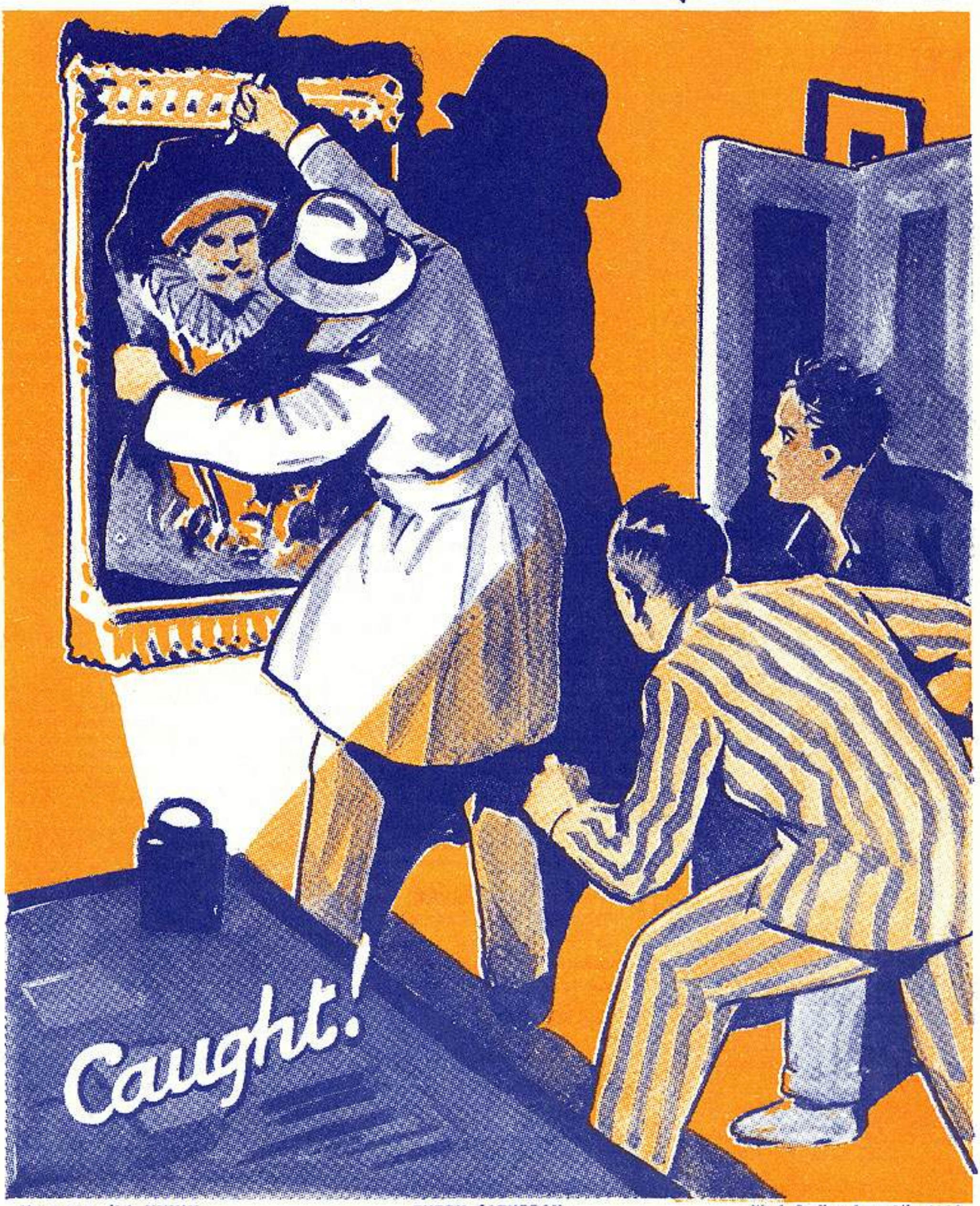
SPLENDID SCHOOL STORY ~ Humorous Supplement and Interesting Cricket Article ~ SENSATIONAL SERIAL — INSIDE!

The MAGNET 2D



No. 1,216. Vol. XXXIX. EVERY SATURDAY. Week Ending June 6th, 1931.

YOUR EDITOR INVITES YOU TO—

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.

WE'RE having a really glorious day to-day, as I write this, and the sun is pouring in through my office windows. Try as I will, I can hardly think of anything else but

HOLIDAYS!

It's a wonderful word, isn't it, when you think of all it means? But, alas, unlike you fellows, your Editor never really gets a complete holiday! He's always got to remember that you chaps insist upon getting your MAGNET every week at the proper time, and the result is that when "yours truly" manages to run away to the seaside or the country, he always has to take a bundle of work with him.

It's the same with our authors. Whenever they go away, the principal item in their luggage is a typewriter. But they—lucky fellows—generally arrange to go abroad, and then start flooding my office with a stream of gaily-coloured postcards, which come from all sorts of unusual places which they strike on their holidays. Naturally, it is necessary for them to travel extensively, because they couldn't write so convincingly about foreign parts of the world if they didn't go there and see the countries for themselves.

You'll find plenty of

REAL HOLIDAY FARE

in the issues of the MAGNET which I am now preparing. The stories of Harry Wharton & Co., for instance, are just the right kind of stuff to read when on holiday, while our latest serial is calculated to make you simply long for each succeeding issue, so that you can follow the breathless adventures of our new hero. As holiday-time is the time for being jolly, well, the "Greyfriars Herald" will see to it that you get plenty of chuckles. Don't forget your MAGNET when you go away, chums! It'll spoil your holiday if you do! And you can buy the MAGNET anywhere in the British Isles—and at most places on the Continent.

HAVE you ever heard of

WIGAN PIER?

One of my chums from Wigan, Joe Aindow, writes to tell me that it really does exist! Actually it is a railway siding where wagons tip their dust into the canal, and it projects only about 4 feet from the canal bank. Joe tells me that if I write to Wigan for a photo of the pier, that is the photo I'll get! I'll take Joe's word for it—but if he or his chums possess a snapshot of the "pier," I'd like to see it!

The first prizewinner this week is Reginald Hickinbottom, of 20, Bute Street, Crookes, Sheffield, who wins one of our topping books for the following yarn:

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,216.

Tramp (to lady): "Could you give a poor man something to eat, ma'am?"

Lady (angrily): "I'll fetch my husband!"

Tramp: "No, thanks, lady; I ain't no cannibal!"

ARE YOU A "HIKER"?

My morning paper tells me that there are already over half a million "hikers" in this country, and I can't help wondering how many of my readers are numbered amongst them. "Hiking," or rambling, is certainly one of the best ways I know of spending a holiday—and also one of the cheapest. All you need is a pair of shorts, an open-necked shirt, strong boots, and a ruck-sack, or an old army pack. A stout stick is an advantage, and then you are ready to take the open road.

Thanks to the enterprise of the many rambling clubs which are dotted all over the country, you can put up for the night at "Youth Hostels," where the charge for a bed and a bath is only one shilling. You can also get food at wayside cottages and little cafes quite cheaply—and you save on fares!

When you come to think of it, some of the

MOST WONDERFUL SCENERY

in the world is to be found in our own country. Several readers have written to me to ask if I can recommend good, cheap holidays to them, and I have no hesitation whatever in advising them to go on a rambling holiday.

Just think of the wonderful places you may reach on foot—the moors of Northumberland and Devonshire, the picturesque coves of Cornwall, the glorious Lake District, the Scottish hills, the Peak district, the Cheddar Gorge, and, for my Irish readers, the Lakes of Killarney. Make no mistake about it, chums, some of the prettiest places in the world are to be found not far from your own doorstep!

Many thanks to those readers who have written telling me about the beauty spots near their own neighbourhoods. I've made a note of several of them, and I hope to visit all of them in time.

One final word of advice, chums! Don't forget to take your MAGNET with you! And, if you've got room in your pack for them, a copy of the "Gem," or one or two issues of "The Schoolboys' Own Library" will help you to spend many a delightful hour en route!

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!

NOW that the weather shows signs of being really warm in the near future, it is pleasant to turn to

A RATHER CHILLY SUBJECT.

Tom Coats, of Isleworth, wants to know how big icebergs are? Well, of course, they vary in size, but generally they are about as big as small mountains. The worst thing about an iceberg is that only about a tenth of it shows above the water. Nine-tenths of it remains under the surface, and this is what makes icebergs so dangerous to shipping. It is impossible to see from a ship how far the ice stretches under water, and, consequently, many ships strike the submerged portion of the iceberg long before they imagine that they are in the danger zone.

Another very dangerous thing connected with icebergs is that the ice under water may melt quicker than the ice above, which makes the berg top-heavy. It thereupon turns turtle—and woe betide the ship that happens to be near enough to it as it heaves over!

Now for a clever Greyfriars limerick sent in by Miss P. Pack, of 27, Peel Street, Lincoln, which well deserves the prize of a penknife.

Old Gosling's a crusty old chap
Who's most apt to snarl and to snap
At fellows who, late,
Ring at his locked gate,
And rouse him from out of his nap!

Here's an amusing little piece of information for you! Would you believe that there was once

A PIG TRIED FOR MURDER?

It sounds unbelievable, but it's true! It happened at Lavegny, in the year 1457, and a pig and her six young were solemnly taken to court, placed in the dock, and tried for having murdered a child! Furthermore, the pig was actually found Guilty, and sentenced to death, while the six young ones were acquitted on account of their youth!

What is in next week's programme?—I can hear you all asking. Here it is:

First and foremost a grand long complete tale by Frank Richards, entitled:

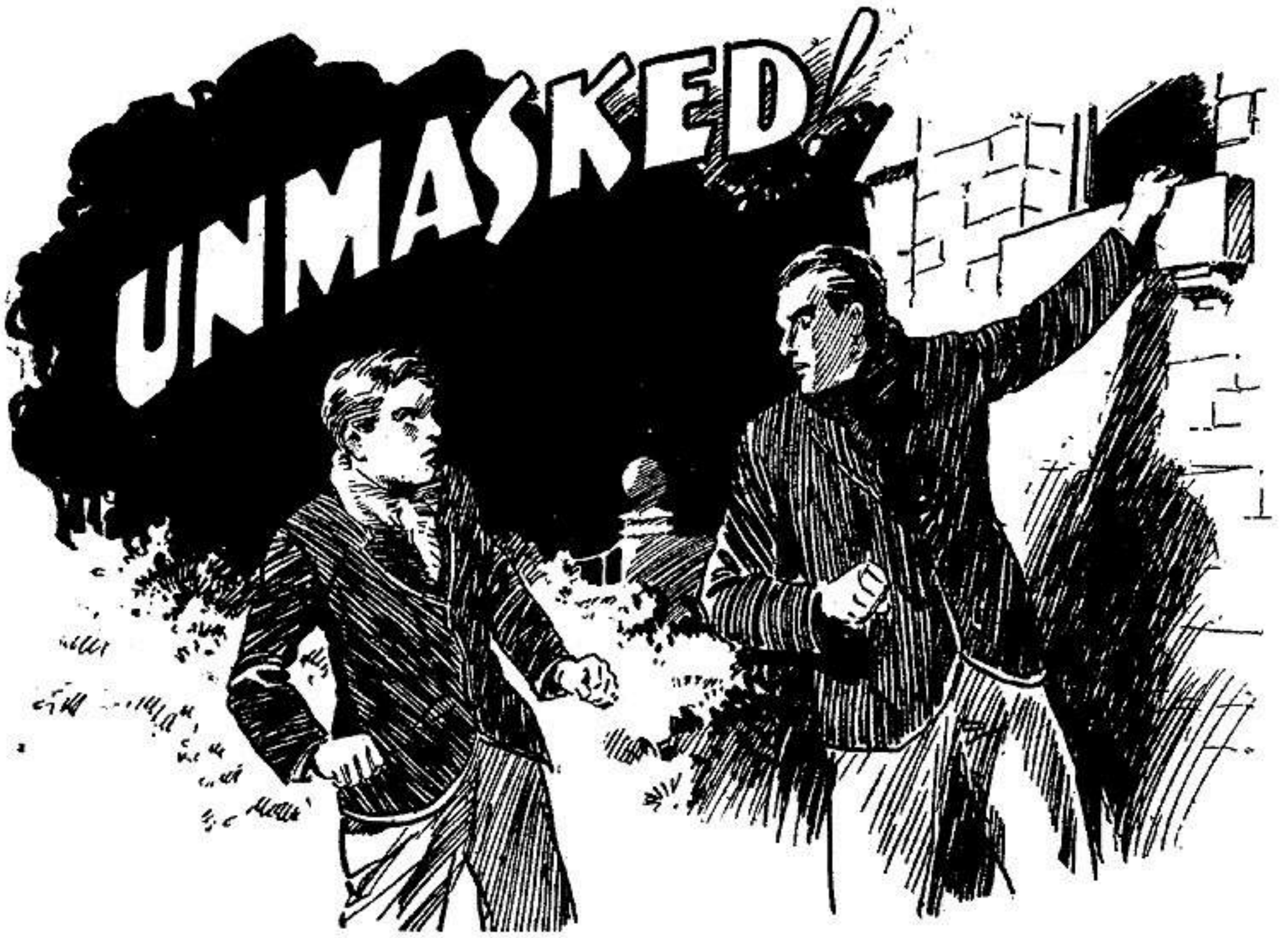
"THE BOY WHO KNEW TOO MUCH!"

It's full of just the kind of things you like to read, and if it doesn't keep you engrossed all the way through—well, you had better see a doctor! It's the kind of yarn you won't want to lay down until you have read every word of it!

What do you think of our new serial "Land of Lost Planes"? A real thriller, what? One of my readers says: "Every serial you publish seems to be better than the last." Well, it is my intention to see to it that this splendid reputation is maintained!

Of course, there will be the "Greyfriars Herald" supplement as usual, another interesting cricket article, and more jokes and limericks.

YOUR EDITOR.



Featuring Harry Wharton & Co., the Chums of Greyfriars.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

What's Up with Wharton?

HARRY WHARTON stopped suddenly.

Morning school was over at Greyfriars, and fellows of all Forms streamed out into the quad.

The Famous Five of the Remove were strolling under the old elms in the bright June sunshine, when Lancaster of the Sixth came along from the House.

The tall, handsome Sixth-Former was heading directly towards the group of juniors, evidently with the intention of speaking to them.

Four members of the Co. gave him cheery grins, and moved to meet him as he came up.

But Harry Wharton, stopping suddenly, flushed red, hesitated a second, and then turned away.

Four pairs of eyes followed him in astonishment.

"Wharton!" called out Bob Cherry.

Frank Nugent caught at Wharton's arm.

"Harry, old man! What's up?"

"Nothing! But——"

"You ass, Lancaster's coming to speak to us. Can't you see——"

"I know! I——"

"You can't cut a Sixth Form man! What on earth's the matter?"

Harry Wharton did not reply, but he would have moved away as Lancaster of the Sixth came under the elms. Frank Nugent held his arm. Frank's face was the picture of dismayed amazement.

It was against all laws, written and unwritten, for a Lower boy to "cut" a Sixth Form man in the quad if the spirit moved the great man to address him. And Lancaster was not, so far as the chums of the Remove were concerned, an ordinary Sixth-Former. They had known him in the holidays; they liked and admired him; they were as friendly with him as it was possible for juniors to be with a Sixth-Former and a First Eleven man. Harry Wharton had been one of his most enthusiastic and loyal admirers hitherto. So his present action was simply amazing to his friends.

By day the most popular fellow in the Sixth at Greyfriars . . .
By night a skilful cracksman who, so far, has evaded the police . . .
And Wharton has discovered Lancaster's terrible secret!

"Off your rocker, Wharton?" asked Johnny Bull blankly.

"My esteemed and idiotic chum——" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Wharton pulled at his arm.

"Let go, Frank! I—I'd rather not see Lancaster!" he muttered.

Nugent did not let go.

"Don't be an ass!" Frank's voice was unusually sharp. "Do you want to insult a Sixth Form man—and the best fellow in the Sixth, too? Hold on, I tell you."

Lancaster of the Sixth was near at hand now.

Wharton gave it up.

With the Sixth Form man within speaking distance, to turn and walk away would have been rather too pointed, whatever the motive of the captain of the Remove might have been.

He remained where he was, his face flushed and uneasy; his chums, also, looking rather red and uncomfortable. They were wondering whether Lancaster had noticed Wharton's effort, and intention, to avoid him. They could not imagine what he would think of it, if he had. The slightest notice from him was an honour and a distinction for a junior. The mere fact that they knew Lancaster gave the Famous Five additional prestige in their own Form. The Co. fervently hoped that the senior had not noticed the amazing conduct of their comrade.

Lancaster gave no sign of having noticed it. There was a pleasant smile on his handsome face as he came to a halt.

"You're wanted, Wharton," said the senior.

"Oh! Yes!" stammered Wharton.

His eyes did not meet Lancaster's. The flush faded out of his face, leaving him a little pale.

Lancaster's dark, keen eyes scanned him. He could scarcely fail to observe that there was something amiss with the captain of the Remove.

"Quelch spoke to me as I came out, and asked me to tell you," said the Sixth-Former. "You're to go to the Head's study."

"Very well!" muttered Wharton.

Lancaster of the Sixth paused. Having delivered the message from Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, he would have walked on, leaving the juniors rather "bucked" at having been spoken to in the quad by the great cricketer whom all Greyfriars delighted to honour. But though the Co. appreciated that distinction as much as usual, it was clear that Harry Wharton did not. He looked, as he felt, utterly uncomfortable. His eyes were on the ground, and it was obvious that he was longing to get out of Lancaster's presence. It was too obvious for the senior to fail to see it; so obvious that the Co. felt worried and discomfited, and quite ashamed, for once, of their leader.

Richard Lancaster compressed his well-cut lips slightly. Such a change in Wharton's manner towards him was startling. Most Sixth Form men, perhaps, would have disregarded a junior's manner, and loftily failed to heed whether it had changed or not. But Lancaster of the Sixth probably had his own reasons for taking heed of it.

"What's up, kid?" he asked good-naturedly.

Wharton's face coloured again.

"Eh? Oh! Nothing!" he stammered.

"Feeling the strain, what?" asked Lancaster. "I hear that you had a rather uncommon experience last night."

"Oh! Yes."

"From what I hear, some Highcliffe fellows got hold of you yesterday, and tied you to a tree, and left you out for the night," said Lancaster. "Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Rather a rotten experience."

"Yes."

"Probably that's what the Head wants to see you about."

"Yes."

Wharton's replies were all in monosyllables. The interview with Dick Lancaster was evidently painful and unwelcome to him.

Why it should be so was a mystery to his chums, and apparently to Lancaster also. The Sixth Form man's eyes were keen as rapiers as they scanned him. But Wharton did not meet his eyes.

"It was Ponsonby and his crowd did it," said Bob Cherry, chiefly for the sake of saying something, "and we're jolly well going to make them sorry for it, too."

"Yes, rather!" said Johnny Bull.

"The sorrowfulness of the esteemed Ponsonby will be terrific!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Where did it happen?" asked Lancaster.

Wharton did not answer. Bob Cherry answered for him.

"It was on the way home from Lantham. That ass Bunter bagged Wharton's bike, and Wharton motor-bussed it, and had to take the cut across Hogben Grange——"

Lancaster started.

"Hogben Grange?" he repeated.

"Yes. And Pon & Co. were mooching about there, and they collared him, as he was alone, and ragged him. Wish I'd been there!" said Bob.

"You—you were left for the night in the grounds of Hogben Grange, Wharton?" asked Lancaster, in an altered voice.

"Yes."

"I suppose you got loose after a time?"

"Yes."

"What time did you get back to Greyfriars?"

"Three in the morning."

"Quelch was sitting up for him," said Nugent. "He's been like a bear with a sore head in the Form-room this morning. Late hours don't agree with Quelch."

Lancaster smiled.

"And they tied you to a tree in Hogben Grange, and left you there for the night!" he said. "A vile trick! That young scoundrel Ponsonby is in want of a thrashing."

"He's going to get one!" said Bob.

"I know Hogben Grange," remarked Lancaster. "I stayed a night there, you know, after a spill on my motor-bike. The grounds are pretty extensive. Where did they leave you in the grounds, Wharton?"

Harry Wharton raised his eyes at last, and looked the Sixth Form man full in the face.

What he expected to read in that face he hardly knew; but all that he read there was a mild and friendly interest.

He did not answer the question.

"You say the Head wants me, Lancaster?" he asked.

"That's so."

"Then I'd better go in."

And with that Harry Wharton turned away and walked quickly towards the House, leaving Lancaster of the Sixth staring after him, and the other fellows crimson with discomfort.

Lancaster gave the juniors a nod and walked on. His lips were compressed and there was a strange gleam in his eyes. The four Removites looked at one another when he was gone.

"What on earth's up with Wharton?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Goodness knows."

"He's as good as insulted Lancaster," said Johnny Bull. "What the merry thump can he have against Lancaster, all of a sudden?"

"Can't make it out," said Nugent.

"The knowfulness is not terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, shaking his dusky head.

"Well, it won't do," grunted Johnny Bull. "We'll jolly well make him explain, when he comes out, after seeing the Beak."

And the chums of the Remove, puzzled and annoyed, followed Harry Wharton to the House.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Caterpillar is Interested!

"CATERPILLAR!"

De Courcy, of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe, did not answer.

The elegant Highcliffe junior, whose slow and sleepy ways had earned him the nickname of the "Caterpillar," was standing with his hands in his pockets, on the steps of the House at Highcliffe School.

He was looking at a group of fellows at a little distance—Ponsonby, Monson, Gadsby, Vavasour, all of his Form. The Caterpillar seemed interested in that group and he did not heed his chum Courtenay, who came out of the House and joined him.

"Caterpillar!" repeated Courtenay.

"Old bean," answered the Caterpillar, without turning his head, "I know there's time for some cricket practice before tiffin. I know likewise that I'm not goin' to put any in. Chuck it!"

Courtenay laughed.

"Slacker!" he answered. Courtenay, the captain of the Highcliffe Fourth, had his bat under his arm. "Well, I'll cut along while you loaf!"

"Don't!" said the Caterpillar. "There's somethin' more interestin' goin' on than cricket. Even the great summer game, my beloved 'earer, takes a back seat at the present moment."

"What the thump——" Courtenay began.

"Look at Pon!" said the Caterpillar.

"Bother Pon!"

"Bother him all you like," agreed De Courcy, with a nod, "but my opinion is that he's sufficiently bothered already. Pon's in low water, old bean—Pon's in a sad and moultin' state. There's somethin' rotten in the state of Denmark, as Jolly old Kipling says—was it Kipling?"

"Shakespeare, fathead!"

"I knew it was some ass," assented the Caterpillar. "Look at Pon! Where is the happy, careless smile of unthinkin', unreflectin' boyhood? Where is the pristine brightness of his jolly old eye? Echo answers where."

"Ass!" said Courtenay.

But he glanced towards the group of knuts.

Ponsonby and Gadsby, Monson and Vavasour, stood in a close group, in low-toned talk. Courtenay would not have noticed them, having little to do with the slackers and black sheep of his Form. But now that his attention was drawn to Pon & Co., he could see that they were in what the Caterpillar elegantly described as a "moultin'" state.

Ponsonby's face was dark and savage. Monson and Gadsby looked worried. Vavasour looked more than worried; he looked frightened. Something, evidently, was troubling the usually happy knuts deeply.

"Pon's been up to somethin'!" remarked the Caterpillar sapiently. "Somethin' more serious than usual, old thing. Pon's a frightfully interestin' study. I keep on wonderin' how long it will be before he's sacked from Highcliffe. He'd have been sacked from any other school long ago. How awfully lucky it is for Pon, old bean, that this jolly old school is in a state of dry rot, with a Chief Beak who dodders and dozes, and a staff that follow his giddy example an' let everythin' slide. How lucky for Pon that dear old Mobbs, our respected Form master, devoted his energies to greasin' up to the nobility an' gentry, and takin' care never to find them out in their little games—what?"

"Oh, rot!" grunted Courtenay. The slack state of the school, which no doubt was fortunate for Pon, certainly did not please the captain of the Fourth.

"But there's a limit, even at Highcliffe," yawned the Caterpillar. "And I'm wonderin' where old Pon has stepped over the limit this time! Looks it, doesn't he?"

"No bizney of ours!" said Courtenay.

"Your mistake, old bean," answered the Caterpillar gently. "I'm frightfully interested. I bet a man two to one that Pon would be sacked last term. I lost that bet—instead of losin' Pon! I'll give you three to one, old soul, that Pon will be sacked this term. Takin' it on?"

"Oh, rats!"

"Come and talk to them," suggested the Caterpillar. "They're in a state of horrid affliction; and it's a kind heart's giddy duty to comfort the afflicted. Let's go and comfort the afflicted, old scout."

"Bosh!"

Courtenay walked away with his bat. The Caterpillar smiled sleepily, went down the steps, and strolled towards the group of knuts.

A less keen eye than Rupert de Courcy's would have seen that the knuts were in an afflicted state. Had their

low-voiced converse reached him, he would have been still more assured of that.

"I tell you it's as safe as houses!" Ponsonby was muttering. "It's that brute Wharton's word against ours. Well, we deny the whole thing!"

"I know that!" growled Gadsby. "But——"

"It was too thick!" muttered Monson. "Tyin' a fellow to a tree and leavin' him out for the night—pah! I told you it was rotten, Pon! But you would have your way, and now we're for it!"

"Absolutely!" mumbled Vavasour.

"We're for it, right enough, if you lose your nerve and give yourselves away!" said Ponsonby, with bitter contempt. "If we all tell the same tale, and stick to it, what can that Greyfriars cad do?"

Pon's friends were not particular in such matters; but standing in the presence of two headmasters and telling falsehoods was rather a strain on them. It was a dangerous game, too, and they were nervous and uneasy. What they had done meant the "sack," even from a slack school like Highcliffe, if it was made clear against them. And lying was a dubious business; there was always danger of something coming out.

"Cheese it!" added Ponsonby in a whisper. "Here comes that ass De Courcy. He's noticed somethin'."

"The brute notices everythin', though he always looks half asleep!" grunted Gadsby.

Three of the knuts looked depressed and dismal, but Ponsonby gave the Caterpillar a forced smile as he came up.

"Oh, don't be a goat!" growled Ponsonby.

"You're not tellin' a friend all about it?" asked the Caterpillar "Perhaps I could help you. You don't need tellin' that I'm the brainy man of the Fourth. The fact is, Pon, I don't really want you to be bunked. You're an interestin' study, and I want to keep you by me, you know, for entertainment in idle moments. See the point?"

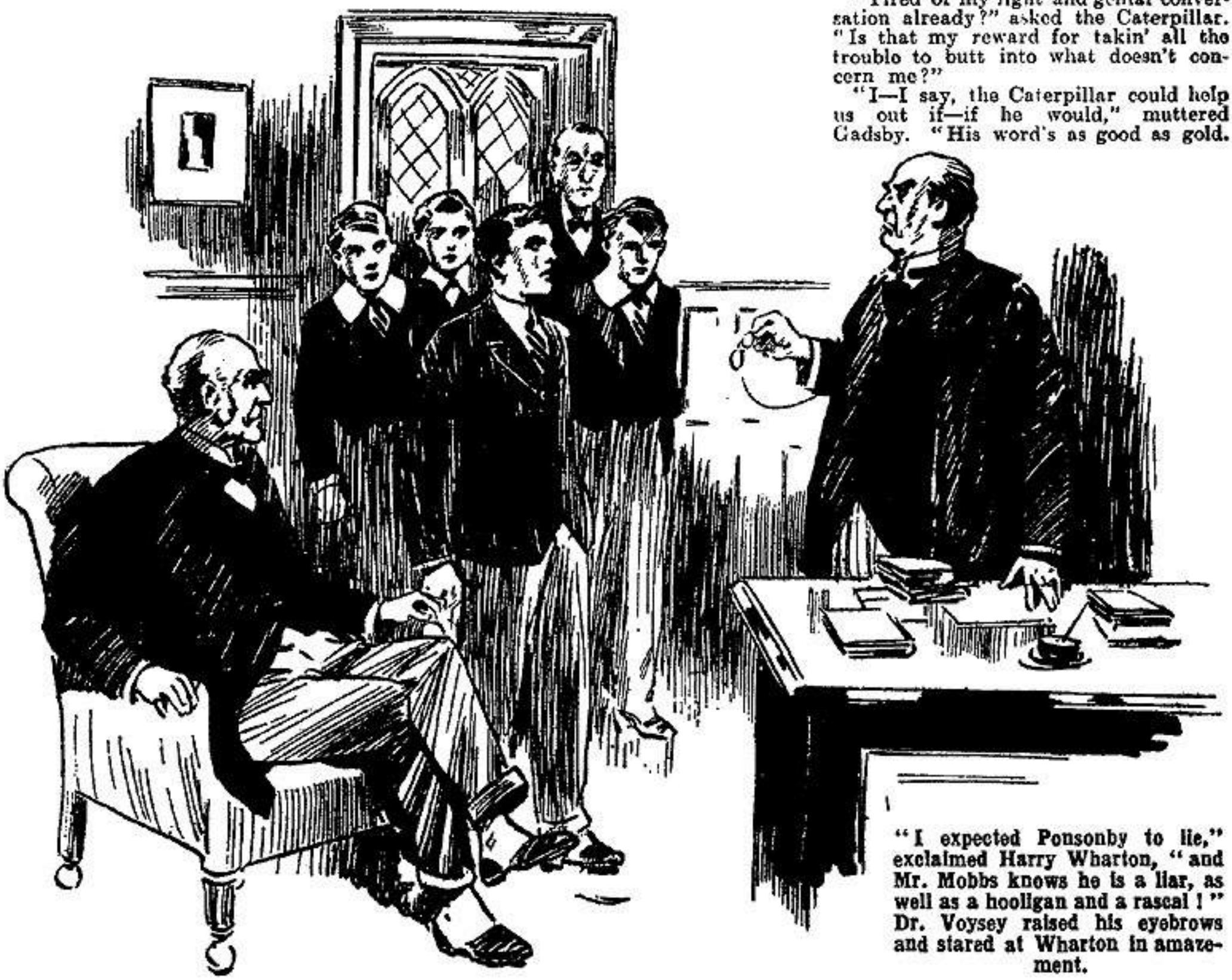
Pon's friends grinned. Pon scowled.

"Make a clean breast of it to your Uncle Rupert," went on the Caterpillar encouragingly. "If a thumpin' lie's wanted, perhaps I could make a suggestion. There's a way of doin' these things. Lyin' is an art, like everythin' else. Your methods are crude, Pon."

"Oh, shut up!"

"Tired of my light and genial conversation already?" asked the Caterpillar. "Is that my reward for takin' all the trouble to butt into what doesn't concern me?"

"I—I say, the Caterpillar could help us out if—if he would," muttered Gadsby. "His word's as good as gold.



"I expected Ponsonby to lie," exclaimed Harry Wharton, "and Mr. Mobbs knows he is a liar, as well as a hooligan and a rascal!" Dr. Voysey raised his eyebrows and stared at Wharton in amazement.

"Well, he's goin' to tell the truth, I suppose," said Monson. "And—and when a man's tellin' the truth, people believe it somehow."

"His own Beak must believe him, or he wouldn't be comin' over here to see our Head!" muttered Gadsby.

"His own Beak can go and eat coke! It's our Beak that matters!" said Ponsonby coolly. "And I can tell you Dr. Voysey would want a lot of proof. Is there any proof?"

"Not if we deny it, I suppose," said Gadsby. "But——"

"Keep your nerve, you ass; that's all that's wanted."

Pon's friends did not answer. They looked dismal and depressed. Hard lying, do doubt, might get the quartette out of the scrape. Lying was not new to them, either. But there was a limit. Pon, at all events, had nerve enough not to give himself away.

"Anythin' a fellow can do, you men?" asked the Caterpillar urbanely. His eyes were on Ponsonby & Co. with a half-mocking smile in them.

"Eh! I don't follow," said Ponsonby. "Nothin's the matter that I know of."

"Dear me! I was thinkin' that you men were in fwightful twouble, and I was rollin' up to comfort the afflicted. Nothin' wrong?"

"Nothin' at all."

"Good!" said the Caterpillar heartily. "I'm glad now that old Courtenay didn't clinch on the bet I offered him."

"What bet, you ass?"

"I offered him three to one that you'd be sacked this term, old chap. Should I have lost?" asked the Caterpillar.

I—I say, Caterpillar, if—if you'd say that you were out with us yesterday afternoon——"

The Caterpillar raised a delicately manicured hand in gentle rebuke.

"Nothin' doin', Gaddy! Like the Yankee in the old story, I cannot tell a lie! I'm not above makin' a suggestion, and puttin' a touch of art into it, if you're hard up for a thumpin' whopper. But I draw the line at tellin' lies myself. Bad form, old bean!"

"Then go and eat coke!" growled Gadsby.

"I'm here to help," said the Caterpillar reproachfully. "If you're goin' to confide in your Uncle Rupert, get it off your chest before the man arrives."

Ponsonby & Co. started.

"The man? What man?" snapped Ponsonby.

"As you keep on starin' round at the gates every other minute, I take it that you're expectin' a caller," smiled the Caterpillar. "Is it another row with Greyfriars? I remember you slid in barely in time for call-over last night, and looked frightfully perturbed. Mobby noticed it, too, I think. What had you been up to, dear boys?"

"Mobby?" exclaimed Monson, in alarm. "You think he noticed?"

"Mobby won't say anything," said the Caterpillar reasurringly. "If you do anythin' shady, dear men, you can rely on Mobby not to find out if he can help it. You can put your shirt on Mobby. Still, it might be safer to ask Mobby home for a week-end, Pon, to meet your uncle the marquis. It will make all safe in that quarter. That's a tip!"

Ponsonby grinned involuntarily.

"I've asked him," he said.

"Bright!" said the Caterpillar approvingly. "Very bright! I shouldn't wonder if you never get sacked from Highcliffe, Pon, and even if you never go to chokey afterwards."

"You silly, footling ass——"

"I'm tryin' to help," said the Caterpillar. "Hallo! Is that the jolly old bean you're expectin'?"

A car turned in at the gates and drove up to the House. In it sat Dr. Locke, the headmaster of Greyfriars, and by his side sat Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove. The Caterpillar capped Dr. Locke politely as the car passed at a little distance, and gave Wharton a friendly grin. Ponsonby & Co. stared on with grim, lowering faces.

"So it's a Greyfriars row!" said the Caterpillar. "Must be pretty serious to bring the headmaster here. What on earth have you duffers been up to?"

Ponsonby set his lips.

"Nothin'," he said. "Nothin', and we all stick to that."

"I hope you'll get away with it, old beans," said the Caterpillar. "I like that chap, Wharton, and I dislike you enormously, but I hope you'll get away with it. What would Highcliffe be like without you, Pon? Like a drama with the villain of the piece left out, what? Hallo! There's old Mobby, and he seems to want you."

The Caterpillar ambled away. Mr. Mobbs, the master of the Fourth, appeared in the doorway of the House, glanced round, and signed to Ponsonby & Co. The four juniors, looking anything but happy, went into the House. The Caterpillar whistled softly. It was obvious to him that Ponsonby & Co. had asked for something serious this time, and he wondered lazily whether they were going to get what they had asked for.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Nothing Doing!

DR. VOYSEY, the headmaster of Highcliffe, was in his study.

The drowsy old gentleman, under whose rule the school had grown slacker and slacker until it was in a state that the Caterpillar described as "dry rot," sat at his writing-table.

There had been an irritated expression on his face when he sat down. He was expecting a caller—an unwelcome caller. There had been a talk on the telephone that morning, and, much against the grain, Dr. Voysey had consented to see the Head of Greyfriars.

It meant trouble, worry, mental exertion, and all these things were anathema to the Head of Highcliffe.

He was accustomed to leaving things in the hands of his staff, thinking and caring little how they went so long as they went smoothly.

His interests, as a matter of fact, were not in the school of which he was the Head. He was a silver-haired, benevolent-looking gentleman, very imposing to the eyes of parents and governors. He looked an ideal schoolmaster, but he had no gift for that very difficult and arduous profession. He was old, he was tired, and his interests were elsewhere.

He had looked irritated, thinking of the coming visit. But his face was placid now. He had already forgotten the expected visitor.

As he sat he was looking at a picture on the study wall—a picture which Highcliffe fellows described as a smudge, wondering what on earth the Beak saw in it to prize it so highly. But Dr. Voysey was an artistic gentleman if he was not a schoolmaster. That Rembrandt was a genuine picture. It had cost Dr. Voysey eight hundred pounds, long years since, and it was worth three thousand pounds.

The old gentleman gave hardly a thought to its value. He gloated over it as a prized possession. Visitors to Highcliffe were always shown that Rembrandt when the Head wished specially to honour them. Many of them perhaps took the same view as most of the Highcliffe fellows, and looked on the work of art as a "smudge." But its market value was undeniable. Dr. Voysey's Rembrandt was famous.

Gazing at the picture, the Head of Highcliffe forgot time and space. It was quite a small picture, its value being in its quality, not in its quantity. It delighted the sleepy old eyes of the Highcliffe headmaster, and he received quite an unpleasant jar when Dr. Locke was announced. He had not even heard the car stop.

Dr. Voysey sighed, withdrew his gaze reluctantly from his Rembrandt, and rose to his feet.

He greeted Dr. Locke with a stiff bow. He took no notice whatever of Harry Wharton, who followed his headmaster in.

Wharton stood silent and uncomfortable while the two headmasters exchanged stiff, formal greetings. It was very much against his own wish that Wharton was there at all.

He had no choice about explaining why he had stayed out of school the previous night; but had he been given his choice he would have preferred to say nothing. He would have been quite content to take the punishment of Ponsonby into his own hands. He detested being put into the position of accusing the Highcliffe fellows, all the more because he was on friendly terms with Courtenay and his set at Highcliffe. But there was no help for it; he had had to come.

"Let us lose no time, sir," said Dr. Voysey. His glance wandered to his Rembrandt for a moment. He remembered that he had to answer a letter from an American collector who had offered him fifteen thousand dollars for the picture—an offer he intended to refuse with bare politeness. He was anxious to get done with this Greyfriars business. He blinked at Harry Wharton over his gold-rimmed glasses. "I understand that this—this boy has some accusation to make against certain Highcliffe boys."

"Not precisely," said Dr. Locke. "The matter is so very serious, sir, that I am bound to bring it to your notice. Unless it is satisfactorily dealt with here, I consider it probable that

this boy's guardian, Colonel Wharton, may take the matter up in the courts."

"If the boy can make his accusation good," said Dr. Voysey peevishly.

"The facts, sir, are these. Last evening Wharton had occasion to take a short cut across the park at Hogben Grange, returning to the school after seeing a cricket match at Lantham. Four boys of this school met him there, overcame his resistance, and bound him to a tree."

"Indeed!"

"Wharton remained tied to the tree to a very late hour. The matter had its fortunate side," continued Dr. Locke, "for it happened that two rascals had planned a burglary at Sir Julius Hogben's house that night, and they met at the beech-tree to which Wharton was tied. As they did not see him in the dark, he escaped what might have been a very terrible danger. He was able to loosen his bonds after they were gone and reach the house and give the alarm in time to prevent the robbery, though not the escape of the burglars."

"Indeed!" repeated Dr. Voysey.

He politely repressed a yawn. It was clear that the attempted burglary at Hogben Grange did not interest the Head of Highcliffe.

"I tell you this, sir," said Dr. Locke, rather sharply, "as showing the danger to which this boy was exposed by the action of Ponsonby and his friends. If those lawless characters had seen him——"

"It appears that they did not, from what you say," remarked the Head of Highcliffe. "We need not, therefore, waste time considering what might have happened, I think."

Dr. Locke compressed his lips.

"Very well, sir! But it was after one o'clock in the morning when Wharton succeeded in releasing himself. Up to that time he was a prisoner in a lonely park. I trust that you see how serious this matter is."

"Undoubtedly. Whom does the boy accuse?"

"You may speak, Wharton."

Harry Wharton coloured.

"I accuse no one, sir," he said. "I had to tell my Form master what had happened. He had to know why I had stayed out the night. But if my headmaster would consent, I should prefer nothing more to be said about the matter."

"Quite so—quite so," said Dr. Voysey, with an air of relief. "If you take that view, Dr. Locke——"

"I cannot take that view, sir!" said Dr. Locke sharply. "I require the fullest investigation into the matter."

"In that case, let the boy give the names, without any further waste of time!" snapped Dr. Voysey.

"Ponsonby, Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour," said Harry.

Dr. Voysey touched a bell, and directed the page who answered it to request Mr. Mobbs to bring Ponsonby, Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour to the study.

There was silence, while the arrival of the Fourth Form master and the four delinquents was waited for.

Mr. Mobbs arrived, with Pon & Co. at his heels.

Three of them were looking uncomfortable; but Ponsonby was perfectly self-possessed. He gave Wharton a cool glance, and his lip curled.

"Here are the boys, sir!" said Mr. Mobbs, barely acknowledging the presence of Dr. Locke.

"Thank you, Mr. Mobbs!" The Head of Highcliffe turned his glasses on the four. "Ponsonby! This boy, whose name is—is—is Wharton, accuses you and your friends of—of tying him to a tree. I think you said a tree, Dr. Locke——"

"Certainly!"

"A—a tree," resumed the Head of Highcliffe—"a tree in Hogben Grange. Did you do this?"

"No, sir!" answered Ponsonby. And the others shook their heads. Hard lying was the order of the day now.

"These boys deny it," said Dr. Voysey, blinking at the Head of Greyfriars. "It would have been indeed a very extraordinary proceeding on their part. I cannot, of course, credit it without proof. I presume that Wharton has some proof to offer?"

"My word, sir!" said Harry.

"H'm, h'm! You do not expect me to value your word more highly than Ponsonby's, I suppose?" said Dr. Voysey testily. "These boys deny it——"

"Certainly, sir!" said Ponsonby. "There's not a word of truth in it. We were nowhere near Hogben Grange yesterday!"

Harry Wharton's eyes gleamed. He had known what line the Highcliffe fellows would take—the only line they could take, if they were not to be expelled from their school. He had been quite aware that this visit to Highcliffe was futile.

The scorn in his look made Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour lower their eyes; but Ponsonby met his look with brazen assurance.

"If I may speak, sir——" said Mr. Mobbs, with a venomous glance at the Greyfriars junior.

"Proceed, Mr. Mobbs," said the Head of Highcliffe.

"I am bound to say, sir, that there has been continual trouble between Ponsonby and his friends and the Greyfriars boys; and that I am convinced that the fault lies with Greyfriars," said Mr. Mobbs. "I am bound to say that I regard this story as a reckless invention!"

Harry Wharton crimsoned.

"I expected Ponsonby to lie," he exclaimed; "and Mr. Mobbs knows that he is a liar, as well as a hooligan and a rascal!"

Dr. Voysey raised his eyebrows, staring at Wharton. Mr. Mobbs turned almost green.

"Dr. Locke, this language!" said the Head of Highcliffe.

"Wharton, calm yourself!" said Dr. Locke. "Sir, you cannot be surprised at the boy's indignation. He has been treated in a ruffianly manner, and is here at my command to state what has happened. I place the utmost reliance on his word."

"H'm, h'm! You cannot expect me to do so, sir, against the declarations of four boys belonging to this school," said Dr. Voysey. "Mr. Mobbs, I believe, relies on the good faith of these boys in his Form."

"Undoubtedly, sir," said Mr. Mobbs.

Dr. Locke rose to his feet.

"If that is the view you take, Dr. Voysey, I am wasting time here," he said. "I will only say that this is not the end of the matter. I have no doubt that Colonel Wharton will take it up, and that you will hear from his solicitors. I bid you good-morning, sir!"

Dr. Locke made Wharton a sign to follow him, and left the study. With a heightened colour he returned to his car, and drove away. His last remark had brought a worried frown to the Highcliffe headmaster's brow. Not that the old gentleman believed the accusation against the Highcliffe fellows; it was easier to take Pon & Co.'s word and dismiss the matter, than to go into it with thoroughness, and Dr. Voysey always chose the easiest path. But the idea of angry proceedings from an irate old colonel threatened disturbance to his repose. It was an unpleasant prospect.

He dismissed Mr. Mobbs and the juniors and remained frowning for some minutes. Then his glance wandered to the Rembrandt, and the cloud cleared from his brow. He forgot the disagreeable interview and the disagreeable consequences that might follow, in contemplation of his artistic treasure. And a little later he nodded drowsily off, and nodded, and nodded, till he was awakened by the announcement of lunch.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Cut in the Quad!

"LOOK here, Wharton——"

"Look here, old chap——"

"What the thump——"

"My esteemed asinine chum——"

The Co. all started together. And Harry Wharton's brow, which was already clouded, clouded more deeply.

He had returned from Highcliffe in the Head's car. Dr. Locke had been extremely annoyed by the result of his call at Highcliffe; though the junior could have told him what he might have expected.

Wharton had begged the Head, with great earnestness, not to report the matter to his uncle and guardian, Colonel Wharton, but to let it pass.

He disliked the fuss that was being made, still more he disliked being placed in the position of accuser. A schoolboy feud, settled by the schoolboys themselves, was one matter; but an affair taken up by the elders was quite

another, and Harry's position was an awkward and disagreeable one.

His headmaster had acceded at length, which was a relief. Probably Dr. Locke realised that the affair could only materialise in a bandying of accusations and denials, unpleasant all round, and leading to nothing.

Dr. Locke consented, at long last, to leave the matter where it was, and, indeed, commended Wharton for his forbearance and forgiving spirit—a commendation which was hardly deserved, for Wharton had no intention of allowing Ponsonby to escape unpunished. He wanted to end the fuss on the subject and take the punishment of Ponsonby into his own hands. That, of course, he did not confide to his headmaster!

Anyhow, the matter had ended, from an official point of view. Ponsonby & Co., at Highcliffe, were rejoicing over their escape; Dr. Voysey had already forgotten the matter; and Dr. Locke, probably, was relieved to have done with it.

Justice had not been done, but justice, after all, was fairly safe in the hands of Harry Wharton & Co., had the headmaster only known it! But Harry Wharton was not thinking of the young rascals of Highcliffe when the chums rejoined him in the quad after his return. Another matter was heavy on his mind.

The four juniors all spoke at once, and Wharton knew what was coming. His brow clouded more than ever. The Co. wanted to know; and what they wanted to know he could not tell them. He did not answer as they spoke, and there was something like irritation in their looks.

"Now, look here, Wharton," said Bob Cherry, "we've waited for you to come back, and now here you are. What did you mean by playing the goat when Lancaster of the Sixth spoke to you after class?"

Wharton was silent.

"Have you got something against him?" demanded Johnny Bull.

No answer.

"You practically insulted him," said Frank Nugent. "I suppose you had a reason?"

"Yes," said Harry at last.

"Well, give it a name," said Nugent tartly.

"I can't."

"And why not?" asked Johnny Bull.

Wharton coloured. There was a long pause.

"I'd rather you men didn't ask me," he said at last. "I—I don't want to have anything to say to Lancaster of the Sixth. No reason why I should ever have anything to do with him—he's in the Sixth, and I'm in the Lower Fourth. I'd rather keep clear of him. That's all."

"You, a Remove man, are taking it on yourself to bar a Sixth Form man, the most popular senior at Greyfriars, except old Wingate!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"Not exactly. I'd rather keep out of his way."

"Well, why?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What's the man done?"

"I—I can't say that he's done anything."

The Co. stared at Harry Wharton. They seemed hardly able to believe their ears, as the captain of the Remove made that reply.

"You can't say that old Lancaster has done anything, but you want to bar him!" exclaimed Bob. "Is that what you call sense?"

"The sensefulness is not terrific, my esteemed fatheaded Wharton," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I—I can't explain," stammered Wharton. "I'm not sure—I mean—I—I can't say anything. No need to talk about it! I'm simply going to keep out of the man's way. That's all."

Bob Cherry drew a deep breath. Bob was seldom angry, especially with his friends. But he was angry now.

"That won't do," he said abruptly.

"It will have to do!" said Harry Wharton tartly. "I suppose I can keep out of a man's way if I like."

"No, you can't! We knew Lancaster in the hols; he's taken a lot of notice of us since he came to Greyfriars—he's been thoroughly decent and kind and good-natured. He's given us tips at cricket—he's tea'd with us in the study. You admit that he's done nothing——"

"I don't know——"

"You must know whether he's done anything or not."

"I—I'm not sure——"

"Blessed if I can make you out. If you're not sure, you're bound to give the man the benefit of the doubt."

"That's only cricket," said Nugent.

"Can't you tell us what you fancy he may have done?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"I can't."

"And why not, you ass?"

"It wouldn't be fair to him, without being sure."

"Well, this won't do," said Bob. "Fellows will soon begin to notice. It may revive that rotten story that Loder of the Sixth started about Lancaster. You haven't forgotten that Loder was at a place called Danby Croft in the holidays, and that there was a burglary there, and Lancaster was staying there, and that Loder more than hinted that Lancaster knew something about it. He's shut up about that since, but if a fellow turns against Lancaster without a reason——" Bob broke off, staring at Wharton's face, which had grown crimson. "Wharton! You ass! You duffer! You're not chump enough to believe anything of that kind against Lancaster, are you?"

"For goodness' sake let the matter drop!" exclaimed Wharton. "I can't talk about it, and there's an end."

"There isn't an end!" exclaimed Bob. "If you're backing up a cad like Loder, against a splendid fellow like Lancaster, you can't expect your friends to follow your example. If you do expect it, you'll be jolly well disappointed."

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath.

"I'm not backing up Loder! Loder's chucked it, anyhow. But—I'm going to keep out of Lancaster's way. I'm not asking you fellows to do the same. But I—I must!"

"It will soon be all over the Remove. Skinner noticed you in the quad, and he's asked me what was up. Smithy asked Nugent. You're captain of the Form, and you can't play the goat without fellows noticing."

"It won't do, Harry," said Nugent.

"I can't help it," said Wharton desperately. "If you fellows knew——"

"Well, we should know if you told us," said Johnny Bull in his stolid way. "We're not thought-readers! Why not cough it up?"

Harry Wharton stood silent.

Evidently his new attitude towards the popular new senior was going to cause trouble between himself and his chums. They liked and admired and respected Lancaster, as Wharton himself had liked and admired and respected him—till last night! They could not understand—and he could not tell them. He could tell no one. He had not told Mr. Quelch—he had not told the Head—he had not told Inspector Grimes, of Courtfield, who had questioned him closely about the two crooks who had met under the ancient beech in Hogben Grange, while Wharton was tied up there in the dark.

How could he tell?

Back into his mind it came—the ruffianly, ferret-eyed Weasel lurking in the darkness under the beech, waiting for his confederate to join him, to crack the crib at Hogben Grange. The Weasel's nickname and description he had given to the police. But the other?

Inspector Grimes had questioned him about the other. Wharton had answered, honestly, that he had not seen the other in the dark, but that the Weasel had addressed him as the Wizard. And he had seen, from the inspector's manner, that that strange name, the Wizard, was known to the police.

But he had not stated that the Wizard, speaking to the other crook, had spoken in the voice of Lancaster of the Sixth!

That he could not say.

His mind tossed in tormenting doubt. Two voices might be exactly alike—even to the little tricks of expression. It was not likely, but it was possible, and while the merest doubt existed, he could not speak the name of a Greyfriars senior in such a connection.

That was impossible.

Wharton had fully intended to give Richard Lancaster the benefit of the doubt. He had intended to carry on the same as before. But he had found that he could not.

He shrank from the presence of the fellow whom his common sense told him was a crook, an impostor, a deceiver, a rascal; while his heart rejected what his mind was forced to admit.

There was a doubt. He clung to the doubt. There was little he would not have given, to have had his faith in Dick Lancaster restored. But it had been shaken to its very roots. While a shadow of a doubt remained, he could not and would not say a word against Lancaster. But he had to keep clear of him—he had to keep away from him.

His chums waited for him to speak. They waited in vain. The dark, harassed look on his face told of the torment and trouble in his mind. But he had nothing to say. Even to his chums, he could not whisper what he had discovered under the old beech in Hogben Grange—not while a doubt remained.

The chums of the Remove exchanged glances.

Wharton was silent, and his friends were silent; but their looks were growing grim. Wharton was their chum, but Lancaster of the Sixth was a hero in their eyes, and it was not cricket to turn against a man for nothing. And there had already been strange talk about the new man in the Sixth, which Wharton's attitude was likely to revive.

The bell for dinner rang out.

"Tiffin!" said Bob Cherry. "Got anything to say, Wharton?"

"No!"

"You don't expect us to be satisfied with that?"

No reply.

"Here comes Lancaster!" said Nugent uneasily.

Among the fellows heading for the House, was the tall, slim, handsome Sixth-Former. He was walking between Wingate and Gwynne of the Sixth, chatting with a pleasant smile on his face.

Wharton looked at him. Could that handsome, care-free fellow be what Loder of the Sixth had hinted—a crook? It seemed impossible. And yet—and yet——

Lancaster glanced at the group of juniors, left his Sixth Form friends to walk on to the House, and came towards them. Evidently he intended to speak.

The great man of the Sixth, the famous hard-hitter of First Eleven matches, was actually seeking them out—making them objects of envy to all the juniors in sight!

The Co. looked anxiously at Wharton. If he played the goat now, it would be marked, pointed, a score of fellows would notice——

There was a struggle in Wharton's mind. He wanted, he longed, to act as usual; to give the man the benefit of the doubt, such doubt as there was. But he could not. Back in his mind came that voice under the dark old beech—the voice of the crook and cracksman nicknamed the Wizard—tone for tone the voice of Richard Lancaster of the Sixth.

He hated the knowledge that was forced on him; he almost hated himself for not having more faith in the man against the evidence of his senses. But there it was, and he could not help it. That handsome face was a lie; that carefree manner was a cheat; and a sudden loathing took possession of Wharton, and subdued all other feelings. He turned and walked towards the House.

Lancaster stopped dead.

The thing was too pointed to be ignored. A junior of the Lower Fourth had "cut" a Sixth Form man in open quad.

Fellows stared on all sides.

Billy Bunter, who was rolling up eager for dinner, stopped, his eyes wide open behind his big spectacles, forgetful even of dinner in his astonishment.

There was a murmur of voices.

Bob Cherry, red with anger, made a jump after the captain of the Remove. He grabbed him by the arm and swung him round.

"Wharton!" Bob's voice was husky with rage. "Are you mad? You fool, how dare you?"

Wharton shook off his hand.

"Mind," said Bob, his voice trembling. "I'm done with you, for one, if you keep on with this."

Wharton walked into the House.

Wharton hit out with all his force and Hobson went down on his back in the quad, gasping, spluttering, and holding a streaming crimson nose. "Oooooogh! Gug-gug-ug! Oooooch!" he ejaculated breathlessly.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Condemned by the School!

MR. QUELCH frowned.

There was undue excitement at the Remove table, the head of which was adorned by the majestic person of Henry Samuel Quelch.

Mr. Quelch was a sedate and orderly gentleman. He liked sedateness and orderliness in others. In fact, he insisted upon these great qualities.

They were distinctly missing from the Remove table at tiffin to-day. Even Billy Bunter was not giving his whole attention to his dinner. For once, Bunter was not hurrying at sixty miles per hour through his first and second helpings to make sure of a third.

Mr. Quelch, naturally, was annoyed. Some excitement was thrilling his Form from end to end. He did not like it. He did not approve of it.

Other masters present in Hall had the same experience. Mr. Hacker, at the Shell table, found his Form whispering more than masticating. Mr. Capper frowned upon a murmuring Fourth. Mr. Prout eyed with portentous disapproval a muttering Fifth. Even the fags of the Third and Second seemed to have caught the infection.

Something was up—unknown to the masters—unknown to many of the seniors and juniors, but spreading in whispers and nods.

At the high table, where the Sixth Form sat in state, Lancaster of the Sixth ate his dinner with his usual calm repose of manner. Nothing in Richard Lancaster's manner indicated that he observed anything out of the common.

At the Remove table, Harry Wharton sat with his eyes on his plate; but his cheeks were red, and he ate scarcely anything. The junior was far from sharing the self-possession and aplomb of the schoolboy crook.

Wharton, as captain of the Remove, and one of the finest junior cricketers at Greyfriars, had a certain place in the public eye. But certainly he had never received such attention as he was receiving now.

As the whispering spread, fellows craned their necks to look at Wharton. He seemed the centre of attraction.

Only his comrades did not look at him. Bob Cherry sat glumly frowning. Johnny Bull was as grim as a gargoyle. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's dusky face was hard as bronze; even the good-natured Nugent was obviously perturbed, angry, and resentful. And they carefully ignored the chum who had always been inseparable from them. That alone was enough to cause excitement in the Remove—a break in the hitherto closely united and happy company of the Famous Five. Certainly, it would not have excited fellows in other Forms, who did not care two straws what went on in the Remove. But fellows in all Forms stared at Wharton now, with the keenest interest and curiosity.

Wharton, without looking up once, was keenly conscious of it.

He knew that he shared with Lancaster of the Sixth the whole attention

of the School. But he could not carry it off with the indifferent smile of Lancaster.

His heart was heavy enough.

He regretted what he had done—yet he knew that, in the same circumstances, he would have done the same again, simply because he could not have helped it.

Every instinct in his nature rose in revolt against the impostor, the cheat, the humbug, the deceiver.

There was a doubt. He kept on repeating to himself that there was a doubt—sufficient doubt, at least, to make it impossible for him to utter a word in his own justification. He could not, and would not, say a word against the man admired by the whole School. But he could not, and would not, speak to him as if nothing had happened. That was impossible.

But to the rest of Greyfriars, knowing nothing of what Wharton knew, it was a sensation.

Lancaster of the Sixth had been seen by a crowd of fellows to walk up to the juniors, to honour them with a word or two—an act of condescension on the part of so great a man. Wharton of the Remove had been seen to turn his back on the great man, cutting him dead.

The unexampled cheek of a junior, in daring to "cut" a Sixth Form man, fairly took the School's breath away.

There was no mistake about it—fifty fellows had seen it, in open quad. It was amazing—unexampled—almost unnerving.

Unless the kid was mad, there was no explanation that occurred to most of the fellows.

That he would be called over the coals for his cheek, was a certainty. Lancaster might be expected to thrash him for his impudence. Wingate, the captain of the school, was giving Wharton a look, from the high table, which indicated that he intended to speak to him later on.

Why Wharton had done it was a mystery. Skinner of the Remove suggested to his friends that he had done it to make a sensation, and bring himself into prominence; a suggestion that made Snoop and Stott and Fisher T. Fish snigger. Loder of the Sixth wondered whether the kid had found out anything about Lancaster, and felt pretty certain that he had. Other fellows made all sorts of surmises. But all agreed that Wharton was a cheeky young ass. that he ought to be kicked, and that he was booked for a high old time.

Dinner that day seemed endless to Harry Wharton.

He ate little; but kept his eyes on his food as if he loved it as much as Billy Bunter.

He wondered whether the meal would ever end. It dragged its weary length along like a wounded snake.

But it was over at last.

Hall cleared, and a swarming crowd of fellows went buzzing into the quad, all talking, and with only one topic, the frightful cheek of that impudent young tick, Wharton of the Remove.

Wharton glanced at his chums as he went out. They did not glance at him. Frank Nugent hesitated for a moment, and then, with an averted face, followed Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull, who stalked away. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh also hesitated; but he shook his dusky head and followed the others.

Wharton set his lips as he went out by himself.

His friends had turned him down. There was a rift in the lute. There had been rifts in the lute before; but this time it was a rift with a vengeance. Under the eyes of a crowd of fellows, his friends turned their backs on him, as he had turned his back on Dick Lancaster.

Deep and bitter anger rose in his breast. After all, they knew him; they knew that he was not given to acting thoughtlessly, frivolously, unthinkingly. They might have trusted him, and borne with him.

But that feeling was brief.

A little reflection showed Wharton how his friends must look at the matter. He had turned suddenly, inexplicably, on a fellow who had always been kind and friendly to him; whose staunchest backer he had been. He had explained nothing. The Co. still felt the same towards Lancaster as ever. It followed that they could not feel the same towards Wharton.

They were sore, angry, irritated, incensed. And Wharton was reasonable enough to realise that they could not help being so. So long as he kept up his present attitude, they were turning him down. It was a blow to him; a heavy blow; but it was only to be expected. And he made up his mind, sensibly enough, to be patient, to prevent the breach from widening, if he could; and to wait for better times, without allowing hasty temper or resentment to betray him.

Some Fifth Form men came towards Wharton as he walked alone in the quad. They did not speak to him; but Blundell of the Fifth kicked him—hard. Potter of the Fifth followed it up with another kick; Greene kicked him in his turn, and then Coker, and then Bland.

Harry Wharton was not the man to be kicked with impunity. Neither were the Remove the men to let their Form captain be kicked without rushing to the rescue. But circumstances were altered now. Wharton staggered to and fro under so many kicks, and Remove men who saw the incident only grinned. The Fifth Form men walked away, still without speaking a word to Wharton. They had made their opinion clear of the junior who had had the cheek to insult Lancaster; they had, in fact, made it painfully clear. Harry Wharton was left gasping.

"You've got what you've asked for, old bean," remarked Vernon-Smith.

Wharton gave him a grim look.

"In fact, I've a good mind to give you one myself," added the Bounder.

"Try it on!" said Wharton savagely.

"What did you insult Lancaster for, you booby?"

"Find out!"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders and walked away. Hobson, of the Shell, came along. Perhaps encouraged by the impunity of the Fifth Form men, Hobby, of the Shell, proceeded to make his opinion clear also. He landed a kick. The next moment earthquakes happened to Hobson of the Shell.

Wharton was very near boiling-point by that time. James Hobson, quite unintentionally, served as a scapegoat. The captain of the Remove came at him with gleaming eyes and clenched fists.

"That's for——" Hobson was beginning. "Yaroooh! My hat! Yoop!" he continued in a howl of anguish, as Wharton's fists crashed on him, right and left.

Thump, thump, thump! Bang, bang, bang!

Hobson of the Shell was a good man with his hands. He was as plucky as any man at Greyfriars. But he was simply nowhere now. The enraged Removite knocked him right and left.

For two or three minutes Hobson of the Shell almost wondered whether the crack of doom had come, and whether the universe was falling in fragments round him.

Then he was left lying on his back in the quad, gasping, spluttering, and holding a streaming crimson nose, and ejaculating breathlessly:

"Oooogh! Gug-gug-ug! Ooooogh!"

Harry Wharton walked away, leaving Hobson for dead, as it were. As he passed under the elms Sykes of the Sixth stepped towards him and kicked him. The helpless junior spun round on him furiously.

"You Sixth Form cad, keep your hoofs to yourself!" yelled Wharton.

Sykes gave him a grim look.

"You measly little sweep, I'll kick you across the quad if you give me any back-chat! By gad, I will, anyhow!"

Wharton dodged another kick, and departed. It was futile to enter into a scrap with a towering Sixth Form man. Likewise, it was against all rules and laws, written and unwritten. Sykes was not a bully, like Loder or Carne—every man at Greyfriars knew that he would not kick a junior unless that junior thoroughly deserved it. Wharton, as a matter of fact, liked Sykes of the Sixth, and respected him. He knew how Sykes felt about the matter, and could not really blame him.

Lancaster of the Sixth appeared on the path. He did not take any notice of Wharton this time. He walked on apparently without seeing the junior, for which Wharton was thankful. But Gwynne, coming along a few minutes later, looked at Wharton, and made a movement towards him—and the hapless captain of the Remove gave him a wide berth only in time. He knew that another kick was coming.

Bob Cherry and the rest of the Co. were under the elms. Wharton moved towards them, and they walked away together. He stopped, with a crimson flush on his face.

"He, he, he!"

That fat cachinnation came from Billy Bunter. Wharton's eyes gleamed round at the fat junior.

"You podgy, cackling chump——" he began.

"He, he, he!" chortled Bunter.

Wharton made a stride at him, stopped, and turned away. Bunter was not worth kicking. He walked back towards the House. Temple, Dabney & Co., lounging by the doorway, looked at him.

"Here's the cheeky cad," said Cecil Temple. "Here's the cheeky fag that cuts Sixth Form men!"

"You measly worm!" said Fry of the Fourth. "What did you mean by it—insulting the man who won the Rookwood match for Greyfriars? If I were old Lancaster I'd jolly well thrash you!"

"Let's kick him!" suggested Temple.

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

Wingate of the Sixth looked out of the doorway. He appeared just in time to prevent a wild and whirling scrap.

"Wharton!" he rapped out.

"Yes, Wingate?" said Harry resignedly.

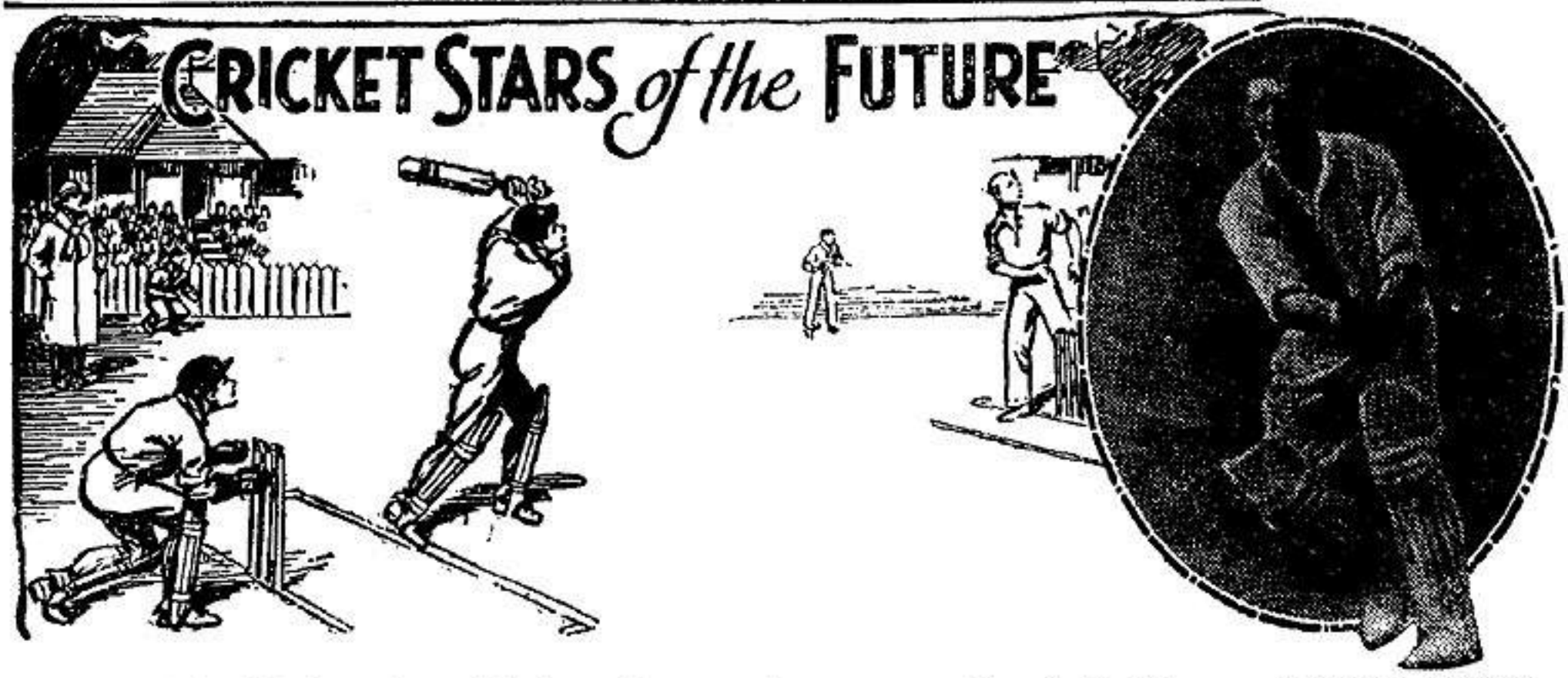
"I've something to say to you. Follow me to my study."

Wharton, with a clouded face and a heavy heart, followed the captain of Greyfriars.

(*Continued on page* 12.)

THE FIRST OF AN INTERESTING SERIES OF ARTICLES DEALING WITH—

CRICKET STARS of the FUTURE



THIS WEEK Our Special Contributor gives you a Nutshell History of TOM COOK, the great Sussex batsman and famous footballer.

A Success at Soccer, Too!

THERE are few, if any, players who hold out so much promise for the future as does Tom Cook, the great Sussex batsman and famous footballer. Yet when he was first engaged by the Sussex County Club as far back as 1922, few would have predicted anything like a cricket career such as we associate with men who are likely to add to England's laurels. But let me tell the complete story.

Cook was born and brought up in the village of Cuckfield, where he attended day school until he was thirteen years of age. He was elected captain of the cricket team two years before he left.

When Cook was thirteen his parents sent him to a school called York Place, at Brighton, and it was there that he found the summer game to be on a very much higher plane. Indeed, the standard was so high that Cook was unsuccessful in his efforts to get into the school team and had to be content with being regarded as a promising footballer.

Eventually he left school to take up engineering. He was apprenticed to a big firm, with whom he stayed for eighteen months, leaving to join the Navy when the Great War was approaching its fourth year. He was under age, but he wanted to "do his bit." When the war came to an end he resumed his engineering studies—this time at the Crystal Palace School of Engineering—and eventually cast about to find a suitable job.

Trade depression had set in, however, and just as Cook was giving up hope he was asked if he'd care to sign on as a professional footballer with Brighton and Hove Albion. He was a success and gained for himself a reputation as one of the best and fairest of players in the League.

A Meteoric Rise!

SINCE leaving school—a matter of some years—Tom only played two games of cricket, both matches being for the second eleven of Cuckfield. In these he did nothing which called for comment, yet a Mr. E. W. Woollen, who saw Cook play, asked him if he'd care to have a trial at the Sussex County ground with a view to taking up cricket professionally.

A "dud" cricketer while at school and then only two games in about five or six years, Cook did not know what to reply. But he loved cricket and had confidence in himself, so he was about the happiest young man in Cuckfield when he rushed home to give the news to his parents.

And it was in June, 1922, that Cook travelled from Cuckfield to Brighton and took his turn at bowling in the nets, a large number of other young cricketers being there for the same purpose. He was only there for bowling; but, to his great disappointment, he never seemed to get the ball past a batsman, and, when lunch time arrived, he was prepared to journey homeward.

Then, to his surprise, he was given a pair of pads and a bat and told to go in and have a knock. The reader must remember that when Cook commenced to bat in those nets on the county ground it was only the third occasion of his having had a bat in his hands since he left school. However, he stuck there and brought off a number of good shots, after which he was taken to the secretary who arranged for Cook to stay in the "nursery."

But again there was something uncanny about Tom Cook, as about six weeks after joining the "nursery"—on July 1st, 1922—he played for Sussex in their County Championship fixture against Leicestershire. Owing to his great reverence for first-class wicket-keepers, Cook was exceedingly careful to remain within bounds; indeed, he overdid it and, when 13, trod on his wicket and flattened all three stumps.

The next match, versus Lancashire, was to be played at Liverpool on July 5th, and Tom Cook was again included in the Sussex eleven, this time playing magnificently and scoring 50 not out, and 26 not out. His exhibition was such as gained him a permanent place in the team and, unless kept away by indisposition, he has played in every match since.

There are hundreds of first-class cricketers in England to-day, but there is not one who can boast of such a meteoric rise from the comparative obscurity of a rural second eleven to the first eleven of a first-class county in a period not exceeding five weeks.

Never Give Up Trying!

I FORGET the real occasion when Cook got his first century in first-class cricket, although I was present at Lords when he got it while playing for Sussex against Middlesex.

It was a feat to be remembered, because not only did it commence the long list of hundreds that he has since compiled, but it gave wonderful and direct evidence of the magnificent spirit which prevails in what is often termed "spectacular cricket."

Cook was playing nicely until he got into the nineties and then it was obvious to everybody that he became nervous. When he made a run he looked round at the score-board. He drove a ball and got 3. And again he looked round at the board and began another period of nerves. To cut a long story short, Durston, I think it was, who was bowling, walked down the pitch and asked him if he had ever scored a hundred in a county game, and after getting a negative reply this great bowler sent him down a ball purposely for Cook to hit. To the best of my recollection this was during Cook's first or second season.

I can think of only one similar action in first-class cricket, and that was many years ago, when S. M. J. Woods, the Australian and Somerset fast bowler, was playing against Oxford University, for whom G. O. Smith was getting his first trial. Woods had skittled out the first three or four batsmen, when he saw poor white-faced Smith coming out to bat. Smith, who eventually became the greatest centre-forward Association football has ever had, was shaking with nervousness, and Woods met him before he got to the wickets.

"This your first trial?" he asked. "Yes," replied Smith. "Well, don't be afraid," went on Woods. "I'll bowl you three long hops on the leg side for a start. Hit each one for four and you'll soon feel confident." The great fast bowler kept his promise: was hit for 12 in three balls—and Smith scored a century. That year the since-famous G. O. got a hundred in the Oxford and Cambridge match at Lords.

Last season Tom Cook was in his best form and played many fine innings, four of them being over a hundred. I was present at Hove when he made 278 against Hampshire and I never saw a better "knock." There was great enthusiasm amongst the players as well as the spectators as he went on seemingly for ever, and everybody roared with laughter when, with Cook's score at 250 not out, a man with a raucous voice shouted: "Send for the fire brigade! They'll put him out."

I saw Cook a day or two ago and he attributed his success to the fact that he never gives up trying. "I try as much to-day as I did on the occasion when I had to bat in the nets at Hove in 1922. I was then without experience; I was practically a stranger to cricket, although I loved the game; and it was honest endeavour which got me with the ground staff of the Sussex club. *And I believe any youth who loves the game and tries hard all the time can do what I have done.*"

What encouragement to the boys of our Empire!

UNMASKED!

(Continued from page 10.)

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Down on His Luck!

WINGATE stood, his hand resting on the table, and on the ashplant that lay there. His eyes were fixed on the harassed, troubled face of the junior who stood before him. Wingate was angry—deeply angry; but he was perplexed, too. Wharton's conduct puzzled him as much as it puzzled others who had seen it, or heard about it.

"I suppose you know what you're here for, Wharton?" he said gruffly. "You're going to get six!"

Wharton made no answer; he had guessed that already.

"But first," continued Wingate, "I want to know what you mean by this? I can't make you out. What you've done is cheeky and silly. But you're not the kid to make a fool of yourself for nothing. I can't make you out. A Sixth Form man—a splendid fellow all round—a man that the whole School is proud of—goes out of his way to be kind to you because he met your people in the holidays, I suppose, and because he's a good-natured chap. You turn your back on him in the most pointed way in open quad, under the eyes of a hundred fellows, and cut him dead. If you're not mad, what do you mean by it?"

No answer.

"You can't imagine that it matters two straws to a man like Lancaster whether you want to see him or not," said Wingate. "You can't imagine that he would ever have noticed your existence at all, except from good nature and because your uncle knew his father in the War."

Wharton was still silent.

"After this, of course, Lancaster will probably kick you, if you have the cheek to go near him," said Wingate. "I don't understand why he did not kick you across the quad when you insulted him. Any other Sixth Form man would have. He's too jolly good tempered."

Wharton thought that he could understand. Lancaster had divined something—guessed something. He was not in the dark as to Wharton's motives, like all the rest of Greyfriars. The schoolboy crook knew. He must know that Wharton had discovered something during that eventful night at Hogben Grange. And though he kept a face of indifference it was likely enough that he was in fear that the junior would talk of what he had discovered.

"Haven't you anything to say?" demanded the Greyfriars captain, irritated afresh by the junior's silence.

"No, Wingate."

"No excuse to offer?"

"No."

"You're not even sorry?"

Wharton hesitated.

"Well, yes. I never meant to insult Lancaster—I never meant—I mean——" He stammered. "Look here, Wingate, Lancaster doesn't care what a fag thinks of him. I know he'd rather have nothing said."

"Of course he doesn't care a straw, and he seems quite willing to let you get away with your impudence," said Wingate contemptuously. "But I happen to be a prefect, and I don't allow Lower boys to insult the Sixth. If you've nothing to say, bend over that chair."

In silence Wharton bent over the chair. The ashplant rose and fell. It was a severe six, and after the last stroke had fallen Wharton's face was pale, though he had uttered no sound.

Wingate pointed to the door with the cane.

"You can go!" he snapped with a contempt in his look and tone that cut Wharton much more deeply than the six. "Get out!"

The six had been severe enough; but Wharton hardly felt it as he went down the passage. Never had the hapless junior's heart been so heavy.

Lancaster of the Sixth passed him in the passage as he went. He passed him without a glance.

Harry Wharton went to his study in the Remove. The studies were deserted at that time of day, and there was no one in the Remove passage. He was glad of it—he did not want to meet the eyes of his Form-fellows.

He closed the door of Study No. 1, and moved restlessly about the room.

Voices reached him from the quad through the open window, cheery voices in the bright June sunshine. They jarred on his ears now.

His thoughts were bitter.

More than ever it was borne in on his mind that he had made no mistake that strange night under the ancient beech in Hogben Grange. It was Lancaster's voice he had heard. It was Lancaster of the Sixth who bore the odd name of the "Wizard" in a gang of crooks. It was Lancaster who, in company with the ferret-eyed "Weasel," had cracked the safe in Sir Julius Hogben's mansion. He knew it—knew it! But he could not say so. He hated the very thought of uttering what he knew.

But to all Greyfriars Dick Lancaster was the athletic, popular senior; the tremendous cricketer who won matches for the school; the splendid sportsman who was almost a god in the eyes of hero-worshipping fellows.

That was what he seemed—and only Harry Wharton knew what he was! Loder of the Sixth suspected. Wharton knew now that Loder's hints and whispers about the new man were not merely the outcome of envy and dislike. But what the bully of the Sixth only suspected, Wharton knew.

And yet there was a doubt—a torturing doubt. All the time there was a possibility that he was in error, that he had misjudged a splendid fellow who had been kindness itself to him.

If he could only be sure! And yet, at the bottom of his heart, he knew that he was sure. His troubled mind swayed to and fro.

The study door opened, and he looked round at Frank Nugent.

Nugent's face was overcast, his manner hesitating. He closed the door after him, and stood looking at his chum. Wharton smiled faintly. He could understand Nugent's mixed feelings.

"Well?" he said at last.

"What did Wingate——" began Nugent.

"He gave me six."

"Well, I suppose you expected that, after what you did?"

"Yes."

"Why did you do it, Harry?" Nugent came nearer to his chum, and his voice was earnest. "Old chap, what is it you've got in your mind? You can't believe anything against the man. That stuff Loder talked a few weeks ago—you laughed at it, the same as we did. Loder himself took it all back in public. Lancaster shut him up somehow."

"I wonder how!" said Wharton quietly. For he knew now that Loder had not "shut up!" because he had seen his mistake. How had Lancaster forced him to eat his words? By some underhand method—some method that would only have occurred to a crook, that could only have been used by a crook?

"We know that Lancaster knew that man Weasel," went on Nugent. "He explained it—the man was an old servant of his uncle's. There's nothing in that. I suppose you take the fellow's word on that?"

Wharton knew that he could not take Lancaster's word on anything now. But he did not answer.

"You know that Lancaster helped to chase the bank raiders at Courtfield, and it was really Lancaster who got back the loot," said Nugent.

"I know the bank raiders got away."

Nugent started.

"You don't think——"

"Don't talk about it, Frank. I've got nothing to say—there's nothing I can say. I've nothing to say against Lancaster."

"It's pretty plain to me, at least, what you've got in your mind," said Nugent. "I think you must be mad, Wharton."

"Let it go at that, then," said Wharton wearily. "The fellows are turning me down right and left, and I can't help it. If you turn me down with the rest, I shan't complain."

Nugent compressed his lips.

"I can't turn you down. I'm your oldest friend here. We've been pals too long for me to turn you down. But it's no good making out that I can feel the same so long as you keep this up, for I can't."

Wharton made no answer, and Nugent, after a troubled pause, left the study without speaking again.

The captain of the Remove leaned on the window, and stared out into the sunny quad.

He was left alone. His best friends had turned against him. Every man in the place seemed down on him. He could not justify himself without speaking out; and he could not not speak out. If only he had not made that bitter discovery! If only those Highcliffe cads had not left him tied under the beech where the schoolboy crook had met his confederate in the darkness of the night! And at that thought Wharton's eyes gleamed, and his teeth came hard together.

Ponsonby was the cause of it all. Ponsonby and his cowardly vengeance for a well-deserved thrashing, had landed Wharton in this. A ruffianly outrage, for which the cad of Highcliffe had escaped punishment, was the root of the whole trouble that had fallen on the captain of the Remove.

And Pon was rejoicing in his escape—rejoicing in the way he had lied successfully, and pulled the wool over the drowsy eyes of his headmaster—rejoicing in the way he had got away with it. Wharton's eyes glinted. Ponsonby, at least, should pay, he told himself savagely. The cowardly malice of the cad of Highcliffe had brought all this upon him—and Ponsonby should pay for all!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Highcliffe Match!

"THRILLIN', ain't it?" yawned the Caterpillar.

Courtenay did not answer.

The chums of the Highcliffe Fourth were standing among a crowd of fellows on Big Side at Highcliffe School. They were watching a First Eleven match. Langley and his men

The " Holiday Annual " rose and fell. It rose in Nugent's hand, and fell on Bunter's bullet head. There was a wild roar from the Owl of the Remove. " Ow ! Yoop ! Wharrer you up to ? Ow ! "

were playing the First Eleven from Greyfriars. Courtenay had eyes only for the game, and chiefly for the man who was, at the moment, batting for Greyfriars—a handsome, graceful fellow, who seemed to play with the stiffest bowling—a new man at Greyfriars named Lancaster, whom he saw for the first time that day.

It was a wonderful innings, and it chained Courtenay's attention. Highcliffe had gone in first and secured 90. Greyfriars were already 150 on their innings, of which 100 belonged to Lancaster. He had just completed his century, amid a roar of cheering from a hundred Greyfriars men who had come over to watch the game.

Near Courtenay and the Caterpillar stood four Remove men from Greyfriars—Bob Cherry, Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh. But Harry Wharton was not with them.

It was a week since the affair at Hogben Grange. During that week the rift in the lute had not mended.

A little farther off Ponsonby & Co. were lounging, taking an idle interest in the game. Highcliffe was a slack school, but the news of the great innings going on on Big Side, had drawn a considerable crowd. Pon & Co. had condescended to give the cricket a look-in.

"Thrillin', what?" repeated the Caterpillar.

"Don't jaw, old chap," said Courtenay. "That man's a marvel! The best man Greyfriars ever sent out! They say he's a new man in the school."

"Terrific, isn't he?" drawled the Caterpillar. "Knockin' spots off the jolly old leather, by gad! Listen to Cherry's dulcet whisper."

"Bravo!" Bob Cherry was roaring, in tones that were far from dulcet. "Good old Lancaster! Well hit, sir!"

"Hurrah!" yelled Johnny Bull.

"That's batting, what?" grinned Nugent.

"The batfulness is terrific and preposterous!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Our esteemed and idiotic side will not have to bat again!"

"No fear!" said Bob. "Highcliffe will never get level. We're going to beat them by a jolly old innings."

"Shouldn't wonder if Wingate declares soon!" remarked Johnny Bull. "We're going to win this by an innings and a few wickets over!"

"Bravo!" yelled the juniors again, as the mighty bat swept the ball away, and the white-clad figures flashed along the pitch.

Lancaster of the Sixth was at the top of his form. His handsome face was bright, his eyes sparkling. He looked as fresh as paint, after making a century. Greyfriars men opined that he was good for another century, if Wingate did not declare.

"Good man, good man!" exclaimed Courtenay.

"Glad to see Highcliffe licked, old bean?" murmured the Caterpillar.

"The man's splendid!" said Courtenay. "He will be snapped up for the county. He's wonderful!"

"Seems a decent sort of bloke," remarked the Caterpillar, his eyes lazily on the great batsman of Greyfriars. "I rather like his looks!"

"Everybody likes him, I think," said Courtenay. "I noticed even Mobby speaking to him civilly."

"My dear man, I saw him speakin' to the Head after lunch," said the Caterpillar with a grin, "and the old Beak was charmed. He's certainly got a way with him. Tactful with old gents."

"There he goes again! Well hit!" exclaimed Courtenay.

"Never saw a bloke so jolly at seein' his school licked," grinned the Caterpillar. "'And even the ranks of Tuscany could scarce forbear a cheer, what? as jolly old Macfadden says—was his name Macfadden?"

"Macaulay, you ass!"

"I knew it was some sort of a Mac. I say, old thing, Wharton isn't here," yawned the Caterpillar. "I gather that there's some trouble on between him and his friends at Greyfriars."

"Is there? I'm sorry," said Courtenay.

"Oh, I dare say it's nothin' serious—kids will be kids!" said the Caterpillar tolerantly. "It's more luck for Pon. I fancy they'd have scragged him, by this time, for the dirty trick he played on Wharton last week; only this jolly old rift in the lute has intervened. I dare say that's why Wharton has asked me to see him."

"Has he? Why?"

"I think he's yearning to give Pon what Pon begged for that night at Hogben Grange; and, lackin' the usual backin' of his strenuous friends, he's rather at a loss," said De Courcy.

"Dear old Pon has been keepin' within gates lately. Bein' of a pleasant, peaceful nature, he hates the idea of runnin' into a ferocious Greyfriars man, thirsting for gore, outside. I understand that Wharton has been lookin' for him a lot and not finding him."

"Rotten fun!" growled Courtenay.

The Caterpillar nodded.

"I don't believe Pon would take first

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(*Continued from page* 13.)

prize if they handed out prizes for pluck," he admitted. "I fancy he's watchin' the cricket to-day because he doesn't care to roam the merry countryside in case a Greyfriars man might be lookin' for him. Wharton will have to keep it bottled up, unless he comes over here and corners Pon in his study. And I suppose he couldn't quite do that."

"There he goes!"

"Who—Pon?"

"No, you fathead; that man Lancaster! Look!"

"Oh, rippin'!" said the Caterpillar without looking. "This is somethin' like cricket, old thing; though, to tell you the truth, I never think a cricket match wholly successful without a bag of cherries. What do you think?"

"Fathead!"

"He's a good man, and a good-lookin' man," said the Caterpillar, his lazy eyes turning on Lancaster as he made good at the wicket once more. "They're certainly goin' to beat us by an innings. Well, let's cheer the enemy, if our friends can't win. It's a poor heart that never rejoices. I wonder why he was suckin' up to old Voysey, though?"

Courtenay turned from the game at that to stare at his friend.

"What the thump do you mean, Caterpillar?"

"Exactly what I say," drawled De Courcy. "You see, I saw it—after lunch. Our never-sufficiently-to-be-respected old Beak was takin' his little trot under the oaks by his study window. This sportsman, Lancaster, had left his friends and was strollin' round, no doubt seein' the interestin' sights of Highcliffe, as he's never been here before.

"Old Voysey, of course, is one of the interestin' sights—an imposin' relic of ancient times."

"Look here, you ass!"

"Still, you would hardly expect a sleepy, snuffy old gent to interest a man like Lancaster, would you? But he did. He took on Voysey in a graceful, tactful, agreeable sort of way; respectful youth addressin' venerable age; an' all that; and I could see the old boy was charmed. Charmed is the word!

"He was glad to make Lancaster's acquaintance—said so. Liked his manners. I watched them goin' it, wonderin' what on earth a man like Lancaster was wastin' his time like that for.

"Do you know, the man's not only a cricketer; he can talk pictures."

"Pictures?" repeated Courtenay.

"Not picture-palace pictures," grinned the Caterpillar. "Works of art—jolly old masters—Rubens, Rembrandt, Michaelangelo & Co. Knows the whole bag of tricks. Old Voysey was just charmed. You can guess what followed."

"No; what?"

"Voysey asked him in, to show him his smudge. I didn't follow them into Voysey's study—not bein' asked. Lancaster's had the jolly old privilege of seein' the Head's Rembrandt, old thing. An honour reserved for really distinguished visitors. Poor man must have been fearfully bored—unless," the Caterpillar added as an afterthought, "unless he really takes some interest in smudges."

Courtenay laughed.

"I was mildly interested," said the Caterpillar. "Every fellow I meet is an interestin' study in one way or another. But why a magnificent bloke like that man Lancaster wasted half an hour on a snuffy old donkey like our beloved Head, beats me.

"I keep on wondering why he was greasing up to Voysey. You see, it's not my bizney, so I'm frightfully interested."

"What utter rot!" said Courtenay a little sharply. "He doesn't look the man to grease up to anybody. If he's interested in art, most likely he's heard of the Head's Rembrandt and was glad of a chance to see it, happening to be here. Don't be an ass, Rupert!"

The Caterpillar sighed.

"Floored again," he said. "Hallo, what's that row about?" It was a roar from a hundred Greyfriars throats.

"It's a boundry, you ass! Watch the game and don't jaw."

"I'm afraid I'm borin' you, old tulip." The Caterpillar looked at his watch. "I'm going to see Wharton—special appointment at the bunshop. I'm frightfully cut up at missin' the rest of the game. I ask you, as a pal, to see what happens and tell me afterwards. That will be my only solace. Ta-ta!"

The Caterpillar sauntered lazily away Courtenay hardly missed his chum; he had eyes only for the game.

As most of the fellows expected, Wingate declared the innings closed at 200. The Highcliffe second innings passed swiftly Lancaster of the Sixth, who had done wonders with the bat, proceeded to do wonders with the ball. Twice the hat trick elicited a wild roar from the Greyfriars crowd on the Highcliffe ground. The innings collapsed deplorably, leaving Greyfriars winners by an innings, wickets, and runs.

"Lancaster, Lancaster!"

The name was on every tongue. That evening in Hall at Greyfriars the wonderful cricketer had an ovation that made the old rafters ring. Fellows of all Forms stood and cheered when Lancaster of the Sixth came into Hall; and his face, flushed and happy and pleased, had never looked so handsome. And Harry Wharton, looking at him then, wondered.

Was this the secret crook who had whispered to the ferret-eyed Weasel under the dark branches of the beech at midnight? Was he—could he have been mistaken? His mind tossed in troubled doubt, and he wondered.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Rift in the Lute!

HARRY WHARTON laid down his pen and pushed his books away; Nugent rose from the table in Study No. 1 and stood hesitating as if in doubt.

"Coming down?" he said at last.

"Not just yet."

Nugent moved slowly to the door.

Life had not run on its usual smooth lines of late among the chums of the Greyfriars Remove.

The rift was still in the lute.

Certainly there was no open breaking off of the old friendship. The Famous Five were still on friendly terms. But all the Remove knew that the once-united Co. were no longer united. When they met they were civil and friendly, but they did not meet so often as before, and they parted sooner. They were under a constraint that made the old frank, careless friendship impossible.

Skinner and his friends, who had charitably hoped to see the disunited chums at daggers drawn, were disappointed. One or two good-natured fellows like Lord Mauleverer and Tom Redwing, who had tried to heal the breach, had also been disappointed.

The breach remained.

It had to remain while the present circumstances lasted. The incident in the quad of the captain of the Remove cutting Lancaster dead before all Greyfriars had excited tremendous interest at the time, but it had passed out of the fellows' thoughts.

Schoolboy memories are not long, and every day had its own incidents and interests.

Harry Wharton was careful to keep out of the Sixth-Former's way, and Lancaster was equally careful on his side not to come into contact with Wharton. So there was no fresh incident to renew interest in the matter. The juniors only remembered that Wharton had cheeked Lancaster, and that they were all down on him for it, but the affair faded from the minds of most of them.

With the Co. it was different. They could not help resenting an attitude they failed to understand, and they resented Wharton's refusal to give the slightest explanation of his conduct. They felt that he was giving credence to the miserable rumours Loder had set afloat about the splendid new fellow; rumours that he had scorned as much as any other fellow at one time. They felt that they could not forgive him for that. They really were waiting for him to "come round," as Bob expressed it, and admit that he had made an ass of himself.

But Wharton gave no sign of "coming round." He only wanted to let the matter alone, to let it fall into oblivion, to get it out of his mind if he could.

He wanted to forget that night at Hogben Grange when he had heard Lancaster of the Sixth whispering with the crook—the other crook—under the shadows of the ancient beech.

So, with outward civility and even friendliness, there was disunion among the Famous Five, and Wharton was left more and more to himself by his friends.

It was Friday evening now, two days after the Highcliffe match, at which Lancaster of the Sixth had distinguished himself once more and become more than ever the idol of Greyfriars. Prep was over in the Remove, and the fellows were going down.

But the cheery tramp of feet, the cheery bawl of Bob Cherry, did not sound at the door of Study No. 1 as of old. Bob and Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh went down together without calling at No. 1. And Frank Nugent had to make an effort to ask Wharton if he was coming down, and when the captain of the Remove replied in the negative, he went to the door with a flush in his cheeks and without speaking again.

He went slowly along towards the Remove staircase. Nugent was Harry's oldest chum at Greyfriars—his best chum. Once or twice there had been

trouble between them, due to Wharton's hasty temper, but Harry had not erred in that way for a long time. Now there was trouble again, for which Wharton certainly was not to blame, though it seemed to Frank that it came of his friend's unreasonableness and obstinacy. What could he have against a splendid chap like Lancaster—and if he had anything, why couldn't he give it a name? That was how Frank looked at it. But much as he liked Lancaster, the Sixth Form man was nothing to him compared with his best chum, and Frank wished heartily that the bone of contention had never come to Greyfriars, splendid chap as he was!

Wharton, left alone in the study, knitted his brows glumly.

Many times it had been in his mind to explain to his friends—to tell them what was on his mind. He was tempted again, as Nugent went silently from the study.

But he shook his head. He was not sure—not sure! He knew it, he felt it, but he could not make so terrible an accusation against any man without definite and absolute proof. His friends would not believe it. They would suppose that he had heard a voice like Lancaster's speaking to the Weasel under the beech in Hogben Grange. Voices were sometimes alike. Indeed, Wharton himself clung to that possibility. But whether his friends believed it or not, he could not tell them. It was not cricket, it was not fair play to Lancaster to breathe a single word to a single soul while the shadow of a doubt remained.

But his face was clouded as the door closed on Nugent. He missed the cheery Bob, he missed the quiet and stolid Johnny, he missed the smiling dusky urbanity of the nabob. But most sorely of all he missed Frank's friendship, the old pleasant confidence and comradeship. He felt sometimes that he could have hated Lancaster for having thus come between him and his friends. And yet he was conscious that he never could hate Lancaster, never could even dislike him, whatever he was.

He turned to the study cupboard and sorted out a pair of rubber shoes. Nugent, had he been still in the study, would have wondered what they were wanted for. He slipped the shoes under his jacket and left the study a little later.

His way did not lie downstairs. He slipped quietly up the upper staircase to the Remove dormitory. Fellows were not supposed to enter the dormitories until bed-time, but that was a rule frequently disregarded. The captain of the Remove entered it and concealed the rubber shoes under his bed.

A few minutes later he came down into the Rag.

There was a crowd of fellows in the Rag after prep. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh stood together, talking; Nugent was sitting by himself, looking at a "Holiday Annual." Wharton did not join them. The Bounder gave him a sarcastic grin; it rather amused Smithy to see the captain of the Remove "on his lonely own." Skinner winked at Snoop and they sniggered.

Wharton, unheeding, picked up a book and sat down to read. Frank glanced at him for a moment over the top of his "Holiday Annual," and dropped his gaze again. Billy Bunter rolled over to join him, with a fat grin on his face.

"I say, Wharton, old chap——"

"I'm reading!" was Wharton's reply. He was in no mood for conversation from the Owl of the Remove.

"Gammon!" said Bunter cheerfully. "You ain't reading—you've only got hold of that book because nobody wants to speak to you."

Harry Wharton breathed hard.

As a matter of fact, there was something in what Bunter said, but that made it none the more agreeable.

Bunter gave a fat chuckle.

"Don't be stuffy, old fellow," he admonished. "I'm speaking to you, though your friends have turned you down."

"Will you shut up, Bunter?"

"Dash it all, what did you expect?" argued Bunter. "Anybody could have told you that it was side to cheek the Sixth. You can't put on roll because you're captain of the Form—not to that extent. Everybody's down on you, and I'm bound to say that it serves you right."

"Clear off, fathead."

"I'm taking pity on you, old chap," said the fatuous Owl. "I say, Wharton, don't pretend to read. You might be grateful to a fellow for talking to you when nobody else wants to. You're practically cut in the Remove, and you know it. It serves you right, of course. A fellow who puts on side and fancies himself, and all that——"

"Will you sheer off, you fat idiot?"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Hook it, fathead."

Billy Bunter sniffed and rolled away. He joined Bob Cherry and his companions and blinked at them through his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Br-r-r-r-r!" said Johnny Bull.

"That ass Wharton is as sidey as ever," said Bunter. "I'm going to turn him down, the same as you fellows. Jevver see a chap with such a swelled head? I say——"

The three juniors walked away. Billy Bunter blinked after them and rolled over to Nugent.

"I say, old chap——"

"Don't bother!"

"Look at Wharton, pretending to read, because he's practically barred in the Form!" chuckled Bunter. "I wonder he doesn't keep out of the Rag. Don't you? Rather rough on you being stuck in his study, old chap. Blessed if I know how you stand a stuck-up ass—yarooooooh!"

The "Holiday Annual" rose and fell. It rose in Nugent's hand and fell on Bunter's bullet head.

There was a wild roar from Billy Bunter as he sat down.

"Ow! Yoop! Whoop! Beast! Wharrer you up to? Ow!"

Nugent glared at him.

"Have another?" he demanded.

"Ow! Wow! Yow!"

Bunter scrambled away. He did not want another. He retired hastily from the spot, rubbing his head.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Caterpillar Astonishes the Natives!

THE Caterpillar sat up in bed in the Fourth Form dormitory at Highcliffe School and smiled. Langley, the Highcliffe captain, had seen lights out for the Fourth some time since, but the Highcliffe juniors had not settled down to repose. Slackness reigned at Highcliffe, from the Sixth to the Second.

A "doddering" headmaster was not likely to have an efficient staff, and the staff were almost as slack as their venerable chief. The prefects were as slack as the staff, or slacker. After

lights out in the junior dormitories the Sixth Form prefects were more likely than not to be gathered for bridge in their studies, some of them more likely than not out of school bounds. A "row" in a dormitory had to be tremendous before it was likely to draw a prefect up to investigate. And what was going on in the Fourth Form dormitory testified to the slackness of the whole school.

Several candles were burning, and Ponsonby, Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour were gathered playing bridge, with a bed for a card-table. Drury and Merton were smoking and talking "geegees." Smithson, Yates, and Benson were playing leap-frog. Frank Courtenay was asleep, but he was almost the only fellow in the dormitory who was, though it was past ten o'clock.

On this particular night, it is true, the Highcliffians were giving themselves a little more "rope" than usual. For the headmaster was away, attending a headmasters' conference somewhere, and staying away the night; and Mr. Mobbs, the master of the Fourth, had gone with him. Dr. Voysey, certainly, never seemed to remember that there was a Lower School at Highcliffe at all, and Mr. Mobbs seldom or never looked into his Form's dormitory after lights out. Still, their absence gave a feeling of additional security to the young rascals of the Fourth. They were well aware that they had nothing to fear from the Highcliffe prefects. The Caterpillar had remarked more than once that nothing short of manslaughter would have drawn Langley away from his evening game in his study, and no doubt the Caterpillar was right.

Sitting up in bed, handsome and elegant in his silken pyjamas, Rupert de Courcy glanced over the unreposeful dormitory, and smiled.

"Beloved 'earers!" said the Caterpillar.

Some of the fellows looked round.

"Takin' a hand, Caterpillar?" asked Gadsby.

"Thanks, no!" said the Caterpillar. "Franky would be shocked if he woke up an' saw me turnin' night into day. I never shock Franky if I can help it. Besides, there's somethin' else on to-night."

Ponsonby looked round and laughed.

"Goin' out on the tiles?" he asked.

The Caterpillar shook his head.

"No. That would shock Franky, too. I'm goin' to have a visitor."

"A visitor!" yelled Monson.

Almost every fellow in the dormitory stared at the cool, urbane Caterpillar as he made that startling announcement. A visitor in the Fourth Form dormitory at half-past ten at night was something new, even for Highcliffe.

"Yes," smiled the Caterpillar. "Man comin' to see me. He's almost due, and I'm goin' down to let him in!"

"Gammon!" said Gadsby incredulously.

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Do I ever gammon?" inquired the Caterpillar. "Don't I always tell the frozen truth? Haven't I often told you men that it adds unnecessary trouble to existence to tell lies? Haven't you found that so, Pon?"

"Oh, shut up!" said Ponsonby, while some of the fellows laughed.

"Look at the way you lied to the Head last week about the raggin' you gave Wharton at Hogben Grange!" argued the Caterpillar. "You got off the sack by pitchin' it hot and strong, I admit. But there's trouble to follow."

"I don't see it," said Ponsonby, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"I'm goin' to point it out to you. That man Wharton, of Greyfriars, is thirstin' for gore. Ever since you tied him to that tree in Hogben Grange you haven't dared to show your nose out of gates——"

"It's a lie!" yelled Ponsonby furiously. He glared at the Caterpillar, forgetful for the moment of the cards on the bed.

"Am I mistaken?" asked the Caterpillar, raising his eyebrows. "Possibly, possibly! To err is human! Let's say, then, that you've kept within gates ever since, not because you're afraid of meeting Wharton outside, but because you've found a new and sudden charm in home, sweet home. The dear old school, the clingin' ivy, the jolly old mullioned windows, and Mobby's red nose appeal to you as they never appealed before, and you can't tear yourself away from them——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get on with the game!" said Ponsonby savagely. "We're playin' bridge, not listenin' to that fool's cackle!"

There was a chortle all through the dormitory. It was pretty well known in the Highcliffe Fourth that Ponsonby was taking uncommon care not to come into contact with the Greyfriars junior he had ragged in Hogben Grange on the night of the burglary there. Every man in the Form knew that Wharton was looking for a chance to meet Ponsonby; and that Ponsonby was seeing to it that he got no chance.

"What ever your reason, dear old bean, it puts that man Wharton in a difficult position," said the Caterpillar. "I met him at the bunshop in Courtfield on Wednesday, and I had to sympathise. He's yearnin' to meet you, Pon—longin' and pinin' and almost sickenin' for it. And you keep on keepin' out of his way. Hope deferred maketh the heart grow sick—and I'm bound to say that you're makin' everybody pretty sick, Pon!"

"Shut up!" bawled Ponsonby. "We're playin' bridge!"

"You can play bridge any time, old bean; but you can't always hear my entertainin' conversation," urged the Caterpillar. "Make the most of it while it lasts, Pon. Look how the matter stands! You rag a man, with the help of three heroic friends—don't blush, you men, your heroism is pretty well known——"

"Oh, cheese it, Caterpillar!" muttered Monson.

"Havin' tied him to a tree, and left him for a night out, you tell bushels of lies, and get off cheap," went on the Caterpillar. "You keep out of the man's way, so that he can't even have the satisfaction of punchin' your nose. I call it rough on Wharton. I told him I sympathised, and offered to help to establish contact. I began to turn over in my powerful brain ways and means of bringin' you up to the scratch, Pon."

Frank Courtenay was awake now, sitting up in bed, listening to the Caterpillar. Every fellow in the dormitory was listening to him with keen attention. They all knew that something was coming, though nobody, so far, guessed what it was.

"It's a lie!" hissed Ponsonby, almost livid with rage, and quite forgetful of bridge now. "I'm not afraid of the cad! I'll thrash him soon enough if I happen to meet him!"

"Mean that?" yawned the Caterpillar.

"Of course I mean it, you drawlin' fool! I'll be glad enough to put the cheeky cad through it, too!"

"Good!" exclaimed the Caterpillar heartily. "There spoke the fightin' blood of the Ponsonbys! You're thirstin' for battle, same as jolly old Wharton! Good egg! Isn't it lucky that you're goin' to happen to meet him?"

Courtenay looked very curiously at his chum.

"What do you mean by that, Rupert?" he asked.

"I've been plottin' and plannin'," explained the Caterpillar blandly. "Pon, by sheer chance, of course, has been keepin' out of Wharton's way. That man Wharton takes the view—quite unjustifiable, of course—that Pon is a sneakin' funk, dodgin' him. So my bizney is to bring the two together, till they click! The question was—how? Pon's love for home, sweet home keeps him within gates—nothin' doin' there! If Wharton came over to see him, Pon's love of law and order would make him bring a master or a prefect on the scene; exit Wharton, without punchin' Pon! It was a frightfully difficult problem, which only a brain like mine could have solved! But I've solved it," said the Caterpillar proudly. "I've spotted the winner, so to speak. To-night's the night!"

Ponsonby stared at him.

"You gabblin' ass, what do you mean?" he snarled.

"Exactly what I say! To-night's the night! The Head's away and Mobby's away, and while the jolly old cat's away the merry mice will play, as the proverb tells us. I've asked Wharton here."

"Here!" yelled Ponsonby.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Gadsby.

"Caterpillar!" exclaimed Courtenay blankly.

"Have I surprised you, my beloved 'earers?" asked the Caterpillar. "I suppose I have! When you've recovered I'll go on."

"Wharton coming here!" gasped Smithson. "Oh jiminy!"

"The man's frightfully keen!" said the Caterpillar. "He's takin' the risk of breakin' bounds at his school after lights-out—takin' a walk in the stilly night—all for the sake of meetin' Pon! I've smuggled gloves up to this dorm—all ready for the fearful combat! Wharton will be here in a few minutes now—I'm lettin' him in—and there's goin' to be a scrap in this dormitory that will make you sit up and rejoice!"

"Great pip!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Courtenay.

"Pon's goin' to have the chance he's longin' for of putting the Greyfriars man through it. He's goin' to have it soon. He's goin' to prove that a Highcliffe man doesn't funk Greyfriars, notwithstanding deceptive appearances. Gad, he's lookin' bucked at the mere prospect!"

Ponsonby gave the Caterpillar a deadly look.

"If you mean that, you fool——" he muttered.

"I mean it, old thing."

"Wharton's comin' here?"

"He's almost due now."

"If you think I'm going to scrap at half-past ten at night—with a rotten Greyfriars cad——"

"I think so," assented the Caterpillar. "I don't think you'll have much choice, after Wharton gets here."

Ponsonby jumped up from the bed.

"Well, I'll soon put a stop to lettin' Greyfriars cads into the school after lights out!" he snarled. "If Mobbs were at home I'd call him——"

"I selected this jolly evenin' because

Mobby and the Head are roamin' the open spaces," yawned the Caterpillar.

"Well, we'll see what Langley has to say about it——"

"We won't!" said the Caterpillar cheerfully.

He leaped from his bed, and, with a bound, was between Ponsonby and the door. A shove on the chest sent Pon staggering back.

"Old thing, keep an eye on that doughty warrior, while I go and see if Wharton's come," said De Courcy.

"Certainly!" said Courtenay.

The captain of the Fourth quitted his bed and placed his back against the dormitory door. Ponsonby eyed him almost wolfishly; but he stood back. He had no chance of shifting Courtenay.

"You rotter!" he muttered.

Courtenay gave him a glance of contempt.

"You're bound to stand up to the fellow after what you did!" he said. "Anybody but a coward wouldn't need asking twice. You're letting down the school by showing rotten funk. You tackled Wharton four to one—now tackle him fairly, man to man!"

"Hear, hear!" sniggered Smithson.

"Dash it all, Pon!" murmured Gadsby.

Even Pon's own knutty friends were ashamed of him now.

"Pon, old man," muttered Monson, "you can't call in a prefect, dash it all! The Greyfriars man is takin' all the risk in comin' here——"

"Pon, old bean!" said Drury.

Ponsonby cast an evil look at his friends. He realised that he was "for it"; there was no escape for him. His eyes burned at the smiling Caterpillar. But he sullenly made up his mind to the inevitable.

"You're goin' to get a fair fight, old man," urged Gadsby. "We're all here to see fair play. It's Wharton who's takin' chances."

"Oh, shut up!" snarled Ponsonby. "Do you think I'm afraid of the brute? I'll fight him willingly enough."

"You delight my ears, old bean," said the Caterpillar. "Once more the jolly old fightin' blood of the Ponsonbys is boilin'. Keep it on the boil, old thing, while I cut down and fetch the Greyfriars man."

The Caterpillar, half-dressed, slipped out of the dormitory. Courtenay closed the door after him and placed his back to it again. There was a buzz of excitement, and Pon's friends gathered round him encouragingly. There was no doubt that Pon needed encouragement. Face to face, and man to man, was not Pon's style, and not what he wanted at all. But that, for once, was what Pon was going to get!

Five would have acted together, as one man, to bring Ponsonby to book. But that matter, like other matters in which they had had a common interest, had dropped since the trouble had parted them.

No doubt his friends would have backed him up, as of old, if he had asked them. But in the present circumstances he could not ask, and did not think of it. Only there was a pang at his heart as he crept out into the darkness alone, leaving his comrades asleep in bed.

Masters and seniors were still up; but Wharton did not descend the stairs. By an upper box-room window he reached the leads outside and dropped to the ground.

Wharton put all he knew into his blows, and Ponsonby dodged, circling completely round the ring, under a fire of chuckles from the spectators. "Is it a fight or a foot-race?" inquired Smithson humorously.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Man to Man!

HARRY WHARTON stood listening in the darkness of the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars.

The deep snore of Billy Bunter rumbled through the silence. He could hear the steady breathing of sleepers near at hand. Not a fellow in the dormitory was awake, except the captain of the Form. And Wharton dressed quickly in the dark and slipped on the rubber shoes he had placed in readiness under his bed. He was going out of House bounds after lights out—a serious matter for any Greyfriars man, and especially for the head boy of a Form. He could not be too careful.

Silent in the rubber shoes, he trod to the door. There he paused again. His chums were fast asleep. He could not waken them. If he went, he had to go alone. But for the unhappy dispute that had arisen in the Co., the Famous

The night wind from the sea blew fresh and keen on his face as he scudded away, keeping in the darkest shadows till he reached the old Cloisters and dropped from a wall into the road.

He walked swiftly away through the summer night.

Highcliffe School lay beyond Courtfield; but there were short cuts by paths on the broad common, and by leafy lanes and dewy fields, and Wharton knew every one of them.

He was bound for Highcliffe; but not a fellow in the Remove had been told. It was natural that Wharton should feel a keen desire to punish Ponsonby for that "night out" at Hogben Grange. He was not the fellow to bear a grudge; but an outrage of that kind was rather too serious a matter to be passed over. Pon had to have a lesson. But that was not the only reason for his determination to punish the cad of Highcliffe. It was that act of ruffianism which had landed him in his present trouble. He owed it

all to Ponsonby; and he was resolved that Pon should not escape with impunity at the cheap cost of telling falsehoods.

He tramped on rapidly by field and lane, through the fine June night, hardly dark even at that hour.

The matter had been arranged with the Caterpillar at the bunshop in Courtfield on Wednesday. De Courcy had, in fact, made the suggestion, and entered into the thing cordially. The Caterpillar, with all his lazy ways and careless outlook on life, had some regard for his school, and felt the disgrace that Ponsonby had brought upon it. An act of ruffianism, and a bushel of lies to escape the consequences, seemed outside the limit to him; and it irked the Caterpillar, too, to see a Highcliffe man funking a meeting with a fellow from another school whom he had ragged with heavy odds on his side. If Pon did not want a fair fight, Pon had better learn to keep out of mischief; that was the Caterpillar's view. If Ponsonby refused to answer for what he had done, he had to be made to; and the Caterpillar was the fellow to make him.

Highcliffe School loomed up against a velvety sky. Harry Wharton squeezed through a gap in the palings of a paddock that adjoined what were called, at Highcliffe, the "old courts." It was a way by which the Highcliffe knuts were accustomed to get out when the spirit moved them to break bounds at night—a way the Caterpillar had used himself more than once, and which he had described clearly to Wharton for present use.

The Greyfriars junior trod quietly under the old trees in the paddock and reached a low wall that gave on the courts.

He was now within the precincts of Highcliffe School, and had to be doubly careful. In the distance he could see lighted windows. The Caterpillar had assured him that, once he was in the Fourth Form dormitory, interruption was very unlikely. But he was not in yet. Dr. Voysey and Mr. Mobbs were away: but the other masters were not yet gone to bed, and most of the Sixth were likely to be still up. It was necessary to be careful.

Wharton stopped suddenly.

There was a moving shadow by the old wall he was approaching; and he wondered, for a moment, whether the Caterpillar, contrary to arrangement, had come out to meet him.

But it was not likely; and Wharton stopped and backed into the shadow of an oak.

Someone was there, looking over the low wall towards the school. It was a squat, thick-set figure. Its outlines, as Wharton watched it, seemed to have some familiarity to his eyes. Dim as it was, he made out that it was the figure of a man, not of a boy.

His lip curled.

Probably it was some shady character from the Cross Keys or the Three Fishers, who had dealings with some of the "sportsmen" of Highcliffe. It was clear, at all events, that the man was waiting there with some object.

The figure stood for some minutes, gazing towards the distant lighted windows, and then moved away and disappeared under the trees in the paddock.

Wharton waited a few minutes more, and then proceeded on his way. Who the man was, and what he wanted there, was no business of his; all he wanted was to keep clear of him.

He dropped silently over the wall, picked his way through the old courts, and emerged into the Highcliffe quad.

Five minutes later he was standing under a window on the ground floor of the House.

Even as he stopped, the lower sash of the window slid up; evidently someone was already on the watch within.

"Right on time, old bean!" came a soft voice, with a slightly mocking inflection in it—the voice of the Caterpillar.

De Courcy gave the Greyfriars junior a hand, and helped him in at the window. Wharton stepped down inside, and the Highcliffe fellow closed the window again. They stood in darkness in a large, dim room, evidently a master's study.

"You're expected, old thing!" murmured the Caterpillar. "Pon's burnin' for the combat—yearnin' for it! You feelin' fit?"

"Quite."

"Not dreadin the terrific wrath of Pon at the last moment?"

"Not at all."

The Caterpillar chuckled.

"Come on, then! Let's get up to the dorm before the fightin' blood of the Ponsonbys cools down! I told Pon to keep it on the boil; but you never know. This way. This is the Beak's study—the Beak's away to-night, you know."

"I can't see an inch."

"Give me your arm, old tulip; I'm the kindly light that leads."

The Caterpillar grasped Wharton's arm and led him away.

By dark passages and dim staircases he led the Greyfriars junior. They stopped at the door of the Fourth Form dormitory, and the Caterpillar turned the handle and pushed. There was some resistance inside the door.

"Old Courtenay's standin' with his back to it," murmured the Caterpillar. "Pon's developed a sudden desire for the company of prefects. Generally speakin', he would hate a prefect to butt into the dorm after lights out, but for once he seems to want 'em. He's not goin' to be gratified."

The door opened, and they passed in. Frank Courtenay gave Wharton a smile and a nod. Every other Highcliffe Fourth-Former stared at him curiously. Pon gave him a black look.

The Caterpillar closed the door.

"All serene now!" he remarked. "Fightin' blood still boilin', Pon?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Pon's in a wax, Wharton," explained the Caterpillar gravely. "Don't mind his manners. He's in a wax. He's been dreadin' to lose this opportunity of provin' that a Highcliffe man doesn't funk a Greyfriars man. It's got on his nerves a little. But now you're here Pon will be all right, won't you, Pon?"

"You rotten cad!"

"Pon, old bean, your language pains me!" said the Caterpillar reproachfully. "What have I done?"

"Backin' up a Greyfriars cad against your own school, you rotter!" snarled Ponsonby.

The Caterpillar raised his eyebrows.

"You don't seem to catch on, Pon," he said gently. "I'm backin' you up. Greyfriars men have been sayin' that you won't tackle a man unless you've got three or four friends to help you handle him. I'm givin' you the chance to prove that that's a slander. What more do you want?"

Ponsonby gritted his teeth. He cast a look round at his knutty friends. Now that Wharton was there alone Pon would have been glad to call on his followers and turn the affair into a ragging. But it was evident that there was nothing doing in that line. Courtenay had a far larger following in the Highcliffe Fourth than Pon, and the captain of the Fourth intended to see fair play. And Pon's friends, as a matter of fact, had no objection to seeing fair play also. As Gadsby whispered to Monson, if Pon didn't want to put up his hands, why the dooce couldn't he have let the man alone in the first place? And Monson nodded assent.

"The hour's growin' late," went on the Caterpillar. "That's nothin' for Highcliffe. Still, there's a limit. I suggest gettin' to business."

"I'm ready," said Harry Wharton quietly.

"Pon's more than ready—burstin' with eagerness," said the Caterpillar. "Here's the gloves. If you want a second I'll be proud to act for you—no Greyfriars gent bein' present. Pick out a second, Pon. Gaddy, you keep time with that big gold watch of yours."

Ponsonby slowly—very slowly—put on the gloves. The grinning Fourth-Formers formed a ring. And in the centre of the ring Pon stood facing the Greyfriars junior—face to face at last, and man to man.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Fight at Highcliffe!

"TIME!"

Gadsby, with his gold watch in his hand, called "Time!"

"Go it, Pon!" came an encouraging chorus from the knuts.

A dozen candles gave plenty of light. Fellows, half dressed or in pyjamas, stood round, looking on eagerly.

Ponsonby gritted his teeth and made up his mind to it. He had a good chance of pulling it off if his courage did not fail. He was a little taller than Wharton, quite as heavy, and a good boxer. His chief difficulty was his rooted objection to taking punishment. Wharton cared nothing for punishment so long as he gave his treacherous enemy the thrashing he had asked for.

In the first round Pon stood up well, and there was a murmur of approval from his friends. Ponsonby was well aware of the kudos he would gain if by good luck he knocked out a fighting-man like the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. And since there was no help for it he put his beef into it, hoping for the best. To prove that he was not a funk, to regain his wavering influence over his set in the Fourth, above all to give the fellow he hated the thrashing of his life, made it worth while to face a pair of punishing fists and do his very best. Savage anger and malice spurred him on, too. In the first round Pon acquitted himself well, and he had warmed to the work a little when Gadsby called time.

In the second round he still stood up to the test.

"Pon's got a sportin' chance if he sticks it out!" murmured the Caterpillar to his chum. "It's jolly odd, you know. I like that man Wharton, and I dislike Pon frightfully, but I'd be glad to see him win. I suppose that's giddy patriotism, what?"

Courtenay nodded.

He shared the Caterpillar's feelings. He would have been glad to see a win for Highcliffe.

"By gad, Pon's goin' it!" said Gadsby.

"Good old Pon!" said Monson. "By gum, he's goin' to win!"

"Absolutely!" murmured Vavasour.

Luck was favouring the cad of Highcliffe. Wharton's foot slipped on the smooth floor, and for a second he was at his enemy's mercy. Pon was not the man to give an enemy a chance. He piled in swiftly, and his right came with a crash on the Greyfriar's junior's jaw, followed up by his left between the eyes, and Wharton went down with a crash.

"Phew!" murmured the Caterpillar.

Gadsby was counting gleefully. Glad enough would Gaddy have been to count the Greyfriars man out.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven——" Gaddy was fairly racing.

"Gaddy, old bean, have you put your foot on the accelerator?" interrupted the Caterpillar.

"Shut up! Gaddy's countin'," said Monson.

"Eight, nine——" panted Gaddy.

Wharton was on his feet again. He was dazed, dizzy, groggy; but not to save his life would he have allowed himself to be counted out.

Ponsonby was on him like a tiger.

Under a rain of fierce blows Wharton hardly knew how he kept his feet, but he kept them. He took punishment that would have made Pon sick, but he took it like a man of bronze. Knocked right and left under smashing blows he rocked and reeled, but he kept his feet.

"Gaddy, you rotter——" said the Caterpillar.

It was time, but Gadsby had not called time yet. Gadsby evidently believed that a timekeeper's duty was to help a pal win. But as the Caterpillar made a step towards him, Gaddy realised that there was a limit.

"Time!" he rapped out hastily.

It came as a much-needed relief for Wharton. The minute rest saved him. He sank on a chair in his corner, panting.

His second fanned him with a towel.

"Hot work!" said the Caterpillar. "Hot work, old bean!"

Wharton did not speak. He needed all his breath.

"As your second, old thing, I'm longin' to see you win," said the Caterpillar. "As a Highcliffe man, I'm yearnin' to see you licked. Like jolly old Desdemona in the play, I do perceive here a divided duty. But fair play's a jewel, and if Gaddy plays any more tricks there's goin' to be another fight in this dorm to-night. Lend me your ears, Gaddy."

"Oh, rot!" muttered Gadsby. But he made up his mind to be a little more careful in the calling of time. He did not want trouble with the Caterpillar.

The minute was up all too soon for Wharton, but he came up promptly with the call of "Time!" and through the next round contented himself with defence while he slowly recovered from the terrific hammering he had received.

Ponsonby pressed him hard and fast. If Pon had a chance of pulling it off, this was his chance. Pon made the most of it. It was a wearing round to Wharton, and he had to take hard knocks without getting at his adversary. He was glad when the third round ended, Gadsby calling "Time!" promptly enough under the searching eye of the Caterpillar.

Another rest pulled Wharton round. When he stood up to his opponent again he had recovered his wind and his strength. He was fit all through, and his pluck was undiminished. In that round Ponsonby attacked hotly again. But this time his attack was stopped and retaliated. Pon began to get some hard hitting, which never did agree with Pon, and his hope of pulling it off began to fade again.

Fifth round followed; and in the sixth Ponsonby had a hunted look in his eyes. His chance—if it had been a chance—had passed, and the Greyfriars fellow had the upper hand now. Ponsonby ended the sixth round on the floor, on his back, spluttering.

"Time!"

Slowly Ponsonby came up to the call of "Time!" for the seventh round. His friends were no longer looking hopeful. Pon had plenty of "beef" left in him, but his courage was failing. He backed and dodged from hard hitting, circling completely round the ring, under a fire of chuckles from the spectators. Smithson asked whether it was a fight or a foot-race, and there was a laugh.

"Go it, Pon!" murmured Monson.

"Put your beef into it, old chap!" said Vavasour.

It was easy enough for the knuts to advise Pon to "go" it; but it was doubtful whether they would have "gone" it themselves, under the hard hitting of the Greyfriars junior. Wharton was pressing the fighting, hard and harder, and Ponsonby ducked and dodged and panted.

Crash!

A right-hander landed fairly on Pon's chin. It almost lifted him from his feet, and he spun over and crashed.

"Some whack!" murmured the Caterpillar.

Gadsby began to count. He did not race this time. He slowed. But it was futile. Pon did not stir; he would not have stirred if Gadsby had counted a hundred. He lay where he was, gasping.

"This is where Highcliffe chucks up the sponge," said the Caterpillar regretfully. "Pon's good for three or four more rounds yet; but the fightin' blood of the Ponsonbys has gone cold. You win, Wharton, old bean."

Harry Wharton peeled off the gloves. It had been a hard fight, harder than he had expected; but Ponsonby lay at his feet, licked to the wide. His glare of hatred did not trouble Wharton.

"Better bathe your chivvy, old thing," said the Caterpillar. "It's goin' to be a bit decorative, I think." He yawned. "It's more than time that good little boys, like us, were in bed—we've lost our beauty sleep already. But the jolly old entertainment was worth it."

He led the Greyfriars junior to a washstand, where Wharton bathed his heated face. Ponsonby's friends picked him up, and helped him to his bed. Most of the Highcliffe juniors turned in, now that the fight was over; but Courtenay and the Caterpillar remained up to give Wharton what help they could in repairing damages. From somewhere in the night came the chime of a quarter; it was a quarter past eleven. Wharton started.

"Don't hurry, old bean," murmured the Caterpillar. "The night's yet young."

But Wharton did hurry. He dried his face, slipped on his jacket, and left the dormitory with the Caterpillar.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Wizard at Work!

"WEASEL!"

It was a whispering voice in the deep shadows of the paddock. Darkness lay thick among the old oaks, and in the darkness, shadows stirred.

"You, Wizard!"

A husky voice whispered back.

Highcliffe School lay dark and silent. Where the crumbling wall of the "old courts" bordered the paddock, two figures met under the oaks. One was the squat, thick-set figure that Wharton had glimpsed when he passed through the paddock on his way in. The other, tall, graceful, athletic, had just arrived. The ferret eyes of the squat man peered at the newcomer, in the thick shadows under the trees, and he gave a grunt of satisfaction.

The face he saw, dimly in the darkness, was a handsome face—strangely in contrast with his own stubbly visage. It was the face of Richard Lancaster, of the Sixth Form at Greyfriars; the face of the Wizard, schoolboy, crook, and cracksman.

"You're 'ere, Wizard!" muttered the Weasel.

"I'm here." The schoolboy crook's tone was low and sharp. There was a bitter note in it. "Isn't it Slimy's order? Isn't there a haul of three thousand pounds, ready for the taking? Of course I'm here."

The Weasel peered at him uneasily. He could see Lancaster's face only

dimly; but he did not like the look on it. The Wizard was there—there to carry out the orders of Slimy Sugden. There had been a time when he would have been keen on the work; as keen as the ruffianly Weasel himself. But there was no keenness in the Wizard's face now. There was a dogged determination, strangely mingled with something like despair. The Wizard was in a mood that the Weasel was not likely to understand.

"It's easy, Dick," muttered the Weasel. "Slimy got it all cut and dried. The headmaster's away to-night—Slimy got that certain. You've been in the place—you've spotted the blooming picture that Slimy can sell over the pond for three thousand of the best. It's as easy as pie, Dick."

"I know that."

"Ten minutes'll see you through, Dick—and you hand the picture to me, and get back to your school. I got the car in the lane, and you bet I'll get that blooming Rembrandt safe into Slimy's hands before morning. What's wrong with you, Dick?"

Lancaster did not answer. He stood silent in the gloom, staring with a fixed gaze at the dim face of the ruffian.

The Weasel muttered an impatient oath.

"You ain't fixed up, as usual, Dick!" He peered more closely at Dick Lancaster's handsome face. Save for its pale, tormented expression, that face was the same that Greyfriars knew—unchanged. The Wizard was accustomed to disguise his looks when he prowled as a thief in the night. This time he had not done so. "You're takin' risks, Dick."

"What does it matter?"

The Weasel stared.

"If you're seen—and you might be seen——"

Lancaster shrugged his shoulders.

"The old schoolmaster's away, Dick, Slimy got that straight; but they mayn't all be in bed yet, and there's a chance——" The Weasel's ferrety eyes peered at him. "If you was seen and recognised, Dick, the game's up for you at your school."

"All the better, perhaps," said Lancaster bitterly.

"Talk sense!" snapped the Weasel. "You're at Greyfriars to play Slimy Sugden's game, not to please yourself. What's got you, Dick? Talk sense."

Lancaster stood silent.

From where he stood under the oaks, he could see Highcliffe School, the great building glimmering in the clear June night. Three or four windows showed a gleam of light from behind the blinds; all were not yet sleeping at Highcliffe.

That mattered nothing to the Wizard. He knew that the headmaster's study, where the precious Rembrandt hung, would be dark and deserted. He knew the lie of the land; he knew that the window would yield at once to his hand; he had only to use the knowledge he had so cunningly picked up the day he had played cricket at Highcliffe.

It was the easiest of easy "jobs" for the schoolboy crook. Ten minutes, or a quarter of an haur—and loot worth three thousand pounds would be handed over to the Weasel, to be borne away in the car that waited.

Slimy Sugden was already in touch with an unscrupulous American collector who was prepared to pay a fancy price for the Rembrandt. Slimy was not close with money—hundreds of pounds would fall to the share of the Wizard. Easy work and easy money.

Yet the hapless fellow's feet seemed rooted to the ground, as if he were unable to take a single step towards the prize.

The Weasel heard a heavy sigh leave his lips. It came from an overcharged heart.

"Dick, you fool!" he muttered.

Lancaster looked at him. He pushed back the low cap from his forehead and wiped away beads of perspiration.

"Weasel! You remember how we were interrupted—last week—at Hogben Grange," he muttered. "Well, it was a Greyfriars kid—a junior who had been tied up in the park by some young rascals—a lad I knew——"

The Weasel's stubby fingers worked.

"Wish I'd got 'old of him, then," he muttered. "He wouldn't have give the alarm if I'd got my 'ands on his weasand."

"A lad I knew," went on Lancaster, unheeding, "a lad I knew and liked—who knew and liked me."

The Weasel started.

"You mean he knows—he's found you out——"

"I mean that he suspects, if he does not know. I mean that he shrinks away from me, as if I were something foul—unclean." The handsome face worked. "I mean that I dare not meet his eyes—I mean, that his look sickens me with shame—I mean that I dare not ask him why he has changed, for fear of what he might say."

"He s told——"

"Nothing. He discovered something that night, I do not know what—enough to turn his liking for me into loathing. But either he is not sure, or else some other reason keeps him silent—he has said nothing. Not even to his own friends. But he knows—knows what I am. If he does not actually know it, in the way of proof, he feels it. Since that night he has avoided me as if I were a leper."

The Weasel breathed hard.

"If he ain't talked, he can't know much, not for certain, anyhow. And coveys that know too much have been knocked on the 'ead afore now."

"Silence, you villain!" hissed Lancaster.

He looked, for a moment, as if he would strike the stubbly, brutal face so near his own. The Weasel drew back with an oath.

"You wouldn't understand," said Lancaster. "I'm a fool to speak of it to you. Slimy wouldn't understand. What has a crook to do with shame?" He laughed a low, bitter laugh. "Do you know why I don't throw up the game? Why I don't break with the gang? Because I dare not let the School know what Slimy would shout out for all the world to hear. That's the hold Sugden's got on me, since I've been at Greyfriars. That's why I'm here to-night—a dog obeying his master's whistle! A dog brought to heel!" There was intense bitterness in Lancaster's voice.

The Weasel made no reply. He was quite incapable of comprehending the dark, bitter mood of the schoolboy crook. But it made him uneasy. The Wizard, once the most daring and reckless of the lawless gang was weakening; that was how the Weasel looked at it. Repentance, remorse, aching shame that ate into the unhappy boy's heart, only meant weakening to the callous ruffian.

"Brought to heel!" repeated Lancaster. "Brought to heel at the crack of the whip."

"You're wasting time, Dick."

Lancaster roused himself. He made a movement, and the Weasel laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"Don't be a fool, Dick! Put on your fixings in case you was seen."

"You're right," muttered Lancaster.

It took but a few moments for the schoolboy crook to put on his "fixings," as the ruffian expressed it. A false moustache, a few touches of greasepaint, and the Greyfriars senior's face looked years older, and unrecognisable as his own. The Weasel drew a breath of relief. The Wizard was getting down to it at last.

Leaving the ruffian under the oaks, Lancaster dropped over the wall into the old courts. Lurking, creeping, slinking in darkest shadows, the thief in the night went on his way. Lancaster of the Sixth, for the time, was no longer in existence; the Wizard was at work!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Thief in the Night!

"QUIET, old bean!" whispered the Caterpillar.

Harry Wharton made scarcely a sound as he followed his guide, led by the Caterpillar's hand on his arm.

Only a glimmer from high windows broke the gloom. It was nearly half-past eleven, and at that hour, few in Highcliffe School were still up. From two or three masters' windows, a gleam of light still shone in the quad, but that was all. Long since, the House had been locked and bolted for the night.

Caution was very necessary, however. It had seemed a tremendous lark to the whimsical Caterpillar to arrange that fight in the dormitory—and Wharton had eagerly closed on the only way of bringing Ponsonby to book. But if a Greyfriars junior had been discovered in Highcliffe School at such an hour of the night, the results would have been very serious for all concerned. Wharton, certainly, would have been reported to his own headmaster, and undoubtedly flogged with the greatest severity for such an adventure; and the Caterpillar, equally certainly, would have had to answer for it.

They trod softly past a door, under which a light still gleamed. The passage was dark, but someone was up. Their hearts beat faster as they passed.

"All serene," whispered the Caterpillar as they turned a corner into another passage, black as the inside of a hat. "But a bloke can't be too careful in the jolly old circs, what?"

"Quite!" agreed Wharton.

"Pon would jump for joy if he could give us away and get you copped by a prefect or a beak," murmured the Caterpillar; "but Courtenay will see that dear old Pon doesn't take a step outside the dorm. We're not really proud of Pon here, dear man, and I'm glad you licked him, though for the honour and glory of Highcliffe, I wish he'd licked you. Sort of mixed feelin's, what? Here we are at the Beak's study door."

De Courcy opened a door, and Wharton passed into the large, dim study, by the window of which he had entered the House an hour ago.

De Courcy gave a subdued chuckle.

"I wonder what Voysey would think, old thing, if he knew that two young sweeps were usin' his study at this time of night," he murmured. "Not likely to guess, what?"

"I imagine not."

"While the cat's away, the merry mice have a high old time," said the Caterpillar. "With the Beak away, this is

the safest route in and out. He sometimes sits up late, dodderin' over the jolly old classics. He's far enough away now, though, an' dear old Mobby's with him. Hold on!" added the Caterpillar, in a suddenly changed voice, as Wharton was stepping towards the window.

"What——" began Harry.

"Quiet!" breathed the Caterpillar.

He drew the Greyfriars junior back, into the deep shadow beside a tall Oriental screen. He pointed to the window.

The starlight on the glass was darkened.

Wharton started violently as he saw it.

That black silhouette against the window was startling enough, at such an hour of the night.

"Who—what——" he breathed.

The Caterpillar suppressed a chuckle.

"Quiet! Mum's the word! You'll have to wait till the coast's clear, old bean."

"But who—do you know——" Wharton stared at the black shadow outside the window. His heart was beating faster.

"I don't know, but I guess." The Caterpillar's tone was whimsical. "We're not the only sportsmen usin' the Head's study window as an emergency exit, old fruit, while the Beak's away. Some merry sportsman of the Sixth has been out of bounds, I take it, and he's gettin' back this way."

"Oh!" breathed Wharton.

"Wait an' see!" murmured the Caterpillar.

The two juniors waited in the black shadow of the screen, and watched the figure at the window.

The Caterpillar had no doubt that it was as he had surmised, and Harry Wharton supposed that he was right. Some breaker of bounds was returning at that late hour, he concluded, and, like the Caterpillar, he had thought of the headmaster's window as a safe route—while Dr. Voysey was away in London.

Nothing but a black silhouette could be seen at the window. The figure was kneeling on the broad stone sill, fingering the sash. A loose cap was pulled down over the forehead, and a dark coat enveloped the figure; the juniors could see that much.

There was a sharp but faint click.

Wharton heard his companion draw a quick breath. The Caterpillar seemed startled.

"What——" whispered Harry.

"I fastened the catch after lettin' you in, old bean," whispered the Caterpillar. "That sportsman has opened it from outside."

Wharton caught his breath.

"It's not an easy catch," muttered De Courcy in his ear. "In fact, it's a pretty hefty catch. It can't be a Highcliffe man who's able to open a catch like that from outside a window."

That had already flashed into Wharton's mind.

"It can't be done with the fingers—that johnny's usin' a tool of some sort—not the sort of tool that a Highcliffe man would have." The Caterpillar's whisper was barely audible in Wharton's ear. "Old infant, that's not a jolly old roysterer returnin' from paintin' the Three Fishers' red. Quiet!"

Wharton's heart throbbed.

The sudden knowledge rushed on both of them at once. It was not a breaker of bounds at the window. It was not a Highcliffe man returning from a spree. The ease and swiftness with which a difficult fastening had been opened from outside, demonstrated that.

Wharton made a movement, but the Caterpillar's grasp closed like iron on his arm.

"Quiet!" he breathed.

The Greyfriars junior stood still, silent. The sash was slipping up under pressure from without; the window was open.

Head and shoulders of the dark figure were already in the room.

There was a light sound as the climbing figure dropped within. The window remained open, but the curtain was swiftly drawn across it, shutting out every glimmer from the stars.

Silent, but with throbbing hearts, the two juniors stood by the screen. They knew that they were in the presence of a law-breaker—that it was a thief of the night who stood within a few yards of them. Both of them kept cool; indeed, had Wharton been able to see his companion's face, he would have seen a grin there. Danger had no terrors for the Caterpillar, and he was enjoying this strange and thrilling adventure.

Silence followed for a long minute, which seemed an age to the two juniors.

The unseen intruder was doubtless listening. Through the silence, faintly, came a sound of soft breathing.

The Caterpillar was still pressing Wharton's arm, as a sign to keep silent. The Greyfriars junior made no movement.

There was a faint sound from the unseen figure at last. A sudden beam of brilliant light shot across the study.

It came from an electric torch.

It did not reveal the two juniors backing behind the screen. It was not even turned in their direction.

It shone upon a picture that hung on the wall opposite Dr. Voysey's writing-table.

The Rembrandt glimmered in the bright beam.

The spot of light moved nearer to the picture; behind it, the figure that held the torch was wrapped in blackness.

The Caterpillar understood at once what dawned more slowly on Wharton. The Caterpillar knew all about Dr. Voysey's Rembrandt and its value; Wharton had heard of it, perhaps, but had forgotten it. To Wharton's eyes the picture was what the Highcliffe fellows called it, a smudge; to the Caterpillar's eyes, as to the cracksman's, it was a canvas worth three thousand pounds.

A keen blade glided over the canvas within the frame.

Almost with the turn of a wrist the canvas was cut out of the frame and the latter was left empty.

There was a sound as the canvas was rolled and thrust under a coat. The beam of light was shut off.

A stealthy sound, receding towards the window! The cracksman had not been three minutes in the room, and he was going! Evidently the Rembrandt was the only object of his visit.

The Caterpillar's teeth set hard. It was useless to shout an alarm; the thief would have been gone with his plunder long before the house could have been roused. There was only one thing to be done, if the midnight prowler was not to escape with the most dearly prized possession of the Head of Highcliffe.

Wharton felt his companion move. He clenched his hands, ready to back up the Highcliffe fellow in whatever he did.

The curtains whisked aside again; the starlight glimmered into the study. The dark figure was half-out of the window when the Caterpillar, with the spring of a tiger, was upon it.

The sudden attack took the cracksman utterly by surprise. He rolled back into the room as the Caterpillar dragged at him and crashed on the floor.

"Back up!" panted the Caterpillar.

Wharton did not need the call.

He was already leaping to the Highcliffe junior's aid, and his grasp closed on the cracksman as the latter began to struggle. And the three of them rolled over, fighting desperately.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Escape!

"HOLD on!"

"Hold him!"

Wharton and De Courcy panted out the words at the same time as the struggling figure leaped up.

Something was in their grasp—they had not let go. But the lithe figure had leaped free, after those few seconds of fierce struggle, and was springing at the open window.

They knew the next moment that it was the cracksman's overcoat that was in their hands.

With the litheness and swiftness of a panther he had slipped out of their grasp. Slipping out of the overcoat, he left it in their hands, and a desperate bound carried him to the window.

Wharton sprawled on the floor. The Caterpillar was left on his knees. Between them they held the coat.

The Caterpillar sprang up and after the figure that was already plunging through the window. Wharton was slower, for he had been sent sprawling on his back.

But the Caterpillar was too late.

The active figure leaped from the window and landed with a light thud on the ground outside.

Without an instant's stop it broke into flight so swift that it seemed scarcely to touch the earth as it fled.

"By gad!" panted the Caterpillar.

His leg was half-out of the window, in pursuit, when he stopped. The fleeing figure had already vanished into shadows.

"By gad!" repeated the Caterpillar. He turned and peered at Wharton. "Hurt, old bean?"

"No." Wharton staggered up. "My hat! He's gone!"

"He's left his jolly old coat behind him! What a trick! By gad, that scoundrel had his wits about him."

The Caterpillar crossed the study swiftly and switched on the electric light. The room was flooded with illumination. It revealed Harry Wharton standing with the cracksman's overcoat in his hand.

"Caterpillar! Look here!" gasped Wharton.

He held up the coat.

On the inside was a long pocket—evidently a specially made pocket for a special purpose. From it projected the end of a roll of canvas.

The Caterpillar jumped at it.

"Oh gad! He had the picture stacked in the coat—of course he did—and he had to leave it with the coat. What luck!"

De Courcy drew the roll of canvas from the coat. It was the famous Rembrandt—the three-thousand-pound picture which had drawn the thief in the night to Highcliffe School.

"Old Voysey's smudge!" chuckled the Caterpillar. "Gad! I can see our venerable Beak thankin' us with tears in his jolly old eyes. It would have broken his heart to lose that smudge!"

"Thank goodness!" gasped Wharton.

He listened. There was no sound of alarm from the house. The struggle in Dr. Voysey's study had been fierce, breathless, but very brief. Such noise as had been made had not reached other ears.

He looked from the window into the June starlight. The fleeing cracksman was gone. The thought had crossed his mind that the thief might be desperate enough to return for his plunder. But there was no sign of him.

"Look at this," said the Caterpillar, picking up a small object from the study floor.

Wharton looked at it. It was an artificial moustache, evidently brushed from the face of the cracksman in the struggle.

"Some gent who didn't want his chivvy to be seen," grinned the Caterpillar. "Sorry he's got away! But——"

"But what?" asked Harry.

"Old bean, we were rather takin' risks. The fellow might have used a jemmy, or a gun! We chanced that."

"I never thought——"

"Neither did I! I'd have chanced it, anyhow; that rotter wasn't gettin' off with the loot! But I fancy we've been a bit lucky, old thing."

Harry Wharton nodded. He leaned on Dr. Voysey's table, panting after his exertions. The fight in the dormitory had tired him, and the fierce struggle with the midnight thief left him quite spent.

The Caterpillar looked at him thoughtfully.

"We've got to rouse the House and let one of the beaks call in the police," he remarked. "But——"

He paused, and Wharton looked at him inquiringly.

"You'll get into a frightful row at your school if it comes out that you were here," said the Caterpillar. "Think you'd better out before I sound the loud timbrel? No need for anybody to know that you were here, unless you want to bag your share of the credit for bafflin' that bold bad bandit!"

Wharton smiled. That consideration did not appeal to him in the least. But he was very anxious that his nocturnal visit to Highcliffe should not be known at Greyfriars. It meant an extremely unpleasant interview with his headmaster, and consequences that would be more unpleasant still.

"I—I'd rather clear, if you don't mind——"

"All serene," said the Caterpillar. "I can easily explain havin' come downstairs somehow, but you would find it rather harder to explain what the thump you were doin' here. Leave it to me."

"I'd be jolly glad," said Harry. "After all, you can tell the police as much as I could. I'm no use if I hang on——"

"None; only a jolly old ornament," said the Caterpillar. "You didn't see the merchant in the dark, I suppose?"

"No; nothing more than a shadow——"

"Same here! We've got his coat; though, if the man knows his business, there's nothin' in the coat to lead to him. Still, the bobbies will be glad to have it, I dare say, and this merry moustache, too. Did you notice anythin' special about the brute?"

"No; only he was as strong as a horse and as quick as a tiger," said Wharton slowly.

"He was all that! But I had another impression——"

"What's that?"

"That he was remarkably youthful for a man in his line of business," said the Caterpillar. "It wasn't a man we were scrappin' with, Wharton—not a grown man, I mean. I'm sure of that. It was a young fellow—I'd give three to one in doughnuts that he was under twenty. Well under, too!"

Wharton started violently.

Now that the Caterpillar's words suggested it, he knew that the same impression was on his own mind.

The cracksman had been athletic, powerful, muscular—as powerful as any man of thirty. But there was a difference.

"You—you think——" stammered Wharton.

"Don't you?"

There was a long pause before Wharton answered.

"Yes," he said at last.

"I've no doubt of it," said the Caterpillar, nodding his head. "I'd bet anythin' on it! Can't be mistaken in a matter like that." He stared curiously at Wharton, whose face had whitened. "I say, what's the row—feelin' bad after that tussle?"

"No, no!" Wharton pulled himself together. He could not tell the Caterpillar what had darted into his mind at the suggestion that it was a boy, and not a man who had struggled in their grasp in Dr. Voysey's study. "No! I'm all right! If—if you think I may as well go, De Courcy, I—I'd be glad to cut—if you're sure——"

"That's all right! Leave it to me," said the Caterpillar. "As soon as you're clear I'll rouse the House—nobody need know that you've been featured in this jolly old scene."

Wharton drew a deep breath. More than ever now he was anxious not to figure in the sensation that would follow the alarm.

"I'll cut, then!"

"Mind you don't run into the jolly old cracksman," grinned the Caterpillar, as Wharton swung himself into the window. "Not much danger of that—I fancy he's far enough off by this time. Good-night."

"Good-night!"

Wharton dropped from the sill and scudded away. In a couple of minutes he was outside the precincts of Highcliffe.

Looking back, he saw lights flashing in many windows—a distant sound of alarmed confusion reached him. The Caterpillar was already rousing the House, now that the Greyfriars junior was clear.

Wharton left Highcliffe behind him and ran swiftly.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Blow Falls!

"GOT it?"

The Weasel whispered hoarsely, as a breathless figure dropped from the wall of the old courts of Highcliffe into the shadow of the oaks in the paddock.

The Wizard did not answer for the moment. He leaned on the old wall, breathing in great gulps.

The Weasel eyed him anxiously. The schoolboy crook was no longer wearing an overcoat, and the false moustache was gone from his face. His hands were empty.

"Dick! You ain't slipped up on it——" muttered the ruffian.

"Fool! Cut and run while you've got time," panted Lancaster.

"What—what the——"

"I was watched for—I don't know how—something must have got out—I only got away by slipping out of my coat and leaving it in their hands," breathed the schoolboy crook. "It was touch and go——"

"The picture?" hissed the Weasel.

"It was in the coat—the coat that Slimy had made with a special pocket for it," said Lancaster bitterly.

"Dick, you've failed—you ain't what you was," muttered the Weasel. "I got to tell Slimy that you've failed again——"

"Tell him what you like! But you'll have no chance to tell him anything if you don't beat it quick! They'll be telephoning for the police already. Get to your car, wherever it is, and beat it, you fool."

Lancaster wasted no more words on his rascally associate. Still panting for breath, he hurried away under the oaks.

The Weasel stared after him, muttered an oath, and hurried away in another direction. The Wizard had failed, the Rembrandt was not destined to fall into the greedy clutches of Slimy Sugden, and it would never be sold across the "pond." A haul of three thousand pounds had slipped through the fingers of the gang. The Weasel spat out oaths as he ran.

But he lost no time. Once the alarm was given there was safety only in flight. The schoolboy crook had only to walk back to his school, where all traces of the Wizard would vanish, and he would become Richard Lancaster of the Sixth again. It was different with the Weasel—a hardened crook, well-known to the police. The ruffian hurried away to the secluded spot where his car was hidden, started up without a second's delay, and let out the car to breakneck speed on the London road.

Lancaster gave him no further thought. He quitted the paddock and sprinted. At a distance of a quarter of a mile, however, he dropped into a walk. Roads and lanes were deserted at that late hour; but he did not desire to draw the attention of any belated pedestrian by running. Once he was well away from Highcliffe he walked at an easy pace.

He stopped at a pond, under the shadow of willows, to wash the traces of grease-paint from his face. He walked on again, his hands in his pockets, his brow dark and moody under the cap that was pulled low over his forehead. If he was seen now he was Lancaster of

the Greyfriars Sixth—out of bounds at night, but impossible for anyone to connect with the attempted burglary at Highcliffe.

But he did not desire to be seen out of bounds as a Greyfriars Sixth-Former. He kept the loose peak of the cap well over his face, and it was not a Greyfriars cap. And he walked by a shadowy lane, avoiding the open road.

Patter, patter, patter!

It was a sound of running feet in the shadowy lane behind him. Lancaster started, and stepped into a clump of willows. Someone was running hard after him. He was more than half-way to Greyfriars now—it could hardly be pursuit. But caution was second nature to the crook. He backed into the blackness under the trees and waited for the runner to pass.

Patter, patter, patter!

The swiftly-running feet passed and died away in the distance ahead. He had a glimpse of a boyish form passing in the gloom under heavy branches. That was all.

When the pattering footsteps had died away in the distance he stepped out of cover again and resumed his way.

Not for a moment did it occur to his mind that it was a Greyfriars junior who had passed him. If he had thought of Harry Wharton he would have supposed that Wharton was asleep in the Remove dormitory; he knew nothing—and could know nothing, of Wharton's adventure at Highcliffe that night. And if he did not suspect whose was that swiftly running figure in the shadows, still less did he dream of the thoughts that were in the mind of the runner.

He strode on in silence and darkness.

He reached the school at last, and slipped in by way of the Cloisters. It was past midnight now, and Greyfriars slept. Not a light glimmered from a single window.

Lancaster paused under one of the old elms in the quad, and stared at the silent building, at the many windows glimmering in the stars.

To that sleeping school he was returning like a slinking thief in the night! They did not know, they never dreamed—unless that kid in the Remove knew. If they had known him as he was—— The hot blood surged into his cheeks.

He closed his teeth hard. They should never know—and it was because he dared not let Greyfriars know him for what he was that he was helpless in the clutches of Slimy Sugden. If only he had never come to Greyfriars! But it was too late to think of that.

Slinking, skulking in shadows, he drew near the sleeping House. His study was on the ground floor—egress and ingress were easy. The branches of an elm cast a shadow across the window, circled by ancient ivy.

He stopped at the window.

His hand was on the sash when the faintest of sounds reached his ears, and he stood motionless, his heart racing. A shadow detached itself from the shadows round him. He turned his head and saw the whiteness of a face glimmering in the gloom.

A quiet voice came through the silence. It was a low, tense voice—a voice he knew—the voice of that "kid in the Remove," in whose avoidance of him he had read suspicion.

"So you've got back, Lancaster."

The Sixth-Former withdrew his hand from the sill and faced round. The colour drained from his face.

There was a long moment of silence as he faced Harry Wharton in the shadow of the elm branches.

With the litheness and swiftness of a panther, the cracksman slipped out of his overcoat and made a bound through the window!

Wharton broke it.

"I thought I might get back first—I ran all the way. I hoped I'd get back first—to make sure! Now I've made sure!"

Still Lancaster did not speak. From his colourless face his eyes seemed to burn.

That running figure in the lane—it was Wharton's, then! He understood that now. But what did the boy know? What could he know?

Wharton's next words enlightened him.

"I was at Highcliffe! Never mind what I was doing there—I was there! I was one of the two fellows you struggled with in Dr. Voysey's study."

Lancaster shivered. The junior's voice was quiet, tense; but it was the knell of doom in the ears of the schoolboy crook. The scorn in the boy's face cut him like a whip.

"I knew it was you at Hogben Grange that night—I knew your voice under the beech. I knew it, I felt it, but I tried to think it was a mistake. I couldn't believe it was you—I wouldn't believe that a Greyfriars man was a thief and a crook. But I knew it all the time."

Lancaster stood silent.

"I wasn't certain before—I'm certain now!" Wharton's voice went on. "Lancaster! I can't understand you—you, a fellow the whole school is proud of! You must be mad! You, a thief—you, a crook—you, hand-in-glove with thieves and cracksmen! I can't make it out! But it's true! Loder knew it, and you've frightened him somehow into holding his tongue. It's true! You can't frighten me, Lancaster! You've got to get out of Greyfriars!"

Still the stricken Sixth-Former did not speak. He could only stare at the accusing face in the shadows, dumb.

"You understand? You've got to get out of Greyfriars! You've no right here—no right! Get out of it, and go back where you belong!"

Wharton waited for an answer. But no answer came. Lancaster stood as if turned to stone.

And the junior turned away and left him standing thus.

The Remove dormitory was silent, sleeping, when Wharton tiptoed in. He plunged into bed. Round him the Remove fellows were sleeping the sleep of healthy youth. But it was long before Wharton slept; before his eyes lingered that white, stricken face—the tortured face of the schoolboy crook, tortured with shame and despair. The face of Lancaster of the Sixth haunted Wharton in his dreams when at last he slept.

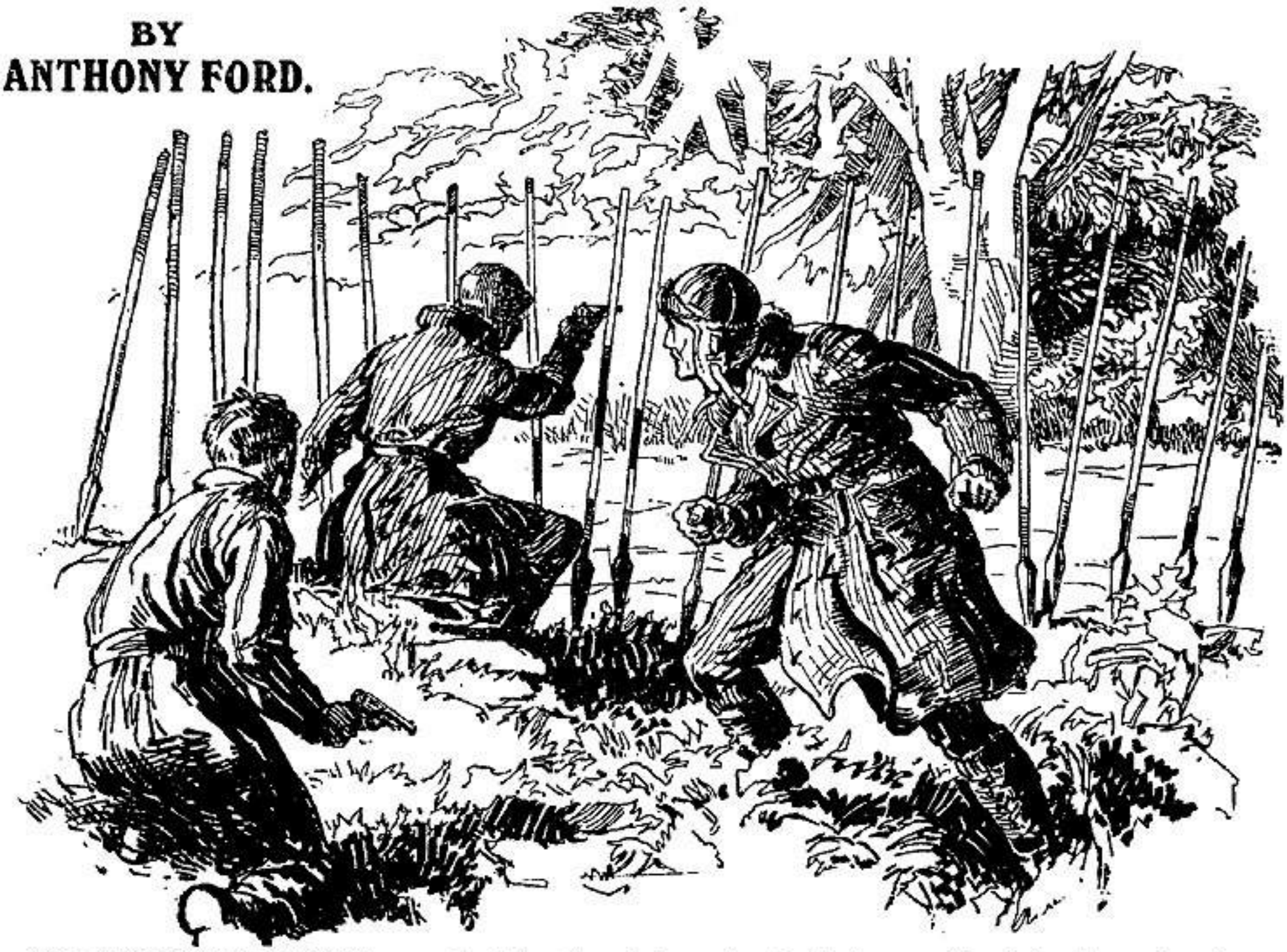
THE END.

(The next yarn in this fine series is entitled: "THE BOY WHO KNEW TOO MUCH!" Make sure of reading it, chums, by ordering your copy in good time.)

CONTINUING OUR PULSE-STIRRING FLYING SERIAL:

LAND of LOST PLANES!

BY
ANTHONY FORD.



HOW THE STORY STARTED.

Entrusted with a fortune, 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, anxious to get his hands on the vast fortune, orders his underlings to kidnap Bill Lyon, chief pilot of the Transcontinental Airways Co. Prompted more by the hope of rescuing his old friend Dexter than from any fear of the "Chief," Bill agrees to pilot a specially-constructed plane through the treacherous wind-belt. Driven along at the mercy of a power over which he had absolutely no control, and concentrating only on keeping an even keel, Bill negotiates the wind-belt and eventually arrives over a dense forest in which Dexter had apparently been forced down.

(Now read on.)

Victims of the Wind-belt!

EARTH swept towards the swooping monoplane with fearful speed. What Doak had described as a dark mass beneath them swiftly took form. As Bill Lyon released the helium valves in the hollow wings, so the plane dropped more rapidly out of the belt of wind, until at last the high hissing of the gale ceased altogether, and there was only the normal scream of the wind as it whistled through struts and ailerons.

Bill sensed the quickened revolutions of the propeller, and realised that they had dropped far below the hurricane belt, and were now head-on into a wind blowing in the opposite direction, two miles below the wind zone they had just come through.

Below, the dark mass resolved itself into a dense forest. Far away, rising very faint and distant in the light of early dawn, were mountains, entirely enclosing the dark forest.

But the pilot had no fear about landing, for from the height at which they still were, he could see that there were many open spaces in the forest, while afar glimmered a sheet of water, like a mirror gleaming pinkly in the rays of the rising sun. They were sweeping down into a bowl of the earth, entirely surrounded by the far-looming mountains.

Bill glanced at the compass, which still refused to function, the needle merely jumping about with the motion of the bus. Where they were the young pilot had not the slightest idea. But, after what had passed, he felt that they might well be approaching some strange place.

There was no sign of life below that he could see. He shrugged, tilting the joystick so that the plane's nose took on a still steeper angle. And then suddenly Bill Lyon gave a little exclamation, and his hands gripped more tightly around the ebonite handle of the joystick.

He estimated they were still something like two miles above the earth. A distance away he saw a wide, green plain, and dotted about it, like the skeletons of some great prehistoric birds, were the battered wrecks of several planes.

The spars gleamed whitely like bones. There were fully a dozen wrecks; a few were blackened, evidence of having caught fire in their crazy descent from the battering wind that had brought them here.

The place resembled a Sargasso Sea of the air; a lonely burial ground for all the wandering ships of the air that had been caught in the aerial vortex so high above, and sucked down to destruction in this apparent desolation.

"Didn't read anything like this in Shane's notes," Bill muttered to himself, staring down at the grim relics. "I guess maybe he described the place though, but the Chief failed to pick up that part of the message. He only got it in snatches, anyway."

The young pilot felt a lump rise in his throat as he stared at the skeletons of forgotten planes; thought of the pioneers who had flown these machines. They were of many types, his experienced eye could tell, even from the height he was above them. There was one there, in particular, of larger, more skeleton-like structure than the others, which Bill realised was a very early effort in aeroplane construction.

Staring down at this Land of Lost Planes, Bill forgot the two killers in the cabin behind him. His mind went back, thinking of the pioneers of aviation who had never been heard of again; men who, like Shane Dexter, had attempted to fly the Atlantic, whose

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signals had been received up to a certain point, and then who had disappeared into the blue. The relics were grim; but there was something very fine about them.

Land of Lost Planes——

The pilot's thoughts were snapped short suddenly. It was Doak, the Chief's white-faced gunman, who croaked suddenly. Instinctively Bill turned his head at the sound.

The gunman's nerve had snapped. Hitherto he had been iron-faced, impassive; but beneath the mask he must have been frightened to death at what he had been through. He was a killer, but he had always had his feet on firm ground when he killed, and he had always made sure of his own safety. Invariably his victims had been shot in the back. Such a man must inevitably break down under nerve-ordeal. He croaked:

"Get down! Get down! Can't you see what's happened to them others? What are you hoverin' around up here for? We'll crash——"

With his white face streaked with crimson, his black eyes wide and staring, he looked half crazed. Uttering a sudden, inarticulate snarl, he snatched his arm away from the restraining hand of the Chief, who had been gazing with interest out of the window.

"Land 'er, will you! You rat!"

He lunged towards Bill, lurching across the cabin like a tiger. The Chief snapped out a word, but Doak was on Bill before his leader could hold him back.

Pent-up hatred of the pilot, coupled with awful fear, gave him madman's strength. He didn't trouble to use the automatic in his shoulder holster, but closed his hands in a steel grip around Bill's throat, yanking the pilot from his seat.

"The controls!" Bill managed to gasp.

The Chief, still green from air-sickness, but feeling better, staggered to the controls as Doak struggled with Bill. He even grinned a little, concentrating on keeping the plane on a level keel, while the two fought there in midair.

Now that they were safely out of the wind zone, he didn't much care if Bill was bumped off by his gunman there and then. He felt that in emergency he could pilot the plane back to safety now. It had been his plan to kill the pilot at some time or another. Why not now as well as any other? The only thing was, he wasn't too sure of landing this monoplane he had constructed. Not on unknown ground.

Bill felt the blood pounding in his ears as Doak's grip tightened. The gunman's face, no longer white, but suffused redly, glared into his own but a few inches away.

Desperately Bill jerked his head forward. It met Doak's chin with a crack which snapped the gunman's head back with a jerk. His grip of Bill's throat relaxed a fraction. The pilot jerked back swiftly. Doak's fingernails tore his flesh as he did so, but the grip was moved.

The young pilot brought his fist crashing into Doak's face. Again and again he hammered the gunman. Now it was Doak who was defending himself against the furious onslaught. He covered his face with his hands, striving to ward off the blows. He crouched on the throbbing floor of the plane cabin, snarling like a wild-cat.

His right hand dropped suddenly, then swept across his chest to his shoulder-holster. An automatic glimmered in his hand. Bill ducked as he sensed, rather than saw, the move. There were three spiteful cracks in as many seconds. Livid jets of scarlet flame speared from the gun-muzzle; the cabin was filled with the acrid smell of powder.

Bill's right hand bunched to a mighty fist. He put all his weight behind it, brought it in one smashing punch to Doak's unprotected jaw.

The gunman sagged, flattened. The plane lurched and swayed crazily; but this time Bill was taking no risks. He stooped swiftly and plucked the automatic from Doak's nerveless hands and stuffed it in his tunic belt.

Turning, he saw the Chief sagging in the pilot's seat, blood streaming from a livid streak across his forehead, and the ground but a few hundred feet away, rushing towards them.

In one movement Bill leapt across to the pilot's seat, grabbed the unconscious form of the Chief, and yanked him out bodily. He didn't know if the man were dead or not, killed by one of his own gunman's wildly shot bullets. His one idea was to regain control of the plane before she crashed, nose down to the ground.

But even as he gripped the joystick, pressed with feet braced against the rudder-bars, he knew he couldn't flatten her out in time. The speed was too great. Doak was crumpled against the cabin wall, the Chief sprawled on the floor.

There was a sudden jar. The ground swung upward. Glass shattered, and the sun blazed squarely into Bill's eyeballs, searing them, then seemed to burst into a golden shower of sparks. Thunder roared about him, and amid it he heard his voice, very faint, saying:

From the fringe of the jungle came a dark cloud of spears, an impressive warning to the three white men who had dropped from the clouds!

"I knew it! I knew we couldn't do it!"

Thereafter he seemed to be wrapped in a warm blanket, which hid light and sound from him!

A Barrier of Spears!

BILL stirred. The sun beat down hot on his face. He opened his eyes, but the blinding glare of the sun made him close them again quickly.

Consciousness returned gradually and painfully. At last, when memory returned fully, the young pilot raised himself on one elbow. His face twisted.

At first sight the plane looked in a bad way. She was up-ended, her tail sticking high in the air, the nose of the cabin seemingly glued to the earth. The front part of the cabin was splintered; but the wings seemed all right, spreading unbrokenly from each side of the fuselage.

Bill found that he had been flung through the front of the cabin, and had landed some ten or a dozen yards away from the nose of the upended plane. He arose to his feet stiffly, feeling himself gingerly, and was surprised and relieved to find that, although bruised and battered painfully, no bones were broken.

His first thoughts now were for the men who had been with him in the cabin. Killers they might be, but they were human beings. They might need attention. He remembered seeing the Chief's face covered in blood, the livid streak across his forehead.

Stalking painfully across to the plane, he peered through a split in the aluminium of the cabin.

There was Doak, still crumpled against the wall, his face buried in his crossed arms.

"Get 'em out first!" Bill muttered to himself. "Have a look around after an' see if the bus is repairable."

He crawled through the split opening in the cabin and bent over Doak. The man was breathing. There was a livid bruise on his temple; a lighter bruise where Bill had walloped him on the jaw. The fact that Bill had knocked him out had probably saved Doak's life. Unconscious, he had been relaxed when the crash came, tumbled about like an empty sack. Braced, he would probably have been smashed among the wreckage.

Dragging the man out, Bill realised suddenly there was no sign of the Chief in the cabin. For a moment he felt puzzled, then remembered how he himself had been thrown clear.

"Probably thrown out the other side," he thought dizzily.

The young pilot heaved Doak out, and stretched him beneath the shade of the plane's wing. He remembered there was a spirit-flask in the cabin, and went back for it. As he groped about he peered through the shattered frame of the cabin window, and saw a figure probing among the gaunt wrecks of the other planes.

Bill recognised the short, plump figure of the Chief, the sun glinting on the lenses of his pince-nez. Anger gripped Bill suddenly at sight of the man, for the Chief was peering and probing about in the skeleton that had been Shane Dexter's aeroplane.

"Hi! You—you confounded ghoul!" yelled Bill hoarsely.

The Chief turned hastily, then called:

"Oh, so you're all right, are you?"

He turned his back and went on coolly with his search. But evidently there was nothing there to interest him, for when Bill clambered from the cabin with the flask of spirits he turned away from the white wreckage and came to the pilot.

"Why are you bothering about him?" he said, while Bill was pouring the spirit between Doak's lips. "He tried to kill you, didn't he? If he gets a chance he'll still try."

"He won't, and neither will you!" Bill answered grimly. "There are two reasons. First, I've got his gun, and I shan't hesitate to use it either on him or you; and, second, although you may have designed this plane, it takes a fellow with more technical skill than you've got to do any repairs to it. I'm the only one among we three who's got that qualification. Did you find the jewels, you—you body-robber?"

(*Continued on next page.*)

"I didn't," the Chief answered placidly. "But no doubt I shall. Dexter is about here somewhere, if he hasn't been killed by the natives he spoke about. If he's alive, he will hand over the jewels to me. If he's dead I will get them. As for your gun that you took from Doak, there are only three bullets left in the clip. Doak has no more on him. I took what he had left when I was holding him back from you."

"A fat lot of holding back you did!" growled Bill. "And, anyway, three bullets are enough for you. I don't know how on earth you weren't plugged when one of Doak's creased you!"

"My luck held good, that's all, my dear fellow," the Chief replied calmly. "It was merely a graze across the temple, which put me out temporarily. Otherwise, I could have landed the plane perfectly well. I am surprised that you didn't make a better job of it! Is it repairable do you think?"

"Look after this dough-faced friend of yours, and I'll have a look round. Mind, though, the first sign of any monkey tricks, and I'll shoot. Savvy?"

"It would be better," said the Chief, "if we were to call a truce while we are here, I think. I will promise you not to play any monkey tricks, as you call it, providing you overhaul the plane and make every effort to help us all out. You will get the reward I stated."

"I trust you just about as far as a snail can run in a split second," grunted Bill. "Which ain't no distance at all! What I said holds good—no monkey tricks, or one of the three bullets in this gun isn't going to do you much good."

He turned on his heel, and left the Chief to tend to Doak.

In a few moments he was absorbed in the task of estimating the damage to the wrecked plane. The fact that the machine had been constructed of aluminium alloy had undoubtedly saved its life.

Bill discovered that the wings, engines, and propellers were untouched; that the cabin and landing gear had been the principal objects that had suffered damage.

"She's a lame duck, but she's still airworthy," he mused. "That off-wheel has been warped back too far, but can be bolted forward again. The structure hasn't suffered. She's good for a take-off and a landing or two yet."

The fact that the cabin had been battered about, the glass smashed, and the window-frames wrenched would not materially affect the machine in flight at all. The only thing necessary was to repair the landing-gear and right the plane.

In a few moments Bill was absorbed in the task of bolting up the warped offside wheel-structure.

Then suddenly the silence was broken by the sharp crack of a gun. He started as if he'd been stung.

"Doaky getting it from his Chief," he muttered, and ran around to the wing of the plane.

Then he checked.

Doak and the Chief were crouched under the wing, immediately facing the fringe of forest which skirted the open plain a couple of hundred yards away. And, flitting in the dark green of the jungle, Bill saw the shapes of men.

The Chief had a gun in his hand, and Doak, too, had one. Both were firing at the men in the jungle. Bill saw one clearly—a tall, lithe fellow, a golden brown in colour, naked, save for a twisted belt of gold which supported a skin of golden colour. Everything about the man seemed golden, even his hair being the rich, burnished colour.

There was a whispering sound, and from the fringe of jungle came a dark cloud of spears, like the short, throwing javelins of the ancient Greeks. The spears soared high in an arc, seemed to make some formation, then fell together until they stuck upright in the ground to form a kind of fence in front of the Chief and Doak. Another cloud whispered out from the jungle fringe, the spears falling with amazing accuracy between the spaces left by the first flight.

In spite of his first amazement, Bill felt admiration for the uncanny skill with which the spears were flung, thus rapidly to form a barrier against the white men.

"You fools! Don't fire at 'em!" he shouted to the Chief. "They're the chaps Dexter was talking about!"

He rushed forward as the Chief, ignoring him, deliberately raised his hand and sighted his revolver between the spaces of the spears. Bill's foot went forward in a lusty kick that caught the Chief on the wrist. The gun spouted noise and flame, but the bullet sailed harmlessly high. In another moment Bill had rushed forward and snatched up the gun..

(Bill and the crooks are in the Land of Lost Planes, where many unknown perils and adventures await them. Will they find Dexter? Don't miss the next hair-raising instalment!)

Greyfriars Herald

Edited by HARRY WHARTON, F.G.B.

LATEST EXTRA GOOD EDITION

No. 48. LAUGH AN GROW FAT. June 6th, 1931.

SINISTER GANG AT GREYFRIARS

Notice-board Meddlers

POLICE ON THE TRAIL

A new form of crime has arisen at Greyfriars. Hitherto it has been absolutely unknown for anybody to meddle with an official notice hung on the notice-boards; but a gang has made its appearance which has altered that state of things. This gang—or it may be only one person—waits until nobody is looking, and then adds irrelevant details and insulting adjectives to the notices hung up. Even notices by Wingate and the Head are not immune from this sacrilege.

The worst of it is that the villain is apparently an expert forger, for he imitates the various writings so perfectly that it is hard to tell which is the genuine notice and which is the spurious part.

Here are one or two that have suffered from his misguided sense of humour.

NOTICE BY THE CAPTAIN.

Below are the names of the burbling idiots who have been selected to play against Rookwood—but who couldn't play against the Second Form:

Wingate, Loder, Sykes, Blundell, Gwynne, Walker, Bland, Faulkener, Price, Fitzgerald, North.

What a crowd! Rookwood will shriek.

I shall be glad if the team selected will be ready to enter the brake at eleven o'clock, and I hope every man jack of them will kick me hard as often as they like.

Signed,
GEORGE WINGATE.

This document has reduced Wingate almost to breaking point, and he has been offering almost impossible rewards to anybody who will tell him the name of the culprit. Here is another specimen:

ENGLISH LITERATURE PAPER.

I shall be glad if the poor nibs who have entered the English Literature Prize Essay will give their names to me not later than midday on Wednesday next, and I will reward them with a sound flogging and 1,000,000,000,000,000,000 lines.
H. S. QUELCH (*Master*).

Although this is quite bad enough, the matter has now taken a more serious turn. The criminals are placing entirely spurious notices on the board, and it is difficult to disprove the genuineness of these notices. Here is one which is strongly suspected to be a fake:

NOTICE:

Will the boy who has purloined my crib to Cæsar please return it as quickly as possible, as I am unable to check the Third Form exercises without it.
E. TWIGG (*Master*).

This one made its appearance on the board last night, and stayed there for about ten minutes, while somebody was telling Loder.

"I am a sneak, a beast and a bully. I am a dingy rotter, and I hope I shall soon be bunked.
Signed,
GERALD LODER.

The Remove Police have the matter in hand, so the culprits are now fairly safe from detection. Popular suspicion rests on Skinner; but in every instance Snoop and Stott have been able to give him a complete alibi. More news may be forthcoming later.

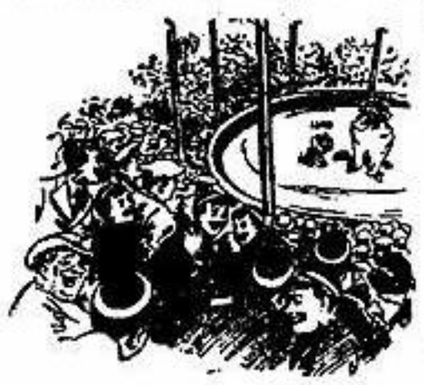
CRICKET CAPTAIN INDIGNANT

Slacking Team

APPEAL BY HARRY WHARTON

Look here, you fellows, this has got to stop. After what happened on Friday, I feel that something has got to be done about our Cricket eleven. I issued an order, and they defied me. It is nothing less than insuborn—insubb—insuborddi—mutiny.

I said to my cricket team on Friday: "Listen, you men. There's a circus in Friardale, but the eleven must not go to it to-night. If you frowst in a stuffy circus tent all the evening, you'll be washed out for the Abbotsford match to-morrow. Stay away from the circus."



There was a lot of grumbling; but I was firm. It would never do to risk being stale for the Abbotsford match, and I told the fellows so.

And what was the result?

When the lights went up, after the clown act, Vernon-Smith and Redwing were sitting near Cherry, Hurree Singh and Nugent. Johnny Bull and Squiff were throwing streamers at Penfold and Mark Linley. Hazeldene was frowsting by himself on the other side of the big tent.

Every man of my cricket team was there. They had disregarded my express instructions.

It is no use them denying it. I know they were there. I was in a front seat, and I saw them plainly.

Well, if there's any more of it, I shall be jolly wrathy. That's a tip.

Answers to Correspondents

(Sorry! Can't manage to reply this week. We have just received a letter from Alonzo Todd, containing 882 pages, and 16,785 questions. We haven't finished reading it yet. We have arranged for the next thirty-seven issues of the HERALD to be set apart for the answers to Alonzo's questions. Perhaps!)

AMAZING SCENE AT CRICKET MATCH

Knotty Problem for Umpire

TEMPLE'S GREAT HIT

An extraordinary incident took place in a cricket match between the Remove and Upper Fourth yesterday afternoon. The incident led to a long argument, which, in turn, degenerated into a display of fistic prowess, and ended in a long lecture from the umpires.

It really was a most amusing point. Readers of the "Herald" are asked to puzzle out what the verdict of the umpires should have been.

The facts were these: Bill Reginald Temple was batting and Squiff of the Remove was bowling. Temple had a hard job to get the first two balls of the over; and at the third he got desperate and, jumping two yards down the pitch, he lashed out with all his might. It was a terrific clout. The ball soared away through the air in the direction of a large oak tree which stood by the boundary.

The ball landed plump in the tree, and remained fixed in the branches in full view of Vernon-Smith, who was chasing it. Smithy looked at the ball, wedged high up in the tree, and wondered how to get it.

Meanwhile Temple started his fourth run, but the umpire waved him back.

"It's a boundary," he said.

"It's not!" snapped Temple. "That branch of the tree projects over the boundary line. The ball is still in the field of play. It hasn't crossed the line. Come on!"

So Temple and Scott ran another two runs. Then the umpire stopped them.

"Lost ball—six!" he said coolly.

"How can a ball be lost when it's right in front of your silly eyes?" hooted Temple. "It isn't a lost ball, and it isn't six. Come on!"

Temple and Scott continued to run. Wharton stared at them. They had already run twelve for the hit, and they showed no signs of easing up.

"Here, cheese it!" he exclaimed. "You can't keep running like this."

"We can keep running until you field that ball and return it to the wicket keeper," panted Temple. "Come on!"

Bob Cherry and Wharton ran over to the tree. Smithy looked at them with gleaming eyes.

"We'll show 'em!" he chortled. "I'm going to shin up the tree. Get underneath that ball and catch it as it drops."

"What-ho!" chuckled Bob.

Up the tree went Smithy. He caught the branch and shook it. The ball was dislodged and fell—safely into the hands of Bob Cherry below.

"How's that?" roared Bob, flinging up the ball.

"Out!" said the umpire.

Temple stopped in the middle of his twenty-ninth run and glared.

"What rot!" he roared. "How is that out? The ball was caught from the tree, not the bat."

"It was still in play," sniggered the umpire, getting his own back. "You were still running—so the ball, speaking metaphorically, was still travelling. You're out. Caught Cherry, bowled Field."

Temple laid down his bat and went to interview the umpire. The Remove crowded round to protect that worthy, and in a moment there was a strong argument raging.

Temple was compelled to go at last. The spectators—who were mostly Removites—backed up the umpire. If Cecil Reginald had had the sense to let the umpire signal a boundary, he wouldn't have been out. It serves him right.

"But still," as he said to Fry afterwards, "I knocked a twenty-niner, so it doesn't matter much."

Can You Turn A Penny Into A Pound?

Let Fisher T. Fish Help You

How many of you guys could turn a penny into a pound in a week or so? None. You've got no business enterprise. I'll show you how it can be done.

1. Buy a penny bottle of ink. Write an article like this for the "Herald." Demand a pound for it from Wharton. (NOTE.—Demand and supply are two different things, Fishy-Ed.

2. Buy vegetable marrow seeds—20 a penny. Grow twenty marrows. Sell 'em at a bob a time.

3. Buy a penny stamp. Enter a competition in the papers. Win a pound.

PETER TODD'S SPECIAL

A Brain-Teaser

Here is an original riddle from Peter Todd. What is it that—

If a man wants it, he's happy; if he gets it, he's miserable; if he looks for it, he's contented; if he finds it, he's unhappy; if he hears it, he's deaf; if he says it, he's wise; if he eats it, he's hungry; if he doesn't, he's satisfied; if he owns it, he's poor; if he lends it, he's glad?

Answer.—NOTHING.

(Toddy ought to know all about Nothing, that's what he's going to be paid for this riddle.)

SAD STORY OF 100 LINES

Poor Old Fishy

STILL WRITING

News has just come to hand of an extraordinary incident connected with an impot of 100 lines which Fisher T. Fish bagged in class this morning. It was during geography lesson. Quelchy said: "Fish! Tell me the Capital of Mexico, and what interest attaches to its history."

Fishy replied, without the slightest hesitation:

"Capital—one million dollars. Interest—seven per cent per annum." And he was rewarded with a hundred lines.

Directly after dinner he sat down and scrawled out his 100 lines. Instead of going out afterwards—for it was a half-holiday—he had more important things to do. He was thinking of starting another moneylending business, so he wrote out a draft prospectus on some sheets of paper.

It was as he looked for his lines that he made the sickening discovery that he had written the prospectus on the back of them. Thinking it wise not to let Quelchy see that prospectus, Fishy got some more paper and wrote them out a second time.

Five minutes later he knocked a bottle of ink over this second hundred, so he started on a third. He had just finished the three hundredth line when Johnny Bull came in and lit the fire on which to boil the kettle. The paper he used to light the fire was discovered to be Fishy's impot.

With many groans Fishy started the fourth hundred. What became of this set it is impossible to say. Whether the breeze blew them out of the window, or somebody took them away in mistake, has not been found out. But, at any rate, they disappeared.

Feeling almost dead beat, Fishy started the fifth hundred. At the time of going to press, he is still writing.

STOP PRESS.—Fishy's fifth hundred torn up accidentally by Squiff. Fishy has just been caned by Quelch for not doing his lines.

TO-DAY'S HAPPENINGS

What to See and What to Miss

SATURDAY

The following is a diary of to-day's events:—

RAG.—12 noon. Courts of Justice. Before Mr. Justice Wharton. Bolsover v. Bunter—unless settled out of court previously. Remove v. Snoop—indictment for sneaking to Loder. Witnesses enter by the side door.

CRICKET MATCH ON LITTLE SIDE: Greyfriars v. Hawkscliffe. Starts at 3 p.m. Tea interval, 5 to 5.30.

BIG SIDE: Greyfriars v. Old Arnoldians. 3 p.m.

TENNIS: Qualifying round for Invitation Championship Matches.

WOODSHED: Birthday party by Harold Skinner. Free smokes. Admission by ticket only. (Guests are advised to bring their own playing cards, as Skinner's cards are usually marked.)

DORMITORY: 10.30 p.m. Bumping and ragging for Fisher T. Fish.

THINGS WE WANT TO KNOW

Has it ever occurred to Billy Bunter that, when he eats a pound of pork sausages, he may be eating a near relation?

Has Coker done anything to his face, or did it grow that way naturally?

Does Mr. Quelch beat carpets during the vac., in order to keep his hand in?

Did Prout shoot that stuffed bear in his study? Or did the brute take a look at Prout and drop dead with fright?

Is it a fact that, when Bob is asleep in dorm, his feet are out of bounds?

Why doesn't Loder buy a watch instead of going down to the Green Man to see the time?

Does Mr. Hawke, of the Green Man, think that Loder is rather a green man, too?