & Co., the juniors in whose eyes he was a hero. They would know. He pictured the amazement, the horror, the disgust in the faces he had known friendly and trusting.

The fellow they had liked, trusted, admired; the magnificent Lancaster; the great cricketer who had been carried on the shoulders of a cheering crowd—known as a thief, a crook, a traitor, a thing so vile that the kindest heart must harden against him, the kindest glance must be averted in scorn and contempt!

The unhappy boy groaned aloud.

He could not bear that. He knew that he could not bear it. Slimy Sugden had played a trump card.

The cold, hard eyes of the crook watched him.

There was a mingling of feelings in Sugden's breast. He liked the handsome boy crook; he was proud of him as the work of his own hands. He liked to see him popular, admired, carrying all before him; he liked to see him spending easily won wealth with a careless and lavish hand; in all his successes and triumphs he felt that he had a share.

But it was as the work of his own hands that he liked him—as the gentleman crook, as the most valuable member of the gang. To the Wizard, his associate and comrade, Sugden could be all kindness, all generosity; even sacrificing his own interests for the boy's sake. But to one who failed, one who weakened, one who threw over the gang and turned his back on his trainer, Slimy was pitiless.

There was no mercy in his look or in his hard heart as he watched the tormented face.

For long minutes Lancaster leaned on the car, silent, broken. Greyfriars men,

had they seen him, would hardly have recognised him.

He spoke at last.

"I'm done! Have your way. I couldn't face that—you know that I couldn't face that! I understand your friendship now, Slimy—the friendship of a cat with a mouse. But you've got me. Give me your orders."

Perhaps, for a moment, there was some twinge of compunction in the crook's hard heart at that utter surrender; but if so, it was only for a moment.

"I'm glad you've come to your senses, Dick. You'll forget all this—it's only a mood. I heard the same from your uncle, long ago; but he ended as you know."

"Wednesday night, at twelve, the Weasel will be waiting for you in the same spot—in the grounds at Hogben Grange."

"I will be there." Lancaster's tone was lifeless.

"Now get into the car, and I'll drive you back."

"Let me alone."

Without another word or a look, Lancaster tramped away. Twenty miles lay between him and Greyfriars, but he did not think of that or care about it. He tramped away across the fields.

Slimy Sugden stood looking after the slim, handsome figure, drooping a little as it went, erect as Lancaster usually carried himself. It disappeared from his eyes at last, and Slimy stepped into the car.

Lancaster had left him, with a heart of lead and a face of misery. But he had left him obedient to his master's voice, and that was enough. It was not Lancaster of the Sixth, schoolboy and cricketer, who was tramping away to the distant school. It was the "Wizard," the cracker of safes. Slimy Sugden knew it, and he was satisfied to know it, and there was satisfaction in his cold, greasy face as he drove away in the two-seater.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Harry Wharton!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Here we are again!"

Harry Wharton was waiting at the door of the House for his friends to come in. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull arrived together.

Both of them grinned as they noted the marks on the face of the captain of the Remove.

"You got Pon?" asked Bob.

"Yes." Wharton smiled as he passed his hand over his face. "He's left me a few souvenirs. Not so many as I left him, I think."

"Good!" said Johnny Bull.

"We met Lancaster of the Sixth, and he told us where to look for you," said Bob. "But you were gone, so we came on. What about tea? I dare say the others will be in by the time we get it ready."

The three juniors proceeded to Study No. 1 in the Remove, where they were soon busy getting tea. Tea was rather late, the affair of Ponsonby having taken up a good deal of time. By the time it was ready Frank Nugent and Hurree Jamsot Ram Singh came in.

The Famous Five were more than ready for tea. Poached eggs and buttered toast disappeared at a great rate. Harry Wharton gave his chums an account of the scrap with Ponsonby of Highcliffe, to which they listened with considerable satisfaction, and there was a chortle when he told them how Loder had taken him to Quelch.

"Poor old Loder!" murmured Bob. "He's frightfully sore lately over being left out of the cricket. What the dickens can a man expect if he smokes in his study and slacks at games and rots about generally? But he seems to have got over his feud with Lancaster. At any rate, he doesn't seem to be saying and hinting things about him as he did."

"I fancy Lancaster found some way of shutting him up," said Nugent. "It was time the silly ass shut up."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Wharton.

"The ratherfulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamsot Ram Singh. But there was a thoughtful expression on the nabob's dusky face. Hurree Singh was not the fellow to tattle, but he could not help remembering the meeting of Lancaster and Sugden, and the Sixth Form man's prevarication—to call it



A LAUGH A DAY
KEEPS THE DOCTOR
AWAY!

Herewith to-day's tonic:

"Hi, what are you doing up my apple tree?" asked Farmer Giles angrily.

"Please, sir," answered the little boy brightly, "one of your apples fell down and I'm trying to put it back again!"

The above amusing ribtickler, submitted by Jean Imray, "The Rest," Ellington Road, Taplow, Bucks, carries off one of this week's **USEFUL POCKET KNIVES!**

only that. A fellow had a right to keep his own secrets, but he had no right to prevaricate, and the dusky junior's opinion of Richard Lancaster had received an unpleasant jolt.

"Speaking of Lancaster, I rather checked him this afternoon on Courtfield Common," said Harry, colouring a little. "I was rather wild when he butted in between Pon and me. The fact is, I was rather a hasty ass. I—I don't suppose he cared anything about it—"

"He's a jolly good-tempered chap," said Bob.

"The best-tempered man in the Sixth. I think, except old Wingate," said Harry. "I think I'll trot along to his study after tea and tell him I'm sorry. I was an ass to check him."

"Nothing like thinking before you speak," said Johnny Bull. "You don't do that often enough, old chap."

"Thanks!" said Wharton rather dryly.

"I say, you fellows—"

Billy Bunfer blinked in at the doorway of Study No. 1.

"Too late!" chuckled Bob.

"Eh?"

"We've finished tea."

"The too-latefulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunfer!"

"I've tea'd with Toddy," said Bunfer, with dignity. "Toddy had a decent spread, for once. But, I say, I've just seen Lancaster come in. He looked frightfully down in the mouth."

"What rot!"

"Well, he did," said Bunfer. "Wingate spoke to him when he came in, and he hardly answered. He slammed the door when he went to his study. I say, you fellows, Lancaster's playing on Wednesday, when the First Eleven go over to Lantham. I was thinking of going over to see the game and taking you fellows with me."

"Awfully kind of you!" said Johnny Bull sarcastically. "We couldn't get to Lantham, I suppose, without you to take us."

"What I mean is, I'm thinking of making a party of it—hiring a car and standing tea at the Pagoda at Lantham afterwards," explained Bunfer. "As you fellows are my pals, I want you to come, see?"

"Anybody hiring out cars free, gratis, and for nothing?" asked Johnny Bull, still sarcastic. "And is the Pagoda at Lantham run on tick?"

"Oh, really, Bull! The fact is, I'm expecting a postal order—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I believe I mentioned to you fellows that I was expecting a postal order," said Billy Bunfer, blinking at the grinning five through his big spectacles.

"I believe you did!" chuckled Bob. "In fact, I believe you've mentioned it about a thousand times!"

"Nearer a million!" said Johnny Bull.

"Well, it hasn't come," said Bunfer. "But it's a cert for to-morrow. It's from one of my titled relations, you know."

"Bow-wow!"

"And I shall stand the excursion to Lantham out of it. Will you fellows join up?"

"We'll wait till the postal order has joined up, I think."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, there's a possibility that there may be a delay in the post," admitted Bunfer. "It's not likely, but it's possible. In that case I should expect my friends to lend me a pound or two temporarily."

"Now we're getting to the milk in the coconut!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I think—"

"Gammon!" said Bob. "You don't! If you could think you'd know that that postal order story won't wash. As a matter of fact, we're going over to Lantham to see the cricket match. But we're not going in your car, Bunfer. Too jolly expensive to a fellow when you stand him a car."

"Beast!"

"We're biking it. On the whole, we won't rely on that postal order," said Bob, shaking his head.

"Well, I'll tell you what," said Bunfer. "If my postal order comes in time, I'll stand a car and a feed at Lantham. If it doesn't, you fellows stand the car and the feed, and I'll do the same on St. Jim's day. You fellows would like to go over to St. Jim's when the First Eleven play there. What do you say?"

"Rats!"

"The ratfulness is terrific!"

"Well, look here. I'll come over to

Lantham on Wednesday on my jigger," said Bunter. "I suppose you'll mend the punctures ready, Cherry?"

"Suppose again!"

"It wants a new chain, too. You'll see to that, won't you, Wharton?"

"No fear!"

"And one of the pedals is gone," went on Bunter. "Think you could fix me up with a new pedal, Bull?"

"Not in the least!"

"I can jolly well tell you fellows that if you want me to come you'll have to do the decent thing about my bike!" said Bunter warmly.

"Can't you come unless your bike is mended?" asked Bob.

"No, I can't."

"Then we'll jolly well see that it isn't mended. If I catch any fellow mending it, I'll give him a thick ear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter. And he rolled out of Study No. 1, leaving the Famous Five chuckling.

Harry Wharton rose from the table.

"I'll get along and see Lancaster, as Bunter says he's come in," he remarked; and he left the study.

In the Sixth Form passage Wharton tapped at Lancaster's door and opened it.

It was growing dusky now, but there was no light on in the study. For a moment Wharton thought that the room was empty.

Then he gave a start of surprise.

Lancaster of the Sixth was seated at the table, his elbows resting on it, and his head sunk in his hands.

He was quite motionless, and it was evident that he had not heard the junior tap at the door, and had not heard the door open.

Back into Wharton's mind flashed what Bunter had said; that Lancaster of the Sixth had looked frightfully "down" when he came in.

He looked "down" enough now.

Wharton stared at him, seeing little more than the top of his head, with its thick, brown hair. Lancaster did not move. He did not know that the junior was there, and the situation was awkward for Wharton.

Lancaster's attitude was that of a fellow sunk in the deepest dejection; a fellow in the last depth of trouble.

Never before had Wharton, or any Greyfriars fellow, seen the handsome Sixth-Former looking anything but bright and pleasant and cheerful. If black care ate into his heart, he never allowed it to be revealed in his face.

Now, alone in his study, he had, for once, given way utterly, to such an extent that he was blind and deaf to his surroundings.

It was amazing that he had not heard the tap on the door, that he had not heard the door open, that he did not know that the junior was standing there looking at him. Wharton stood silent, not knowing what to do.

What terrible trouble was it that had struck Lancaster down like this? What could it mean?

A long minute dragged by, and still Lancaster did not move. His face remained buried in his hands, and a faint sound came from him—a long, deep sigh. It touched the junior's heart strangely.

Wharton backed silently to the door.

Only too well he realised how the Sixth-Former would hate having been seen thus; what a deep wound it would be to his pride. Wharton was only anxious to spare him that wound.

He backed softly and swiftly into the passage, and drew the door shut after

him. But he need not have been so careful; Lancaster heard nothing, saw nothing. He was oblivious to everything. For once his strength and courage had crumpled up. In those black moments he was at the bottom of an abyss.

In the passage, after shutting the door, Wharton hesitated. He was amazed and disquieted by what he had seen. It chimed in strangely with vague doubts that had, in spite of himself, hardly realised by himself, risen in his mind in regard to Richard Lancaster.

Was that hopeless figure, sunk in despair, the handsome and magnificent Lancaster—the fellow Greyfriars knew and admired? What secret carking care could have prostrated him like this?

Wharton would have gone, but it came into his mind that any Sixth Form man might drop into the study at any moment to see Lancaster. Wingate might come to speak about the Lantham match, or Sykes, or Gwynne—anyone, in fact. And if they saw him like this—

It did not take the junior long to decide. He lifted his hand and knocked on the door—not the usual tap, but a loud bang. That was certain to rouse the Sixth Form man. And this time he waited to be told to come in before he opened the door.

He heard a movement in the study. That loud knock had startled the Sixth-Former from the lethargy into which he had sunk.

"Come in!"

It was Lancaster's usual pleasant voice that called.

Wharton opened the door slowly. He wanted to give the senior time to recover himself. But Lancaster did not need it.

When the junior entered, he saw the usual Lancaster standing by the table—calm, cheerful in countenance, smiling. The change in him was amazing; Wharton could almost have believed that that sunken figure at the table had been a figment of his imagination. The fellow's self-control was wonderful; and Wharton knew—knew beyond the shadow of a doubt—that he must be playing a part.

"Oh, you, Wharton!" said Lancaster. His tone was even, his smile friendly and genial. "You look as if you had had a rather vigorous argument with that Highcliffe man."

"Yes," stammered Harry. He was taken aback and confused. "I—I came—"

"Fire away!"

"I—I was rather cheeky this afternoon, Lancaster. I'm sorry! I—I thought I'd tell you so!"

Lancaster laughed.

"That's all right, kid! Don't let that worry you!"

"I was a cheeky ass to speak as I did," said Harry.

"That's all right."

Lancaster dismissed him with a nod. The junior withdrew and closed the study door. As he went down the passage Wingate of the Sixth passed him. The Greyfriars captain stopped at Lancaster's door, and went in.

Wharton, as he hurried away, was glad that he had roused Lancaster; otherwise it was certain Wingate would have seen him as Wharton had seen him.

But the junior's mind was sorely troubled as he went away. He liked Dick Lancaster, admired him, respected him, as all his comrades did, as almost all Greyfriars did. And yet—and yet—

It was long before Wharton could

dismiss from his mind the picture of that sunken figure in the Sixth Form study. And even when he dismissed it at last, it haunted the back of his mind; it was not to be wholly dismissed.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Cricket at Lantham!

"JOLLY day!" said Bob Cherry.

"The jollyfulness is terrific!"

It was a glorious afternoon at the end of May. Harry Wharton & Co. were in the best of spirits as they wheeled out their bikes for the ride to Lantham.

Wednesday was a half-holiday, and the chums of the Remove were not the only ones, by dozens, who were going over to Lantham that afternoon.

Early in the day Wingate and the great men of the First Eleven had gone to play Lantham on their own ground. And in the afternoon half Greyfriars was likely to be on the scene.

Coker of the Fifth was starting on his motor-bike. Potter and Greene both declined a lift behind Coker—perhaps because life was sweet—and went by train. Hobson and a crowd of the Shell went to catch the Redclyffe motor-bus. Temple of the Fourth had hired a car, which was packed with as many of the Fourth as it would hold, and one or two over.

Vernon-Smith of the Remove had a car, too, with several friends in it; the Bouncer had plenty of money to spend. Push-bikes were good enough for Harry Wharton & Co., and they liked the ride as well as the prospect of seeing the cricket match.

Billy Bunter was going, too, according to his own statement; but as his bike was still in its usual state of disrepair, and as his celebrated postal order had not arrived, after all, Bunter had to solve the problem of transport somehow.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Good-bye, Bunter!" called out Bob Cherry, as he put a leg over his machine.

"I say, old chap, hold on a minute!" Bunter came puffing up. "I say, which of you men is going to give me a lift to Lantham behind him?"

"The whichfulness is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Dear man!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"I'll stand behind you, if you like, Wharton," said Bunter.

"I don't like, old fat man! I can't pull a ton uphill," chuckled the captain of the Remove.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Try Shanks' pony," suggested Bob Cherry. "Ten miles on your hoofs will bring down your fat a little, old porpoise!"

"Beast! Are you going to give me a lift, Nugent?"

"Probably not!" grinned Nugent.

"I say, you fellows, don't bike away while a fellow's talking to you. Lend me a couple of bob for my bus fare!" howled Bunter. "I can get the motor-bus most of the way, but I've run out of tin—"

"Oh, bother!" said Wharton. "You don't want to see a cricket match, you fat ass! You don't care twopence about cricket."

"Well, a lot of my friends will be teeing at the Pagoda, and they will expect to see me," said Bunter.

"I fancy your friends won't thank me for lending you your bus fare," said Wharton, laughing. "But here you are."

He tossed a two-shilling piece to the fat junior, mounted his machine, and followed his friends.

Bunter grabbed the coin, and started for the nearest motor-bus stop. Billy Bunter was not keenly interested in the First Eleven match at Lantham. But he was deeply interested in the fact that a crowd of Greyfriars men were certain to "tea" at the Pagoda bunshop.

Among so many tea-parties, Bunter had no doubt that he would be able to wedge in, and prove to be the Pagoda's best customer that day.

So Billy Bunter rolled away cheerfully on the motor-bus, while Harry Wharton & Co. pedalled away on push-bikes equally cheerfully.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's jolly old Pon!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the Famous Five swept in a bunch down the lane that led towards the Redclyffe road.

Four elegant fellows were strolling loftily along the lane—Ponsonby,

the lane. Nugent and Hurree Singh and Johnny Bull, who were ahead of their companions, shot onward, unaware of what had happened; while Wharton, barely escaping a fall, jumped from his machine. Bob Cherry leaped down at the same moment.

There was no time to return and reach Ponsonby & Co. They were in swift retreat. Bob jerked an apple from his pocket, which had been intended for light refreshment during the cricket match at Lantham.

There was another whiz.

"Yarooooh!" yelled Ponsonby.

Bob's aim was unerring. It was a large apple, and a hard one. It crashed on the side of Ponsonby's head and sent him spinning.

He rolled down the bank, and sprawled in the dusty lane, yelling.

"One good turn deserves another!"

closed on Ponsonby's ankle, and the dandy of Highcliffe was dragged back.

For a second time Ponsonby bumped down in the lane.

"Now, you cur—" panted Wharton.

"Let go!" screamed Ponsonby, as the Greyfriars junior grasped him by the collar and proceeded to rub his features in the dry mud of the lane.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob. "Give him beans, old bean!"

"Ow! Ow! Groooogh! Ooogh!" spluttered Ponsonby. "Leggo! Ow! Help!"

Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour



"Well caught, Lancaster!" yelled Bob Cherry, waving his arms excitedly and catching the junior nearest him a stinging cut beneath the right ear. It happened to be Bunter, and there was a fiendish yell.

Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour, of Highcliffe School.

Bob Cherry waved his hand in cheery salute, and received a black glare from Ponsonby in return.

The cyclists swept by; and Ponsonby, with an evil glitter in his eyes, stooped and picked up a stone from the road.

His companions grinned as he took aim at one of the riders from behind.

Whiz!

There was a yell from Harry Wharton.

The missile caught him in the middle of the back, with a sharp rap, and he lurched on his bike, which went rocking wildly, and almost overturned.

"Hook it!" grinned Ponsonby

The four Highcliffians scrambled hastily up the steep grassy bank beside

grinned Bob. "It was worth the apple. Hurt, old man?"

Wharton did not answer.

He ran back along the lane, leaving his bike, with his fists clenched and his eyes flashing.

Ponsonby scrambled to his feet.

His head was singing from the crash of the apple, and he gasped for breath. But at the sight of Wharton speeding towards him he scrambled desperately up the steep bank after his comrades. But for Bob's prompt shot with the apple he would have escaped easily enough—Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour had already disappeared through the high hedge above. But delays were dangerous! Wharton ran like a deer, and roached the Highcliffe fellow before he could reach the hedge. His grasp

looked down from the hedge at the top of the bank. But the Co. had circled back on their machines by this time, and the Highcliffe three did not venture down. They were not anxious for an encounter with the hard hitters of the Remove; and the dandy of Highcliffe was left to take his medicine on his own.

It was rather bitter medicine. With an ache in his back where the stone had struck him, Wharton put his beef into the matter. Ponsonby was left wondering whether he had any features left by the time the Greyfriars junior had finished rubbing them in the hard mud.

"I think that will do!" gasped

(Continued on page 16.)

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(Continued from page 13.)

Wharton, "You rotter, you'll think twice before you buzz stones at a fellow's back again."

"The twicefulness will be terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Come on!" said Harry.

The Famous Five remounted and rode onward. No more whizzing stones followed them. The consequences of that method of warfare were altogether too painful for the Highcliffe knuts.

Ponsonby staggered to his feet.

Under its coating of dust, his face was crimson with fury.

"Oh gad!" murmured Monson. "That Greyfriars brute has made a picture of Pon."

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"You rotten funks, why didn't you come and help me?" shrieked Ponsonby, glaring up at his friends. "You sneaking cowards!"

"Oh, rats! Why didn't you help yourself!" retorted Gadsby. "It was man to man, wasn't it? Only one of them touched you."

"Absolutely!" agreed Vavasour.

Ponsonby's reply was a stream of language that would have earned him the "sack," even from Highcliffe School, had his headmaster heard him.

After which, Cecil Ponsonby proceeded in search of a much-needed wash, scowling blackly, while his comrades suppressed their grins.

Meanwhile, the Famous Five of Greyfriars rode cheerily on their way, dismissing Ponsonby & Co. from their minds, though Harry Wharton, at least, was destined to be reminded of them before that day was out.

Miles slid under the rapid wheels of the machines; and the town of Lantham appeared ahead at last.

When the chums of the Remove, having put up their machines, came into the Lantham C.C. ground, a roar of cheering and a storm of hand-clapping greeted their cars.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Who—"

"Lancaster!" exclaimed Wharton.

A hundred Greyfriars voices were shouting:

"Well hit!"

"Bravo!"

"Good old Lancaster!"

Peter Todd looked round at the Famous Five with a cheery grin. Toddy was packed in a crowd of juniors who had come over by train.

"It's another boundary," he said. "Boundaries are cheap to-day! That man Lancaster can hit."

"Hurrah!"

Harry Wharton & Co. settled down cheerfully to watch. And the game was worth watching.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Catch of the Season!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Nobody answered Bunter.

"I say—"

"Dry up, old fat man!" said Bob Cherry over his shoulder.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

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"Cheese it!"

Billy Bunter snorted.

It was not King Cricket that had drawn the Owl of the Remove into the packed ranks of the spectators on the Lantham ground. Bunter was thinking of matters much more important than cricket.

The sun was sinking over the Kentish downs. It had been a great game; and it was getting near to a close finish. It had drawn a big crowd of Lantham folk and a big crowd of Greyfriars men. All were watching keenly. Harry Wharton & Co. had forgotten time and space. It was no time for Bunter to butt in.

Bunter did not mind that, however. He had discovered the Famous Five in the crowd, and succeeded in wedging his way towards them. And Bunter was not to be denied.

"I say, you fellows—" he recommenced.

"If Lancaster gets the ball again—" murmured Johnny Bull.

"I say—"

Bob Cherry glared round at the Owl of the Remove.

"Will you dry up, you fat ass?" he demanded.

"The esteemed silence is golden," said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "The jawfulness is not the proper caper, my idiotic Bunter."

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"Kick him; you fellows!" called out Vernon-Smith.

"Beast! I say, Bob, you might tell a chap how the game's going!" said Bunter reproachfully. "You know I'm short-sighted."

Bunter, as a matter of fact, did not care two straws—or one—how the game was going. But he was aware that the soft answer turneth away wrath. Bob was not proof against that appeal. He did not want to take his eyes off the game for a moment; he had hardly taken them off for a minute during the hours that the Famous Five had watched through that golden May afternoon. But he gave Bunter a little attention now.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "If you want to know that—"

"You know how awfully keen I am on cricket!" said Bunter.

"Oh, my hat! Well, we batted first," said Bob. "We," of course, meant Greyfriars. "We had 140 for the first innings and 150 for the second. That's 290, if you can work it out."

"Is it?" said Bunter.

"Lantham took 130 in their first innings," continued Bob. "They're at the end of their second innings now—159 for nine wickets."

"Are they?" said Bunter.

These figures represented nothing to Bunter, who did not take the mental trouble to put two and two together. He did not realise what a thrilling conjuncture they indicated.

"So you see!" concluded Bob.

Bunter did not see.

"They want one more to tie and two to win," said Bob, putting it in words of one syllable, as it were, to make it clear to Bunter's limited intellect. "We've got total 230, they've got 289—got that?"

"Oh, yes!" agreed Bunter. "I say, you—"

"Don't say anything; no need for you to talk. It's touch and go since they've got their last man in. Plenty of time for them to knock up runs before stumps are drawn."

"Oh, yes! I say—"

"Lancaster bowled the last over—"

that's what brought their last man in. He did the hat-trick."

"Did he? I say—"

"If he was bowling now, it would be all U P for Lantham," continued Bob.

"Would it? I say—"

"But he isn't, worse luck," said Bob. "Sykes is bowling."

"Is he? I say—"

"Can't you see he is, fathead! Don't you know Sykes of the Sixth by sight? If Sykes knocks over a wicket we win—see?"

"Shall we? I say—"

"But he doesn't seem able to do it," said Bob Cherry. "And that Lantham batsman isn't bad, either. If he bags a single they tie."

"Do they? I say—"

"If he bags two, where are we?" demanded Bob.

"Eh? We're on the Lantham Cricket Ground," said Bunter, blinking at him, surprised by the question.

"You benighted idiot—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"If that Lantham man bags two we're beaten!" roared Bob.

"Are we? I say—"

"For goodness' sake, shut up, Bunter!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "When that ball comes in they're bowling the last of the over."

"But I say—"

"Use your eyes, fathead, and give your chin a rest!"

The juniors watched the field eagerly. The game, hotly contested all through the hours that the chums of the Remove had watched, was close to a thrilling climax. Had Lancaster of the Sixth been bowling that over, no Greyfriars man doubted that he would have knocked over a wicket and won the game for Greyfriars. That, perhaps, was scarcely just to Sykes, who was a first-class bowler, and seemed unable to touch the Lantham man. But Dick Lancaster, magnificent batsman as he was, was also a wizard with the ball, and he had performed the "hat-trick" in each of the Lantham innings.

No runs had materialised from the last over, so far, and the crowd watched with all their eyes. A single run would make it a tie; two runs would make it a win. In the next over, if there was a next, Lancaster would bowl again, and put "paid" to Lantham—all the Greyfriars men were sure of that. The present over was, in the opinion of Greyfriars, Lantham's last chance. Probably Lantham held a different opinion. But there it was!

And so the last ball of that over was a thrilling affair. If the Lantham batsman hit it away, the game was a goner—for Greyfriars. It was anybody's game now.

"I say, you fellows—"

Bob Cherry jammed an elbow into Bunter's fat ribs. Bunter's fat voice, in those thrilling moments, was as irritating as the buzzing of a wasp.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

He shut up at last. Matters much more important than cricket had to be neglected till the game was over, that was clear. Bunter snorted, and blinked at the green field and the white figures dotting it, through his big spectacles, with an impatient blink. He wanted those fatheads to get done with it, so that he could get down to things that really mattered—such as tea at the Pagoda.

"There he goes!" breathed Frank Nugent.

"Oh, bowl—bowl!" groaned Bob Cherry, as Sykes proceeded to prepare for the last ball of the over, with what seemed to Robert Cherry exasperating

slowness. "Bowl, you ass! Can't the man move?"

"He won't get that wicket!" said the Bounder. "Sykes can't touch that Lantham man. And if he hits out this time—"

"Look out for a catch in the field," said Redwing.

"That man hasn't given any catches so far."

"Oh, shut up, Smithy!" growled Bob. "Is that man never going to bowl? Can't he get a move on?"

"He's going," said Johnny Bull.

"If only old Lancaster was bowling!" groaned Bob.

"Well, he isn't. Sykes isn't bad," said Harry Wharton. "Oh, my hat! Oh, my only summer hat! Oh!"

The click of bat and ball rang across a silent field. The Lantham man had played a cautious game through that over, so far. Now he hit out, and the leather flew.

Bob Cherry suppressed a groan. "The game's up!" breathed the Bounder.

The leather was whizzing; the batsmen were running. The game was up for Greyfriars, unless— But another figure was running—a lithe, graceful figure, with feet that seemed hardly to touch the greensward. A shout rose from Greyfriars that swelled to a roar.

"Lancaster! Lancaster!" Lancaster of the Sixth did not even hear the roar. He was moving like a lightning flash. Now he swerved, turned, his handsome head thrown back, his eyes fixed on the leather that seemed to float down into his upheld hand.

Back he went—back, bending, still watching the leather—and all eyes watched him, almost in anguish. It was a matter of a split second, but it seemed like an age. Would he do it? No—yes! No! Yes—yes!

The faint sound of a smack as a ball met a palm!

Then a terrific roar.

"Caught!"

"Oh, well caught!"

"Well caught, sir!"

Bob Cherry hurled his cap into the air. He yelled at the top of his voice. The ball was in Lancaster's hand.

"Caught!" shrieked Bob. He waved his arms excitedly, and caught the nearest fellow just beneath the right ear. It was Billy Bunter, and there was a fiendish yell from Bunter as he collapsed in the grass under that hearty smack. "Caught! Caught!"

"Yaroooh!"

"The catchfulness is terrific!"

"Caught! Oh, caught!"

"Bravo, Lancaster!"

"Greyfriars wins! Hurrah!"

"Ow! You've busted my back! Wow!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Good old Lancaster! Bravo!"

Wingate of the Sixth rushed up to Lancaster. He thumped him on the back, with a thump that made him stagger. Lancaster gasped and grinned. Round the field the Greyfriars mob were roaring. The clapping of hands rang like machine-gun fire. Fellows tossed their caps into the air, careless where they came down, or whether they ever came down at all. A surging mob surrounded Lancaster of the Sixth, yelling and cheering.

"Isn't he a prize-packet?" gasped Bob Cherry. "Isn't he a coughdrop? Isn't he the jolly old goods? What?"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hurrah!"

"It's the catch of the season!" chuckled Bob. "The jolly old catch of the season! Bunter, old fat man, we've won! Hurrah!"

"I say, you fellows, what about tea?" "Fathead! Hurrah!"

Only Billy Bunter was thinking of tea, though it was late for tea. Greyfriars had beaten Lantham. And Lancaster of the Sixth had won the game for the school with the catch of the

season! And the Greyfriars men cheered Dick Lancaster till their throats were hoarse and husky.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bold, Bad Bunter!

"HOLD on!" gasped Billy Bunter.

In the surging, excited crowd that streamed off the cricket ground, the Owl of the Remove had lost the Famous Five. But he found them again as they were wheeling out their bikes to take the road home to Greyfriars.

Harry Wharton & Co. were in great spirits. They had had a happy afternoon watching the finish of a great game. They had seen their school win. And the fellow who was a hero in their boyish eyes had made the winning catch. Lancaster had seen them in the crowd, and given them a kind nod. And a nod from the great cricketer was glory and distinction. It was no wonder that the Famous Five were feeling merry and bright.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's the jolly old porpoise again, turning up like a bad penny!" said Bob. "Feeling bucked, Bunter?"

"I'm hungry." "Well, come to think of it, I'm ready for tea," said Bob. "The sooner we get home the better. Good-bye, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! What about tea at the Pagoda?"

"No time, fathead!" said Wharton. "We've barely time to get back to the school before lock-up."

"Lots of fellows will be late to-day," said Bunter. "There was a crowd at the Pagoda this afternoon, you fellows, while you were blinking at that game. I thought you would be coming in, but you hadn't sense enough to come over for tea. I had hardly a snack. I say, you fellows, let's go and tea at the Pagoda now."

"And what are we to tell Quelch, fathead?"

"You can tell him you had a lot of punctures and had to wait at Lantham while they were mended," suggested Bunter brightly.

"We haven't had any punctures, fathead."

"I wish you'd keep to the point," said Bunter. "I can tell you I'm hungry. I'll stand a spread at the Pagoda. I mean, one of you fellows can lend me some tin and I'll settle out of my postal order—"

"Time we were off!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull! Look here, how am I to get back?" demanded Bunter.

"Bus, or train, or Shanks' pony!" suggested Bob.

"That means being late, and a jaw from Quelch. I don't mind being late if we have tea at the Pagoda. It's worth it. But—"

"Well, ass, you should have started before. You didn't want to see the cricket, anyhow."

Bunter snorted. Cricket, certainly, had not kept him in Lantham that afternoon. He had haunted the bunshop most of the time, picking up a trifle here and there from Greyfriars men who came in to tea. But chiefly he had looked forward to a spread after the match. And there was to be no spread, so far as the Famous Five were concerned! It really was hard cheese! If there was to be no spread Bunter was anxious to get back in time to avoid

WELL DONE, SCOTLAND!
GIRL READER WINS A
TOPPING PRIZE

for sending in the Greyfriars
limerick illustrated below:



As Quelch was strolling one day,



The wind blow his Mortar away.



It flew over the wall,



To the joy of us all.



There were lines and the dlokens to pay!

One of this week's Splendid Books has been dispatched to Miss Nellie Scott, of 27, Hartington Road, Aberdeen, Scotland, for her winning effort.

Set to work, lads, and bag one of these useful prizes!

"jaw," lines, and a possible licking, from his Form master.

"Now, look here," said Bunter, "the train's gone, while I was looking for you fellows. The motor-bus to Courtfield will be too late. One of you fellows will have to give me a lift on a bike."

"You bothering ass!" exclaimed Wharton. "If you'd gone to the station, instead of haunting us like a fat ghost you—"

"Beast!"

"You can get the motor-bus," said Harry. "If you get off a mile this side of Courtfield and take the footpath across the park at Hogben Grange you will get back in time for lock-up."

"Why, you silly chump!" gasped Bunter. "It's half a mile across Hogben Grange, and another mile on to the school—"

"Well, that's the only way," said Harry.

"You can give me a lift on your bike and—"

"Fathoad!"

"Well, I'll tell you what," said Bunter. "You take the bus, Wharton, and walk home from Hogben Grange. And lend me your bike. See?"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Don't be selfish, you know," urged Bunter. "I could never stand selfishness. It's mean!"

"My only hat! You fat chump—"

"Well, can I have the bike?" asked Bunter.

He laid his fat hands on Wharton's jigger.

"No!" roared Wharton.

"Beast! Well, look here, lend me a bob for the bus."

"I've lent you that already once, you fat image!"

"If you mean that two-bob bit, I had to pay my fare to Lantham, and I had to have a snack—"

"Oh, dry up!" exclaimed Wharton. "I can find another job. It's worth that to lose sight of you till lock-up."

"Yah!"

Harry Wharton ran his hands through his pockets in search of a shilling. There was a sly gleam in Billy Bunter's little round eyes, behind his big round spectacles. The way out of Lantham lay down a long hill, and once a fellow was on a bike, going down that hill free-wheeling, that fellow was fairly safe from capture. Billy Bunter could be strategic. His fat brain was evolving a stratagem now.

Wharton had to let the bike go, as he felt through his pockets for the necessary shilling. Bunter was holding the bike. The other bikes were resting against a fence.

Bunter, whose movements generally resembled those of a tired snail, acted with sudden and unexpected promptness.

While Wharton was running his hands through his pockets and the other fellows standing by their machines, the fat junior made a sudden spring into the saddle of the bike.

Had pedalling been required, the fat Owl of the Remove certainly would never have got away with it. In fact, he would not have tried it on.

But the long hill sloped down before him, and the instant he was in the saddle Bunter shot away.

The bicycle fairly whizzed.

Harry Wharton spun round after him. For the moment he did not grasp the sly Owl's intention.

"You fat duffer! Bring that bike back!" he roared. "Here's your bob!"

Bunter did not answer. He did not look back. He drove at the pedals—an

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easy task on a steep slope. The bike went like an arrow.

"What is the fat idiot up to?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Wharton gave a sudden yell.

"The villain! He's riding my bike! I—I—I'll—"

He rushed after William George Bunter.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob.

The felonious intention of the astute Owl dawned on the Famous Five all at once. They started after the vanishing fat form whizzing down the hill.

"After him!" yelled Nugent.

"I'll get him!" gasped Bob. "I'll catch the fat rotter!"

He threw his leg over his machine.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Wharton.

Bunter was already vanishing round a curve of the hilly road. "Hold on, you men!"

"But he's got the bike—"

"Hold on! You won't catch him before you get to the bottom of the hill, and that's nearly two miles. I shall have to walk, and you'll have to wait for me. We shall be late for lock-up."

"We'll scrag Bunter—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Scragging Bunter won't get us back to school before Gosling locks us out. I'll take the bus. Let him rip!"

Evidently, it was the only way. Bunter was out of sight, going swiftly downhill. He could not be recaptured before the bottom of the hill was reached; and it was possible, too, that the astute Owl would turn off the road, in which case he would not be captured at all. Harry Wharton laughed again. It was rather exasperating to be deprived of his bike, but Bunter as a bold, bad raider was rather entertaining.

"After all, I can do it on the bus and Bunter couldn't," said Harry. "He would crawl in hours late if he had to walk from Hogben Grange. I hope the fat duffer won't break his neck. I fancy he will be sorry he raided that bike when he comes to Redclyffe Hill. You fellows get off, and I'll cut across and get the motor-bus. There's still time."

"Right-ho! We'll kick Bunter when we catch him up!" said Nugent.

"Do—hard!"

Four members of the Co. mounted their machines and whizzed off in the direction Bunter had taken. Harry Wharton walked over to the market square and boarded the motor-bus, which was about to start. Wharton had had a happy afternoon, and was in cheery spirits, which, perhaps, helped him to tolerate Bunter's antics with patient equanimity. But he little dreamed what the strange outcome was to be as the motor-bus rolled out of Lantham.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Ponsonby's Vengeance!

"LOOK out!" muttered Gadsby.

"What the dooce!" grunted Ponsonby.

Ponsonby's eyes glinted.

Pon was in a bad temper that afternoon. His features were still feeling the effects of a severe rubbing in hard mud. Moreover, the Highcliffe knuts had spent most of the afternoon at the Three Fishers, up the river, in a billiards-room, where one of their undesirable acquaintances had cleared them out of a good deal of their pocket-money. They had smoked innumerable cigarettes, and were feeling the effects of them. All four of the Highcliffe knuts were tired

and irritable, and Ponsonby was the most savage-tempered of the four.

They were following a grassy path through the park at Hogben Grange on their homeward way when Gadsby glanced back and gave the warning.

He had caught a glimpse of a Greyfriars junior coming along the path behind the Highcliffe quartette.

"That cad Wharton!" muttered Ponsonby, clenching his fists.

He stopped.

"Here, hold on, you ass!" exclaimed Monson, in alarm. "Don't start a row with those cads! Let them pass."

"Chuck it, Pon!" said Vavasour, equally alarmed. "I'm not goin' to scrap with that gang—absolutely."

Ponsonby sneered.

"There's only one of the gang," he said. "The others aren't with him."

"They were all together—"

"They're not together now."

The Highcliffians looked back, watching the Greyfriars fellow as he came swinging along the path.

Wharton had not observed them yet. He was not thinking of his old enemies of Highcliffe; indeed, he had forgotten the existence of Ponsonby & Co.

The Highcliffe knuts had been lounging along slowly. Wharton, walking vigorously and swiftly, was quickly overtaking them.

He had dropped from the motor-bus on the Redclyffe road, to take the short cut across to the school, by way of Hogben Grange and Courtfield Common. By that route there was time to reach Greyfriars before lock-up, but he had no time to lose. So he was putting his best foot foremost, so to speak.

Ponsonby & Co. watched him coming on. Pon made a sign to his comrades, and they backed into the thick foliage beside the path.

"He's alone!" whispered Pon, his eyes gloaming.

"Where the dooce are the other cads?" muttered Gadsby. "They were all together on bikes, when we saw them this afternoon."

"That doesn't matter. He's alone now—you can see that the other rotters are nowhere about."

"Absolutely!" murmured Vavasour.

"We've got him!" breathed Ponsonby. He passed his hand over his face. "I'll make him pay now! By gad, I'll make him pay!"

Ponsonby breathed hard and thick. He had a long score to pay off, and this was his opportunity. Pon was not likely to let such a chance pass. He had longed for it, yearned for it; and now it had come! Ponsonby was almost trembling with eagerness; his eyes gloaming with bitter hatred and malice.

Harry Wharton came swinging on. He had not seen the Highcliffe fellows, but he would not have turned back had he seen them. It was miles home to Greyfriars by any other route, and he was pressed for time.

As he came abreast of the spot where the four had backed into the trees, Pon made a sign.

The four leaped out into the path at once, and surrounded the Greyfriars junior, with grinning faces. Four to one, they had no disinclination to tackle even so hard a hitter as the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

Harry Wharton came to a sudden halt.

"Collar him!" breathed Ponsonby.

Wharton jumped back.

"Hands off, you rotters!"

They rushed on him at once. Wharton's hands came up like lightning. A crashing blow sent Ponsonby spinning backwards, and he went down on his



Ponsonby pushed Wharton against the tree and secured him to one of the low, thick branches. Then he stuffed a cap into the prisoner's mouth. "It'll be midnight or later before the cad wriggles loose!" he said, with a savage laugh.

Back with a wild yell, the "claret" spurting from his nose. The next moment Gadsby was sprawling, yelling, beside him.

But Monson and Vavasour grasped Wharton, and bore him backwards with their weight.

The Greyfriars junior struggled fiercely, hitting hard. Monson and Vavasour had their hands full.

Had Wharton had only the two to deal with, they would have gone down. But Ponsonby and Gadsby scrambled up and sprang to the aid of their friends.

Fighting hard, the Greyfriars junior went down in the grass, with the four Highcliffians sprawling over him.

"Give him jip!" panted Ponsonby. His nose was streaming red, and felt as if it had been knocked flat. He rained blows on the struggling Greyfriars junior.

"Oh, you rotters!" panted Wharton. He struggled fiercely. But four to one were long odds, and he was pinned down at last in the grass, panting and exhausted from his efforts. And four pairs of hands held him fast.

His eyes gleamed up. Ponsonby's open hand struck him across the face, and he gasped.

"Chuck that, Pon," muttered Gadsby. "There's a limit! Chuck it, I tell you!" Ponsonby laughed savagely.

"I'm goin' to give him more than that. Get the cad's hands tied, and get him off the path. Somebody may come along."

"Look here, what are we goin' to tie his hands for?" muttered Vavasour. None of the Highcliffe fellows liked the expression on Ponsonby's face.

"Because I tell you," snarled Ponsonby: "I've got a whipcord here. Drag the cad's paws together, I tell you."

Wharton resisted desperately; but his hands were dragged together, and the whipcord bound round his wrists. Then the Highcliffians hustled him away from the path, into the thickness of the woodland.

In the grasp of the four young rascals; he had no choice about going. A savage kick from Ponsonby rewarded him for lagging. But for the presence of the other fellows there was little doubt that Pon would have handled the Greyfriars junior savagely, now that his hands were tied. But the others had a sense of shame, if Pon had not. Gadsby pushed him back when he was about to give a second kick.

"Stop that, Pon!" he snapped. "Look here!" roared Ponsonby. "I tell you there's a limit! Don't be a rotter!"

"Absolutely!" murmured Vavasour.

Ponsonby glared at his comrades, but he refrained from laying either hands or feet on the prisoner again. But the Greyfriars junior was hustled away roughly enough; none of the party had any tenderness to waste on him. They left the grassy path a considerable distance behind, and stopped at last under a big old beech, of which the drooping thick branches formed a leafy canopy. In that lonely spot they were safe enough from interruption.

Through an opening in the trees Wharton had a glimpse of the old roofs and red chimneys of Hogben Grange. But he was at a good distance from the house; much too great a distance for a

call to be heard, if he had thought of shouting for help.

Pon's companions eyed him rather uneasily, as they stopped under the shady big beech. The savage look on Pon's face disquieted them. Supercilious dandy as Pon was, in his manners and customs he was little more than a hooligan at heart; and his companions, as a matter of fact, would have been glad to have been clear of the whole affair. But Pon's influence was strong over his set at Highcliffe, and they were ready to back him up, so long as he did not go over their limit—which was rather a wide limit.

"Well, what now?" grunted Gadsby. "You're not thinkin' of lynchin' the fellow, I suppose?" he added sarcastically.

"Don't be a silly ass, Gaddy!" Ponsonby breathed hard and deep as his eyes glinted at Wharton's scornful face. "I'm goin' to give the cad the time of his life."

"You're not goin' to hit him, with his hands tied," said Gaddy stubbornly. "We're not standin' for that, Pon."

"I'm goin' to give him worse than that. Get him fixed here."

Ponsonby pushed Wharton against a low thick branch that drooped almost to the ground. His hands, bound together behind him, were passed over the branch. Ponsonby bound his arms to the branch, using Wharton's own handkerchief twisted, for one arm, and Gadsby's handkerchief for the other. Gadsby raised objections.

"You fool! Your hanky's not marked—mine is," snapped Pon. "Yours might be anybody's."

"What difference does that make?" grunted Gadsby.

"Lots! We're not leavin' this Greyfriars cad with any proof to back up a yarn against us, you ass."

"Oh!" said Gadsby. He had not thought of that; but the wisdom of the serpent was strongly developed in Cecil Ponsonby.

The Highcliffe juniors stepped back as soon as Wharton was secured to the branch. Twisted handkerchiefs, carefully knotted, made strong bonds, and the Greyfriars junior was a safe prisoner now.

"You rotters!" said Harry, in a choking voice. "You rotten funks! What do you mean by this? You can't leave me here!"

"Can't we?" said Ponsonby, with a savage laugh. "You'll see! How long do you think it will take you to wriggle out of that?"

Wharton did not answer that question. Ponsonby's intention dawned on his mind now; but not to save his life would he have asked a concession from the cad of Highcliffe. But Monson broke out uneasily.

"You ass, Pon! He can't get out of that at all! You're not goin' to leave the chap here all night."

"Who says I'm not?" sneered Ponsonby.

"Look here, Pon—" muttered Gadsby.

"We're leavin' the cad there—like that!" said Ponsonby deliberately. "I fancy he will wriggle loose in time—perhaps about midnight—perhaps later. He can get home with the milk in the mornin'."

"Oh gad!" murmured Vavasour.

"He can spin a yarn, then, about bein' tied to a tree in Hogben Grange," grinned Ponsonby. "His headmaster may believe him, or not. More probably not, in my opinion. If we're asked anythin' about it, what do we know? Nothin'."

"Oh, my hat!"

"We know nothin'—never even met the fellow," said Ponsonby calmly. "Anyhow, he's booked for a night out."

"Somebody will hear him yellin'—"

"Nobody will hear him yellin' when

I've stuffed up his mouth," answered Ponsonby coolly.

"Oh crumbs!"

The three watched Pon in unquiet silence while he stuffed Wharton's cap into the prisoner's mouth, and secured it there with a length of twine which he tied round the prisoner's head.

Wharton was securely gagged now, and it was evident that he could not make his position known to anyone passing through the park by the paths. And no one was likely to leave the paths and seek the deep shade under the big beech in the thickness of the wood, especially as night was approaching. At night no one was likely even to be on the paths.

"You can't do it, Pon!" muttered Monson, with a white face.

"Where's the risk?" sneered Ponsonby.

"It's sackin' if it came out—"

"Do you think Dr. Voysey, or Mobbs, or anybody at Highcliffe, would take Wharton's word for this?"

"Not if we deny it. But—"

"Well, we're goin' to deny it, or it's sackin', as you say. Come on!" said Ponsonby. "The sooner we're back at Highcliffe the better now."

"You can't do it!" muttered Gadsby.

"Absolutely!" whispered Vavasour.

"That's enough!" said Ponsonby.

"Come on, I tell you! That cad's goin' through it, and I hope he'll get sacked at Greyfriars for stayin' out the night. Get goin', you mumblin' asses!"

Monson and Gadsby and Vavasour hesitated. Young rascals as they were, and deep as was their dislike of the Greyfriars junior, they hesitated to go this length. But Ponsonby had his way, as he usually had with the knutty set at Highcliffe. He hustled his friends away from the spot. They went reluctantly, but they went.

Ponsonby & Co. disappeared through the trees.

Harry Wharton was left alone. He was left struggling with his bonds, and striving to get rid of the gag. He failed in both efforts; Pon had done his work carefully and well. The long, drooping branch of the beech swayed and rustled as the bound junior struggled, and that was all. And spent

at last by his futile struggles, Harry Wharton desisted, and leaned back on the branch. He was a helpless prisoner, and a helpless prisoner he remained while the sun disappeared and darkness spread over the countryside; darkness black as pitch under the branches of the beech in Hogben Grange.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Where is Wharton?

"WHARTON!"

No reply.

Mr. Quelch was taking roll-call at Greyfriars.

He glanced at the ranks of the Remove as Harry Wharton, head of the Form, failed to answer to his name. Then he marked Wharton absent, and went on with the roll.

"Wharton's late!" murmured Bob Cherry. "That means lines."

"We'll scrag Bunter!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Silence!" called out Wingate of the Sixth.

Calling-over finished and the school dismissed, Billy Bunter scuttled away in haste. But the Co. were in no hurry to scrag Bunter, much as he deserved scragging. They were worried about their chum. The Co. had reached the school in good time; and Billy Bunter had rolled in, on Wharton's bike, barely in time to escape being locked out, and in a state of breathless perspiration. But Harry Wharton had not arrived, and his friends wondered what had delayed him. There was no reason, so far as they could see, why he should not have reached Greyfriars in time for calling-over.

However, he did not come in, and the four had a very late tea, expecting to hear his step every moment.

At prep he had not come in, and when prep was over in the Remove studies, and Wharton had not appeared, his chums began to feel alarmed.

"What the dickens has become of him?" asked Bob Cherry, when they went down after prep. "Dash it all, he's had time to walk all the way from Lantham now!"

"Can't have been an accident?" said Johnny Bull. "Motor-bus turned over, or something."

"Oh, my hat! Blessed if I can imagine what's keeping him!"

At nine o'clock Bob Cherry was sent for to his Form master's study. He found Mr. Quelch looking very grim.

"Wharton has not come in, Cherry," said the Remove master.

"I know, sir."

"He was with you at Lantham, I believe?"

Bob explained that a fellow had borrowed Wharton's bike to get home, and that the captain of the Remove had returned by motor-bus; at all events, had left his friends with that intention.

Mr. Quelch knitted his brows.

"I trust that there has been no accident," he said. "If he is not in by bed-time I must make inquiries. You may go."

Bob Cherry rejoined his friends in the Rag in a worried and alarmed frame of mind, which was shared by the rest of the Co. What could possibly have happened to keep Wharton out of gates so late, was an utter mystery.

At bed-time there was no news of the missing junior. Loder of the Sixth saw lights out for the Remove, and there was a vacant bed in the dormitory. Mr. Quelch had telephoned to the motor-bus office at Courtfield, and



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learned that there had been no accident on the bus line. But the fact that there had been no accident only made the missing junior's absence more inexplicable.

"What on earth's become of him?" said Bob Cherry, after Loder had turned out the lights and left the dormitory.

"Having a night out!" suggested Skinner. "Lookin' on the wine when it is red, and the billiard-table when it is green."

"Oh, shut up, Skinner!"

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"You fat rotter!" hooted Bob Cherry. "It's all your fault, whatever's happened! And something must have happened."

"Oh, really, Cherry! I think it's jolly lucky, as it turns out," said Bunter warmly. "If I hadn't borrowed Wharton's bike I should have come back the way Wharton came. Well, whatever's happened to him might have happened to me, in that case! Jolly lucky it was Wharton and not me."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Skinner.

"Why, you fat, frabjous, foozling fat-head—" exclaimed Bob.

"Well, I think it's jolly lucky," said Bunter. "If he's been knocked on the head by some tramp—"

"You fat idiot—"

"Or run over by a car—"

"You burbling chump!"

"Or whatever it is," said Bunter cheerfully. "I'm sorry, of course. But I think it's jolly lucky I borrowed his bike, in the circumstances. If Wharton's been killed, or anything—"

"You benighted bandersnatch, shut up!"

"Well, I suppose you'd rather it was Wharton than me!" said Bunter warmly. "That's how you ought to look at it, you know."

Bob Cherry sat up in bed.

"We haven't scragged that fat villain yet," he said. "Let's scrag him now."

"Hear, hear!"

"The scragfulness is the proper caper."

Four juniors turned out of bed with bolsters. If any accident had happened, Harry Wharton's chums were far—very far—from feeling glad that it had happened to Wharton instead of Bunter. Gladness on that point was confined wholly to William George Bunter. And for the next few minutes Billy Bunter howled and roared under four bolsters that swiped him ruthlessly.

"Scragging" Bunter, though solacing, did not relieve the anxiety of Harry Wharton's chums. The Co. remained awake long after the rest of the Remove had fallen asleep. Bunter's snore echoed and re-echoed through the Remove dormitory; and one by one the other fellows dropped off. But four pairs of eyes remained open.

Hour after hour chimed from the clock tower. Every long and weary minute the wakeful juniors hoped to hear Wharton's tread. Midnight had passed, and the deep stroke of one boomed through the night. But there was no tread of a returning junior, and the dormitory door did not open.

Greyfriars was buried in silence and slumber. Only from one study window light glimmered through the blinds into the dusky quad. Mr. Queloh, too anxious now to be angry, was sitting up late waiting for Wharton. The rest of Greyfriars slept; save for four anxious juniors in the Remove dormitory—and one other!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Wizard Wakes!

LANCASTER of the Sixth was not sleeping.

There was no sleep that night for the schoolboy crook.

There was work for him to do—work for the "Wizard's" light fingers in the still small hours of the dusky May night.

While Greyfriars slept, Lancaster of the Sixth stood at his study window staring out into the quadrangle.

Midnight had boomed; and all was silent and still.

The face that looked from the window was white and set. The handsome eyes were almost haggard. But the expression on Lancaster's face was one of fixed determination.

He had rebelled. He had resisted. He had kicked. And he had been called to heel. Slimy Sugden was his master, and he had to obey his master's voice.

Bitter distaste for the crooked life of the past had grown up in his breast. But the past was not to be thrown behind, as he had wildly hoped. He was at Greyfriars, not like the rest, but to carry out Slimy Sugden's orders. Repentance came too late to save him.

To give up ill-gotten wealth, to face penury and want, to leave Greyfriars and all the school meant to him; that, he thought, he could face, rather than go on by crooked ways. If he could disappear, leaving the school remembering him as they had known him—remembering him as the cricketer, the sportsman, the decent fellow, he could have endured the rest.

But to leave Greyfriars knowing him for what he was—he could not face that. Wingate was his friend—he had never had a real friend till he had met old Wingate—and a chill like ice seemed to strike his heart at the thought of Wingate knowing what Slimy Sugden could reveal. Those juniors in the Remove, too—Wharton, Cherry, and the rest—the thought of their horror, their scorn, cut him like whiplash.

Anything else he could have faced, but not that—not that! Never that!

Never that! Slimy Sugden held him in the hollow of his hand! If he "went back" on the gang, Slimy and the rest would have no mercy on him. Once a crook, always a crook!

In Slimy's hands he was as powerless as the bird in the net of the fowler; as the fly in the web of the spider; as the mouse in the claws of the cat. Easy wealth had ceased to tempt him; but he could not face the scorn and aversion of his school. Only that one hold Slimy had on him now; but that hold was stronger than steel.

He leaned from the window and looked round. At a distance one window still glimmered with light. One master was sitting up very late. It mattered little to Lancaster.

He had returned from Lantham with the victorious cricketers, the hero of a cheering crowd. In those hours he had forgotten Slimy, forgotten the gang, forgotten the work planned for that night. But afterwards, alone, he had to remember.

After his friends had let him go he had spent the hours in his study; dark and gloomy hours. His work had to be done; he had ceased to struggle. But his heart was like lead as he waited, sleepless, while the school slept.

But now, as he prepared to go, something of the old lawless feeling of adventure woke in his breast.

There was, perhaps, a lawless strain

in his nature. And old habits were not easily forgotten.

As he looked over the strange tools in the leather wallet, old feelings came back and new feelings faded. He ran his fingers over the smooth steel with a curious sense of pleasure. He was the "Wizard," the cracksman from whom no safe was secure—his was the master-hand that no device could baffle. Many a keen man at Scotland Yard wondered who was the unknown crook who had brought off, successfully, so many difficult "jobs"; but no man knew the "Wizard" outside the gang.

He had pitted his brains against the keenest brains at Scotland Yard, and so far he had had the best of it. He had enjoyed his success, his triumph; and something of that old feeling came back to him now, banishing the leaden heaviness of his heart.

He was surprised, perhaps he was pleased, to find that his subconscious self was rising keenly to the work of the night. His spirits had recovered something of their elasticity as he slipped from the window, closed down the sash, and cut across the shadowy quad, keeping in cover of the shadow of trees and buildings.

He looked back. The light was still glimmering from the blinds at Mr. Quelch's window.

He wondered why the Remove master was sitting up so late; and remembered vaguely that he had heard that a junior was missing at bed-time. That did not concern him, however. He passed into the silent old Cloisters and dropped from a wall into the road.

With swift, silent footsteps, he hurried on to Courtfield Common, and tramped across the dark common towards Hogben Grange.

He stopped under a tree by the path, and his hands glided over his face. Had anyone seen him up to that moment, he would have been recognised as Lancaster, of the Sixth, out of bounds at night. But after that halt under the tree, no Greyfriars man would have recognised Lancaster of the Sixth.

A false moustache was attached to his upper lip now, making him look years older; his chin had a mottled look, as from a badly-shaved beard, and a criss-cross of sticking-plaster was on one cheek. A cheap cloth cap was pulled low over his forehead; a dirty woollen muffler was round his neck. He would have passed for a man of thirty.

His spirits were rising higher now.

The sense of lawless adventure was strong upon him.

His repentance, perhaps, had not yet gone so deep as he had imagined. He had told himself that there was no help for him; that he was a crook and must continue a crook. He had expected to go through the night's work with a sullen temper and a heavy heart. But old associations were too strong; repentance was too new. His temper was not sullen now; his heart was no longer heavy. Lancaster of the Sixth had been left behind; and it was the "Wizard" who was stealing through the darkness towards the "crib" that was to be "cracked."

He stopped by the park palings, and a swift glance up and down the lane showed that the coast was clear. At a spot where one of the palings was broken he slipped into the park.

Any other Greyfriars man would have been puzzled to find his way about the grounds of Hogben Grange in the dark. Lancaster did not falter for a moment.

He was an old hand at this game. Without a pause, softly, stealthily, he threaded his way among the trees towards the solitary spot where his confederate, the Weasel, was to wait.

The Weasel, he knew, would be already there; the ruffian was not likely to be late.

Once before, the Weasel had awaited him under the beech in the Grange and Lancaster had not come. This time he was not to fail. This time he dared not fail.

But it was not slowly, reluctantly, that he threaded his way through the dark shadowy trees and shrubberies. Repentance, remorse, for the time, at least, were quiescent; he was no longer the Greyfriars man who had been frantically cheered at Lantham that day, who had been cheered at Greyfriars till the rafters of the old Hall rang again. He had almost forgotten that now. His step was light, his eyes were bright, under the shadows of the old trees; he was the "Wizard" now, the crook and cracksman, the enemy of Society whom no law could bind.

Slimy Sugden, could he have seen him now, would have been satisfied with the unhappy boy whom he had trained in the ways of evil.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Mystery of the Night!

HARRY WHARTON leaned back wearily on the sagging branch, his eyes half-closed, weary to the bone. Hours, long and seemingly endless hours, had passed since the Highcliffe ragers had left him tied to the drooping branch under the great beech in Hogben Grange. Never had minutes seemed so long to him—and the hours without end.

For a long time after Ponsonby & Co. had gone, Wharton more than half-expected them to return and release him. He could not quite believe that even Ponsonby, hard-hearted, reckless, and savagely malicious could intend to leave him there for the night. The matter was serious enough; for such an act meant the "sack" for Pon, if it could be proved against him.

But when darkness thickened over the Grange, Wharton knew that Ponsonby & Co. were not coming back. They were gone, and gone for good; and he was left to face the night alone.

The risk for Ponsonby, after all, was little, as Wharton realised; for he had a forehead of brass and a glib tongue, and lies cost him nothing. It would be one fellow's word against the denials of four. Dr. Locke, no doubt, would believe Wharton; but at Highcliffe, Ponsonby & Co. would be believed, or at least given the benefit of the doubt.

Wharton realised that, and that he had no relenting to expect from Ponsonby. The Highcliffe fellows, by that time, were back at their school; three of them probably unquiet and uneasy, but silent for their own sakes; one of them enjoying his triumph and his vengeance. The prisoner under the great beech had nothing to expect from them.

Black darkness encircled him.

In the openings of the park, and on the long facade of the mansion of Sir Julius Hogben, the stars of a fine May night glimmered, but the rays did not penetrate under the massive canopy of the ancient beech. The bound school-boy could see hardly an inch from his nose.

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He had struggled and wriggled, and struggled again; minute after minute, hour after hour; and he was still a prisoner. His wrists were lacerated with his efforts to loosen the whiplash that fastened them. He had loosened the cord a little, and that was all.

The twisted handkerchiefs that fastened his arms to the branch, were still tightly knotted. They had given a little, but only a little.

Ponsonby had calculated that the Greyfriars junior might struggle loose between midnight and dawn. No doubt he was right. But at midnight Harry Wharton was still bound.

Every effort had failed to rid him of the gag in his mouth. He would have shouted for help in the faint hope of some keeper hearing from a distance. But the gag was safely fastened, and he could utter no sound but a low, faint mumble. His jaws ached, and his lips were sore with the effort to get rid of the gag, and he had desisted at last.

The sunny May day had been followed by a clear, fine, but cold night. Heavy dews were in the grass under the ancient beech. Wharton, when he rested from his efforts to release himself, was cold and chilled, though another struggle with his bonds soon warmed him again.

But now he was worn out, heavy with sleepiness. He could not tell the time, but he knew that it must be very late, probably past midnight. In spite of aches and discomforts and an uneasy position, he nodded off to sleep more than once, only to awaken with a start and a shiver.

What his friends thought of his absence from the school, he could not imagine. Possibly he would be searched for—but if so, the search was certainly not likely to extend to the woodland in Hogben Grange. There was not the remotest chance of that.

He was a prisoner till he could struggle free; and it was likely to be nearer dawn than midnight when he succeeded.

Ponsonby, some time, should pay for this—pay for it heavy and hard. But there was little comfort in that. The weary junior alternately struggled and rested, and nodded off to uneasy slumber from moment to moment.

And then, after what seemed to him endless hours, there was the sound of a faint stirring among the thick trees.

He started and listened.

It was not the wind. He heard a sound of a branch put aside to clear a way—a soft slinking footstep.

His heart beat.

He knew that it must be past midnight. Who was stealing stealthily through the shadows of the park at such an hour? Not a keeper—no keeper would be there at midnight, far from the paths, and treading so stealthily. A poacher—still more unlikely. There was nothing in the grounds of Hogben Grange to poach. Wharton, listening with startled ears, could not begin to imagine who the man could be, or what he wanted there.

He had longed to hear the sound of footsteps in the wood. But now that he heard it, there was a difference. He could have attracted the attention of the newcomer, though he could not speak; by a mumble from behind the gag, or by swaying and rustling the drooping branch to which he was tied. But he remained still and silent.

There was something alarming, something creepy, in the stealthy movements of the unseen man.

Whoever he was, whatever he wanted, obviously he could be there for no good. A man who crept through the midnight

shadows, with the stealth of a prowling wolf, was not a man whose attention the junior desired to attract. Instead of making his presence known, Wharton found himself hoping that the stealthy prowler would fail to see him, in the black darkness under the beech.

His heart beat unpleasantly, as a shadow, blacker than the darkness round him, passed within a foot or two. He heard the breathing of the unseen man as he passed.

He remained perfectly still, perfectly silent. He was bound and helpless, at the mercy of this unseen prowler; if the man discovered him. He could only be some prowling thief of the night—though why he had penetrated into the blackness under the canopy of drooping branches round the ancient beech, was a mystery.

The stealthy tread stopped.

The unseen man had come to a halt under the beech, near the giant trunk. He remained there, silent, motionless. He was not more than seven or eight feet from Wharton, evidently in complete ignorance of the junior's presence there.

Wharton's flesh almost crept, with the strangeness of the situation. It was uncanny, eerie.

Who was the man? Why was he there? What could it mean?

There was a glimmer in the blackness. A tiny beam of light was turned on the dial of a wrist-watch.

Wharton's startled eyes fixed on it. He saw the dial in that tiny gleam, and saw that it indicated half-past twelve. He saw the leather strap that fastened the watch to a rough, hairy wrist; part of a rough sleeve, and a dirty cuff. That was all he saw; then the beam was shut suddenly off.

But the junior understood now. The ancient beech in Hogben Grange was a place of appointment; this unseen man was there to meet someone, and he was waiting. That was, indeed, the only explanation of the man's presence there, though it had not occurred to Wharton before. He heard a low, muttering voice.

"If he don't come this time! If the Wizard don't come this time! He let me down before, cuss him! By hokey, if he lets me down again! Strike me! If the Wizard don't come—"

The muttering died away in a mumble. There was a savagely angry note in it. Strangely enough, it seemed to Wharton that it was a voice he had heard before, though not a familiar voice. It was a hard, coarse, husky voice, and he wondered where he could have heard it.

Long minutes crawled by.

Several times the unseen man, leaning on the great trunk of the beech, shifted his position and muttered impatiently. Several times Wharton caught that strange name, the Wizard, in his angry mutterings. The man was there to wait for someone he called the Wizard, and the unknown Wizard had let him down on a previous occasion, and he half-believed that the Wizard was going to let him down again. So much Wharton gathered from his mutterings.

Who was he—who was the Wizard? Thieves of the night, that was fairly clear. Wharton, never more wide awake than he was now, kept silent, making no motion that could draw the attention of the man leaning on the beech.

He heard another sharp mutter, and there was a movement. He could not see the man, but he knew that he was listening intently.



The great door swung open at last, and a half-dressed butler, with a startled footman at his elbow, stared out at Wharton. "What—who—" "Burglars!" panted the school junior. "Quick! In the house—a man called the Weasel!"

Wharton listened, too.

Faintly came a sound from the trees. There was a stirring of a swaying branch, a soft footstep. Someone, unseen, was standing under the beech, not a yard from Wharton.

"You're there, Weasel?"

It was a whispering voice.

Wharton wondered whether this was some amazing, hideous dream. The Weasel—he knew that name! It was the name of the man who had driven the car in the bank raid at Courtfield a week ago, whose description the chums of the Remove had given to the police. It was the name, or rather the nickname, of a man known to Lancaster of the Sixth.

But it was not the name of the Weasel that startled Harry Wharton. It was the voice that whispered.

For he knew that voice.

Unless he was dreaming, unless he was mad, it was Richard Lancaster, of the Sixth Form at Greyfriars, who was standing in the darkness under the old beech, whispering to the ruffian who lurked there.

Meeting a man known to be a thief and a bandit, hunted by the police! Was he dreaming?

The husky voice of the Weasel answered.

"I'm 'ere! You've kep' me waiting, Wizard."

"Really?"

It was a cool, drawling voice. If Wharton had mistaken the voice when it whispered, he could not mistake that cool drawl. It was Lancaster of the Sixth who was speaking. Either he was out of his senses or it was Richard Lancaster who spoke.

There was a muttered curse from the Weasel.

"I began to think you'd let me down agin, Dick!"

Dick! Lancaster's name was Richard! Wharton strained his eyes in the blackness under the beech. But he could see nothing of the figure that stood only a yard from him. But he knew—knew in the marrow of his bones—that it was Lancaster, and the horror of it held him spellbound.

Back into his mind, like a flood, came many recollections, dismaying, confusing. The strange story that Loder had told, which all Greyfriars had derided as a fantastic slander, born of envy and hatred; Lancaster's acquaintance with the Weasel, so lamely explained away; the escape of the bank raider, in whose pursuit Lancaster had taken part—these and many other things thronged into Wharton's startled mind. And he knew now what he had doubted already, though he had never clearly realised it.

The cool voice was speaking again. If it was not Dick Lancaster's voice, Wharton had lost his senses.

"Come! We've got work to do, Weasel. I've seen the safe, and know how long it will take. We shall not get out of Hogben Grange under half an hour."

There was a stealthy tread and a rustle. Lancaster—if it was Lancaster—was gone, and the slouching ruffian had followed him.

Harry Wharton was alone again.

A faint rustling died away in the wood. Then all was still.

Wharton's face was white as chalk.

Was it Lancaster? Was it possible? Could two voices be so alike? And the name—Dick!

He knew that it was Lancaster. He knew that Loder of the Sixth had told what was true, and that Lancaster, the handsome senior of Greyfriars, the sportsman and cricketer, the hero of the school, was a crook and a cracksman. He knew it, yet he rejected it. His heart, his mind, rebelled against the knowledge that was forced upon him. In spite of himself he clung to the faint hope—the faintest of hopes—that it was not so.

For some minutes after the crooks had gone Wharton remained still, only conscious of horror and dismay.

But he roused himself.

What he had heard left no doubt as to what was intended. Lancaster or not, the Wizard was there to "crack a crib." The two rascals were stealing through

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THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Thieves in the Night!

WHARTON remained perfectly still.

He was almost stunned.

Lancaster of the Sixth! Was it possible? Was he dreaming? Lancaster of the Sixth meeting the Weasel in this strange secret place, at nearly one o'clock in the morning!

LAND of LOST PLANES!

BY
ANTHONY FORD.

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

Entrusted with a fortune representing two million pounds, Shane Dexter, a crack American pilot, sets out to fly the mighty Atlantic, but is caught in a wind-belt, and forced down in some uncharted country. His wireless signals for help are picked up by a notorious crook who is anxious to get his hands on the vast fortune Shane Dexter carried with him. The crook instructs his underlings to kidnap Bill Lyon, chief pilot of the Transcontinental Airways Co. The orders of the "Chief" are duly carried out, and Bill is given the option of piloting a specially prepared plane through the treacherous wind-belt to the unknown country, or death. He accepts the former, but his acceptance is prompted more by the hope of rescuing his old friend Dexter than from any fear of the "Chief," for Bill Lyon knows not the meaning of the word fear.

(Now read on.)

Specially Constructed Wings!

A LOW whistle of admiration left Bill Lyon's lips. He forgot that the man standing next to him in the hangar was a self-confessed crook; forgot that in the shadows, a mere half-dozen feet away from him, was a white-faced gunman with an automatic who would cheerfully drill a bullet into him—and like it.

For the Chief—which was the only name by which he ever heard the little round-faced man with the killer's eyes behind his pince-nez referred to—had taken him to a small hangar at the far end of a three-acre field, and was showing him the plane which the kidnaped Bill was to fly for him.

"She's fine!" Bill acknowledged, genuine admiration in his voice.

The plane was a cabin monoplane, with a forty-foot wing span. The single wing, sweeping from either side of the cabin, was considerably wider than the average, built deeply as if to contain fuel.

"Do you think those wings are going to stand up to a wind pressure of anything up to a thousand miles an hour?" Bill drawled, with raised eyebrows. "'Cos if so, feller, you've hit a hummock, an' you're going to turn right over. She's a sweet job, I'll admit, and clean-lined, and I see you've built her more on the lines of a glider than a fast flying-ship. But with fuel tucked away in those wings, they'll just snap off clean when she has the terrific pressure of the wind we're going into if Shane's estimate of its speed is right."

The Chief had been listening to Bill



attentively, a little smile twitching the corners of his lips.

"I am glad you said that," he said. "It confirms my opinion of you as being a man who certainly knows his job. But actually it is the design of those wings which is going to bring us through the Aerial Gulf Stream. They don't carry fuel—that is taken in a specially-constructed tank down the fuselage near the tail. The wings are built deeply hollow like that, because they contain—or will contain—helium."

"Helium! Gas!"

"Just that. You see, the heavier an object is in a high wind the more liable it is to damage, because of the greater resistance it offers. I will give you an illustration of what I mean. A kite flying in a high wind is released; it is borne swiftly along, and, because of its lightness, it obeys every current and eddy of the wind, offering no resistance at all. But take a small balloon, with a little weight attached to it, and inevitably the wind will rip the balloon away from the weight, tearing the fabric to shreds.

"By filling the wings of this machine with helium I have reduced the weight of the plane, fully loaded, by more than one half. Every part of it is of aluminium, so there will be no danger of fabric tearing under pressure of the wind. It will simply ride buoyantly along, literally 'sailing' before the gale. Thus, by riding through the wind, intact, we stand a good chance of landing without damage, which is more than the other three pilots did—Dexter, Poineau, and Von Hassen."

"Being the sort of man you are," Bill said, "I suppose you have checked up on the possibilities of getting out of this no man's land where Dexter is. It's one thing getting there on the crest of a wind which blows you there at a thousand miles an hour—it's another getting back again. What has the agile old brain schemed out there?"

The Chief's grey, lustreless eyes rested on Bill's face a moment.

"That is where the helium helps us again," he answered. "To assist in landing, as soon as we sight our objective, and the gale force slackens—as presumably it does, else the other pilots would not have landed their machines at all, but been blown on indefinitely—the helium is allowed to escape from the hollow wings through the valves I have supplied, thus increasing the weight of the machine so that it will settle more steadily landwards. On our return journey, of course, we shall fly at a much lower altitude, below the belt of wind, and therefore you will navigate the craft as you would one of your air liners."

"You think of everything, don't you?" Bill drawled. "Have you thought of what might happen when we pick up Dexter and Poineau? Three of us against you two?"

Doak's voice came from the shadow of the hangar.

"Mister, I'm praying that you'll do something silly like an' give me an opportunity of bumping you off. Dexter an' the Frog don't mean nothin' to me—but you"—his voice rasped vindictively—"I love you like I do poison! When I look at you my finger is jest tremblin' around the trigger of my gat, an' my blood-pressure goes up one hundred degrees in trying to stop myself from killin' you!"

"Er—shall we go in now?" the Chief

asked blandly. "We fly at sundown. The same conditions, you see, the same hour as Shane Dexter. We must find that belt of wind."

Thirty-Seven Thousand Feet Up!

THE lights of Valentia Island, the cable terminus off the southwest coast of Ireland, gleamed needle-like below the high-flying monoplane. The night was clear and starry, and Bill Lyon had had little trouble with the monoplane after he had been flying her for twenty minutes and become accustomed to the controls and the machine's remarkable lightness.

At first that feature of it had been somewhat disconcerting after the heavy Transcontinental passenger liners he had been used to piloting. The speed with which it gained altitude was amazing; in a little under two minutes—one hundred and five seconds—the monoplane had soared to a height of one and a half miles.

That he was on a desperate venture Bill knew only too well. But the dangerous part of it, he thought, did not rest so much in the belt of wind which he was trying to locate, or in the actual adventure of trying to find Shane Dexter, the American pilot. It was in the two crooks in the cabin with him now that the danger lay.

It needed no great judgment of character to be aware that the man

THRILLS!

A hand-to-hand fight in an aeroplane travelling at two hundred and fifty miles an hour, thirty thousand feet above sea level.

THRILLS!

referred to as the "Chief" was simply a cold-blooded criminal who, once his ends had been accomplished by means of Bill Lyon, would seek the first opportunity he could of killing the young pilot.

He had not kidnapped Bill to pilot the plane for him in the hopes of rescuing Shane Dexter, but merely to gain possession of the jewels which Dexter had been carrying when he had crashed. When once those jewels were in his possession, he would, either himself, or through Doak, shoot Bill in cold blood when they were safely near land, dump him overboard, and fly the plane back himself to his private hangar. Or, possibly, he had no intention ever of returning to England, but would fly on to some other place, where he could dispose of the jewels safely.

Yet, despite this chill feeling of for ever having the muzzle of an automatic pointed in the direction of the small of his back, Bill Lyon was definitely thrilled and exhilarated at the prospect of the adventure lying before him and the chance of rescuing Shane Dexter, his American friend, and Poineau, the French pilot.

The cabin was comfortably warm, the exhaust-pipes from the twin rotary engines above the single wing running beneath the floor. The Chief was seated in a wicker armchair—or, slumped, rather, already feeling the effects of his incurable air-sickness.

Bill chuckled grimly to himself as he thought of how the man would feel when eventually they got into the wind zone.

Doak, arms folded across his chest, his right hand constantly within lightning reach of the automatic he wore in a holster beneath his arm under his coat, also was seated at his back. The gunman's black eyes, glowing strangely in his white face, never moved from Bill, following every movement the pilot made when studying controls and indicators.

"There's no need for him to worry about me trying to go against them—yet!" the pilot told himself. "But that black-eyed Susan had better watch his step when I make contact with Dexter and the Frog, for, sure as little green apples are round, we'll overcome 'em and hand 'em to the police!"

Bill studied the chart spread out in its waterproof case before him, and decided that it was time for more altitude. They were now not far from the spot where Dexter's last message had been received by an Atlantic liner.

The needle-lights of Valentia had vanished a quarter of an hour ago. Below them stretched a vast, empty black pit. There was a faint mistiness over the sea, blotting out the dim lights of vessels which they might otherwise have seen.

As the young pilot shifted the joystick the monoplane soared upwards, still higher in the vault of stars, like a gull with outstretched wings which had been caught in the upward-eddy current of a gust of wind.

A tense feeling gripped Bill; he found his jaws locked together, and discovered he was crouching, rather than sitting, at the controls. Though his hands were perfectly steady and his pulse normal, he had a queer feeling at the pit of his stomach, as if something was going to happen pretty soon.

His altimeter read a thirty-seven thousand feet; and he checked the upward flight of the bus, reckoning seven miles above the earth to be enough, and as near to Dexter's altitude as he could estimate. He glanced over his shoulder at the two men behind him, and a silent chuckle left him.

The Chief's face was a pale green in colour, ghastly in the lights of the four small globes which illuminated the cabin. Little beads of perspiration dotted his forehead.

Bill grinned.

It struck him as really funny that a man—a cold-blooded crook such as the Chief—should be a victim to so ordinary a thing as air-sickness.

Doak's expression was the same—immovable. The man might have been sitting comfortably on the top of a bus, for all the excitement he showed. There was his hand, folded under the crook of his left arm, ready to fly to the automatic should Bill make a move which he might interpret as suspicious.

Sight of the gunman's grim, immovable face angered Bill suddenly. He was going through with this adventure, not because he was being urged to at the point of a gun, but because he wanted to rescue his old friend Dexter. And he was thoroughly fed-up with the feeling that he had that gun's muzzle constantly pointed at him.

"Since they're here, they'll have to stick!" he told himself savagely. "But I reckon the white-faced boy friend 'ud be a heck of a lot safer without that gat he keeps fingering. Here's to try to get it away from him. I'd feel more master of the situation if it were in my pocket rather than his!"



As Bill brought the plane to an even keel, his right hand shot out and gripped the gunman's wrist. Doak wriggled, jerked his head forward, and sank sharp teeth into Bill's hand!

With this thought uppermost in his mind, Bill wrenched on the joystick, pushing the nose of the plane up in a steep climb, holding himself braced to prevent his falling back from his seat into the cabin.

Neither Doak nor the Chief were prepared for this unexpected move. In any case, the Chief was feeling too ill to be able to help himself much.

With the steep tilting of the nose of the plane, his weight was flung back against the wicker chair, which toppled over, sending him sprawling to a corner of the cabin.

Doak's arms flung up wildly in an effort to keep his balance as his chair tilted, too.

Bill kept the nose of the plane pointed upward for a matter of ten seconds, then as suddenly sent her down in a steep dive.

With a strangled grunt Doak was flung from his chair, sprawling full length on the floor of the cabin. Despite the speed of his gun-hand he had had no opportunity to grasp the firearm.

The swiftness with which Bill manoeuvred the plane was too great to give Doak the opportunity, and, the helium in her hollow wings making her so exceptionally light, the monoplane answered to Bill's slightest touch as if she were a living bird.

As Doak crashed to the cabin floor from his chair, Bill brought the plane to an even keel, then swung round to Doak. His right hand shot out and gripped the gunman's wrist, as he made a dive for the shoulder holster. Doak wriggled, jerked his head forward, and sank sharp teeth into Bill's hand.

Bill shouted, and his left fist crashed against the side of the gunman's jaw. Doak hung on grimly. Again Bill's

fist drew back to smash at the gunman again. He hadn't much time to work in; he couldn't leave the plane flying without attention for more than a few seconds—more especially since he reckoned they were near the wind belt, if that Aerial Gulf Stream were in movement around these parts.

The young pilot's bunched left fist landed with a crack on the point of Doak's jaw. The gunman stiffened and quivered, then relaxed as that hearty wallop knocked the senses from him. Bill's hand shot out towards the gunman's shoulder holster beneath his coat. But before the pilot could grip the butt of the gun he saw there, he was flung to the floor with a crash which knocked every ounce of breath out of his body.

The plane reeled crazily. Bill saw Doak's unconscious figure sliding towards the wall of the cabin. The Chief and his overturned chair slithered in the same direction. Again the plane behaved like a crazy thing, lurching up and down like a ship on slow, heavy rolls of waves.

The Wind Belt!

ALL thoughts of attempting to overcome Doak and taking his gun left Bill. He had but one thing in mind—to regain control of the monoplane. The floor of the machine was vibrating with the same tremor as a taut violin string which has been violently twanged.

"Chees'!"

The exclamation left Bill's lips in an awed whisper as, crawling on hands and knees, he regained his seat, and his eyes instinctively sought the indicators

of the dashboard. It was sight of the needle of the air-speed indicator which caused his exclamation; for the black needle was jammed against the end of the marked face of the clock, registering two hundred and fifty miles an hour, and it would have registered more had it been possible. But it was broken.

In his long flying experience Bill had attained some high speeds, but this was the first time he had ever known the needle of the air-speed indicator to wipe the dial clean, and stay there.

The steady, rather high drone of the two engines was gone now, muted beneath a sound far more powerful than their rhythmic beat. An even, hissing noise, such as escaping steam would make when going through a valve too small for the pressure behind it. A hiss so powerful that it was almost terrifying because of its intensity. And, high above the hiss, a penetrating, screaming note, almost a whistle. A croak came from the corner of the cabin where the Chief had been flung but a few seconds before when Bill had tilted the plane.

"The wind belt! We're in it!"

"We are!" agreed Bill, raising his voice. "Well in it! When your pasty-faced playmate comes to, you might keep an eye on him to see he doesn't slam a bullet in my back while I'm concentrating on keeping an even keel, if you want us to live through this!"

Thereafter the young pilot forgot the very existence of the Chief, and his pallid-faced gunman. Every faculty was keyed to its tensest to bring the rocking plane to an even keel in the tremendous wind in which it had been snapped up.

He dared not use rudder or wing controls too much, for fear of the wind snapping them, but worked them gently, almost jockeying the ship to a level keel. And suddenly he knew he had attained that, not by any of the gauges on the indicator board, for all of them were broken, having reached their limits, but by the fact that all perceptible motion suddenly ceased.

Almost it seemed that they had landed, and might have been standing motionless in a field. But, of course, it was not that, for the hissing sound went on with terrific intensity with, above it, the high, screaming whistle.

Realisation of the stupendous force of the wind in which they had been snapped up was driven home to Bill when he realised that the hissing sound was the wind rushing over the plane surfaces, and the high, screaming note was the force with which it whistled past the struts and engine supports.

Bill glanced at the face of the compass to see in which direction they were being driven, and found that the needle was wavering and wobbling from side to side in the most erratic manner.

"Either that's busted, too," the pilot muttered to himself grimly, "or else there's a deal of electricity up here which has disorganised it."

Then he remembered that in Dexter's notes the American airman had said that his compass had been disorganised, too. Bill glanced at his watch, and cursed gently when he found that that, too, had stopped. It had stopped at 3.33 a.m., British time, and how long had elapsed since then Bill had no conception.

Time and movement seemed to have stopped since they had been sucked into the aerial vortex. They were like puppets now, without any mechanical device to aid them in discovering their whereabouts, just driven along at the mercy of a power over which they had absolutely no control.

True, Bill could control the monoplane to a small extent. He could keep it on an even keel, although he found now that there was no need for him to touch the controls at all. The wind kept the rudder and wing-slots absolutely rigid, so that when he did try to shift the joystick a fraction when he thought they were tilting slightly, he had to shove his entire weight against it, and strain to move it the fraction of an inch.

Now, he realised, the lights of the cabin were growing dim, and he saw that they were no longer flying in inky darkness, but that the sky was becoming lighter. It would be daylight in another hour.

The wind was slackening, too. The stars had faded; the sky was a faint, misty blue around them.

Bill glanced out of the cabin window. He noted that the sun, which normally would have risen behind them in their flight from east to west, was more to the left.

"Flyin' south-west by south," he muttered. "Gosh! I'd give a lot to know just where we are, and how far we've gone in this."

He turned to the others.

"Doak, you black-eyed beauty," he shouted, "stick your head out of the cabin window and see what you see below!"

He saw Doak look at the Chief and the Chief nod. Doak stepped across to one of the sliding windows and pushed it open six inches. He stuck his head out. His body became rigid, after one wild flutter with his arms.

The Chief staggered to him, heaved him from the window, dragging him

into the cabin again. And even Bill felt a twinge of pity for the gunman. His leather flying helmet had been ripped to pieces. His face was covered in blood. Blood streamed from his nose, and even his face was torn where the ripped leather of the torn flying helmet had lashed it.

The wind had struck him like something solid when he had put out his head.

After a few minutes Doak opened his eyes, when the Chief had poured some spirits down his throat. He glared at Bill, his thin lips twisted with hate.

"What d'you think you're playin' at?" he snarled, his voice weak, but rank with hatred. "You put something out there that would hit me."

"I didn't. I would have done if I could have planned something," Bill admitted candidly. "No, Doaky boy, it was the wind that hit you, that's all. Did you see anything below?"

"Caught a glimpse of something dark—not like land, nor like the sea. Looked like how a forest might appear from the air. We're pretty high, aren't we?"

"Seven or eight miles," Bill replied. "Well, hold tight, 'cos we're going down."

The Chief stepped forward.

"No, not yet!" he snapped. "The wind'll slacken more later. We'll carry on until it does. Dexter was blown down, and we'll go on to where he—"

"You'll go on to just where I want you to!" Bill snarled suddenly.

"Listen, feller! I'm the pilot of this bus, and don't you forget it. Yeab, you can wave that automatic about under my nose as much as you like, but you haven't the pluck to use it now. If you do, it means we all go down together. So for the moment what I say goes, and we go down now!" he wrenched at the lever which controlled the escape valves in the hollow wings. The Chief tightened his thin lips, glared murderously at Bill, but tucked away the automatic he had produced. And immediately Bill had opened the wing-valves, motion gripped the flying monoplane.

Vibration shook the floor again. She reeled crazily from side to side, up-ending, till Bill strained on the joystick. Gradually he got her nose level, then tilted it downward into a long glide. He dared not make the glide too steep for fear of the wind getting under the tail and turning them completely over.

Where they were heading to he had no idea. What Doak had seen for that brief second over the side of the plane he did not know. He might find Dexter alive; they might meet hostile savages. It seemed likely that he would meet with death at the hands of his two criminal passengers.

But a sudden, fierce exultation gripped him as he felt the pressure against the joystick lessen, and knew they were slipping safely out of the belt of wind.

(What strange country lies before Bill? Will he find his pal Dexter? See next week's smashing chapters of this novel story, boys!)

THE GREYFRIARS PRETENDER!

(Continued from page 23.)

the darkness towards the mansion of Sir Julius Hogben, and in half an hour, according to what the Wizard had said, the robbery would have taken place, and the crooks would be gone with their loot—unless Wharton could give the alarm in time!

It could not be Lancaster! But if it were he was a midnight thief, and the arm of the law was stretched out for him. Wharton had his duty to do—if he could do it—and his duty was to defeat the scoundrels who were bent on robbery.

With an almost savage determination the junior resumed the struggle with his bonds.

They were already loosened. He had ceased from exhaustion. But he had had a long rest, and his strength had returned. And he had an incentive now, greater than even the desire for liberty—to prevent a crime; to resolve that torturing doubt; to know the truth, whatever it was!

He struggled desperately for release.

Slowly, slowly he dragged loose the bonds that held him to the branch. Minute followed minute. His arms ached horribly. He gasped and choked behind the gag. But he cared nothing now for pain and fatigue. He struggled with iron determination.

Long, long minutes! The crooks must already be in the mansion. They were at work, the light fingers of the Wizard on the safe! Long, long minutes, but his arms came loose from the branch at last.

He staggered forward, and fell in the grass.

His hands were still tied behind him; but the knotted whipcord had loosened under the strain, and after a brief rest he forced his wrists free. He tore the gag from his mouth and panted for breath.

He stumbled as he groped his way through the drooping canopy of branches from under the ancient beech.

He was utterly spent, aching with exhaustion, dewed with perspiration, his brain swimming. But his determination remained fixed. If there was yet time!

He stumbled on almost drunkenly through the trees. But the keen night wind, salt from the sea, revived him.

His brain cleared, his strength came back. He broke into a run. At a distance, glimpsed through openings of the trees, the many-windowed facade of Hogben Grange glimmered in the stars.

Wharton was soon running hard.

He was out of the trees now, crossing level, green lawns that glimmered silvery in the starshine. He cut recklessly across flower-beds, tramping down flowers; passed a spraying fountain,

(Continued on next page.)

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glimmering statuary. He panted for breath as he ran, but he did not slacken.

The thieves were in the house—if they had not yet gone. And the house was sleeping, silent. Where were they? In what portion of that great building, by which of the numberless windows or doors had they forced an entrance? He could not guess. All that he could do was to alarm the house. Panting, the breathless junior ran up the great marble steps to the tall porch and the great door of the mansion.

He found the bell. It was a huge, old-fashioned bell. Wharton dragged at it, and a clanging rang through the house.

The sound was almost thunderous in the silence of the night.

Wharton rang and rang and rang. It seemed to him that the house would never wake. Yet it was only a matter of moments before lights glimmered in windows, footsteps sounded within, locks and bolts unfastened.

The great door swung open.

A half-dressed butler, with a startled footman at his elbow, stared out at the dishevelled, breathless schoolboy. Light flashed on in the great hall.

"What—who—"

"Burglars!" panted Wharton. He reeled in the doorway. "Quick! In the house! A man called the Weasel, and—and another! They're in the house! Quick!"

The butler stared at him blankly. A portly, middle-aged gentleman, in a flowing dressing-gown, appeared on the high staircase. Wharton recognised Sir Julius Hogben.

"What is it, Bates?" came the baronet's voice.

"This—this boy—" stammered the amazed butler.

"There are burglars in the house, sir!" shouted Wharton. "They are at your safe now, if they're not gone yet! I saw them—heard them! I tell you they're in the house!"

Sir Julius stared at him for a startled second.

"To the library! Quick, Bates! Lose no time!" he rapped out.

Wharton, exhausted, staggered against the open door, panting. The butler, the footman, rushed away down the long hall. Sir Julius, with whisking dressing-gown, followed, catching an ancient sabre from a trophy of arms on the wall as he went.

Harry Wharton leaned on the door, breathing in gulps. Lights were flashing on all over the house. He heard a shout, a crash. They were still in the house, then! The butler's voice came in a yell:

"Burglars! The safe's open! They're gone!"

There was a buzzing of voices, a clattering of footsteps. Hogben Grange was wakeful now from cellar to attic, and in wild alarm and confusion.

Harry Wharton hurried down the long hall to the open doorway of a great library. A French window at the farther end stood open.

The thieves were gone. The clanging of the bell had alarmed them as well as the household, and they had fled. The safe stood open. Papers, documents, bundles of bonds, lay within and without, scattered. The thieves had gone, but they had not had time to take their plunder. They had fled only just in time. Sir Julius Hogben was at the telephone, frantically ringing up Courtfield Police Station. Harry Wharton had been in time to prevent the robbery. But the midnight thieves were gone, and the torturing doubt in his mind and his head was still unresolved.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

In Doubt!

MR. QUELCH started from a doze in his armchair by a dying fire.

It was nearly three o'clock.

He rubbed his eyes.

In the silence of the night he heard the distant echo of the bell in Gosling's ledge.

There was a sound of wheels on the drive.

The Remove master hurried from his study. The door of the House was open by the time a car stopped at the steps.

"Wharton!"

It was Harry Wharton who stepped from the car. Mr. Quelch stared at him with grim, gimlet eyes.

"Go to my study, Wharton."

"Yes, sir."

The Remove fellow passed into the House. Mr. Quelch descended the steps and spoke to the chauffeur. What Sir Julius Hogben's chauffeur said to him in reply made the Remove master's eyes open wide.

The car rolled away again, and Mr. Quelch re-entered the House and returned to his study.

Wharton was waiting for him there.

The junior's face was white and tired; his eyes were heavy, though not so heavy as his heart.

"Wharton, the chauffeur has told me that you prevented a burglary at Sir Julius Hogben's house." Mr. Quelch's voice was quite gentle now. "But you must explain."

Harry Wharton told him. The Remove master's brow set grimly as he heard of what Ponsonby & Co. had done. Wharton touched on that as briefly as he could, but he had to explain why he had remained out of gates that night. When he told of the meeting under the ancient beech, the Remove master listened with still keener attention.

"You know one of the scoundrels, then, my boy? You are sure it was the man who drove the car in the bank raid?"

"Quite, sir; a man called the Weasel."

"And the other—he was a stranger to you?"

Wharton was silent.

Was the other a stranger to him?

He did not know.

Mr. Quelch's eyes scanned the white, tired, troubled face. He could not understand all that he saw there.

"You know nothing of the other man, Wharton?"

"I could not see him, sir. It was pitchy dark. The Weasel called him the Wizard; that is all I know—I mean, all I can say."

"A strange nickname; probably known to the police," said Mr. Quelch. "My dear boy, you look worn out, and no wonder! I will speak to you again in the morning; you must go to bed now."

Four juniors in the Remove dormitory were still awake when the door opened and the light was switched on.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, Wharton!" exclaimed Bob Cherry in great relief.

"We've been jolly anxious about you, old chap," said Johnny Bull.

"Wharton has returned safely, my boys," said Mr. Quelch. "Do not talk to him to-night—he requires rest."

"All serene, you men," said Wharton.

He turned in, and Mr. Quelch turned out the light and left. Other fellows were awake now, and a dozen voices questioned the captain of the Remove.

"I'll tell you to-morrow," said Harry.

"Right-ho, old bean," yawned Bob.

"All's well that ends well, anyhow. Good-night."

The Remove were soon asleep. But Harry Wharton, weary as he was, did not soon close his eyes.

He wondered whether Lancaster, in his room in the Sixth, was sleeping. Could he sleep?

Wharton could not sleep.

Was Lancaster guilty? Could he be guilty? Or rather, could he be innocent? Schoolboy—and crook! Cricketer—and cracksman! It was wildly impossible, and yet—and yet, Wharton felt, with a shudder, that it was so. And yet his faith in the fellow he liked and admired struggled with that black certainty! His heart, if not his brain, rejected what it seemed must be true.

The bright May dawn was creeping in at the high windows of the dormitory before Wharton slept at last.

THE END.

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