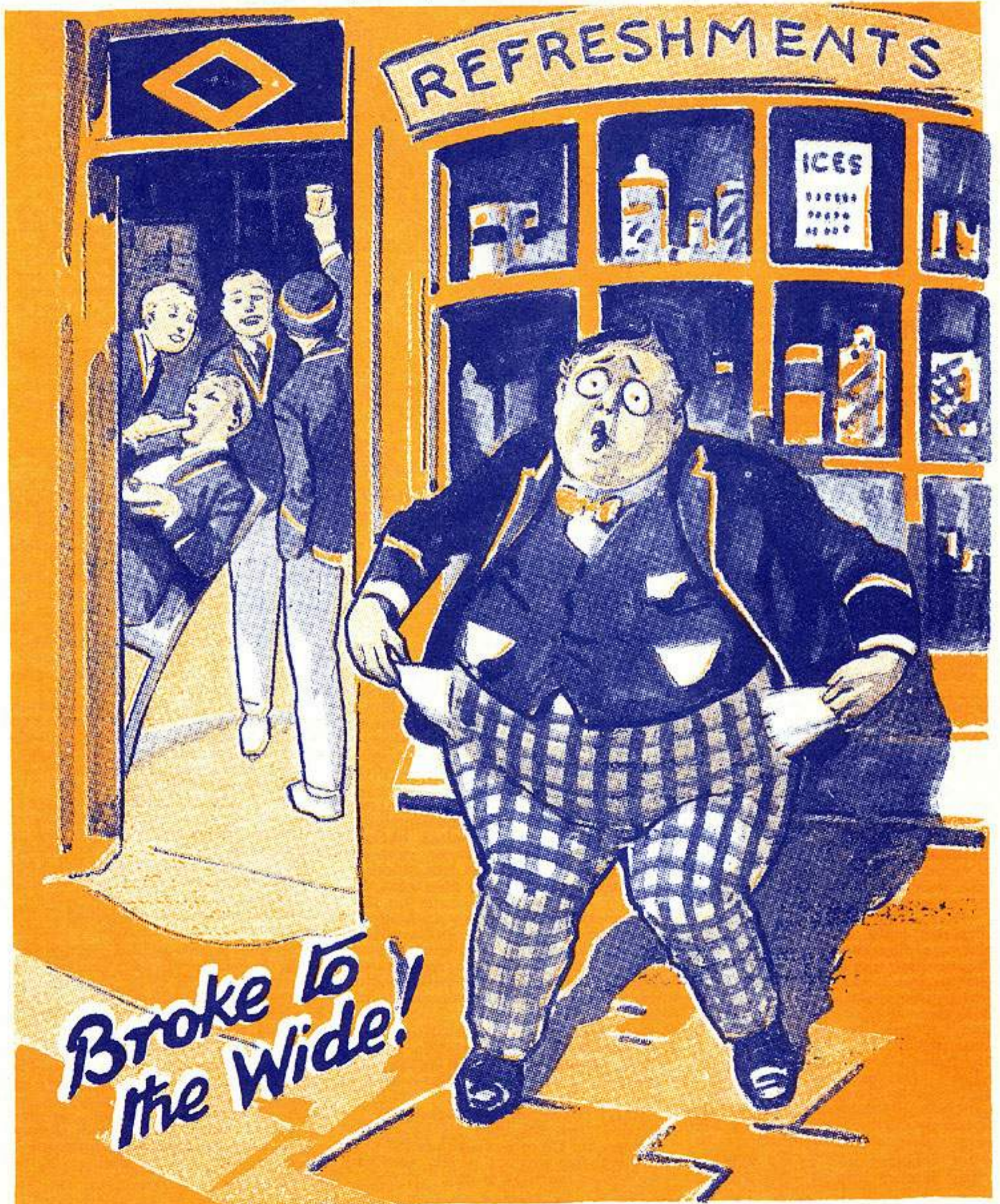


"THE BOY WHO KNEW TOO MUCH!"

Thrilling Complete School Story—Inside.

The **MAGNET** 2^D



THE BOY WHO KNEW TOO MUCH!



FEATURING
THE WORLD-FAMOUS
SCHOOLBOYS, HARRY
WHARTON & CO.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Looking for Lancaster!

WHERE the dickens is the man?"

Wingate of the Sixth asked that question for the third or fourth time.

He stared round impatiently.

"Anybody know where Lancaster is?"

Nobody seemed to know.

The Greyfriars captain frowned. He was friendly, almost chummy, with Dick Lancaster, the new man in the Sixth Form at Greyfriars. But cricket was cricket; and when a man was wanted to bat, it was that man's duty to be on the spot.

Lancaster of the Sixth was not on the spot. He was not to be seen.

Dozens of fellows were asking themselves where Lancaster was, and what the dickens he thought he was up to. It was the first time the new man had been found wanting when cricket was the order of the day.

"Here, Cherry!" called out Wingate.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry came scudding across from a group of Remove men who had gathered on Big Side to watch the game.

"Lancaster's not turned up!" snapped Wingate.

"Want me to play?" asked Bob cheerfully.

Wingate glared.

Bob's question was humorous. It really was not likely that the Greyfriars captain would be calling on a Lower Fourth junior to play because a Sixth Form man was missing.

But Wingate was in no mood for The Magnet Library.—No. 1,217.

Lower Fourth humour. He glared at the cheery Bob as if he could have eaten him.

"You young ass! Cut off to the House and see if Lancaster is there! Tell him we're waiting. If he's not there look for him."

"Right-ho!" answered Bob. And he cut off.

Wingate grunted.

It was a Form match that afternoon—Sixth against Fifth. It was not a matter of the first importance in itself. But after that game Wingate was to make his final selection of the men who were to go over to St. Jim's on Wednesday. And the St. Jim's match was one of the biggest fixtures on the Greyfriars card.

It was a foregone conclusion that Lancaster of the Sixth would play at St. Jim's; Wingate was not likely to leave out the finest cricketer ever seen at Greyfriars. Still, the man ought not to have been playing the goat like this.

A wicket had gone down; Lancaster was next man in, and Lancaster was not on the ground. The bowler was waiting, the field was yawning, and Wingate, frowning, sent in another man, leaving Lancaster to come later in the innings.

Bob Cherry trotted cheerfully away towards the House. With him went his chums—Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull and Hurree Janset Ram Singh—to help him look for Lancaster.

Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove, was not with his chums that afternoon. There was a rift in the lute; and Wharton was not of late, seen with the Co. so much as of old.

"Seen Lancaster, Skinner?" bawled Bob Cherry, as the juniors passed Harold Skinner on their way to the House.

"No, and don't want to!" answered Skinner politely.

Bob paused a second, to knock Skinner's cap off, in acknowledgment of that polite answer, and trotted on.

"Seen Lancaster, Smithy?" The Bounder was coming out of the House as the juniors arrived there.

"No. Isn't he on Big Side?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"He jolly well ought to be, but he jolly well isn't!" explained Bob. "Old Wingate's sent us to find him. He nearly bit my head off because I offered to play in Lancaster's place."

The Bounder chuckled.

"Serve you right if he'd bitten it quite off for your cheek!" he answered. "Here—what—you silly ass, what are you playing at?"

Having sent the Bounder's hat whirling, Bob trotted into the House, followed by his chums.

"Betier draw the Sixth first!" said Nugent.

The four juniors headed for the Sixth Form studies to "draw" the Sixth, as Nugent suggested. Why Lancaster had not turned up for the cricket was rather a mystery; but his study seemed a probable place to find him.

Bob Cherry did the Sixth Form passage as if it were the cinder-path. Perhaps he was in a hurry to carry out Wingate's orders; or perhaps it was sheer exuberance of spirits. Anyhow, he pelted down that sacred passage, where mere juniors were supposed to walk in fear and trembling, at top speed.

—THIS SUPERB SCHOOL-ADVENTURE STORY!

It was sheer ill-luck that Loder of the Sixth came out of his study just as Bob was passing his doorway.

Bob had no time to stop. He did not even see Loder before he crashed.

Crash!

Bump!

"Oh!" gasped Loder.

"Owwwww!" spluttered Bob.

Gerald Loder sat down suddenly. Bob Cherry staggered back against the wall. Nugent and Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh came to a halt just in time to save themselves from piling up on Loder.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Nugent.

Loder staggered to his feet. He had not been in a good temper when he came out of his study. The new man, Lancaster, had the place in the Sixth Form team that Loder regarded as his. Loder's temper, never good, was not improved thereby. But if his temper had not been good before he received Bob's charge, it was worse afterwards. The expression on his face as he staggered up was like unto that of a demon in a pantomime.

"You—you—you——" he gurgled.

"Sorry, Loder!" gasped Bob. "I'm in a hurry! Wingate's sent me to find Lancaster. He's wanted to bat——"

That did it!

Lancaster's name was not likely to placate Loder. It was more likely to have the effect on him of a red rag on a bull.

He grabbed Bob by the collar.

"Come into my study, you young hooligan!"

"I—I say, Loder——"

Loder spun the junior into the study. He grabbed a cane from the table.

"Bend over!" he gasped.

"But I—I say, I'm in a hurry——"

"Bend over!" roared Loder.

"Lancaster's wanted——"

"Bend over!" raved Loder.

There was no help for it.

Barging about in the Sixth Form passage was a serious offence, considered—by the Sixth at least—to merit a whipping. Flooring a Sixth Form prefect was a still more serious offence. Bob rather wished that he had restrained the exuberance of his spirits. But it was too late to wish that now.

Swish, swish, swish, swish, swish, swish!

Loder laid on the "six" as if he were beating a carpet. Bob Cherry wriggled painfully. His chums looked on from the doorway with sympathetic looks.

"There!" gasped Loder. "Now cut, you young ruffian!"

"Ow! Wow!"

Bob wriggled out of the study. He proceeded up the Sixth Form passage at a much slower pace than before.

"Hard luck, old chap!" said Bull.

"The hardness of the preposterous luck is terrific, my esteemed idiotic chum!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Ow! Wow!" was Bob's reply.

"Well, here we are!" said Nugent, and he knocked at Lancaster's door and threw it open. "I say, Lancaster, have you forgotten the match? You're next man in, and Wingate—— My hat, he's not here!"

The study was empty.

"Not here!" said Johnny Bull, staring into the study. "Where the dickens can the man have got to?"

"Ow! Wow!"

"Better look farther," said Nugent.

And the juniors proceeded to search farther for Lancaster of the Sixth, Bob Cherry wriggling as he went.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Beastly for Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER grunted discontentedly.

Bunter was peeved.

Standing before the cupboard in Study No. 7 in the Remove, Billy Bunter blinked into it and was peeved.

The cupboard, like the celebrated Mrs. Hubbard's, was bare.

His study-mate, Peter Todd, had gone down to Big Side to watch the cricket. Bunter had hoped that Toddy had laid in something for tea before he went. That would have been only thoughtful on Toddy's part.

But perhaps Toddy had been too thoughtful to lay in supplies before tea-time. With Billy Bunter around, it was improbable that the supplies would have remained available for tea.

Anyhow, there was nothing in the cupboard. And there was nothing in Bunter—or he felt as if there were nothing. It was hours since dinner—and Bunter had had nothing since, but a bunch of bananas he had found in Ogilvy's study, and a bag of biscuits he had fortunately discovered in Johnny Bull's. So he was hungry.

It was Saturday afternoon, a half-holiday at Greyfriars School. Bunter, naturally, wanted to enjoy his half-holiday. His idea of enjoyment was to repose his fat person under a shady tree and pack away tuck.

But Bunter was prevented from enjoying his half-holiday in his own way by the disconcerting fact that tuck cost money, and Bunter was in his usual impecunious state.

Not for the first time, Billy Bunter

The police would give anything to know the identity of the "Wizard"—notorious cracksman. But the one schoolboy who could help them is effectively silenced!

had been disappointed about a postal order! A remittance, scheduled to arrive from one of his titled relations, had failed to materialise.

But there were more ways of killing a cat than choking it with cream. When a fellow was seriously in need of tuck, and lacked the wherewithal to purchase tuck, the natural resource was to bag another fellow's tuck. That, at least, was Bunter's natural resource in such circumstances.

On a fine half-holiday in June most of the fellows, naturally, were out of doors. Most of the Remove men were watching the senior cricket match on Big Side. Bunter was not interested in senior cricket matches—or junior matches, for that matter. He was not even aware that the game was going on. Matters of weightier import filled his fat mind.

"Beast!" grunted Bunter.

He referred to the absent Toddy, whose fault it was that the study cupboard was bare.

He rolled out of Study No. 7. Most of the studies, it was certain, would be unoccupied. He had already done fairly well in Ogilvy's and Johnny Bull's. Now he headed for Study No. 1.

Wharton and Nugent, he felt certain, would be out of the House. In fact, he had seen Nugent go out.

So he rolled into Study No. 1, sure that it was vacant and that the study cupboard was at his mercy. And in matters like this Bunter was merciless.

So sure was he that the study was empty that he rolled straight across to the cupboard without taking the trouble

to blink round him through his big spectacles.

That was how it happened that he did not see a junior standing at the window looking out into the quad.

He opened the cupboard door. Harry Wharton turned round from the window.

Bunter's eyes fell on a cake. Wharton's eyes fell on Bunter.

Bunter reached out a hand, grinning. Wharton, also grinning, reached out a foot.

Biff!

"Yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter staggered and sat down on the study carpet. Harry Wharton looked down at him genially.

"Have another?" he asked.

"Ow! Beast! Ow!" roared Bunter. "I didn't know you were here, you beast! I mean I—I came here specially to speak to you, old chap! Ow! Stop kicking me, you rotter! If you think I was after that cake—— Yaroooh!"

Bunter fled.

The door of Study No. 1 slammed after him, and for some minutes there were sounds of woe in the Remove passage. Bunter had often been kicked, but he had never grown to like it. He leaned on the banisters on the Remove landing and gasped and grunted.

There was a footstep on the Remove staircase, and Bunter blinked down at a rather tall, graceful, and athletic figure that was coming up. It was Lancaster of the Sixth Form, looking very handsome in his First Eleven blazer.

Bunter gave one blink and grunted. Lancaster of the Sixth had no interest for him.

He could not "touch" a Sixth Form man for a little loan to tide him over till his celebrated postal order came.

The senior did not even look at Bunter; probably did not notice that the fat junior was there at all.

He passed on and walked up the Remove passage. At

that Bunter gave him another blink. He wondered what on earth a Sixth Form man could want in the quarters of the Lower Fourth. A prefect might come there with an official ashplant to administer merited punishment; but Lancaster was not a prefect. Bunter saw him stop at the door of Study No. 1, tap, and enter.

The door of Study No. 1 closed after him.

Bunter grunted again. The man had gone there to jaw to Wharton, apparently. Perhaps to give him a licking; for Bunter remembered that there had been some sort of trouble lately. Wharton, once one of the new senior's loyal admirers, had turned against him for some reason. Billy Bunter charitably hoped that Lancaster had gone to Study No. 1 to give Wharton a licking. That would serve the beast right for having kicked Bunter out.

The sight of Lord Mauleverer coming out of his study a minute or two later drove Wharton and Lancaster from Bunter's mind. His eyes gleamed behind his big spectacles, and he rolled up the Remove passage to meet Mauly.

"I say, Mauly, old chap!"

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer.

He stopped in dismay.

His lazy lordship had made an effort. He was going down to Big Side to see the cricket; then William George Bunter appeared, like a lion in his path.

There was quite an affectionate grin on Bunter's face as he bore down on Lord Mauleverer; but there was no

reciprocal affection in the noble countenance of his lordship.

Maully backed promptly into his study and closed the door. Bunter accelerated. But he arrived only in time to hear a key turn.

"I say, Maully, old chap!" Bunter rapped on the door with his fat knuckles. "I say! Coming out, old man?"

"No!" came from within.

"But you were just going out when I spotted you, Maully."

"Yaas."

"I say, I'll wait for you, old fellow."

"Do!" said Maully.

Lord Manleverer, in his study, stretched his elegant and lazy limbs on his luxurious sofa. So long as Bunter was in the offing his lordship intended to "sport his oak." But he did not mind Bunter waiting for him in the passage. Bunter could wait as long as he liked, so long as a locked door preserved Maully from his proximity and his conversation. Maully was an accommodating fellow. He was comfortable on the sofa, and he hoped that Bunter was comfortable in the passage.

Tap, tap! came after a minute or two.

"I say, Maully! Maully, old bean, are you coming out?"

Maully turned a deaf ear.

"I say, Maully, Mrs. Mimble has got some lovely ices at the school shop—simply scrumptious ices!" Bunter talked through the keyhole. "I say, you've stood me ices sometimes, Maully; now I'm going to stand you some. Come along to the tuckshop, Maully."

Tap, tap, tap!

"Can't you hear me, Maully?"

"Yaas."

"Why don't you answer, then?"

"Too much fag."

"Are you coming out?" hooted Bunter.

"Not till you're gone, old bean."

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter gave it up and rolled away. He dropped into Newland's study, and a bag of apples occupied him pleasantly for a few minutes—Monty Newland and his study-mate, Penfold, being out. Then he looked into Wibley's study and found a packet of toffee. Feeling a little better, though still hungry, Bunter rolled away to the Remove staircase and went down.

The House seemed deserted. But as Bunter rolled away to the door he came on four Remove fellows; and Bob Cherry hailed him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Bunter! Seen Lancaster, Bunter?"

"Blow Lancaster!" answered Bunter peevishly.

He was not interested in Lancaster.

"My esteemed fat Bunter—" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows, I'm glad I've run into you," said Bunter. "The fact is, I was going to look for you. I say, I've been disappointed about a postal order, and—"

"Fathead! Have you seen—"

"I think I mentioned to you fellows that I was expecting a postal order," said the Owl of the Remove, blinking at the juniors seriously through his big spectacles.

"You did—a million times or so! Don't mention it again," said Frank Nugent. "Have you seen—"

"I say, if you fellows could lend me—"

"Have you seen Lancaster?" bawled Bob Cherry. "He's wanted on Big Side, and Wingate's sent us to find him. We've hunted everywhere for the ass! Have you seen the man?"

"Never mind Lancaster," said Bunter.

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"I wanted to tell you fellows that Mrs. Mimble has got in a lot of lovely ices—"

"Have you seen Lancaster?" roared Johnny Bull.

"Simply scrumptious ices—"

"Oh, kick him!" said Nugent.

"I say, you fellows, I dare say I can tell you where to look for Lancaster if you want him. In fact, I know where he is. Lend me a bob—"

"You fat villain! Where's Lancaster?"

"If you can't oblige me with a trifling loan till my postal order comes, I don't see why I should oblige you, Bob Cherry. If you want Lancaster, you can jolly well find him, and be blown!"

And Billy Bunter, elevating his fat little nose contemptuously, started to walk away. He stopped suddenly as Bob Cherry grasped him by the back of the neck. Bob was getting tired of looking for Lancaster, and "six" from Loder had made him a little less good-tempered than usual. He grasped Bunter's fat neck and shook him.

"Where's Lancaster, you fat freak?"

"Ow! Find out! Leggo! Ow!"

"Where is he, you fat chump? Will you tell me where he is?" roared Bob.

"No! I jolly well won't!" hooted Bunter. "Now leggo, you beast!"

Crack!

Billy Bunter's bullet head established contact suddenly with the wall. There was a fearful howl from Bunter.

"Now, where's Lancaster?"

"Ow! Wow! Ow!"

"Give him another," said Johnny Bull—"harder!"

"Ow! Beast! Wow! He's in Wharton's study!" howled Bunter. "Leggo! Wow!"

"In Wharton's study!" ejaculated Bob. "What the thump is he doing in Wharton's study?"

"Ow! Wow, wow!"

"Let's look, anyhow," said Nugent.

"We've got to find the fathead!"

"If you're pulling my leg, Bunter, I'll jolly well kick you! In fact, I'll kick you, anyhow!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Yaroooooh!"

The four juniors tramped up the stairs to look in the Remove study for the missing cricketer. Billy Bunter rolled out into the quad. He rolled across to the tuckshop behind the elms, to make one more attempt to induce Mrs. Mimble to understand what a splendid customer she was losing by a too strict adherence to business on a cash basis.

His efforts proved of no avail, however, and Bunter turned out his pockets in an endeavour to find a coin. Like the celebrated Mother Hubbard's cupboard, however, his pockets were bare, and the scrumptious ices remained outside Bunter.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Down and Out!

HARRY WHARTON stood at the window of Study No. 1 in the Remove, staring out into the quad. In the distance he could see the green playing fields and the white-clad figures dotting the green, and the crowd of Greyfriars fellows gathered round. The junior's face was darkly clouded. After kicking Bunter out of the study the captain of the Remove had turned back to the window and remained there, looking out. But he hardly saw the scene that lay before his eyes in the bright June sunshine. His brow was wrinkled in troubled thought.

His heart was heavy.

The difference with his chums weighed on his mind. He would have been glad

enough to join the cheery Co. on the cricket ground but for the trouble that had arisen between them. Nobody was to blame for that trouble. His friends could not understand why he had turned against Lancaster of the Sixth, the new man at Greyfriars who had jumped into popularity at a bound. They liked Lancaster; they admired him, as all the school did—and till a few days ago Wharton had shared their hero-worship to the full.

The fellow was so splendid in every way—a wonderful cricketer, far and away the finest cricketer in a cricketing school, yet without a trace of "side"; a Sixth Form man, yet kind and friendly to the juniors whom he had met in the holidays; good-hearted, good-tempered, liked by almost everyone with whom he came in contact; the "beau ideal" of a senior schoolboy—a fellow with whom the most carping critic would have found it difficult to find fault.

Even now, knowing what Lancaster was, Wharton could not dislike him; he could only wonder at him and pity him.

If there had been a doubt Wharton would have clung to it—as he had long clung to the faintest doubt.

But there was no longer a doubt; he knew what Richard Lancaster was—a crook, an impostor, a cheat, a wolf in sheep's clothing, a whited sepulchre, a breaker of the law.

He alone knew, and the knowledge was overwhelming.

He was thinking, as he stood at the sunny window, of what had happened the night before—of the attempted robbery at Highcliffe, when all doubts had been finally banished, and he had discovered Dick Lancaster to be—what he was!

So far Wharton had said nothing. He had told Lancaster that he must get out of Greyfriars, and left it at that. To no one else had he spoken a word. But if Lancaster did not go—

He must go! He could not remain now that Wharton knew. If he had the brazen effrontery to remain, Wharton had to speak out. Then he would have to go. Yet, in spite of what he knew, Wharton realised that he was sorry for Lancaster—sorry that the fellow had to go.

There was a tap at his door, and it opened. He spun round irritably from the window, supposing that it was Bunter again. But it was not Bunter. It was a handsome, athletic Sixth Form man who stood in the doorway.

Wharton stared blankly at Lancaster.

The senior came into the study and closed the door behind him. Harry Wharton continued to stare at him.

Lancaster made a handsome figure in flannels, with the First Eleven blazer. Wharton, looking at him, almost doubted his own certain knowledge of what the fellow was. This splendid-looking cricketer—could he be the secret thief who had crept into Highcliffe School, with a false moustache gummed to his lip—a thief in the night? Looking at him, it seemed impossible, and yet it was true.

Lancaster's face was unusually pale. There were signs of stress in it. Wharton doubted whether he had slept the night before. The discovery Wharton had made meant the end of all things for Lancaster of the Sixth. Wharton knew that the blow must have been a crushing one.

He was surprised to see Lancaster there. If the fellow had come to make an appeal for silence, he must know that it was useless. And Wharton had supposed that he was on Big Side with the Sixth Form men who were playing the Fifth. He stared at the senior without speaking.

Lancaster was the first to speak. "You gave me a surprise last night, Wharton." His voice was low, but quite calm.

"I suppose so," said Harry. "I've been thinking—ever since."

"Yes."

"I'm rather hard hit."

"I'm sorry!" said Wharton mechanically.

"You see"—Lancaster smiled faintly—"I'm denying nothing."

"It wouldn't be much use."

"Perhaps not, though I fancy you'd have some difficulty in proving the accusation you've made."

The dark eyes were keenly on the face of the junior, watching, searching.

Wharton made a gesture.

"I don't know, and don't care, anything about that," he answered. "I know what you are, and why you are at Greyfriars. You've deceived everybody here, from the Head down; you must have deceived Sir Hilton Popper, who brought you to the school. Your whole

"My father was killed in the War, as you know. I was left a mere kid, without a bean. I went to my uncle—as kind a man as ever lived, but the slave of drink—a tool in the hands of a gang of rogues. He died and left me with them."

"You!" muttered Wharton. Looking at the fellow, it seemed incredible that he had been trained in a gang of thieves.

"The chief of the gang had a kindness for me. He saw that I was trained to take a decent place in the world. He is the most dangerous crook in London; but my uncle had been his friend, and he was capable of kindness. He did his best for me. But at the same time he trained me to be—"

"What you are!" muttered Wharton.

"What I am!" said Lancaster.

There was a silence. Wharton's heart was heavy. He was conscious of deep compassion. Yet talking was useless. A crook was a crook; and a crook had

I'd like to justify myself a little. You mayn't find it easy to take my word now, but I can tell you with truth that when I came to this school I hoped to throw the old life behind me. Slimy—the man I spoke of just now—was my friend; I thought he might stand for it. I was mistaken. He was my friend so long as I was the Wizard—the crook and cracksman. At the first hint of throwing over the gang, he showed the cloven hoof."

"I understand."

"That isn't all. I resolved to break with it at any cost. And then—then I found that I was in a cleft stick. If I broke with Slimy, he was going to show me up here—in my true colours! I could go—leaving all Greyfriars knowing what I was and why I had come. I couldn't face that!"



By sheer ill-luck, Bob Cherry pelted down the sacred Sixth Form passage just as Loder came out of his study. Crash! Bump! Nugent, Bull, and Hurree Singh halted only just in time!

life here is a lie from beginning to end! You and your confederates have made use of Greyfriars as a headquarters! You're here under cover to—to—"

Wharton broke off. The thing seemed too horrible to put into words.

Lancaster winced.

"It's not quite so bad as that," he said. "But you wouldn't understand, kid. You couldn't understand."

"I can't," said Harry. "A splendid fellow like you—with the world at his feet—dabbling in crime. I can't understand that."

"You're only a kid," said Lancaster, in the same low, quiet voice. "But I was years younger than you when I fell into the hands that trained me. It wasn't giving a fellow much of a chance, was it?"

Wharton shuddered.

no place at Greyfriars. The interview could only be painful, and he wondered why Lancaster had sought it. It was easy enough for the schoolboy crook to read the junior's thoughts.

"You wonder why I'm here?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"Not to ask you to keep silence," said Lancaster.

"I couldn't."

"I know you couldn't!"

"I—I don't want to hurt you," said Harry in a low voice. "I'm ready to keep silent about—about what I know now. It's not my business to run you down. If you'd succeeded at Higheliffe, it would be different. But you got away with empty hands. I don't think it's my duty to give you away—if you get out of Greyfriars."

"You've left me no choice about that," said Lancaster quietly. "But—"

Wharton felt a pang at his heart. He believed what the schoolboy crook was telling him.

"But for that I should have left the school weeks ago," said Lancaster. "But I couldn't let Greyfriars know. I couldn't. Slimy had me in the hollow of his hand because of that."

"I understand," muttered Wharton again. "But when you tell him that you've been found out—that you've got to go—"

"He will have to make the best of it. That's so. I shall leave Greyfriars and go back where I belong." Lancaster's pale face became paler. "Slimy will hold his tongue so long as I stick to him. He has no use for reformed crooks. If you hold your tongue, too, the School will know

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nothing. You can be satisfied with seeing the last of me."

"I shall not say a word when you're gone."

"But it's hard," said Lancaster. "Harder than you may think. I'm not the fellow to whine, I hope; I can take punishment. But it's in your hands, kid, and you might make it easy for me."

"How do you mean?"

"Wingate's counting on me for the match at St. Jim's on Wednesday. It will be a blow to him if I'm gone. It's only a few days more. If I go over to St. Jim's with the eleven on Wednesday, I can fix it up for a telegram to reach me there after the match, and not return to Greyfriars. Will you leave it at that?"

Harry Wharton was silent.

It was not much to ask, perhaps, for a fellow whose whole life had fallen in ruins round him. It was only a few days more. And it was true that Wingate was counting on his wonderful new recruit for the St. Jim's match. It would be a heavy blow to lose Lancaster from the team. And surely it was not much to grant the fellow who had lost everything; that one last triumph before he went!

"B-but—" stammered Wharton. The miserable thought had come into his mind made the colour flush in his cheeks.

Lancaster understood, and his pale face crimsoned.

"But," he said, "you can't trust me! Why should you? I deserved that! It's no good telling you that if I stay till the St. Jim's match, you can trust me to that extent; that I shall stay as Lancaster of the Sixth and not as the Wizard. Why should you believe me?"

He turned to the door. Wharton made a quick step forward.

"I believe you, Lancaster! I do trust you! Let it be as you say. A few days can't matter; and I do trust you!"

"Thank you," said Lancaster quietly. Bang!

The study door flew open.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Bunter says that Lancaster's here!" roared Bob Cherry. "Are you here? Oh, hero you are!"

Wharton stood confused by the sudden interruption. But he marvelled to see how swiftly Lancaster resumed the normal. The schoolboy crook's self-control was amazing.

He glanced round at the juniors in the doorway, and smiled—his old pleasant smile.

"What's up?" he drawled. "Am I wanted?"

"Well, my hat!" said Bob. "Have you forgotten the cricket match?"

Lancaster started. As a matter of fact, the match on Big Side had gone completely out of his mind. And Wharton, realising it, realised also how deeply, how utterly the schoolboy crook had been overwhelmed by the blow that had fallen on him and what a stress and strain lay hidden under his calm outward aspect.

"My esteemed idiotic Lancaster, the worthy Wingate is waiting for you, and he is terrifically infuriated," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"My hat! Thanks for calling me; I shall have to sprint," said Lancaster, with a smile. And he left the study.

"Well, my word!" said Nugent. "Fancy old Lancaster forgetting a match! What's up with him?"

"Come on," said Bob. "We don't

want to miss Lancaster batting." He looked back from the doorway at the captain of the Remove and added: "Coming, Wharton?"

Wharton shook his head. The four juniors hurried away after Lancaster, and Harry Wharton was left alone in the study again.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Out for a Duck!

WINGATE stared grimly at Dick Lancaster as he came on Big Side. He came quickly enough now that he had been reminded of his forgotten duty. But the search for him had taken quite a time, and two more Sixth Form wickets had gone down, and still Lancaster had not been available. Sykes and North of the Sixth were at the wickets now, Potter of the Fifth bowling; and Lancaster was not immediately wanted. There was an apologetic smile on his face as he joined the Sixth Form men outside the pavilion.

"Awfully sorry, Wingate! Can't make out how I came to be so careless! You ought to chuck me out of the eleven."

Wingate's frowning face melted into a smile. Lancaster's manner was disarming. And old Wingate liked him. There were few fellows whom he liked so much as he did Dick Lancaster, though he had known him only a few short weeks.

"Well, dash it all, Lancaster," he said. "I had you down third to bat, and sixth man has gone in now."

"Hurree Singh told me that you were terrifically infuriated," said Lancaster. "And no wonder!"

Wingate chuckled.

"But what—why? Had you forgotten the game, or what?" he asked. "That wouldn't be like you."

"The fact is, I had," said Lancaster. "First time I've ever done such a thing, and I'm frightfully sorry, and unless you let me off under the First Offenders' Act—"

Wingate laughed. His good-humour was quite restored, astonished as he was that a cricketer like Lancaster could possibly have forgotten a match.

"After all, no harm done," he said. "You'll go in next. But for goodness' sake don't have another lapse of memory on St. Jim's day!"

"Not likely!" said Lancaster, laughing.

"This is really only a practice game; but when we go over to St. Jim's we shall have all our work cut out to beat Kildare and his lot," said the Greyfriars captain, "and you know I rely on you. Hallo, there goes Sykes! Man in, Lancaster!"

All eyes were on Lancaster, as he passed Sykes on his way to the wicket. Fellows were wondering what he had been up to, and why he had not appeared on the ground before. But they fully expected to see him make the fur fly now that he was there. There were some good bowlers in the Fifth Form at Greyfriars; but not a man who was able to touch Lancaster, if the new senior was in anything like his usual form. No one doubted that he would be "not out" at the finish of the innings.

Some fellows, however, observed that Lancaster did not seem quite his usual self. The light spring seemed to be gone from his step—his handsome head was not so erect as usual. Bob Cherry & Co. had returned at once to the cricket



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ground, anxious not to miss Lancaster's innings, and they watched him curiously.

"Blessed if I can make the man out!" remarked Bob. "Why the thump was he jawing to Wharton in the study, and forgetting all about the cricket?"

"Echo answers why!" said Johnny Bull.

"The whyfulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"It's queer—because Wharton's had simply nothing to do with him lately," said Bob puzzled. "That's why we're rather rusty with Wharton, to put it plain. Lancaster's been thoroughly decent to us ever since he came to the school, though he's in the Sixth and we're fags—and all of a sudden Wharton turned against him, and never said why I know that he's not spoken to him since—and Lancaster seemed to have forgotten that there was such a chap at Greyfriars at all. And now it—"

Bob shook his head. He was quite perplexed.

"Lancaster may have been asking him what he was playing the giddy ox for," grunted Johnny Bull.

"He wouldn't," said Nugent. "A Sixth Form man wouldn't care much what a kid in the Remove thought of him—especially such a big gun as Lancaster."

"Well, he's jolly good-natured."

"That's so. But—blessed if I make it out," said Nugent. "I say, old Lancaster doesn't look so fit as usual."

"I was just thinking so," said Bob; "but I fancy he's going to give the Fifth some leather-hunting. Blundell's put Greene on to bowl, and I'll bet you two to one in doughnuts that he bags at least a dozen off Greene."

"No takers!" grinned Nugent.

Greene of the Fifth was bowling to Lancaster; but the look on William Greene's face was not optimistic. Greene knew that he had no chance of getting near the sticks. But he did his best, which was all a fellow could do.

The result was surprising.

Every man on the ground was expecting the cheery smack of willow and leather, and to see the red ball whizzing away like a bullet. It was not a difficult ball to play, either; Greene was not a dangerous bowler. Few men in the Sixth, if any, would have failed to knock that ball away.

Lancaster failed.

There was a smack; but it was not the smack of bat and ball. It was the smack of ball and stumps.

A gasp went round the field.

Greene himself was the most astonished. Greene of the Fifth could not believe his eyes. He stared along the pitch open-mouthed.

He had bowled Lancaster first ball—bowled the mighty batsman of the Sixth; the batsman who, as a rule, left even old Wingate in the shade. The middle stump was down; the wicket had a toothless look. Wicket-keeper blinked at it, seeming dazed.

Wingate, at the pavilion, gave a sort of jump.

"Bowled!" said Wingate blankly. "Bowled! My only hat! Bowled! Clean bowled! Oh!"

"Is the man asleep?" gasped Sykes.

"Bowled!" repeated Wingate.

"Bowled Greene! Oh!"

"Good old Greene!" roared Coker of the Fifth. "Well bowled, sir! Well bowled!"

"Well bowled, be blowed, you fat-head!" growled a Sixth Form man. "A kid in the Third could have played that ball."

Lancaster, for a moment, stood staring down at his wrecked wicket. He seemed surprised, too.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Might as well have left him where he was. He's not much good here. Duck's eggs are cheap to-day."

"What the thump's the matter with the man?" said Johnny Bull.

"Goodness knows!" said Nugent. "A duck for Lancaster—my hat!"

"Off colour," said the Bounder oracularly. "Might happen to the best man. Just off colour."

"If he does that at St. Jim's—" murmured Hobson of the Shell.

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Lancaster carried out his bat. Greene was still staring open-mouthed, like a fish out of water. Greene could hardly get it into his head, yet, that he actually had bowled the mighty Lancaster first ball.

Another Sixth Form man went in to take Lancaster's place. Blundell, the captain of the Fifth, smiled. He was sorry, as a cricketer, to see a good man crack up like this; but the collapse of the Sixth Form champion gave him hopes of beating the top Form of Greyfriars.

Lancaster's face was crimson as he came up to the pavilion. Wingate looked at him. Wingate was not the skipper to reproach a man for an unexpected failure; especially a man who had never failed before. But he was utterly amazed. Lancaster was such a cricketer as Greyfriars had seldom or never seen before; and he had failed like the veriest "rabbit." Wingate simply could not make it out.

"Sorry!" breathed Lancaster. Wingate found his voice.

"You're not fit to-day, old chap?"
"I'm afraid not."
"Might have said so before!" grunted Walker of the Sixth.

Lancaster coloured more deeply, and went into the pavilion. He was anxious to get away from staring eyes. He left murmuring voices behind him. Many of the fellows agreed with Walker. If a man wasn't fit, he could say so before he threw away a wicket for his side. This meant that the Fifth would very likely pull it off; which, in the eyes of the Sixth, was not a consummation devoutly to be wished.

A few minutes later Lancaster walked back to the House. Many curious glances followed him.

"If he crocks up like that at St. Jim's—" said Temple of the Fourth.

That was the thought in many minds. It had been a foregone conclusion that Lancaster would play at St. Jim's. But after such a hopeless failure as this, the matter was doubtful. And many Greyfriars fellows wondered whether, after all, the name of R. Lancaster would appear in the list for the big fixture.

In his study Lancaster of the Sixth paced moodily to and fro. Since the discovery of the previous night he had been under a severe strain. The knowledge that he was known in his true colours to at least one fellow at Greyfriars, a fellow whom he liked and respected, had struck him hard. The knowledge that he must go, that he must give up Greyfriars, and all the school meant to him, had struck him still harder. But not till now had he realised how deeply he had been shaken—shaken to the very soul. His miserable failure on the cricket ground had surprised himself. It gave an added touch of gloom to the misery that was eating into his very heart.

Tramp, tramp, tramp! His pacing footsteps crossed and recrossed the study incessantly. The flush had faded out of his face; he was pale and worn and looked strangely old.

Loder of the Sixth, lounging in the passage, heard that unceasing tramp of feet, and smiled. But even Loder might have pitied his rival and enemy, had he been able to read the heart of the schoolboy crook.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Nothing Doing!

HARRY WHARTON came out of the House, and walked down to Big Side. He was tired of his own company; tired of the troublesome thoughts that thronged in his mind; tired of thinking of Lancaster and the blow that he had been driven to deal a fellow whom, in spite of all, he realised that he yet liked. He hoped that the fresh air and sunshine, and the company of the other fellows, would drive the whole thing from his mind. And now that Lancaster, in a few days, would be gone, there was no reason why the rift should continue between him and his friends. There had not been exactly a quarrel; but the Co. could not understand his attitude towards the fellow who was a hero in their eyes, and a certain coldness had been inevitable. It was not easy for a proud and high-spirited fellow like Wharton to make the first advances; but he had resolved to do so.

The Sixth Form innings was over when he reached Big Side. Lancaster was not on the ground, and Wingate, rather irritably, had dispatched a fag

to tell him that he was wanted. It seemed hardly possible that Lancaster, after forgetting the match in the first place, had forgotten it again. But it looked like it, and the Greyfriars captain wondered what on earth was the matter with the man. He was not likely to guess.

The chums of the Remove were standing in a group, waiting for the Fifth Form innings to begin. Wharton looked over the crowd and came towards the four. They did not notice him for the moment; they were getting used now to "going about" without Wharton.

"Lancaster will pull up in the bowling," said Bob Cherry. "He bagged a duck for the Sixth. Well, after all, any man might bag a duck. I've bagged ducks myself."

"You have, old man," agreed Johnny Bull, with a grin. "Many a time and oft, in fact."

"Fathead! Wait till Lancaster gets the ball!" said Bob impressively. "He was frightfully off colour in the Sixth Form innings, but I tell you he's going to make hay of the Fifth Form wickets."

"The hayfulness will be terrific!" assented Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"If he doesn't—" said Johnny Bull.

"Oh, he will!" said Bob.

"If he doesn't, it won't look rosy for his chance of playing on Wednesday. Wingate's picking out the men for St. Jim's after this game."

Wharton felt a pang as he heard. So Lancaster had made a duck in his innings! It was no wonder, considering what the hapless fellow had on his mind! Wharton knew the cause, if no one else did.

"Can't make out what's the matter with the man," said Johnny Bull. "First he forgets the match, then he bats like a born idiot, or like Coker of the Fifth—same thing. Now he seems to have forgotten again. Wingate's sent Paget of the Third to fetch him. Doesn't he know he's wanted to bowl?"

"That jaw with Wharton in his study seems to have upset him," said Bob.

"Wharton must have bored him frightfully."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry became aware of Harry Wharton at his elbow. "Come to see the finish?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"Lancaster made a duck in his innings!"

"Yes, I'm sorry for that."

"If he doesn't pull up on the bowling I fancy he won't go over to St. Jim's," said Johnny Bull. "Loder may get a chance again."

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob. "Might as well wire St. Jim's: 'You win,' and let it go at that, and save the fares."

"Better tell Loder that!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"No fear! One six is enough for one day!" said Bob, laughing.

"Got any idea what's the matter with Lancaster, Wharton?" he added, turning to the captain of the Remove again.

Wharton coloured uncomfortably.

"How should I know?" he stammered.

"Well, he was pow-wowing with you in your study, instead of coming down to the game," said Bob. "Have you got over your hump?"

"What? I don't quite—"

"I mean, Lancaster seems to have taken the trouble to look you up and talk to you. Can't guess why, after your thumping cheek to him. Perhaps you've found out now that Lancaster is one of the best chaps breathing, and that you're a silly ass!" suggested Bob.

"I'd rather not speak about Lancaster," said Harry. "Look here, you men, we've been rather at loggerheads,

and all over nothing. A Sixth Form man has nothing to do with us. Let it drop."

"The dropfulness is the proper caper," agreed Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "Let the smilefulness of esteemed friendship banish the infuriated frown of loggerheadfulness."

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob. "That jolly old moonshee who taught you English at Bhanpur, Iuky, was a real, genuine corker! His knowledge of the language must have been preposterous and terrific!"

"My esteemed, idiotic Bob—" "Look here, Wharton," went on Bob, in his direct way, "you had something against Lancaster. You never said what it was, but you acted as if you thought he wasn't a fellow fit to touch. I don't suppose Lancaster cares a brass button. But it's not the thing. It's not done. If you've got over it, and you think the same of Lancaster as you did before, I'll be jolly glad to hear it."

Wharton made no answer to that. There was no answer that he could make.

"If not," said Bob, "tell us what you've got against the man. That's only cricket."

Wharton did not speak.

A glint came into Bob's blue eyes. "What do you mean, Wharton? Have you still got something up against the most decent chap in the school and keeping it a secret?"

Wharton drew a deep breath. "Can't you fellows let the whole thing drop?" he said. "We have nothing to do with the Sixth. Let's agree not to speak about it again."

"That won't do!" said Bob curtly. "It's not the thing," said Johnny Bull, shaking his head. "I know you've said nothing against Lancaster, but you're practically making out that he's a bad hat in some sort of way. I can't understand you. But I tell you plainly that I don't like it!"

Frank Nugent was silent. Hurree Janset Ram Singh opened his lips, but closed them again without speaking.

Wharton breathed harder. He could not speak out, all the more since his promise to Lancaster to keep his miserable secret if he left Greyfriars. But to his friends his attitude seemed one of obstinate unreasonableness. The rift had to remain in the lute—at least until Lancaster was gone from the school.

"Well, let it go at that, then," said Harry wearily; and he left the group of juniors and mingled with the crowd.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's old Lancaster!"

Curious eyes were fixed on Lancaster as he went into the field with Wingate and his men. It was noticed that his face was pale, but otherwise he looked fit enough. Fellows wondered whether he was going to "crock" in the bowling, as he had in his innings. Wingate put him on to bowl the first over, against Blundell of the Fifth.

"Phew!" murmured Bob Cherry. Harry Wharton's face clouded.

His heart almost ached with compassion for the hapless fellow. Whatever he was—and there was no doubt what he was—he certainly was a keen cricketer—a born cricketer. He had no equal at Greyfriars, whether with the willow or the leather. But now he was failing lamentably.

It was no wonder. The wonder was that he could, with such stress on his mind, play at all—that he could keep up that outward aspect of indifference, with a heart like lead in his breast, the blackest of black thoughts in his mind.

Wingate's face grew longer and longer as Lancaster bowled that over. It gave

the Fifth twelve runs, and Blundell's wicket was never in danger. Obviously, the best senior bowler at Greyfriars was off his form.

Twice again Lancaster was given the ball. That he was making efforts was plain enough. But he failed. After that Lancaster was not called on to bowl again. And when, in the field, he missed an easy catch and gave Hilton of the Fifth a new lease of life at the wicket, the Greyfriars men stared at one another, and Skinner of the Remove called out "Butterfingers!" without getting kicked.

"Sorry, old man!" Lancaster said to Wingate when the game was over. "I know I'm rotten to-day!"

Wingate nodded in silence. He was thinking of the St. Jim's match and wondering whether Lancaster would be rotten then.

It was a single-innings game, and the Fifth won it with two wickets in hand. And the one topic in all the studies at Greyfriars that evening was the hopeless collapse of Lancaster of the Sixth.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Not the Finish!

SLIMY SUGDEN selected a cigar from his case, nipped off the end, and lighted it slowly and methodically. His greasy face was calm and thoughtful. Only the glint in his black eyes showed that he was disturbed. The fat, greasy man sat, heavy and solid, in the shabby armchair. A strange contrast to his stolidity, Lancaster moved about restlessly, pacing the room, his face pale and harassed, his eyes burning, his lips quivering. All the cool self-control of the schoolboy crook seemed to have been thrown to the winds.

It was a private room in an inn twenty miles from Greyfriars School. Lancaster had done the distance swiftly on his motor-bike after classes on Monday. At that distance from the school his meeting with Mr. Sylvester Sugden was not likely to be seen by anyone who mattered.

Sugden had listened, almost without a word, to what Lancaster had to tell him. Now he sat silent and thoughtful, tinking hard while he drew at his cigar. It was a matter that required hard thinking. To Lancaster it was the end of his life at Greyfriars—the end of all that made life worth living, since that change of heart and of mind had come to him. To Slimy Sugden it was not the end. The blow was a heavy one, but it did not crumple Slimy as it had crumpled the "Wizard." Slimy, meditating coolly, was considering how to parry it. But it had not even occurred to Lancaster that it could be parried. He was not the Wizard of old.

The senior of Greyfriars moved about, unresting. He paused every now and then to stare at the greasy, crafty face of the master crook. Greasy, crafty, unscrupulous, hawkish—never had Sugden's face seemed so base in the boy's eyes before. This was the man who had trained him—who had had him in hand in the impressionable years of early boyhood and trained him to crime. Lancaster's loathing for the man amounted almost to sickness. But the man was his master.

The silence was long—broken only by Lancaster's restless tramping. Slimy threw the cigar away half-smoked. His bushy brows wrinkled in thought.

Lancaster wondered what was the subject of his reflections. The game was up—that was clear. A respite had been given him, so that he might not fail Wingate in the match on which

the Greyfriars captain's heart was set. Not that he was likely to be of much use, after all, in his present state of frayed nerves and gnawing misery and despair.

Anyhow, the game was up; it was Monday now, and Wednesday was the limit. There was nothing to think out—so far as Lancaster could see. But the master crook's view seemed different.

Lancaster came to a stop, at last, facing the greasy man. His impatience was not to be longer controlled.

"What about it, Slimy? I've told you how the matter stands. I've got to

kid's as straight as a string—nobody could get a hold on him. Not that he would care for threats; he's not that sort."

"Nothing like the senior Loder?"

"Nothing at all. As straight as a die. Loder's a blackguard and a coward at heart. Wharton's clean all through and no coward. He can't be frightened."

"Nothing in the same line, then?"

"No, no, no!" snapped Lancaster.

"There are other ways," said Slimy Sugden quietly—very quietly.

And Lancaster started as if a serpent had stung him.

He came a step closer to the crook and his eyes burned down at the greasy face.

"Listen to me, Slimy! Lancaster's voice was tense, distinct. "You've got me in your hands! I'd throw up the gang this minute, but I dare not let

you're fed-up with Greyfriars, if you want to leave, if you're the coward to throw up the chance of your life at a schoolboy's threat, there's nothing more to be said. You're not the man I thought you!"

"Have I any choice?" muttered Lancaster.

"Get out of Greyfriars!" said Slimy, with bitter contempt. "Give up your fast and only chance of keeping your head above water! Give up the thought of ever being anything but a crook in the underworld! I've given you a chance that wasn't easy to give—of cutting a decent figure in the world, of making a decent position for yourself—a chance I never had!"

"You're a crook; but it's something to have another, and a brighter, side to your life. I've given you that. Throw it away, if you like, like a coward and a fool! Give up all decent associations, and stick for the rest of your life to company like the Weasel's and Ratty the Rogue's! Make an end of all the hopes I had of you—knock all my planning into a thousand fragments! But don't expect me to spare you if you do!"

Lancaster panted.



Without first looking round the study, Bunter reached out for the cake. As he did so, Wharton reached out with a foot. Biff! "Yaroooh!"

get out of Greyfriars. Fix up a telegram—make it look plausible—you've never been at a loss for a lie, anyhow. Let me get out of the school quietly—without fuss—and get back to the underworld I belong to. What are you thinking of?"

Sugden spoke at last.

"Fool!" he said briefly.

"I've told you—"

"Let's have it clear. Only the boy Wharton knows?"

"Only Wharton. That fellow Loder suspected long ago, but I handled him. He dare not speak. He dare not hint. I've got a paper he signed and gave to a bookmaker—it's the sack for him if the headmaster should see it. I was able to handle him—he's a rotten rascal and walked into my hands. It's different with Wharton."

"You can't handle him?"

Lancaster stared.

"It's you that's the fool, Slimy! The

Greyfriars know what you could betray. For that reason, and only that reason, I'm your man still. But if you're thinking of hurting the boy, forget it. If he's harmed—if a hair of his head is harmed—I go straight to the police and give the whole show away! I swear that—and I'll see that you and every man in the gang gets what's coming to him. Let the boy be harmed. Slimy Sugden, and you know what to expect!"

Sugden watched his passionate face quietly. There was a ring of savage sincerity in Lancaster's voice. He meant every word he said, there was no doubt about that.

"I was not thinking of harming the boy, Dick. There are other ways—less dangerous ways."

Lancaster eyed him savagely, suspiciously. He did not trust Mr. Sylvester Sugden.

"Let's keep cool," said Sugden. "If

"Slimy, you're mad! Do you think I want to leave Greyfriars? Don't you understand what it is to me? I've told you I'd rather leave and beg my bread than carry on there as a crook! I mean it! But I've jumped to your orders—I've played up—and you know why—because I dare not let the school know me as I am—as the boy Wharton knows me. But for that—"

"But for that you'd have thrown me over!" sneered Sugden.

"I would—I would—a thousand times!" exclaimed Lancaster passionately. "But you've got me there—you would betray me, and I couldn't face that—the shame of it! Better death—better a thousand deaths! But now—now—you can see I've got to go!"

When I'm gone, the boy will keep silent—he's promised! I've nothing to fear there. You dare not tell me that you will give me away to the fellows who like and trust me—that you will—"

He broke off, panting, staring at the hard face of the crook.

"Leave Greyfriars against my orders, and every man and boy in the school shall know you for what you are!" said Sugden icily.

Lancaster clenched his hands convulsively.

"You'll go too far, Slimy—don't drive me to desperation—"

"Keep cool!" said the master crook coldly. "If this were the end, as you think, I'd make the best of it. But it is not the end. You've lost your nerve, Dick—that is all!"

"What can I do?" muttered Lancaster. "I don't want to leave Greyfriars. I cling to it like a drowning man to a plank. It's all that there is in life for me. Leaving the school will be like going out of the sunshine into a black pit. I shall sink, never to rise again. I know it! I go down—for ever! Back in the gang—back in the underworld—associating with thieves, sharpers, rogues, vagabonds! I can see myself, when I'm older, Ratty the Rogue over again!" He shuddered. "But what can I do? I'd rather leave than carry on there as a crook—I've said it and I mean it! Now I've got no choice left—the boy knows. He will speak out if he has to."

"He has not spoken yet?"

"Not a word."

"Why?"

"I hardly know. He likes me, I think—perhaps pities me! He's more hurt than anything else at finding out what I am. I dare say he doesn't want his school disgraced, too—he'd rather I dropped out quietly. I know he doesn't want to hurt me. I think he'd give anything to be able to believe in me as he once did. He will say nothing if I get out. He's promised that—I can trust him. But if I kick he will be hard as steel. He will not keep silent and let a crook stay on in the school. How could he?"

"Money—" suggested Sugden.

Lancaster gave a laugh of bitter contempt.

"Fool!" he said.

"What can the boy prove?" asked Sugden.

"I don't know exactly how much he knows—only that he knows the truth. It's not a question of proof. Once the police are told that the Wizard is at Greyfriars, posing as a Sixth Form man there, they will do the rest. They only need a clue."

"That's true," Sugden nodded.

"The boy must keep silent."

"He will not keep silent."

Sugden's greasy lip curled. "I tell you he shall not be harmed," said Lancaster. "You've got me in the hollow of your hand, Slimy—I cannot, I dare not, let you tell them what I am, what I have been—but let harm come to the boy, and I throw everything to the winds; let the least harm come to him, and the police shall know everything I can tell them!"

"The boy shall not be harmed. It's risky, and there's no need. There are other ways. I did not foresee this when you went to the school, Dick, but I foresaw that there might be difficulties. You're overwhelmed because you've lost your nerve. I can handle this."

"Yes, I've lost my nerve," muttered Lancaster. "The Wizard was famous for his nerve—but I've lost it now. I

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could have died of shame under the eyes of a schoolboy—"

"Cut it out," said Sugden coolly. "That is a mood—and moods pass. Leave the boy to me. He shall not be harmed. There's no need. His silence shall be secured—leave that to me!"

"I've told him that I get out on Wednesday—after a cricket match we're playing at another school—"

"Leave it at that."

"I've told him that I shall not return to Greyfriars—"

"You will return!"

"Then he will speak—"

"He will not speak. Leave it to me. Not a hair of his head shall be harmed. I know what you would do in that case, Dick—don't waste your breath telling me again. Go to the cricket match you speak of—it will be better for you to be away. When you return to Greyfriars you will have nothing to fear."

"I don't understand!" muttered Lancaster.

"Leave it to me."

Lancaster resumed his restless tramping, Slimy Sugden watching him coldly, sardonically. The schoolboy crook's brain was in a whirl. In spite of himself, he drew hope from the master crook's words. As he had said, he clung to Greyfriars like a drowning man to a plank. It was all that saved him from being submerged in the morass of crime. It was all that saved him from becoming like the Weasel, like Ratty the Rogue, like Sugden himself. Greyfriars was hope to him—the hope of somehow, some time, dragging himself free of the mire of crime. It was like the light of day to him. On the reverse side there was only blackness and despair.

He stopped at last, and faced Sugden again.

"If the boy's not hurt—"

"He shall not be hurt!"

Lancaster breathed hard and deep.

"You answer for it that he will be silent without—without—" His eyes searched the greasy, cold face.

"I answer for it."

"Let it go at that, then."

Five minutes later Dick Lancaster was on his motor-bike, speeding back to Greyfriars.

He was no longer the restless, careworn fellow who had tramped the room at the inn under the eyes of Slimy Sugden.

Somehow—he did not know how yet—Slimy was going to parry the blow that had threatened to shatter all things for him. In that, he could trust Slimy. The master crook was not a man of idle words.

He hardly knew whether he was glad. Better to leave Greyfriars than to carry on deception and follow crooked ways where he was liked and trusted. If only he could have left with a fair name and fame, leaving respect and kind memories behind him! But in that he was at Slimy Sugden's mercy, and Slimy had no mercy for him if he rebelled.

Deep down in his heart, perhaps, he was glad that the master crook had forced him to carry on. If the junior was silent, he would remain a Greyfriars man, and while he was a Greyfriars man, he felt that there was a glimmering of hope for him, like the faint glimmer of a beacon where all else was darkness.

His heart gave a bound when the grey old walls of the school came in sight. Then he knew that he was glad—glad, in spite of everything, that it was not the end.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

"Richard Himself Again!"

LODER of the Sixth glanced into Wingate's study, and his lip curled in a sneer. The Greyfriars captain, sitting at his study table, had a paper before him, and a pencil in his hand. He was going over a list of names, with a corrugated brow. It was Tuesday, the day before the St. Jim's match. Loder did not need telling what that list was, or the cause of the frown on Wingate's brow. He stepped into the study, and Wingate looked up.

The Greyfriars captain was worried, and the sight of Gerald Loder did not seem to relieve him. He grunted.

"I suppose Lancaster's washed out?" said Loder, with a nod towards the cricket list.

"I don't know."

"You don't know—the day before we play St. Jim's!" sneered Loder. "You don't know—after the exhibition the fellow made of himself in the Form match on Saturday!"

"He was frightfully off colour," said Wingate slowly. "Something was wrong with the chap! He may have pulled round since."

"Do you mean that you're going to play Lancaster, and leave me out, at the cost of chucking the game away?"

Wingate gave him a grim look.

"That's not the way to talk, Loder. If old Lancaster's in anything like his usual form, you're not in the same street with him, and you know it, or ought to know it. But—"

"I'm glad there's a 'but'!" sneered Loder.

Wingate rose from the table.

"You'd better come down to games practice, Loder! You're not keen on it, though you're keen on playing for the school. But if Lancaster's still off his form, we shall want you. I shall see to-day."

Loder's face became a little more amiable.

"I'll come like a shot!" he said.

"Right-ho!"

Wingate went along the passage to Lancaster's study. The door was open, and he walked in. Lancaster was standing at the window, looking out into the sunny quad. His eyes were on a junior who was sauntering by himself under the elms—Wharton of the Remove, and the sight of Wharton had brought a cloud to his brow.

But his brow was clear as he turned towards Wingate. Whatever it was that had been the matter with Lancaster on Saturday, there was no sign of it in his looks now. Never had he looked more handsome and fit.

"Feeling fit?" asked the Greyfriars captain.

"Fit as a fiddle."

"I'm not pretending that you didn't give me a shock on Saturday, Lancaster, old man. You did."

"I know. I'm sorry!"

"We all have our moods and tenses," said Wingate, with a smile. "If you're all right again—"

"Right as rain!"

"Well, you look it!" conceded Wingate. "If I had to leave you out of the team to-morrow, old bean, it would be rather a hard knock for me. Come down to the cricket and let's see how you shape."

"Like a shot!"

Wingate's face was cheery as he walked down to Big Side with Lancaster and Gwynne. The man had been off
(Continued on page 12.)

CRICKET STARS of the FUTURE



THIS WEEK :

"Old Cricketer" gives you a pen picture of C. C. Dacre, a young New Zealander and star batsman of Gloucester C.C.

Playing at the Age of Nine!

C. DACRE is a shining example of what any schoolboy can accomplish if he applies himself to almost any subject with the one great aim of excelling therein. Further, he is an example for every cricketer—no matter whether he plays for his county or for a junior club—to copy; for he hits the ball with all his might, and goes on to the field with the fixed determination to score quickly or come out.

Dacre is a young New Zealander, and visited, for the first time, England in the summer of 1927. He was quite new to the wickets and general conditions that prevail in this country. And, what is still more astonishing, before he came over here he had only played in Saturday cricket. One can imagine, therefore, what an arduous task was his when he had to play every day against the greatest cricketers in the land throughout the summer of 1927.

His triumph was such as caused the authorities to keep him in this country. Of course, no English sportsman is in favour of the importation of Colonial cricketers; but the engagement of Dacre with the Gloucestershire County Cricket Club did not come about as the result of his eagerness to be identified, in a professional capacity, with English cricket. He loved the game, he excelled in it. He had lost both parents, and had no ties in New Zealand, and because his batting displays were talked about throughout the county cricket world, Gloucestershire, who needed another young batsman, pressed him to accept an engagement and qualify for the county by residence.

Young Dacre was born at Devonport, Auckland, New Zealand, and at the age of nine he attended the Davenport Public school, where he immediately got into one of the junior elevens. But as he went on he was not satisfied with playing for his school alone, for the matches were played on Saturday mornings, and he hated the idea of wasting the afternoons by playing the part of onlooker at matches of senior clubs.

Eventually, he joined a side called North Shore, so getting two matches every Saturday—one in the morning, and the other in the afternoon. He remained at school for a period of seven years, or until he was sixteen years old, and during this time Devonport won the Auckland Schools' Championship each year, the last four seasons being captained by Dacre.

2,000 Runs in One Season!

IT was Dacre's custom to put in practically every spare moment at practice. He soon made up his mind that the ball was meant to be hit, and not merely stopped, and he cultivated the art of footwork in order to get into that position whereby he could impart the maximum of power when striking the ball.

So successful was he in this, that he confesses to writing the following letter to his father, and leaving it on the breakfast-table at home, because he hadn't the courage to speak out.

"Dear Father,—I'm sorry to tell you that I've smashed the bat you gave me, and as I hadn't any to use during the last fortnight, I had to borrow two from other chaps at school, and I've smashed those as well. But, please, I hope you won't be cross, because each time I've smashed a bat I've scored 100, and last Saturday I got 200, not out. The other chaps want a new bat each, and I must get one, too. But, please, I won't want any more pocket-money until they are paid for."

Yes, young Dacre, while at school, scored seven centuries in eight innings, and his 200, not out, was played on a big ground where every run had to be run out. There were

no boundaries. And quite early in those years he spent at school he scored in one season the phenomenal total of 2,000. In New Zealand the provinces play matches much in the same way as we in England play county games. And so wonderful were Dacre's performances at school that he, as a small boy of fourteen, was chosen to represent Auckland against Wellington, an honour which thousands of really capable men players of the province were coveting for themselves. And on that day he wore his first pair of long trousers.

When Dacre left school he was not able to devote so much time to cricket, for it was necessary for him to think of a career, and he then spent five years working in a warehouse. His spirit revolted at the close confinement, and then he lost both parents. The poor youth was grief-stricken, and he knew that his only hope of forgetting was to go right away from his old surroundings and spend his days in the open air.

It was then that a sheep farmer in a big way of business offered him a job; and so young Dacre began to dip sheep and sort out fat-stock for the markets. His employer was a lover of cricket, in consequence of which Dacre was given many opportunities to play. He represented his province in many matches, and was chosen to represent New Zealand in Australia.

Flogging the Bowling!

DACRE confesses that he experienced the greatest joy of his life when he was asked to accompany the New Zealand team to England in the spring of 1927, and what he did during that tour is not only a matter of history in the world of cricket, but it set up a new and refreshing rate of scoring.

In the first match of the tour, v. H. H. Martineau's XI., Dacre staggered the opponents and onlookers by scoring 101 in an hour. In the next match, v. M.C.C. at Lord's, he made 107 in just over an hour, eighty of his runs being boundary hits. Again, v. Leicestershire, he got 90 in an hour and a quarter. Against Edinburgh he made 167 in an hour and a half, a rate of scoring which takes the breath away. Then against the great bowling side of Gloucestershire he hit 64 in less than half an hour, 30 of them being made from hits that went out of the ground. In the next match he scored a dazzling 176, 132 of these being boundary hits, the ball being flogged out of the ground on eight occasions. Last season, when he took the field for Gloucestershire, he played brilliantly, and his innings of 223 against Worcestershire will long be remembered by the good people of Worcester.

Only a few days ago I asked Dacre to give me a message for my readers, and he complied by saying: "Tell them to persevere, and never to give up hope; to practise and practise; to hit, but never to hit blindly; to watch every ball closely, and learn to use the maximum of power." Then he added: "I have always taken my failures as I would my successes—with a smile. Yes, tell them to keep smiling, no matter what happens, and they will assuredly conquer in the end."

"I learned a lesson on keeping my good temper when playing for New Zealand against Victoria (Australia)," he continued. "Vernon Ponsford, the famous Australian cricketer, was batting, when the sun caused a shadow of the grand-stand to appear across the wicket. Ponsford kept appealing to the umpire to cease play, and this so annoyed the latter that he lost his temper, stripped off his white coat, threw it on the ground, and refused to take any further part in the game. From that moment I decided never to get rattled."

THE BOY WHO KNEW TOO MUCH!

(Continued from page 10.)

colour on Saturday, there was no doubt about that. But such things happen at times to the best cricketers. If Lancaster was his old self again, there was going to be a Greyfriars victory at St. Jim's.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There goes old Lancaster, with his jolly old willow!" shouted Bob Cherry, in the quad. "This way, you men!"

There was a rush of fellows to the cricket-ground. Games practice was not a great attraction in itself; but every man at Greyfriars wanted to know how Lancaster was shaping. A crowd gathered to look on.

Harry Wharton was among them, though he was not with his friends. The captain of the Remove had given up the idea of healing the breach till Lancaster was gone. It would not be long now. On the morrow, when Lancaster went over to St. Jim's with the cricketers, he would not return. Wharton would have been glad for the schoolboy crook to score one more triumph before he went—to leave in a "trailing cloud of glory." And Wharton looked on curiously to see how Lancaster shaped at cricket.

Not a word had passed between them since that interview in Study No. 1. They had seen one another only at a distance. There was nothing more to be said—the thing was settled.

But when he had seen the Sixth Form man about the school, handsome and indifferent, Wharton had wondered. He had wondered how the fellow could keep up that outward aspect with what Wharton knew must be on his mind. Now, as he handled his bat, he seemed quite the old Lancaster—the born cricketer, the fellow without a care on his mind or his heart. And Wharton, watching him, could only marvel.

Evidently the fellow had determined that his last day as a Greyfriars man should be a triumphant one. Evidently he had banished black care, and pulled himself together. Now he seemed to be living and breathing cricket, as if no other thought had ever entered his mind.

Sykes of the Sixth, Potter of the Fifth, and two or three other good bowlers plied him hard; but there was no "duck" to-day. The mighty batsman was himself again. With a cheery smile on his face he knocked the leather all over the ground; and Wingate's smile expanded into a joyous grin. Loder of the Sixth looked on, scowling. Loder's brief hope had faded away. If the fellow had been off colour on Saturday, he was not off colour now. He was at the top of his form.

"Richard's himself again—what?" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"What-ho!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"You'll do, old man—you'll do!" the juniors heard Wingate call to the batsman. "You're going to make St. Jim's sit up and take notice to-morrow, old bean! Now chuck that bat away and send me down a few."

And when Lancaster bowled him first ball, the Greyfriars captain chuckled with sheer delight.

"You'll do, old bean!" he repeated.

"Don't Loder look pleased?" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Loder tramped away savagely. Harry Wharton walked off the field, wondering. How the man could keep it up like this was a mystery to him. He looked as if he had forgotten the

sword of Damocles that was suspended over his head; but he could not have forgotten. He was "for" it. But he was game all through—game to the last! And, knowing what he knew, Wharton could not help admiring the man's courage and self-control. The pity of it made his heart ache. If only things could have been different! If only Lancaster could have been what he had seemed! But it was useless to think of that.

Later, he saw Lancaster walk back to the House, between Wingate and Gwynne, his face smiling, happy, careless, many eyes following him with admiration. And back into his mind came another picture—of a stealthy, surreptitious figure creeping in dark shadows—and he turned away his eyes. The pity of it! But the fellow who led a double life had to go, and the sooner he went the better.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

St. Jim's Day!

"IT'S a question of cash," remarked Bob Cherry thoughtfully.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Has your postal order arrived, Bunter?"

"Nunno! It—it's been delayed!"

"Then roll away! Buzz off!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Vanish!"

"Look here, old chap—"

"Disappear!"

"I say—"

"Shut up, anyhow!" said Bob Cherry.

"Now, you men, about the cash! It's just a question of cash! What?"

"The cashfulness is not terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"But the poolfulness of our esteemed resources may meet the ridiculous case."

"Railways are jolly useful institutions in their way," went on Bob.

"But they've got one drawback—they charge railway fares. And the fare from here to St. Jim's is rather steep. But if we can raise the wind, it's worth it to see Lancaster knock spots off the St. Jim's men."

"Hear, hear!"

"Smithy's going," remarked Nugent.

"He's got a car. Smithy's the man to blow money. He's taking Redwing in his blessed car!"

"Well, it won't run to a car for us," grinned Bob.

"The burning question is whether it will run to railway fares."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Unless, of course, Bunter will telephone home to Bunter Court, and ask his pater to lend us the Rolls—I mean, one of the Rolls—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was morning break on Wednesday. That morning, at quite an early hour, the Greyfriars First Eleven had started, and they had been long gone. Dick Lancaster, of course, was with Wingate and his merry men. And the fellows had no doubt that he was already "knocking spots" off St. Jim's with the willow or with the leather. And many Greyfriars fellows were keen to get over to St. Jim's that afternoon, and see as much as they could of the game.

The afternoon was a half-holiday, and Bob Cherry and his friends agreed that it could not be better spent than in watching the First Eleven beat St. Jim's—especially old Lancaster. Great things were expected of Lancaster. Bob confidently predicted a century in each innings, as well as a couple of hat-tricks, and a few miraculous catches in the field. Probably that was an exaggerated expectation. Still, it was certain that the St. Jim's game was going

to be a great game, and that Lancaster would make the home cricketers sit up and stare. It was going to be a famous victory, and the chums of the Remove were keen to see it.

Leave to go over to St. Jim's could be obtained easily enough from Mr. Quelch. Cash was a more difficult matter. Railway fares were steep, and the chums were not overflowing with superabundant cash like the Bounder.

"I say, you fellows, I'll phone home for the Rolls, if you like," said Bunter. "The pater would send it along like a shot, if—if he doesn't happen to be using it to-day. Of course, he might be."

"The mightfulness is terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I think that's a generous offer," said Bunter warmly.

"And I'll tell you what—I want to come over to St. Jim's. I want to see that fellow D'Arcy of the Fourth, you know. He's an old pal of mine—"

"Does he know?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Beast! I should tea with him in his study; and he would stand a fellow a decent tea," said Bunter.

"I've a lot of other friends there, too. Tom Merry would be jolly glad to see me. I've got a letter from him in my pocket now, saying that he hopes I shall be able to come over."

"Gammon!"

"I'll show you the letter, if you like," said Bunter, with dignity.

"Show up, then!"

"I remember now I left it in my study."

"My dear man, we always like the news from old Tommy. We'll come up to your study and see the letter."

"I remember now that ass Toddy tore it up in mistake. I say, you fellows, stop cackling! Look here, suppose I phone home for the Rolls? If it comes you get a free joy-ride to St. Jim's. If it doesn't—"

"If!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"The if-fulness is terrific!"

"If it doesn't, you fellows stand me the railway fare. What do you say?"

"Rats!"

"Oh, really, you fellows—"

"Now you've done your funny turn, old bean, roll away," said Bob.

"We've got to think this out."

Billy Bunter snorted and rolled away. Money was rather "tight" in the Remove, so far as the four chums were concerned, and there was no hope for Bunter in that direction.

"What about Wharton?" asked Nugent hesitatingly.

There was a moment's silence in the Co.

"Better ask him," said Bob. "Dash it all, we're pals, though he will keep on playing the giddy ox. Let's ask him."

Harry Wharton was strolling under the elms during break on his own. His brow was thoughtful. Lancaster was gone with the First Eleven, and, according to the compact made with the captain of the Remove, he was not to return to Greyfriars after the match. Some plausible excuse was to be made. He would be called away after the game; the cricketers would return without him. It was the easiest and least unpleasant way of making the break. There would be surprise, regret, at Greyfriars when he failed to join up later, but some good reason would be given. And nobody, certainly, would dream of guessing the facts. Lancaster would not be seen again. He would be remembered with kindness, affection, respect. Wharton was far from grudging him that. Indeed, he was conscious

of regret in his own breast that Lancaster would never be seen at Greyfriars again.

He was thinking of it with a clouded brow when his chums came up and joined him. Bob plunged into the matter at once.

"We're going over to St. Jim's to see the end of the game," he said. "Like to come along?"

"Oh!" said Harry.

"We're going to pool resources," said Nugent. "I think it will run to third-class fares. You'll come, Harry?"

Wharton coloured.

He would have welcomed this friendly overture gladly enough at any other time, and on any other subject.

But it came awkwardly now.

He was keen enough to see the game, especially with so magnificent a cricketer as Lancaster playing for the school. He would have enjoyed the half-holiday in company with his chums. But he knew that he could not go over to St. Jim's.

He had seen Lancaster start with a heavy heart. It would be painful to see him again. But that was not all. Lancaster would see him there. He might think—he would think—that Wharton was watching him, keeping an eye on him to see that he kept the compact. That would be like hitting a man when he was down.

"Well?" grunted Johnny Bull, as the captain of the Remove did not reply.

"The esteemed company of our idiotic chum will be terrifically agreeable to our absurd selves," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Do come, Harry!" said Nugent.

"Look here, even if you don't like Lancaster, for some fat-headed reason, you'll like to see him play St. Jim's. And old Wingate will be worth watching." He looked curiously at Wharton. "You'd like to see our friends at St. Jim's, too—Tom Merry and D'Arcy and Figgins and the rest—"

"I'd like to come," said Harry, "but I—"

"Oh, wash out the buts," said Bob. "Now, shell out, and let's see how the cash runs for the fares all round—"

"I can't come," said Harry. "I'd like to, but—but I'd rather not."

"That's lucid, I must say!" remarked Johnny Bull dryly.

"Well, I can't come," said Wharton, flushing. "You fellows go, of course. I've got some tin, if you're in difficulty about the fares—"

"Well, if you're not coming we won't borrow your tin," said Bob. "I don't see why you can't come. Every man in the place will go, if he can raise the wind and get leave. But please yourself!"

"Please yourself, by all means,"

grunted Johnny Bull. "It's a free country."

And the four juniors walked away, leaving Wharton to himself, far from pleased at what they could only regard as a rebuff.

There was a counting of cash and a pooling of resources, and the four juniors found that it would "run" to third-class return tickets. So that matter was satisfactorily settled.

After dinner that day Bob and his friends started at once for the station. Billy Bunter started, too. Lord Mauleverer was going over to St. Jim's, and Bunter had attached himself to his long-suffering lordship. Herbert Vernon-Smith rolled off in great style in a car, with Redwing and two other fellows in it. He called to Wharton as he saw the captain of the Remove standing at the gates.

Nugent ran after the others and re-joined them. Wharton saw him speak to them, and all four glanced back at him. They were puzzled, and perhaps a little irritated. After that glance back they walked quickly on and did not see Wharton again.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Left on His Own!

"LEFT on your jolly old own?" asked Skinner agreeably.

Snoop sniggered.

Harry Wharton made no answer. He was walking in the quadrangle, in the golden June afternoon, when Skinner and Snoop passed him on their way to the gates. Skinner and Snoop were not thinking of the cricket match at St. Jim's. They were going to



Lancaster missed an easy catch, and gave Hilton a new lease of life at the wicket. The Greyfriars men stared at one another, and Skinner called out "Butterfingers!"

"Squeeze in, if you like, Wharton. We'll make room somehow."

"Thanks, I'm not going."

"Oh, all right!"

The Bounder rolled off in his car. Coker of the Fifth hooted and chugged away on his motor-bike. Coker was bound for St. Jim's—if he did not slaughter himself or somebody else on the way there. Quite a crowd of other fellows were going to the station. Harry Wharton looked after his friends as they went. Frank Nugent glanced back, saw him at the gates, and ran back to him.

"Look here, Harry, do come along!" he said. "What's the good of sticking here by yourself? Join up, like a good chap!"

"I'd like to, old fellow," said Wharton. "Look here, Frank! I've not got my back up. I hope you'll have a jolly good time, and I'll be glad to hear that Lancaster's made a big score. But I've got a reason for not coming. Cut off and catch your train!"

"Oh, all serene, then!"

join a merry little party, including Ponsonby and Gadsby, of Highcliffe School, at the Three Fishers, up the river, with smokes and billiards. But the amiable Skinner paused a moment to deliver his gibe at the captain of the Remove.

"Come along with us!" suggested Skinner, grinning. "It's going to be jolly at the Three Fishers."

"Go and eat coke!" said Wharton, and he turned his back on Skinner.

The black sheep of the Remove went grinning on their way. Harry Wharton strolled under the elms, with his hands in his pockets.

He was not feeling cheerful.

His chums had gone out, irritated with him for not joining up. He missed them, and he was feeling "left" and lonely. The thought of Lancaster weighed on his mind, too.

He could not have acted otherwise than he had done, that was certain. Yet he had a feeling of having been hard.

(Continued on page 16.)

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(Continued from page 13.)

Surely, he had gone as far as any honourable fellow could go in promising to keep the fellow's wretched secret, if he left Greyfriars. He could not feel sure that he was doing right, even in that. But he knew that he could not betray him—if he got out of Greyfriars and was never seen there again. But that was essential. It was not only that he had been a crook. He was a crook still—as the attempted robbery at Highcliffe showed. To keep silent and spare him was impossible. It would have been becoming an accessory to crime.

Yet he knew that he was sorry that that handsome, pleasant face and athletic figure would never be seen in the school again. The fellow had been so splendid, in every way—every way but one! Perhaps he had never had a chance—a real chance! Trained as a crook, among crooks, what chance had he had? There was good in him—plenty of good. In other circumstances he would have been what he looked—Wharton was sure of that. But he was what he was, and Greyfriars was no place for him.

"Coming on the river, Wharton?" Squiff shouted to him in passing.

Wharton shook his head.

He was in no mood for company.

He walked aimlessly under the elms, after Squiff was gone. Some fag practice was going on, on the cricket ground, and Wharton walked in that direction and favoured Tubb & Co., of the Third, with his desultory attention for a while. But Third Form cricket soon palled on him, and he walked away again.

He was feeling, as a matter of fact, "rotten." He could not help thinking of Lancaster.

He wondered how the cricketers were getting on at St. Jim's. Was Lancaster playing up in his usual style? Or had he, perhaps, "crooked," as he had done on Saturday? What he had on his mind was enough to put any fellow off his form. Wharton hoped that he was playing a good game, that his last day as a Greyfriars man would be a triumphant one.

Two Sixth Form men came out of the House, and they were grinning gleefully. Wharton drew near to them, wondering if it was news from the cricketers at St. Jim's.

"Wish I'd gone over," he heard one of them saying. "My hat! Wingate said that old Lancaster was a rod in pickle for St. Jim's."

"He's all that!" said the other man.

"You've heard from St. Jim's, Parkinson?" asked Harry, with the respect due from a Lower Fourth junior to a Sixth Form man.

Parkinson of the Sixth glanced at him quite genially.

"Yes; Wingate's phoned. We went in first, and Lancaster made his century."

"Oh, good!"

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"He took four wickets in the St. Jim's first innings—the hat trick in one over," said the Sixth Form man.

"Good man!"

"They were all down for a hundred—Greyfriars forty-five ahead on the innings. That's the latest. It's going to be a win, of course!"

The Sixth Form men walked on.

Wharton felt his heart lighter. Lancaster was playing a great game, as all Greyfriars expected. Wharton was glad of it. Yet he wondered. How could the fellow do it?

Wharton went into Hall to tea. He had no fancy for tea in the study all by himself.

After tea he walked out of gates. He was tired of hanging about the school on his lonely own.

He had decided to walk over to Highcliffe. Courtenay and the Caterpillar would be glad to see him, and it would fill up time till the cricketers returned from St. Jim's.

His spirits rose a little as he walked up the Courtfield road in the bright June sunshine. A closed car, coming up the road at a snail's pace, passed him, and he glanced at it carelessly. He did not think of giving it a second glance, and he was unaware that after he had passed, the car turned in the road and followed him at a distance. Wharton was thinking of many things that afternoon, but danger was not among them.

At Greyfriars, Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, was taking his ease in the armchair in his study, after correcting a pile of papers for his Form. Mr. Quelch's repose was disturbed by a tap at his study door, and Trotter presented himself—with a telegram.

The telegram was addressed to Harry Wharton, but at Greyfriars all such communications passed through a Form master's hands. Mr. Quelch ripped open the buff envelope.

"Wharton, Greyfriars School, Kent. Ask leave come home immediately. Aunt Amy ill.—James Wharton."

Mr. Quelch's crusty face softened. This was bad news for the head boy of his Form.

"Find Master Wharton at once, Trotter, and send him to me."

"Yessir."

"Ask the messenger to wait."

"Yessir."

Trotter was absent ten minutes. He came back alone.

"Master Wharton's gone out of gates, sir. Gosling says he saw him go Courtfield way about half an hour ago."

"That is very unfortunate." Mr. Quelch frowned. "It cannot be helped, however, the boy would naturally be out of gates on a half-holiday. Gosling does not know where he is gone, Trotter?"

"He says not, sir."

"Tell Gosling to send him to me immediately he returns. And give this reply to the messenger."

An hour or so later, Colonel Wharton, at Wharton Lodge in Surrey, was the astounded recipient of the following message:

"Wharton coming home by earliest possible train.—Quelch."

And the old gentleman pulled his grizzled moustache, stared at the telegram, and wondered what on earth it meant, and whether Mr. Quelch at Greyfriars had taken leave of his senses.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Kidnapped!

HARRY WHARTON turned out of the Courtfield road into the footpath to Highcliffe, and passed from bright sunshine into the shade of leafy branches. He heard the sound of a car behind him, but did not turn his head; it had no interest for him. He was not aware that the car stopped at the footpath, and that two men dropped from it and ran lightly up the path after him. The chauffeur backed the car off the road into the shady path under the trees, and waited with his engine running.

Wharton swung along the footpath, which led by woods and fields towards Highcliffe School; a short cut which saved going round by Courtfield. It was a pleasant walk in the leafy month of June. But the captain of the Remove was not destined to reach Highcliffe that afternoon, or to arrive anywhere near it. A score of yards from the road, the branching trees and high hawthorn hedges screened him from general view, and the two men who had left the car quickened their pace and came up with him.

No thought of danger was in his mind, but he naturally turned his head at the sound of rapidly running feet and quick breathing.

He had a glimpse of a squat, thickset man, whose face was more than half hidden by a thick beard and a low-peaked cap; and of another man with a sandy moustache and horn-rimmed glasses. Neither face was familiar to his eyes, and he had time for only a glimpse. Even as he turned, the two men leaped on him, and taken utterly by surprise, the junior went crashing to the grass.

Wharton was too astonished by the sudden attack even to struggle for a moment or two.

He sprawled on his back in the grass, in the grasp of his two assailants, panting.

The man in the glasses, holding him, stared anxiously up and down the path. It was not a frequented path, but a pedestrian might have come in sight at any moment.

"Quick, Weasel!" he breathed.

"We got him, Ratty!" grunted the thickset man.

"You rotters——" panted Wharton.

He began to struggle fiercely.

Even yet he did not guess the object of the attack unless it was robbery. But the name of the Weasel spelled danger. He knew that name—and now he knew the ruffian, in spite of his false beard. It was the Weasel—the confederate of the schoolboy crook—the man that Lancaster knew; the man who had driven the car in the bank raid at Courtfield a few weeks ago. It was the Weasel—the man who had addressed Lancaster by the strange name of "Wizard." The other man was a stranger to Wharton; he had never heard of Ratty the Rogue.

"Quiet, you young fool!" hissed the Weasel.

In the grasp of two powerful men, the junior had no chance. But he resisted desperately.

For a full minute he struggled, the two ruffians muttering oaths as they endeavoured to secure him.

The Weasel's false beard was brushed off in the struggle, revealing the cruel, jutting jaw of the ruffian. But the schoolboy's resistance was futile. Breathless, still striving to resist, he was lifted from the ground and rushed back along the path towards the waiting car.

"Quick!" hissed Ratty the Rogue.

Wharton got a hand loose, and clutched at the doorway of the car. A savage blow on the wrist loosened his grasp, and he went headlong in.

Ratty and the Weasel, panting, jumped in after him.

"Let her out, Tadger!" panted Ratty.

But the chauffeur did not need telling. As Ratty slammed the door shut, he let the car out, and it raced along the Courtfield road.

Wharton, dazed, dizzy, utterly astounded, lay in the bottom of the car. It was difficult for him to realise what had happened to him. It was little more than a minute since the ruffians had seized on him, and now he was in the closed car, speeding away—where? He could not guess.

But further resistance was impossible. The burly Weasel was kneeling on him on the floor of the car, his little piggy eyes gleaming, his jaw jutting threateningly.

"Keep quiet, you young fool!" he snarled.

Wharton's mouth was open to shout. Deftly, Ratty the Rogue stuffed a pear-shaped gag into it. The junior's choked voice died away in a faint mumble.

"That's better!" grunted the Weasel.

Wharton glared up at the ruffian. His brain was in a whirl. He struggled feebly, unavailingly, with a sinewy knee jammed on him. Ratty the Rogue bent down, grasped his wrists and drew them together, and bound them fast with a cord.

"Now, take it easy, kid," said Ratty with a grin. "You ain't going to be hurt! But you got to keep quiet."

A large rug was thrown over the junior as he lay on the floor. He was hidden from sight now, if by chance any eye should glance in the closed car.

The Weasel removed his knee and sat down, and re-adjusted the false beard. Since the bank raid, the Weasel did not desire his unprepossessing countenance to be seen on the Courtfield roads without disguise. Neither did Ratty the Rogue, for that matter; but the sandy moustache and the horn-rimmed glasses changed the man who had used the gun in the bank raid, beyond recognition.

The car tore on.

In a few minutes it had left the Courtfield road, and was following a lane that led away from the town.

What direction it was taking, remained unknown to Wharton, though the jolting told him that it was no longer on the high road.

He lay half-suffocated under the rug; gagged, his hands tied, a helpless prisoner. A foot rested on the rug over him, pinning him down. The rascals were taking no chances of the schoolboy struggling to his feet, and catching an eye in a passing car.

For long minutes the junior lay in a state of mental confusion. But he steadied himself at last. He was kidnapped, and the kidnapping had been swift, ruthless, evidently planned in advance with care and forethought. And one of the kidnapers was the Weasel, the man Lancaster knew; the man who had called Lancaster Wizard. That knowledge helped Wharton to arrive at what the kidnapping meant.

He had been watched for that afternoon. The closed car crawling on the Courtfield road near the school, had been on the watch. Others, perhaps, had been on the watch also, in case he did not fall into this trap. What the rascals would have done, had he not gone out of gates that afternoon, was unknown to him. He knew nothing of the telegram which, had he been in the school, would have started him on a journey to Surrey.

But he knew that plans had been carefully laid; that trouble and expense had not been spared to make the coup successful.

What did it mean?

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are also offered as prizes.
STEP IN AND WIN ONE,
CHUM!

With bitterness in his heart, scorn and anger in his mind, he knew what it meant—what it must mean.

This blow came from the schoolboy crook.

The Weasel's presence was a proof of the connection. The squat ruffian was a confederate of the "Wizard's." There could be no object in kidnapping him but one—to secure his silence; to enable the schoolboy crook to carry on at Greyfriars. He might have doubted it; might have sought for some other explanation. But the Weasel's presence made it a certainty. Only because he knew the truth about Lancaster could that lawless gang have any reason for spiriting him away.

He had trusted the fellow, knowing what he was! Fool that he had been! Lancaster had claimed a few days of grace—for the St. Jim's match. His real object had been to gain time—for this!

In that thought, Wharton did the schoolboy crook an injustice. But he knew nothing of Slimy Sugden, and it did not occur to him that Lancaster, even now, did not know what was happening to him.

His feelings were bitter as he lay under the enveloping rug, while the swift car ate up the miles.

Several times the muttering voices of the two crooks came to his ears. But for the most part they were silent.

The car tore on. How many miles it covered, Wharton could not calculate; but he knew that it must be many, many miles.

Kidnapped! They were taking him far from Greyfriars—far from search, far from pursuit! What did they intend? What fate was in store for him?

The car stopped at last.

Wharton was lifted to his feet. The rug remained round him, and over his head, blindfolding him. With an iron grasp on either arm, he was lifted from the car and forced to walk. He realised that he was in a building; his feet stumbled on unseen stairs.

Suddenly he was released. The cord at his wrists was cut, the gag jerked from his mouth. The rug was taken away. He stared round him dizzily. A door slammed; a bolt grated home.

He was left alone. Gasping for breath, he stared round him with dizzy eyes—at a bolted door and a shuttered window. He was a prisoner—where he could not begin to guess. The schoolboy crook's secret was safe now!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Return of the Cricketers!

HENRY SAMUEL QUELCH
sighed.

Buzzzzz!

Once more the scanty leisure of the Remove master at Greyfriars was invaded. First it had been a telegram; now it was the telephone. Mr. Quelch laid down his book and lifted the receiver.

"Hallo!" sighed Mr. Quelch.

"Colonel Wharton speaking."

"Oh!" said the Remove master. Evidently it was a trunk call from Surrey. But the colonel could hardly have expected his nephew home yet, even if Harry Wharton had started immediately the wire had reached Greyfriars.

"Is that Mr. Quelch?"

"Speaking!" said the Remove master.

"I've received a telegram signed with your name, sir!" came through
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the deep voice of Colonel Wharton. "I presume that you sent it?"

"Quite!" agreed Mr. Quelch.

"I am at a loss to know what it means, sir."

"Indeed! I supposed that I had made my meaning clear, Colonel Wharton. Your nephew was out of gates when your telegram arrived."

"Eh?"

"On a half-holiday the boys are free till calling-over," explained Mr. Quelch. "The moment your nephew comes in I shall tell him that he has leave to go home, and he will take the first train."

"What?"

"I can do no more than that, sir, as it is quite unknown where Wharton has gone," said Mr. Quelch.

"What the deuce, sir, do you mean?" exclaimed Colonel Wharton testily. "I have sent no telegram."

"Wha-a-a-t?"

Mr. Quelch almost dropped the receiver in his surprise.

"I have sent no telegram, sir."

"Colonel Wharton!"

"I repeat, sir, I have sent no telegram, and I fail to understand yours. Will you explain what all this means?"

"I—I—I do not understand!" stammered the Remove master, in bewilderment. "A telegram reached the school, addressed to your nephew, and signed with your name, this afternoon. I opened it, as his Form master, according to rule. It stated that his Aunt Amy was ill—"

"His Aunt Amy is not ill."

"And that he was to ask leave to come home at once!"

"This is amazing, sir! I sent no telegram! I was astonished—astounded—to receive yours, stating that my nephew was coming home. What the deuce, sir, does it all mean?"

"I—I fail to comprehend! Hold the line, please—I have the telegram here. I will read it to you."

Mr. Quelch did so.

"It is some idiotic sort of a practical joke, I presume!" boomed the colonel's voice. "I have certainly sent no telegram; and Miss Wharton is perfectly well. Fortunately, it seems that my nephew has not started for home."

"No, sir! He was out of gates, and has not yet come in. I intended to send him immediately he returned to the school."

"It is fortunate that he was out, otherwise he would have had a painful shock. His aunt is perfectly well. What lunatic can have played this foolish trick? Where was the telegram handed in?"

Mr. Quelch glanced at the slip.

"Wimford, sir."

"That is near here," said the colonel. "Some local practical joker, it would appear—certainly a telegram from me would be handed in at Wimford Post Office. It is extraordinary."

"Extraordinary, indeed!" grunted Mr. Quelch. "Fortunately, no harm has been done—the boy has not yet heard of this telegram. I recommend you, sir, to inquire at Wimford Post Office and learn who has played this detestable trick—an offence against the law, sir."

"I shall certainly do so at once, sir. I am quite amazed. It is extraordinary—most extraordinary."

Colonel Wharton rang off.

Mr. Quelch put up the receiver, grunted, and returned to his armchair, with knitted brows.

He was disturbed and angry. Certainly he was relieved not to have had

news to give to the junior when he came in. But such a trick was deeply exasperating. As the telegram had been handed in at a town in Surrey, the sender was obviously beyond Mr. Quelch's reach; but he hoped fervently that Colonel Wharton would be able to trace the author of such a stupid and unfeeling practical joke. That it was anything but a foolish practical joke did not yet occur to the Remove master. He little dreamed of what was happening to Harry Wharton in those very moments.

It was Mr. Quelch's duty to take roll-call in Big Hall that evening. Harry Wharton did not answer to his name.

But quite a large number of Greyfriars fellows had late leave that day to go over to St. Jim's. They were not expected back till the cricketers returned. Wharton, certainly, had not gone over to St. Jim's, as Gosling had seen him go out of gates late in the afternoon. Neither had he asked his Form master for leave to go. But it was possible enough that he might have gone some distance to meet his friends returning; and in any case, it was not very unusual for a junior to be late for call-over on a half-holiday. Mr. Quelch attached no great importance to the fact that Wharton did not answer to his name, only making a mental note to give him fifty lines.

It was considerably later when the cricketers returned, and the summer dusk was deepening over Greyfriars.

Crowds of fellows had gathered at the gates to greet them, though it was past the usual time for the House to be closed. Rules were relaxed on such an occasion as St. Jim's day.

Mr. Quelch went to his study window, when a roar of voices announced that the returning team was coming. Henry Samuel Quelch was not a cricketer himself, but he took a patriotic interest in the exploits of the First Eleven. The result of the first innings was already known; Wingate had phoned to his friends in the Sixth left behind. Every fellow was expecting to hear of a great and glorious victory when the cricketers came back.

Mr. Quelch smiled genially as he heard the roar of cheering in the quad. The great men were coming in, with the crowd of followers who had gone over to see the game. The roar that woke every echo of Greyfriars told that they came home victorious.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"Bravo!"

"Good old Lancaster!"

"Hurrah!"

It was a terrific roar. Lancaster's name was shouted on all sides. Evidently Lancaster had done well for his side. Mr. Quelch smiled at the sight of the tall, graceful figure, the handsome face, among the cricketers as they came up to the House.

He liked Lancaster of the Sixth; there were few at Greyfriars who did not like him.

He leaned from the window, catching Wingate's eye. The captain of Greyfriars was looking elated—in fact, exuberantly joyful.

"How did it go, Wingate?" asked Mr. Quelch.

Wingate grinned cheerfully.

"Ripping, sir! We won by seventy runs, or, rather, perhaps I should say that Lancaster did—"

"Oh, rot!" said Lancaster, laughing.

"Hurrah! Good old Lancaster! Hurrah!" all Greyfriars was roaring.

"I congratulate you, Wingate!" smiled Mr. Quelch.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"Shoulder high, you men!" roared Sykes of the Sixth.

"Look here!" exclaimed Lancaster.

"Chuck it! My hat! I tell you—"

His voice was drowned in a roar. On the shoulders of Wingate and Gwynne, surrounded by a roaring, cheering mob, Dick Lancaster was swept into the House.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Missing!

"WHAT did I tell you men?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Did I say that that man Lancaster would bag a century in each innings, or did I not?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"You did, old bean!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"The didfulness was terrific, my esteemed and idiotic Bob!"

"Did I say he would hand out the hat trick?" continued Bob Cherry.

"You said twice!" grinned Nugent.

"H'm! Well, once was enough for St. Jim's," said Bob. "What the thump do you expect of a man? Hat tricks while you wait, or what?"

"You said twice!" chuckled Johnny Bull. "The hat trick twice, old man! But you were right about the giddy centuries! First time a Greyfriars man ever doubled his century in a match with St. Jim's. I believe Lancaster was born with a bat in his hands!"

"Did I say he was a giddy marvel, or did I not?" went on Bob Cherry, who appeared to fancy himself in the role of prophet.

"So did we all!" said Johnny Bull. "I knew he would knock spots off St. Jim's. But I never knew he would knock so many spots off. We beat them by seventy runs; but the fact is, they were lucky. They've got some good men over there, or they'd have been washed right off the earth!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! I didn't hear you cheering Lancaster's centuries at St. Jim's, Bunter!"

"I was looking for that chap D'Arcy most of the time," said Billy Bunter. "Funny thing the way the man kept on disappearing in the crowd every time I spotted him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I knew how jolly glad he'd be to see me; but he never seemed to see me at all, you know," said Bunter. "Funny, wasn't it? I was quite sorry to leave at the finish without having spoken to him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I say, you fellows, did you see anything of Wharton on the way home?"

"Wharton!" repeated Bob. "No! Isn't he here?" Bob glanced round the Rag.

The captain of the Remove was not among the swarm of juniors there.

"Quelch has just asked me if he came to meet us on the way home," said Bunter. "I told him I didn't know; hadn't seen him, anyhow."

"He's jolly late in, if he's out of gates," said Nugent, in surprise. "I should have thought he'd have wanted to know how the game went."

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All unconscious of the two cracksmen who were following in his path, Wharton, with his hands thrust deep in his pockets, walked on!

"Well, it was Lancaster's game; and perhaps he's not interested in old Lancaster," said Johnny Bull, with a grunt.

"I fancy he'll be interested when he hears that old Lancaster made a century in each innings!" chuckled Bob. "If that doesn't make him love Lancaster like a brother, nothing will! Two centuries—the hat trick—four odd wickets—three splendid catches which I saw with my own jolly old eyes—I ask you men, did you ever see a cricketer like that man Lancaster?"

"Never!"

"Well, hardly ever!"

"The neverfulness is terrific!"

"I could talk about it all night!" said Bob. "Did you notice that catch when he got Kildare of St. Jim's—"

"Think we had our eyes shut?"

"Did you notice the look on Darrell's face when his leg-stump went—"

"Did we not?" chuckled Nugent.

"I suppose we've got to go to prep!" said Bob, with a groan. "Fancy prep on a night like this! 'Member how Lancaster got that St. Jim's man Monteith—he thought it was going to be a wide—"

"And the widefulness was not terrific!" grinned Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "My esteemed and ridiculous chums, this is a day worthy to be marked with a white stone."

"Notice how old Wingate chortled when Lancaster did the hat trick? Fairly gurgled!"

"Prep!" said Nugent.

"Blow prep! Bless prep! Bother prep! Precious little prep will be done this jolly old evening, my beloved 'carers! Let's hope that Quelch will

have his best temper on in the morning!"

Unwillingly the juniors went to prep. In spite of all rules, most of them wandered out of their studies during prep, to talk in passages and doorways of the great game at St. Jim's, and the magnificent show put up by Lancaster of the Sixth. Even Skinner & Co. for once showed some interest in the topic of cricket.

Prep, as the Bounder remarked, was an insult and an injury on such a day.

And prep was fearfully scamped in most studies.

Frank Nugent, in Study No. 1, did his prep alone. He wondered where Wharton was when prep was over and the captain of the Remove had not put in an appearance. Nugent was not feeling uneasy, but he was extremely surprised.

"You've not seen Wharton?" he asked, when he met his chums in the passage after prep.

"No; hasn't he come in?" asked Bob.

"Seems not; he's not come to the study, anyhow."

"May find him downstairs."

"Well, he seems to have cut prep," said Nugent. "This means a row if he doesn't come in jolly soon!"

"Can't be more trouble with Highcliffe, I suppose?" said Johnny Bull. "You remember those rotters got him and tied him to a tree one evening, and he was out till after midnight—"

"That's not likely to happen twice."

"Well, no! But it's queer, his staying out."

The chums of the Remove looked

round the Rag for Wharton when they went down. But he was not there; and nobody seemed to have seen anything of him. Wingate of the Sixth, looking a little tired, but extremely cheerful, glanced into the Rag soon afterwards.

"Wharton here?" he called out.

"Not here, Wingate," answered Bob Cherry.

"Anybody seen him?"

Nobody had.

"Gosling says the kid went out of gates before half-past five," said Wingate; "he doesn't seem to have come in since. Any of you kids know where he might have gone?"

"Haven't the faintest!" answered Bob.

"Well, he will get a licking for this!" grunted the captain of Greyfriars, and he walked away to Mr. Quelch's study to report.

The Remove master was looking worried. He remembered the recent occasion when Wharton had been ragged by the Highcliffe fellows and kept out late at night. It was extremely improbable that such a thing had happened again, but he was uneasy.

"You have not been able to learn where the boy went, Wingate?" he asked.

"Nobody seems to know anything about it, sir," answered Wingate. "Gosling says he walked out of gates in the direction of Courtfield."

"He cannot be in Courtfield at this hour."

"Hardly, sir!"

"If it should prove to be another outrage by the Highcliffe boys, severe

measures shall be taken!" said Mr. Quelch, with a glint in his eyes. "But I cannot think—"

"It doesn't seem likely, sir."

"No; but I am feeling very uneasy. If he does not return by bed-time, I must make inquiries. It is very annoying."

"Anything I can do, sir?" asked Wingate.

The Greyfriars captain was rather anxious to get to the prefects' room, where a joyous discussion of the day's match was going on.

"At present, no, Wingate."

Mr. Quelch was left looking worried. Wingate was feeling a little concerned; but he concluded that the thoughtless junior had gone off somewhere, and perhaps lost a train back, or something of the kind. As a matter of fact, his mind was full of the great match at St. Jim's, and at the moment had little room for anything else. He put a cheery face into the prefects' room, and glanced over many cheery faces there—missing, however, the one he specially wanted to see.

"Where's old Lancaster?" he asked.

"Sporting his oak, I believe," answered Sykes.

Wingate grinned.

"He's jolly well not going to sport his oak this evening! I'll go along and root him out!"

And Wingate walked along to Lancaster's study in the Sixth. In the Rag, where the juniors most did congregate, there was another topic now, as well as the great and glorious victory at St. Jim's. The fellows were wondering where on earth Harry Wharton was, and what could have happened to keep him out late—and as bed-time drew nearer they wondered more.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Slimy's Way!

LANCASTER of the Sixth was stretched lazily in a big chair in his study by the open window. The June evening was soft and balmy, and it was very quiet and pleasant there.

Lancaster was not exactly "sporting his oak," as Sykes had expressed it; but he had withdrawn himself as soon as he could from the buzzing crowd, and he hoped that no one would come along and disturb him. He had plenty of food for thought.

Hard play all through a long summer's day had tired him a little; but it was a pleasant sort of fatigue to a fellow so thoroughly fit and healthy. He had enjoyed that day to the very limit. Black care had been cast away. He had lived that day only for cricket; the Wizard and all his works were dismissed from mind, and he was only a Greyfriars man playing for School. And the excitement, the cheering, the constant buzz and bustle of the long day, had helped to keep black thoughts at a distance. But on the homeward journey they had intruded; and now that he was alone they thickened on him.

He had broken the compact with that Remove kid and returned to Greyfriars with the team. What next?

Slimy had said that Wharton would be silent; that his silence would be secured. How?

He had not seen Wharton since his return. He had not expected to see him, so far as that went. But the junior must know that he had come back—must have heard his name roared in the quad—must have seen him carried into the House shoulder-high. What was the kid thinking—and doing?

Had Slimy worked it? If so, how?

As he lay back in the big chair, his hands behind his head, his new limbs stretched at ease, the soft breeze at the window playing on his face, Lancaster wondered. He half-expected to hear Wharton's step in the passage—to see the junior's scornful, accusing face in the doorway. He half-expected to hear a heavier tread—that of a master sent to conduct him to the Head—if Wharton had spoken out. He would not have been surprised to hear the tramp of a constable's foot.

And yet he realised that he did not quite expect any of these things—for Slimy was not a man of idle words; and Slimy had said that the boy would keep silent.

Had he worked it—and how? He dared not harm the boy—he knew that

the Wizard meant every word of the threat he had uttered. If the boy was hurt, the game was up for the whole gang; Lancaster's resolution was fixed on that, and Slimy knew that it was fixed. There was a point beyond which the master crook dared not provoke him.

A footstep came up the passage and stopped at his door. Richard Lancaster's heart beat faster.

"Hallo, old bean!"

Wingate of the Sixth looked into the dusk of the study.

Lancaster, master of himself, smiling, gave him a nod without rising. He looked the picture of lazy ease and comfort.

"Look here, we want you, old man," said Wingate. "You're not going to understudy the fower that blushed unseen, Lancaster. You're wanted."

"You'll turn a fellow's head at this rate," said Lancaster.

Wingate laughed.

"Not likely in your case! But you can't win big matches for the school and hide your light under a bushel. By Jove, Lancaster, it was a big day for Greyfriars when you came—I never knew what a prize-packet we were getting the day Sir Hilton Popper brought you here."

"You're glad I came to Greyfriars?" said Lancaster, with a curious look at the captain of the school.

"Well, I should be rather an ass if I wasn't, though you've washed out a lot of my own personal kudos," said Wingate, with a grin. "Fellows used to say that I was the best batsman at Greyfriars. I haven't heard that remark lately."

"Oh, rot!"

"My dear man, you can play my head off with the willow, as easily as you can play old Sykes' head off with the leather. And we haven't a man in the field anything like you. You're a giddy marvel all round."

"I shall have to see my hatter after this," said Lancaster gravely. "I shall want a much larger size."

"I think that's what the men like about you most, old man—not a trace of swelled head," said Wingate; "though if ever a fellow was entitled to pat on the roll you're the man."

Wingate sat on the edge of the study table, facing Lancaster. He little dreamed of the thoughts hidden behind the handsome, smiling face before him. Nothing had happened, Wharton had not spoken—that was clear to the schoolboy crook. He had had plenty of time to speak, but evidently he had not done so. How had Slimy worked it? Wharton had not come over to St. Jim's with his friends. Lancaster, whose eye nothing escaped, had noted that, and he understood why. Not till Lancaster came in at the gates could the boy have known that he was coming back; but he must know now—he must have long known. If he was in the school, he must know. And it was now long past lock-up—he must be in the school. Slimy had worked it somehow—but how? What influence could even that wary, cunning, astute crook have over a fellow like Wharton? How had he secured the boy's silence?

Wingate's next words came as if in answer to the schoolboy crook's unspoken question.

"By the way, Lancaster, you saw nothing of that Remove kid, Wharton, on the way home, did you?"

"Wharton!" repeated Lancaster slowly. "No."

"Quelch has an idea that he may have come to meet us on the way home—a lot of fellows did," explained Wingate.

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"But I've asked nearly everybody, and nobody seems to have seen Wharton."

Lancaster started a little.

"Why?" he asked. "Isn't the kid in the House?"

"No; he seems to have cut call-over, and hasn't come in."

Lancaster sat upright.

"You mean that he isn't here?"

"That's it. I dare say he'll turn up by bed-time," said Wingate carelessly. "There's a whopping waiting for the young ass. But look here, old man, come along to the prefects' room; the fellows all want you."

Lancaster did not reply. Wingate, looking at him in the glimmer of sunset from the quad, noticed that his face seemed pale.

"Fagged a bit?" he asked.

"Yes—a trifle." Lancaster's voice was unsteady. "I say, isn't it rather serious for a junior to stay out as late as this?"

"You bet—it's a whopping for him when he comes in. Unless something's happened to the kid, of course."

"Unless something's happened to him!" repeated Lancaster mechanically.

"Well, he was ragged some time ago by some fellows from Highcliffe—tied to a tree at Hogben Grange and kept out late," said Wingate. "The young rascals got off punishment by some pretty hard lying on the subject, from what I hear. It's possible there's been something of the kind again. Not that it's likely, of course."

"Then the kid's missing?"

"Oh, he'll turn up all right, like a bad penny. Look here, old man, I've come to root you out—the fellows all want you—"

Lancaster smiled, but it cost him an effort.

"You'll have to let me off, old chap. The fact is, I'm rather tired—I hate owning up to it, but there you are."

"Rot!" said Wingate. "You were as fresh as paint after a slogging day. But I'll let you off till supper in Hall—you'll have to turn out then, if we have to come here and carry you."

And with that and a cheery laugh the Greyfriars captain left the study.

The smile dropped from Lancaster's face as if it had been wiped away as the door closed behind Wingate. He leaped to his feet.

Wharton—missing!

Lancaster needed no more than that! Slimy had worked it, and that was the way he had worked it. Lancaster knew! He wondered now that he had not guessed. He seemed to be losing his keenness. He might have guessed! What other way was there to silence the boy?

Slimy dared not hurt him. He was sure of that! Not for a moment did he doubt that. But Wharton was missing! Wingate fancied that he would turn up for bed-time. Lancaster knew that he would not. Slimy was not the man to fail. The boy would not return!

Lancaster paced the study with irregular steps.

Fool that he had been not to guess! He might have guessed! What other way was there? Yet he had not guessed. The old keenness of the Wizard seemed to be deserting him. More and more he was becoming a Sixth-Former of Greyfriars, less and less a wary crook. He might have guessed!

Where was the boy?

Unharméd! He was sure of that. A prisoner! That was a certainty, too. Lancaster was to have gone that day. He had not gone, but the boy who knew his secret had gone in his stead. He saw it all now.

He clenched his hands.

"Never, never!"

He breathed the words between set teeth.

He made a stride to the door. To leave the House, the school; to rush out his motor-bike; to tear away as fast as petrol could drive him; to face the master crook and demand the boy's release at any cost, at any danger—that was the thought in his mind. To defy Slimy Sugden, to dare him to do his worst—anything rather than this!

But he stopped.

The cold, hard, greasy, implacable face rose before his mind. He could defy Slimy, but he would have to pay for his defiance. The crook would be pitiless. All Greyfriars would know what only Wharton yet knew.

The wretched fellow groaned aloud.

What could he do?

He paced the study again. It could not go on—it couldn't! If he had felt before that it could not go on, he felt it now more intensely. It could not, with a boy imprisoned in some secret den to secure his silence. Again he strode to the door, his mind made up

his chance. The smile lingered on Dick Lancaster's face, hiding the bitterness of death in his heart.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Vanished!

"NOT here!" said Bob Cherry. The rising-bell was clanging over Greyfriars in the sunny summer morning. Bob, first out of bed in the Remove dormitory, as usual, glanced at Harry Wharton's bed. It was empty.

"Not here!" repeated Bob blankly.

Wharton had not come in when the Remove went to bed the previous night. Some of the fellows had remained awake for a time discussing and speculating as to what was up. They had fallen asleep at last, nothing doubting that the missing junior would return later.

He had not returned. Many eyes turned on the empty bed. It had not been slept in.

"My hat!" said Nugent, with a deep breath.

"Our jolly old Form captain's taken a night out this time!" grinned Skinner. "This will be the sack for Wharton!"

"Shut up, Skinner!" growled Johnny Bull. "Something's happened to the chap."

"If it hasn't, something will," said Skinner, "and what will happen will

be the order of the boot! Ow!" added Skinner, as a bolster landed on him and strewed him on the floor, cutting short his humorous observations.

Faces in the Remove were grave. Nobody but Skinner felt disposed to take a humorous view of the matter. Harry Wharton had stayed out all night, which meant expulsion from the school, unless he could give a

satisfactory explanation. And what explanation could there be, except an accident?

Four faces were very gloomy as the juniors went down. There was remorse as well as anxiety in the hearts of Wharton's chums. They had left him the previous day in an irritated mood, leaving him alone for the day. They were not to blame, but it seemed to them now that they were to blame. They had left him, and while he was left without his friends something had happened. They could not guess what, but something that had kept him away all night. What could have happened? He was not the fellow to walk under a motor-car or to fall over a cliff. What could it mean?

"If—if—if it's something serious," muttered Nugent, with a lump in his throat. "and—and it must be—"

He remembered Wharton standing at the school gates, looking after them as they went to the station. That was the last he had seen of his chum. Was it the last he was ever to see of him?

"The seriousness must be terrific," said Hurreo Jamsot Ram Singh soberly. "But let us ask esteemed Quelch. He must know."

The four caught Quelch on his way to prayers. The Remove master's face, always severe, was unusually grave now. They wanted to know what had happened, but they dreaded to hear the answer.

"Wharton, sir—" faltered Bob.

"Wharton did not return last night,"

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There was a tramp of feet, and his door was flung open. A crowd of Sixth and Fifth swarmed in the passage—a sea of laughing faces.

"Come out, Lancaster!"

"Come out, you modest violet!"

"Bag him, you men!"

"Supper in Hall, old bean!" grinned Wingate. "You're wanted, and we're not taking no for an answer. Scrag him!"

Like a fellow in a dream, Lancaster was hustled away by the laughing crowd. He went to supper in Hall, stunned by the roar of cheering that greeted him as he appeared there. Masters as well as boys joined in the cheering. Old Prout was purple with his vocal efforts; Capper was squeaking in his high-pitched voice; Quelch grinning like a good-tempered gargoyle; Lascelles shouting as loud as any school-boy. Sixth and Fifth roared and thundered. Supper in Hall was a great function after such a match as that at St. Jim's. The hero of the hour had a smiling face, and no eye could read the thoughts behind it.

Shame, disgrace, all these fellows knowing the truth, these ringing cheers turned to hisses or to scornful silence, these bright, friendly faces averted in contempt, disgust, horror! No, he could not face that! He was strong, but it was beyond his strength to face that. Silence—silence, and the boy must take

said Mr. Quelch. "Do not alarm yourselves unnecessarily. He will probably return safely. His absence is inexplicable, but—"

"But you know what's happened, sir?" exclaimed Nugent.

"Nothing is known," answered Mr. Quelch. "No one seems to have seen the boy since he walked out of the gates yesterday afternoon."

"Oh!" gasped Nugent.

"News may reach us any moment," said Mr. Quelch kindly. He understood what the juniors were feeling.

"An accident, sir!" muttered Johnny Bull.

"Nothing can be heard of any accident," said the Remove master. "I have made extensive inquiries. The police know nothing. Nothing is known at any hospital in the locality."

"He couldn't have gone home for any reason, sir?"

"I was in communication with Colonel Wharton late last night. He has not gone home," said Mr. Quelch.

Bob gritted his teeth.

"The Highcliffe fellows—you know what they did once, sir!"

"I am calling at Highcliffe this morning to inquire," said Mr. Quelch. "Every inquiry will be made."

The school went in to prayers. After prayers the disappearance of Harry Wharton was the sole topic.

Mr. Quelch was seen to leave in the Head's car, and all the fellows knew that he had gone over to Highcliffe School. When he returned it was soon known that there was no news. Mr. Quelch was very busy that morning, but not with his Form. The Remove were taken by a prefect. At dinner there was a vacant place at the Remove table.

Fellows who had clung to the idea that Wharton's absence might be due to some fresh "rag" by Ponsonby & Co., of Highcliffe, gave up that idea now. Obviously, nothing in the nature of a "rag" could have kept the junior away from school all this time.

He had not gone home. No news could be had of any accident. The missing junior seemed simply to have vanished from the face of the earth. Gosling had seen him leave the school

about half-past five the previous afternoon and take the direction of Courtfield. After that, space seemed to have swallowed him up.

Billy Bunter had a suggestion to make. Bunter mooted the theory that Wharton had run away from school to become a pirate. But the fat Owl's valuable contribution did not even evoke laughter.

Where was Wharton?

If the theory of an accident had to be given up, what could account for his continued absence? Kidnapping was suggested, but it seemed a wild idea. Who could want to kidnap him?

"If he'd only come over to St. Jim's with us—" groaned Bob Cherry after dinner—at which he had eaten hardly a mouthful.

"Why the thump didn't he?" growled Johnny Bull.

"Just that fatheaded set he's been making against Lancaster; he wouldn't come over and see Lancaster making hay of the St. Jim's men. That must have been his reason—if he had a reason."

"He said he had a reason," muttered Nugent.

"Well, that must have been it. Oh, the awful ass!" groaned Bob. "Where can he be, you fellows? Where on earth can he be?"

"The wherefulness is terrific."

"They've got the fishermen from Pegg searching along the cliffs," said Nugent, his lips quivering. "But—but that's not it! Wharton wasn't the fellow to tumble over a cliff. Besides, he went out towards Courtfield—that's not the way to the sea."

"What wouldn't I give to see the old chap trotting in at the gates this minute!" groaned Bob.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"

"I say, there's no news yet!" said Bunter. "They haven't found the body—"

"What?" yelled Bob Cherry.

"The body—Yaroooooh! Owl! Beast! Leave off kicking me! I was only telling you fellows they hadn't found the body—Whoooooo!"

Billy Bunter fled for his life.

The four chums "mooched" dismally about the quad. Under the elms they came on Lancaster of the Sixth. His face was very grave, and he cast a curious—it might have seemed almost a furtive—glance at the juniors. The trouble in the four young faces gave the schoolboy crook a pang. There were heavy hearts at Greyfriars that day, but none heavier than his.

"No news yet, you fellows?" said Lancaster quietly.

"No," muttered Bob. "I say, what do you think can have happened to him, Lancaster?"

Little did Bob dream how easily the Sixth-Former could have answered that question had he chosen!

"He seems just to have vanished into space," said Nugent.

"Well, he can't have quite, can he?" said Lancaster. "I shouldn't worry too much if I were you. It's queer, of course. But Wharton's not the kid to land in serious harm; he can take care of himself. I feel quite sure myself that he's safe and sound."

"But if he is, why doesn't he come in?" asked Bob.

Lancaster shook his head.

"No use asking me that! It's jolly queer! But I feel certain that he's all right—certain that he's safe—wherever he is."

"I wish I did!" muttered Bob.

But Lancaster's words left the juniors feeling a little comforted when he walked on. His lightest opinion had weight with them. The whole thing was utterly mysterious and perplexing; but if old Lancaster thought that Wharton was safe and sound, very likely he was right. Old Lancaster was not the man to talk out of his hat.

Lancaster smiled bitterly when his back was turned to the juniors. He had been unable to resist speaking a word of comfort to the distressed chums, though prudence warned him to hold his tongue. Slimy Sugden had trained him, but his training had not been thorough; he should not have left the schoolboy crook a conscience!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Calling in Ferrers Locke!

"**K**IDNAPPED!" snapped Colonel Wharton.

Inspector Grimes nodded slowly.

Dr. Locke nodded still more slowly. Mr. Quelch pursed his lips.

The four gentlemen were gathered in the Head's study. School was over at Greyfriars. A whole day had passed without news of the missing junior. The one topic now in the quad, in the passages, in the studies was the disappearance of Wharton of the Remove. The glorious victory of St. Jim's had quite faded into the background. Nothing was talked of, thought of, but the amazing disappearance of a Greyfriars fellow in the broad light of day.

Colonel Wharton tugged savagely at his grizzled moustache. His eyes smouldered with suppressed wrath.

"It's clear!" he said. "The telegram makes it clear!" He looked at the Courtfield inspector.

"I must agree," said Mr. Grimes. "That false telegram signed by your name, sir, would have caused the boy to leave the school immediately had he been within gates. It could have been sent with no other object. It was a second string to their bow."

"But—" murmured the Head.

"My nephew was watched for outside the school!" rapped the colonel. "It



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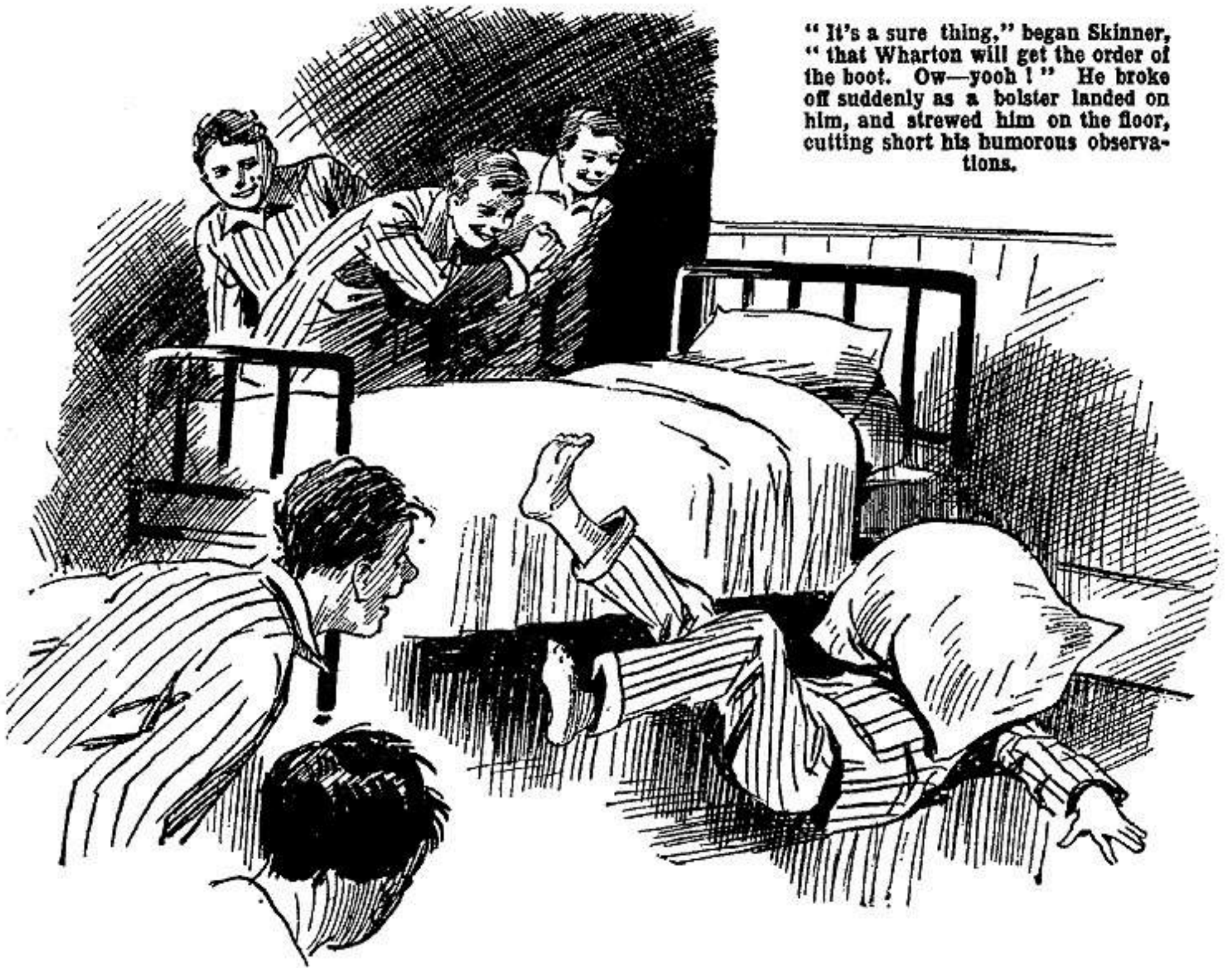
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"It's a sure thing," began Skinner, "that Wharton will get the order of the boot. Ow—yoooh!" He broke off suddenly as a bolster landed on him, and strewed him on the floor, cutting short his humorous observations.

was probable that he would go out on a half-holiday, and he was undoubtedly watched for. But the telegram was dispatched to make all sure; if he had not gone out, that would have made him go out."

"It appears clear, sir," said Inspector Grimes. "Had Master Wharton been in the school he would have started for Courtfield to take the first train on receipt of that telegram. Somewhere on his way home to Surrey he would have been seized. He would have been watched leaving the school, of course. Indeed, it is quite likely that when he left, the rascals supposed that he had had the wire."

"But why?" said the Head.

"Why?" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"There you ask me too much, gentlemen," said Mr. Grimes. "But for the telegram I should conclude that the boy had met with some accident in some lonely spot, or even that he had gone off with some foolish idea in his head, as schoolboys have done before now. But the false telegram signed by Colonel Wharton's name proves conclusively that there was a design to entice him out of the school yesterday afternoon."

"Conclusively!" grunted the colonel.

"They—whoever they are—left nothing to chance," said Mr. Grimes. "Whether he went out, or whether he stayed in, their plans were laid. Unaware of his danger, the boy had no chance of escaping it."

"If he had gone with his friends——" said Mr. Quelch.

"I do not think that would have saved him, sir. On so long a journey these scoundrels would have found their opportunity, I have little doubt."

"But who?" said the Head helplessly. "And why?"

"That is inexplicable," said Colonel Wharton. "We are not in the United States, where kidnapping for ransom is a common occurrence. It is scarcely credible that my nephew can have been kidnapped with such an object."

"Scarcely, sir!" said Mr. Grimes. "Had Greyfriars drawn the attention of a gang of kidnapers, they would have selected another victim, I think—such as Lord Mauloverer, who is known to be very wealthy, and who would certainly have been quite as easy a victim."

"But if that is not their object," said the Head, "what can their object possibly be?"

"That is what we have to ascertain, sir," said Mr. Grimes. "There is one gleam of light at present."

"And that?" asked the Head.

"A short time ago Master Wharton was instrumental in preventing a burglary at Hogben Grange. He was able to give us the name of one of the thieves—a well-known crook long wanted by the police, called the Weasel. This man was also concerned in the bank raid at Courtfield a few weeks ago. It is possible that some motive of revenge on the part of this rascal and his associates may have something to do with it."

"It is possible——"

"Possible, perhaps," said Mr. Quelch. "But the man Weasel was, as you say, concerned in the bank raid. He was chased, and the plunder taken from him by two boys of this school, of whom Wharton was not one. They were Coker of the Fifth Form and Lancaster of the Sixth Form. No revengeful

attempt has been made on either of these boys."

The inspector pursed his lips.

"I said, sir, that it is a gleam of light—only a gleam!" said Mr. Grimes. "I do not build upon it. At the same time, in view of what appears to have happened to Wharton, I recommend that the two boys, Coker and Lancaster, should be on their guard—very much on their guard."

"Undoubtedly!" said the Head.

"Meanwhile——" said Mr. Quelch.

"Meanwhile, sir, we have the case in hand, and hope for results," said Inspector Grimes. "The circumstances point to kidnapping—that is all we are assured of at present. But we are losing no time, sir. I hope to have news for you before long."

Inspector Grimes took his leave, a very puzzled man. The three gentlemen in the study looked at one another. Colonel Wharton gnawed his moustache. He was as puzzled as the inspector. All the circumstances indicated kidnapping, yet kidnapping seemed inexplicable. The junior was kept away by force, or he would have returned. The false telegram proved that there had been a carefully laid scheme. But who kept him away—and why? The gleam of light referred to by the inspector seemed a very faint glimmer indeed to the others. But where was Wharton? In what hands had he fallen?

Dr. Locke broke a gloomy silence.

"I am completely at a loss," he said slowly. "Inspector Grimes is a capable man, a zealous man, but I fear that he is at a loss also. If Wharton does not

return to-day, I think there is only one step to be taken."

Colonel Wharton looked at him. "I shall send for my relative," said the Head.

"Your relative?" repeated the colonel.

"You have probably heard of him," said Dr. Locke. "He is, I believe, a very celebrated man in his own line of business. His name is Ferrers Locke—he is a private detective, of Baker Street, in London."

The colonel's eyes gleamed.

"Good!" he ejaculated.

"He is a busy man—a very busy man," said Dr. Locke. "But I am sure he will not refuse to come here at my request and investigate. He is well acquainted with Wharton and his friends, and will take a personal interest in the matter."

"If Wharton is to be found, Ferrers Locke will be able to find him," said Mr. Quelch, with a nod. "Nothing could be better."

"Assuredly," said the colonel, "I know Mr. Locke, and have every faith in him. Dr. Locke, you have relieved my mind immensely. With your permission, I will remain and see Mr. Locke when he comes."

"I should have suggested it, sir."

And the conference in the Head's study broke up. Colonel Wharton, pacing under the elms in the quad, was the recipient of many glances from the Greyfriars fellows. His bronzed face was grim; but his heart was lighter since the Head had stated that Ferrers Locke would come. If any man could solve the strange mystery of Harry Wharton's disappearance, it was the celebrated Baker Street detective.

The Head still nourished a hope that there would be news of the missing junior. But as the June sun sank lower, and the day drew to an end, he had to give up that hope.

There was no news. Search and inquiry were going on. For a wide radius round the school everyone knew that a schoolboy was missing, and that a reward was offered for news of him. But there was no news. Harry Wharton had vanished from all knowledge as utterly as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up. And the Head at last took up his telephone receiver and gave Ferrers Locke's number.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER!

Hope!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter rolled into Study No. 1, with his little round eyes full of excitement behind his spectacles.

Prep was over in the Remove—not that Bob Cherry and his friends, at least, had given much attention to prep.

The four chums were gathered in Study No. 1, disinclined for the crowd in the Rag. They were discussing, for the twentieth time or more, the mysterious disappearance of the captain of the Remove. It was a dismal discussion, for no amount of talking seemed to help. The matter was thrashed out over and over again, without a glimmer of light dawning on the subject. It seemed a hopeless problem, from whatever angle it was looked at.

They only hoped that there might be news, and that hope was growing faint. News, if it came, might come any moment. But it did not come, and the friends of the missing junior had an

experience of the hope deferred that makes the heart grow sick. All the more bitterly it was borne in on their minds that they had been estranged from their chum when this sudden and inexplicable disaster had befallen him.

But as Billy Bunter rolled into the study, his fat face full of excitement, the four Removees spun round eagerly, their faces lighting up.

"News?" exclaimed Bob, with a gasp.

"Have they heard?" exclaimed Nugent.

"News! I should jolly well say so!" said Bunter. "Leave it to me to bag the news, old beans! You fellows never hear anything. Precious little goes on in this school without my knowing, I can tell you!" And the Owl of the Remove bestowed a fat, complacent wink on the staring four.

"What do you mean?" Nugent's voice was husky. "If you've heard anything, Bunter—"

"I jolly well have!" said Bunter emphatically. "I've told nobody yet—except some fellows in the Rag, and some Fourth Form chaps, and a Fifth Form man, and—"

"Tell us—quick!"

"I'm telling you as fast as I can, ain't I? I got it from the Beak himself!" said Bunter importantly. "So it's official. You see, I was in Masters' passage when he came to speak to Quelch—"

"Will you cough it up, you babbling idiot!" hissed Bob Cherry. "Cut the cackle, and get it out, you fool!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Get it out!" yelled Bob savagely.

"Is it news of Wharton, you idiot?"

"If you're going to call a fellow names, Bob Cherry, when he takes the trouble to come and tell you the latest news—" began Bunter indignantly.

"Here, I say, leggo! Yaroooh!"

Bob grasped him by the collar. Bunter evidently did not understand that the chums of the Remove were anxious. Perhaps he did not see anything special to be anxious about. But if it was news, the juniors were not disposed to wait till Bunter unwound it slowly.

Shake, shake, shake!

"Now, you fat dummy—"

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter.

Bang! Bunter's bullet head rapped on the study door. A fiendish yell rang the length of the Remove passage.

"Now get it out!" shrieked Bob.

"Ow! Wow! My napper! Wow!"

Bunter rubbed his head and roared. Bob glared at him as if he could have eaten him. But it was a case of more haste and less speed. Bunter roared and yelled instead of imparting his news.

"Let's go down," said Nugent hastily. "If that fat fool knows, the other fellows know—"

"Ow! I say, you fellows, hold on! They don't know—only the fellows I've told!" gasped Bunter. "Keep off, Bob Cherry, you beast! I've a jolly good mind not to tell you now, after—"

"Is it news of Wharton?" hissed Bob.

"Have they found him? Answer!"

"Oh, no! They haven't found the body—Keep off, you beast!" Bunter dodged round the table. "Wharrer you jumping at a fellow for? They haven't found the body, so far as I know. Keep off, can't you? Look here! I jolly well won't tell you if you ain't civil!"

"There's no news." Nugent's brief hope had died. "It's only the fat idiot's cackle! Get out, Bunter!"

"That's all you know!" sneered

Bunter. "I can jolly well tell you it is news—though they haven't found the — Keep off! I heard the Head tell Quelch—he left Quelch's study door open, you see, and I was there—right on the spot! I don't mean to say I listened—you know I wouldn't do anything of the sort—but I happened to hear—"

"Oh, cheese it!" snorted Bob Cherry.

"Well, I like that! I can tell you, other fellows have been jolly glad to hear the news, and you, being Wharton's friends—"

"The jawfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "Will you come to the esteemed point, Bunter?"

"How can a fellow come to the point when you keep on interrupting him—banging a fellow's napper, too!" said Bunter warmly. "Ungrateful, I call it! But, of course, you don't care about Wharton as I did. He wasn't your pal as he was mine. I dare say you've nearly forgotten him already. But I hope I'm not that sort. I'd walk miles to see the body. I say, you fellows, the Beak told Quelch—I heard him—that Locke's coming—Ferrers Locke—you've heard of Ferrers Locke, I suppose—"

"Ferrers Locke!" repeated the four juniors with one voice. And every face brightened.

Bunter grinned. He had succeeded in interesting them, after all. His news was worth hearing.

"That's it," he said. "You know, that detective Johnny is a relation of the Beak's. Well, old Locke's phoned to young Locke—the old Obadiah to the young Obadiah, you know—he, he, he!—and Locke says he'll come. The Beak told Quelch so. I heard him! He'll be here in the morning!"

"Oh!" said Bob Cherry, with a deep breath.

"Oh, good!" said Nugent.

"The goodness of this esteemed news is terrific," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "The felicity of my worthy self is enormous."

"And all you can do is to bang a fellow's napper when he comes to tell you," snorted Bunter. "I can jolly well tell you, Bob Cherry—"

"Oh, get out!" growled Bob.

"That's your way of thanking a chap, I suppose. Suppose the Head had caught me listening outside Quelch's door—I mean, I wasn't listening, but he might have supposed—"

"Hook it!"

"I came to tell you fellows—I haven't told a dozen fellows yet. It will be all right now," said Bunter. "That man Locke's jolly clever, and I can tell you he will find the body—Yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter departed hurriedly from an ungrateful study, closely pursued by a whizzing cushion. The cushion overtook him in the doorway, and there was a yell in the Remove passage.

"I say, this is jolly good!" said Johnny Bull. "If any man can find old Wharton, Ferrers Locke can. It was a brainwave of the Head's to send for him."

"That man Ferrers Locke is a giddy genius, in his own line," said Bob hopefully. "Lots of things that don't mean anything to us, may mean a lot to him when he gets going. I dare say he's dealt with dozens of kidnapping cases. He will find Wharton, you fellows."

"It's only kidnapping," said Nugent, in a low voice. "That's bad enough; but—but—it couldn't be—" He broke off.

"Of course it couldn't," said Bob. "Why should anybody want to hurt Wharton? That's rot!"

(Continued on page 28.)

LAND of LOST PLANES!

(See introduction on page 26.)



Kodon, Son of the Sun!

WHIRLING round, Bill Lyon pointed the gun at Doak as he heard the gunman fume.

Doak's hand dropped, and his thin lips writhed back in a snarl.

"Gone native, have yuh, rat?" "One squeak more out of you and I plug you!" Bill drawled. "What d'you want to fire at those chaps for? They hold Dexter prisoner, but he said they were friendly enough. Haven't either of you any sense?"

"They chucked a spear first!" grunted Doak.

"It was a sign, that's all," answered Bill. He could see where the first flung spear had fallen. "Don't you think that chaps who can sling spears like they can, to form a fence like that, could throw one and kill you with it first time if they wanted?"

Contemptuously he turned his back on Doak. For a moment murder gleamed in the gunman's eyes. He raised his hand a little, but the Chief's hand fell on his wrist.

"Not yet," whispered the Chief, shaking his head. "He was right. We were too hasty. Find Dexter first, and get the jewels, then we can settle with both of them, if he can get the natives to be friendly."

In the meantime, Bill had walked boldly to the barrier of spears. He was acting purely on instinct, but he felt that what he had said to Doak and the Chief was right—that if the men in the jungle had wanted to kill, they could have done so without warning. The fact that they had merely thrown up a

barrier in front of the white men with their spears, and still had refrained from killing them, seemed to him to prove that they were not unfriendly.

He jerked up one of the upright spears from the ground. He saw that the haft was of a light-coloured wood, and the spear-head a shining, black substance. He tested it and found it to be of razor sharpness—obsidian, a volcanic substance like black glass, with the durability of a diamond.

For a moment he hesitated, holding the spear in his hand. Then, with an instinctive gesture, he turned the haft towards the jungle, the blade towards himself, as a gesture of peace. He

For twelve months the natives fed him on the fat of the land and gave him every attention. But the thirteenth month was destined to be an unlucky one, for he was to be offered up as a human sacrifice!

went through the fence of spears, walking slowly and deliberately.

After a moment's thought he decided to make his friendship more apparent. For want of something better, he took off the flying-helmet he was still wearing and draped it over the butt of the spear, as if to hide the fact that it was a weapon.

The sun gleamed down on his bare head, so that his own hair gleamed as goldenly as that of the men in the jungle. And at sight of his approaching thus there broke out from behind the screen of dark green leaves an excited murmuring.

The Ruined Temples!

THE muttering of the men behind the screen of forest trees held a definite note of fear in it. Then their voices ceased suddenly. Silence fell like a blanket, so that there was no sound at all, and Bill could hear the beating of his own heart, pounding drum-like in his ears.

The sun blazed like a great golden ball, sinking steadily towards the west. Its rays shimmered on the rich golden hair of one of the men in the trees; and, to his amazement, Bill Lyon found the man to be kneeling, head bowed to the ground, in an attitude of devotion towards his own advancing figure.

The young pilot almost checked his advance with astonishment. It seemed strange that these people, who had first announced their presence by a cloud of spears, should now prostrate themselves before him.

Bill kept on steadily, thrust aside a rope of liana which hung suspended from a feathery-leaved tree, and passed into the shade of the forest. There, within the gloom, he saw a number of the golden-haired men, totalling about fifty. Each one was kneeling, head bowed, turned in his direction.

"They don't seem particularly warlike!" Bill muttered to himself—and at his soft tones the man nearest him arose.

There was a strange expression on his face as he looked at the pilot. Fear showed in his eyes, but something of

gladness, too, as if he were looking at a conqueror or—the thought flashed through Bill's mind queerly—at a god!

He was a fine-built man, with broad shoulders, and muscles rippling like cables beneath the gold of his skin. His nose was curved and flattish, like that of a North American Indian, his eyes strangely dark against his tawny skin. Rack his brains as he might, Bill could think of no race of people he had come across in his travels who resembled this man.

He gestured with his arm, as if to indicate a passage through the forest; and, looking, Bill saw there was a faint trail leading through—a narrow pathway, cut between the thick-growing lianas which drooped rope-like everywhere from the palms and tropical trees.

Bill turned his head, and between the rows of spears could see Doak and the chief standing beneath the wing of the upended monoplane, watching him curiously.

The young pilot's mind worked swiftly. If only he were alone, he felt sure he could impress these strange people that he was something marvellous, since they already seemed to imagine so. But as soon as the Chief saw Shane Dexter he would try to get the Crown jewels of Levania from him, and then make a getaway. And Bill sensed that were such a thing to happen these golden-skinned people would quickly begin action.

Gesturing to the standing man to wait, Bill turned and stalked back through the trees and the fence of spears till he reached Doak and the Chief.

When he spoke it was almost in a whisper, as if he were afraid of the golden-skinned people overhearing him.

"Listen, you two!" he said. "We're in one big mess if we don't tread careful. If you want to get out of here, the best thing you can do is obey me for a while. You know I'm not the kind to play any dirty trick on you."

The Chief nodded, his strange, lack-lustre eyes fixed on the pilot. He himself had sensed the awe with which the men in the forest had treated Bill, and he realised that for the time being at least Bill was their protection.

"They seem to take me for a god or something, by the curious way they're behaving, and if we can keep the illusion up, so much the better for us," Bill continued. "Since you two started firing at them they'll probably think you're my bodyguard. I think perhaps it'd be better to keep that up. Yeah, I know it's funny, Doak, seeing you'd cheerfully plunk a bullet through me as soon as not; but don't forget I'm the lad who's going to get you out of here. What happens afterwards is on the knees of the gods. So that we're not likely to quarrel among ourselves, the best thing for you two to pretend is that you're dumb. Savvy? Can't talk!"

He watched the Chief's reaction to this suggestion somewhat anxiously. What he really wanted to avoid was the Chief having conversation with Dexter, should they find the American.

Doak's narrow mouth opened, as if to begin raving at Bill; but the Chief stopped him with a movement of his hand. Then he nodded at Bill, although a smile twisted his lips.

"He might," thought Bill, and, followed by the Chief and Doak, he

made for the forest again—"he might have fallen for that and be putting himself in my hands, or he might have some scheme of his own. Still I've got my point."

The men were standing by the time they reached the forest again. They bowed low upon seeing Bill, staring curiously at the two men behind him. They were frank in their glances, too; there was nothing of fear in them as when they looked at the pilot.

The man who appeared to be the leader led the way through the trail, keeping about a yard ahead of Bill and a little to one side. As they left the fringe of the forest the jungle became thicker and thicker, so that they seemed to be walking through a twilight aisle.

The place was drenched in eerie silence. It seemed more uncanny by the fact that there was life about them. In a clearing of the tree-tops a swarm of bright-hued butterflies dipped and wheeled silently, like a cloud of gold and flame. Once Bill caught a glimpse of a tawny, mottled shape, whose shadow blended so well with the dapple sunlight and shade that he blinked to see if he really had seen aright—and when he opened his eyes the shape was gone.

For half an hour they plunged on steadily. The man guiding was unflinching, never hesitating, following a trail as plainly marked to him as Piccadilly would be to Bill. Piccadilly! Bill grinned as the name occurred to him.

How long since he had been in London? Where were they now? How long had it taken to fly? There had only been a few short hours of darkness through which they'd flown. Only one night had passed. It seemed incredible to believe that only two days—or was it three?—had passed since he had come back from the monotony of piloting a Transcontinental plane across the Channel and back.

His thoughts checked, swerved abruptly to the present. The guide had stopped, was motioning for him to go ahead. The trees had been thinning, and now Bill and the crooks were in an open space. As they passed along, Bill subconsciously noted pieces of masonry, overgrown by weeds and moss and creepers, and thought they must have been some rock formation in the forest.

The truth was driven in on him now as he looked. They had been ruins, grown over by the irresistible jungle. But here, where the trees stood back, the ground had fallen in, leaving a wide, deep basin, sloping gently to the centre. It might have been an upheaval of Nature, or it might have been made

INTRODUCTION.

Entrusted with a fortune in jewels, 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. In the hope of rescuing his old friend Dexter, Bill agrees to fly the "Chief" and his henchman through the wind-belt. Eventually, they alight on the fringe of a jungle, in which Dexter has apparently been forced down. The three white men are approaching the jungle when a cloud of spears comes soaring through the air to form a barrier against them. Raising his gun, the "Chief" is about to fire when Bill rushes forward and snatches the firearm from his hand.

(Now read on.)

by the sweat of a million men's brows. For a wall, smooth, and shaped like a great, winding serpent, writhed around the rim of the basin.

Below, in the floor of the bowl, so that they were looking down at them, were grouped squat temples, built of a dull red stone, gleaming in patches blackly where they were inlaid, like ancient mosaic, with obsidian.

The bowl must have been nearly a mile in area, the grotesquely carved wall entirely surrounding it. Two thoughts flashed through Bill's mind as he looked. One was of the slow swarms of sweating men who—how long ago?—had built that wall. His next thought was a speculation, wondering if the beings who had built this place could have known anything of the art of camouflage.

Overgrown as it was by weeds and creepers, coupled with the dull red and black, the place was practically invisible from the air. Three of the temples were fairly close together in the centre of the bowl. The fourth, smaller, more compact, standing little higher than a man's head, and without perceivable opening, stood under the shade of the frowning wall. The colours seemed to blend with light and shade, so that when Bill stared at one point for long he found it wavering before his eyes, and discovered that he couldn't focus it for long. Small wonder, then, that the ruined temples had escaped his notice when they had been flying in the wind zone, miles above.

A brazen gong sounded suddenly, reverberating between the walls of the bowl, emitting a clangour that rumbled and boomed so that a flock of birds shot up from the trees of the jungle, chattering and scolding at the noise that had disturbed their peace.

Figures appeared like magic in the bowl, swarming out from the three squat temples. Bill had seen no look-out anywhere that could have seen them coming, yet that their arrival was expected was obvious by the clamour of the gong. The men who came out from the temples were like those standing now behind him, smaller in the distance, the dying sun gleaming on the gold of their hair and the girdles about their waists, glittering on the shining black substance of their spear heads.

At the head of them Bill saw one robed figure—that of a man, bent and old, whose hair was silvery white. He clutched in his hand a staff, about which two serpents of gold entwined themselves, their heads crossing at the top.

The men formed themselves in two columns, spreading fanwise from the doors of the temple from which the old man had come, while he stood at the end, awaiting the white men.

There were carved steps leading down from the wall to the bowl. For a moment Bill hesitated, anxiously scanning the ranks of the assembled men to see if Shane Dexter were among them. An icy hand seemed to clutch at his heart as he realised that there was no sign either of Shane Dexter, the American airman, or of Poineau, the Frenchman. Was he too late?

He shrugged. It was no good standing there wondering. The thing to do now they were here under these circumstances was to keep on with the bluff that he was a god, play it out to the end. That was the only way he'd be of any use to Dexter.

Slowly, with as much dignity as he could muster, he stalked down the

hundred or so steps leading to the floor of the bowl, followed by Doak and the Chief, a yard behind, and, following them, the golden-skinned men who had found them.

There was a murmur in the ranks of the men as Bill approached. He certainly was a fine figure. Chance had made him big, muscular, broad-shouldered and blonde. Hard work, flying, and open-air life had made him bronzed and fit. With the redness of the dying sun glinting on his gold hair, he looked as if he might indeed be a superior, white-skinned member of the tribe which was now greeting him.

The murmur died away as he approached. The men knelt, batting their heads to the ground.

"Must hurt 'em, I should think," Bill found himself thinking vaguely, as he realised that the ground was one huge mosaic of tiny red and black stones.

The old, robed man was incredibly ancient. His skin was withered and hung in folds upon his skinny frame; his face was parchment-like, etched with a thousand lines and wrinkles. But with much creaking and labour he prepared to fold himself up like the others and do homage to Bill.

"No need for that, old-timer," Bill said hastily, and stepped forward to take the old priest by the arm.

Black eyes glowed into his as he supported the ancient frame. If the old chap were a hundred years old—as indeed he might well be—there was plenty of fire in the sparkle of his eyes.

"Kodon!" he said simply.

"Kodon!" came in a deep murmur from the bowed men.

"Seems like that's my name!" pondered Bill.

He half-turned, and from the corner of his eye caught sight of Doak, suggestively handling his revolver. He cursed to himself at his folly in not looking to see whether the gunman had been carrying one at his hip when he was unconscious. He had only bothered himself with taking the automatic from the man's shoulder holster.

"Put that thing away, you fool!" he murmured sharply. "They're not going to do us any harm—yet. And don't answer me back. You're dumb!"

The old man looked at Doak, and spoke in a curious, clipping language. The words could scarcely have held any vowels at all, and seemed more like a succession of clicks and gutturals.

Doak put his hand to his mouth and shook his head, as did the Chief. There had been something about the old man's fiery regard which told them it would be safer for them to appear dumb.

At the moment Bill, too, wished that he was dumb. The difficulty of language was a great risk. They might think it strange that a being whom they considered a god shouldn't understand their language.

"Probably think it stranger if I didn't talk at all," Bill muttered. "I guess I'll have to pretend a lot!"

The priest turned and led the way to the largest temple of the cluster of three. They walked up between the avenue of prostrate men. A wide, dark entrance showed the dim interior of the temple. They could see massive pillars supporting the roof and the faint gleam of gold embossed on them. Next moment they were inside, their eyes blinking in the cool shade after the glare of the setting sun reflecting from the red stonework of the bowl.

A raised dais was in the centre of the temple. Surrounding it were eight of the golden-skinned men. They were leaning on spears, downthrust before them. Their heads were bowed, yet their

posture was curiously alert. On the dais was a bed of skins, on which reclined a figure.

A shout from this figure, echoing and re-echoing through the temple.

"Bill! By Gosh! Bill Lyon!"

Awkward!

AT the shout the guards became electrified into action. They whirled around, up-ending their spears, so that the black, glittering points were thrust towards the figure on the dais.

Bill Lyon stared, his eyes rapidly becoming accustomed to the gloom. And then a shout burst from his own lips.

"Dexter! Shane Dexter! We're not too late!"

For it was the American pilot who was reclining on the bed of skins on the dais.

Dexter could not move towards them on account of the thrusting spears, which grimly forbade his movement. His bronzed face was alight with eagerness, his dark eyes blinking as he saw the three white men, behind them the old priest, and behind them again, now watching fearfully, a number of the golden-skinned men.

The priest was looking doubtfully, first at Dexter, then at Bill.

The English pilot suddenly became alert to a sense of foreboding. He was being weighed, studied, and he felt he was on the verge of making a false move. His senses were acutely sharpened by the danger of his position, and he knew for the first time that the old priest was beginning to doubt.

"I can't talk their lingo, Shane," he said in a monotonous voice to the American, as if he were muttering some incantation. "Have you picked any of it up?"

"Yes," answered Dexter.

"They seem to take me for one of their gods or something," said Bill. "They call me Kodon. I've got to make 'em believe it all the time, or we're in a fix. What sort of a fix are you in, to have a guard like that?"

"Me? Huh! I'm a sacrifice. I'm goin' to be offered up to you to-morrow! Yes; to-morrow is the feast day of Kodon, Son of the Sun, and for a year I've been made a fuss of—"

"Then tell 'em that I, Kodon, Son of the Sun, wish to be alone with the 'sacrifice' for a little while, that I may question the 'sacrifice' to see that it is worthy! Tell 'em that I can't talk to them yet until the feast is over; my father the Sun won't permit it!"

A twinkle glimmered in the American's eyes at this grave speech, but his face was emotionless as he translated the words into the clipped speech of the natives. The priest, still doubtful, stared at him, then glanced half-fearfully at Bill. Finally he bowed, clipping words to the men with the spears.

They moved back swiftly from the dais, bowing for Bill to ascend it, but closed round Doak and the Chief as they, too, made steps to follow Bill.

Bill's eyes fixed on Doak. He could see that the gunman was on the verge of speaking.

"If you want to get out of this place

alive," he said, "you'll still play dumb. Already they're beginning to doubt—"

"I don't know what it's all about," cut in Dexter swiftly, "but you'll come to no harm yet. They'll take

you outside until Lyon has finished his examination to see if I'm fit for him. Then you'll be brought back here to the temple. Best do as they say for now, and no harm'll come to you."

The Chief nodded. He was playing a patient game. He was prepared to wait—until he could lay hands on the jewels Dexter had. He signed to Doak, and together the two of them, between the guards, were taken to the temple, followed by the old priest.

As he reached the entrance to the temple the Chief paused, turned, and stared sombrely at the two on the dais. Then he turned and went outside. A moment later, and there was a long rumble, and two massive doors slid into place, to meet together, closing the entrance to the temple.

Promptly Shane Dexter's hand shot out and gripped Bill's.

"Last time I saw you was at Croydon," he cried; "an' now it's Heaven knows where! But it's mighty good to see you! How did you get here? Who are the two sinister-lookin' birds who're playin' dumb? Did you smash your plane? Why—"

Bill chuckled.

"One at a time, old-timer!" he grinned. "I've got a few questions to ask, but I'll tell my yarn first."

Swiftly he outlined his kidnapping by the man called the Chief; the crook's desire for the Crown jewels; and the journey in the monoplane.

"If you hadn't been carrying those jewels this feller called the Chief wouldn't have bothered his head about you!" finished Bill. "It was just luck that he picked up the messages. And Poineau—where's he?"

"Dead!" Dexter said briefly. "Von Hassen succumbed to his injuries first. Poineau wasn't so lucky. You see, these people are Myas, I've discovered. They've been expecting their god, Kodon, Son of the Sun, to visit them for centuries past. Von Hassen obviously wasn't a god—he was too terribly injured for that, and he wasn't fair enough. Poineau had a big, fan-shaped golden beard, and for a time they thought he was. Then when I came along on the scene and started to build a wireless set out of the bits and pieces off the planes, he helped me, and they thought we were going in for evil practices. No, they never mistook me for their god—I guess I'm too dark. He's supposed to be a big, hefty blonde—an' you most certainly fit the picture, feller!"

"Well, they decided to find out if Poineau really was their god, so they put him to the test. That was not so long ago. He had to walk through the Temple of Death. If he came out alive he was safe enough and would be hailed as their god."

"Temple of Death?" echoed Bill.

"What's that?"

"Did you notice that squat, flat-topped temple by the wall a half-mile away? Well, no one ever goes within a quarter of a mile of it. It's death—and I don't mean maybe. Poor old Poineau had to walk into it—there's one opening only. He never came out again. No man in the whole history of

(Continued on next page.)

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the tribe has ever been in and come out.

"No; don't ask me what happens. I don't know. But in view of the history of the place, you can't wonder that any man who's lucky enough to walk in there and get out again is hailed as the High Cockalorum. For it's never been done!"

"And if we're not careful I might be put to the test!" Bill exclaimed.

"That's so," answered Shane Dexter. "We've gotta be careful, laddie. The reason I'm not dead is because the Mayas have an old custom which I seem to have heard of before."

"They take the most comely man in the tribe a year before a feast day, and they anoint him, and dedicate him to the gods. After that he has a marvellous time for a whole year. They feed him up, give him anything he asks for, because he's the chosen of the gods. And they chose me, I reckon, not because I'm good-lookin', but because I'm a stranger to the tribe and dark-skinned, and they thought it might please their god more."

"Early this morning they heard your plane, and word went around that Kodon was coming at last. I reckon you must have landed shortly after sunrise, which helped 'em with the illusion that you were the Son of the Sun. They were scared, but after an hour or so they got up a party to find you. When they saw those carrot locks of yours it just about settled things for 'em, and they took it for granted you were Kodon. So here you are in time for me to be sacrificed to you to-morrow—"

"Why, they must be the old sun-worshippers—Mayas, you said?" Bill exclaimed. "Hey—gosh! We must be in Central America somewhere! The Mayas were a people allied to the Aztecs and the Toltecs. I know for a fact that in the jungles of Central America there are supposed to be hidden remains of ruins and temples that—"

"Central America!" breathed Shane Dexter, amazed. "Gosh! Don't that sound nice an' near home? But it's incredible! At the moment, though, I don't care where we are so long as we get out!"

"We will, somehow!" Bill said quietly. "You say the sacrifice isn't till sun-up to-morrow—about noon. That gives us more time than if they were like other heathens and did their ullagulla stuff at nightfall. No good plan was ever evolved with a tired brain and empty stomach—"

"They'll bring fruit and meat," returned Dexter.

As he spoke the doors of the temple rumbled back and the old priest with

THE BOY WHO KNEW TOO MUCH!

(Continued from page 24.)

"Well, why should anybody want to kidnap him, if you come to that?" said Johnny Bull.

"Well, ye-es; but—but—" Bob paused. Then he brightened. "Lancaster of the Sixth thinks he's safe and sound. He said so. He thinks it's nothing worse than kidnapping. He's no fool."

"That's so." Nugent brightened, too, and Johnny Bull gave a grant of assent, and Hurree Singh a nod. The opinion of Lancaster of the Sixth was something like an oracle to the juniors.

"Look here, let's go and tell Lancaster this," said Bob. "He will be jolly glad to hear it."

"Let's!" agreed Nugent.

The juniors, with much brighter faces, went down the stairs. They went at once to the Sixth Form passage. Loder of the Sixth, lounging in his study doorway, stared at them.

"Any news of Wharton?" he asked.

"Not of Wharton, yet," answered Bob. "But there's jolly good news, Loder—we've heard that Ferrers Locke is coming here to look for him."

Loder started.

"Ferrers Locke! The detective?" Loder's eyes glinted.

"Yes. We're going to tell Lancaster," said Bob.

Loder stared at him, and grinned sardonically.

"Do!" he said. "He will be frightfully bucked." He laughed as the juniors went on their way.

But they wasted no thought on Loder. Bob banged at Lancaster's door, and threw it open. The Sixth-

Former raised his eyes from a Greek book on the study table.

"I say, Lancaster, I thought you'd like to know," burst out Bob. "We believe Wharton's going to be found jolly soon—"

Lancaster gave him a strange look.

"The Head's called in Ferrers Locke—"

"Ferrers Locke?" The name dropped mechanically from Lancaster's lips. He wondered whether the juniors saw the colour waver in his cheeks.

"Yes—the detective, you know," said Bob eagerly. "He'll find Wharton all right! Don't you think so?"

Lancaster smiled. He smiled with his lips; but his eyes were hard.

"It is said that Ferrers Locke never fails," he answered. "Thank you for coming to tell me. I'm—glad!"

His eyes dropped to his book again. The juniors withdrew from the study, rather damped. Lancaster of the Sixth had not seemed so keenly interested as they had expected.

He was more keenly interested than they could have dreamed. When the door closed on them, he lifted his eyes from the Greek again. In those handsome eyes there was a hunted look.

"Ferrers Locke!" he whispered. "Ferrers Locke—at Greyfriars!"

Lancaster drew a deep breath. He must not lose his nerve now—he would need all his nerve, all his courage, all his resource! They were not likely to fail him. But there was a chill in his heart like the touch of ice.

THE END

(The next story in this splendid new series is entitled: "THE WAY OF THE WIZARD!" You can only make sure of reading it by ordering your copy WELL IN ADVANCE!)

(Continued from column 1.)

Doak, the chief, and the eight spearmen entered the temple.

Dexter hastily arranged himself so that he was sitting at the feet of the "god" Son of the Sun. The eight spearmen bent low and arranged themselves around the dais. Skins were put for the Chief and Doak to rest on at the foot of the dais.

Huge heaps of fruit on golden dishes that made the eyes of the Chief and Doak open wide, were brought to them. While they ate Bill talked to them, watched fearfully by the eight guarding spearmen.

"Sleep if you can and get rested," Bill advised. "We'll try to make a getaway at early dawn. But we must have rest!"

He tried to relax on the soft skins; prepare himself for the ordeal of trying to escape with Dexter. What happened when they got to the plane again didn't matter. There was a better chance of

overcoming Doak and the Chief than this entire tribe.

The temple was lit now by a soft glow from a hanging lamp. The hours passed, the silence becoming deeper. The eight spearmen might have been carved from bronze, they were so still; but their eyes were watchful of their sacrifice. Their "god" slept peacefully. But suddenly Bill awoke, hearing a faint sound. He stiffened.

It was Doak—he was talking in his sleep!

And he was supposed to be dumb! A spearman leaned forward, eyes rolling in fright. Then he shouted, leaped forward, and banged at a heavy copper gong with the butt-end of his spear!

The brazen clangour rolled through the temple.

(What will happen now? The sun worshippers will show no mercy if they find out they are being deceived! Don't miss next Saturday's stirring instalment—every line contains a thrill!)

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Greyfriars

No. 49.

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June 13th, 1931.

Edited by
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How Gosling Celebrated

AND THE SEQUEL

"MR. WILLIAM GOSLING WINS BIG SWEEP!" It was in all the morning papers. Greyfriars, of course, sat up and took notice.

We had been hearing about Gosling's sweep ticket for a long time. The Head doesn't allow us to indulge in sweepstakes; but the same ban can't, of course, be placed on the School porter, so Gosling was able to invest ten bob of the surplus profits of his job in a ticket.

What Gosling was going to do if he won!

"If I part of it, however, had seemed rather formidable, considering there were about a million other speculators. But Gosling had been very optimistic, and the morning papers seemed to have justified his optimism. They didn't give the address, but the name was sufficient, and a crowd of us rushed off to the porter's lodge.

Apparently Gosling had already heard the glad news. Instead of pottering about at his daily tasks, he was reclining in an armchair in front of his lodges. A pipe was in his mouth; a tumbler and a suspicious-looking bottle stood on a garden table beside him.

"Gosling, Gosling!" we yelled.

"Thank you! Thank you! I'd be lucky!" grinned Gosling. "What I say is this: 'Go on! Go on!' Tell me 'Ead I want to speak to 'im, will you?"

"What?"

"Go on! Tell the 'Ead I want to speak to 'im!" repeated Gosling, with a glare. "An' don't stand there arguing with a gent of independent means!"

"Oh, crickey!"

We grinned. So this was how sudden wealth was going to affect Mr. William Gosling! Nature didn't rush to carry out his order; most of us would rather have fished an earthquake earthquake Gosling's summons to the worthy Beak!

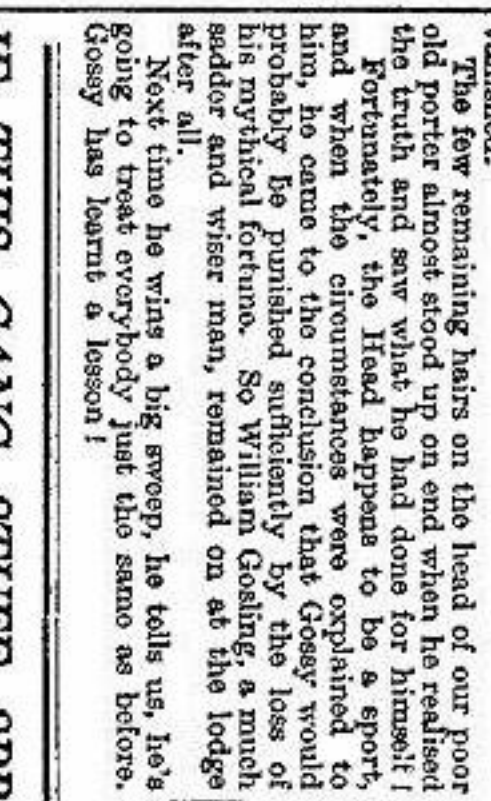
Gosling's glare became quite ferocious as he saw that nobody meant to go. Fortunately—for himself—he had no time to carry out a campaign of assault and battery before Mr. Quetch appeared on the scene.

Quetch fairly jumped as his goggle eyes fixed on the porter's sprawling figure.

"Gosling! How dare you take things so easy at this time of the day!"

"What's that to do with you, Quetch?" asked Gosling, cheerfully, thereby nearly paralysing the Remover Beak. "What I say is this: 'You run away an' mind your own business! Buzz off—see?"

Quetchy rubbed his eyes, apparently under the impression that he must be experiencing some word dream. Finding that he still remained awake,



he staggered off in the direction of Dr. Looker's house.

Five minutes later, he reappeared; the Head was with him now, and most of us backed away to a respectful distance. The comms out looking for trouble.

But he didn't succeed in inspiring awe in Gosling. Now that he had won a fortune, Gosling was beyond being awed.

"Gosling!" said the Head, in a deep, deep voice.

"Morning, mate!" Gosling responded, to the accompaniment of a horrified gasp from everyone else. "What I say is this: 'You ain't such a bad old covey—'ave a drink with me!"

"Gosling!" hooted the Head, almost falling down at that surprising invitation. "Are you intoxicated or mad? Whichever it is, you are discharged! Leave the school premises at once!"

Gosling chuckled with amusement.

"Keep your wool on, old 'un!" he said. "I'm leavin' all right, don't worry! Think I want to stay on at this one-eyed place longer than I can sip?"

Gosling seemed to have reached his top note. He had, too! With a vengeance, in fact! For exactly five seconds later, Mr. Prout came rushing up with a newspaper in his hand.

"Gosling, my poor fellow!" he panted. "In case you may have been misled by earlier reports I hasten to communicate the news contained in this later edition of the paper. The winner of the big sweepstake was not William Gosling, but WILLIAM JOSLING!"

"WOT?" shrieked Gosling.

It was only too true! The report in the earlier edition had made a mistake in one letter and with the alteration of that one letter, all Gosling's dreams vanished.

The few remaining hairs on the head of our poor old porter almost stood up on end when he realised the truth and saw what he had done for himself! Fortunately, the Head happens to be a sportsman and when the circumstances were explained to him, he came to the conclusion that Gosling would probably be punished sufficiently by the loss of his mythical fortune. So William Gosling, a much sadder and wiser man, remained on at the lodge after all.

Next time he wins a big sweep, he tells us, he's going to treat everybody just the same as before. Gosling has learnt a lesson!

REVIVAL OF POLITENESS

VERE DE VERE MANNERS AT GREYFRIARS

Our Society Correspondent is somewhat careless with my forms us that there are all the signs of a great revival of politeness at Greyfriars. The Remover and I was with my nose. Please don't, Routh, he tells us, have started raising their caps to each other as they pass in the quad. In fact, two places and rounded my facial have been observed to bow courteously fashion as they meet the sentries; some have even gone as far as to fall on one knee and extend the right hand in a kind of royal salute.

Other signs are not lacking of this remarkable revival. Bolsover Major was struck on the nose by the tip of Temple's walking-stick (Temple was lording it along the towing-path yesterday. The following dialogue ensued:

Temple: "My fault, I fear!"

Bolsover: "Not at all, sir. The accident was purely the result of my nose sticking out too far!"

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THE BOOLOOWOLOO ISLANDS

Ripping New Serial Advertisement by ALONZO TODD

CHAPTER I.
In Dire Distress

Oh, my dear friends, can you withstand an appeal for monetary assistance when the case is that touching as this? Out in the remotest of the Boolorooloo Islands, my dear friends, the poor savages are war-torn, and take the ing patched waistcoats and ragged, set of the day off so that you may overcoat, while in many cases they are so thin that they are barely hanging together. They need clothes badly. My dear friends, (This ripping Advertisement MAY be continued next week. Don't miss these fine instalments. Packed with thrills.)

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FISH'S WEIGHING MACHINE

Collapse of Promising Venture

CAUSE: BUNTER

Fisher T. Fish, American financier and ideas specialist, brought a weird-looking contraption into the Rag the other evening.

"What is it?" was the question hurled at him from all sides.

"Just the one thing in the world this sleepy old show has been waiting for!" was Fish's proud reply. "Gentlemen! Allow me to introduce my home-made automatic penny-in-the-slot weighing-machine. Every customer gets his correct weight in addition to his fate and fortune, neatly printed on a card. Seeing's believing; roll up and try it for yourselves!"

We did.

Wharton tried his luck first. He stood on the balance and inserted a penny, while Fishy went behind to attend to the works. There was a crash and a click, and a printed card shot out.

"Eight-stone nine. You will succeed in your ambition!" read out Wharton.

"Pretty good, eh?" remarked Fish.

Wharton grinned.

"Not bad; the only drawbacks are that I don't weigh eight-stone nine, and I don't know what the ambition is! Someone else have a go!"

Bob Cherry risked a penny. There was another crash, another click, and another card shot out.

"Eight-stone nine. You will succeed in your ambition!" read Bob.

"Same as Wharton's, yet I weigh about six pounds more than he does!"

"Roll up and try your luck, gentles!" yelled Fishy, encouragingly.

"This machine cannot lie; one penny only!"

Bolsover rolled up. He weighed eight-stone nine and he was going to succeed in his ambition. Dite Johnny Bull, and Vernon-Smith, and Bustrade, and Trevor, and Alonzo Todd, and Wun Lunge.

"Look here, Fishy, sure this machine of yours is all right?" asked Skinner dubiously. "If it is, of course, I don't mind spending a copper—"

"Your correct weight guaranteed!" said Fish blandly. "I guess I worked out this machine on scientific principles an' it can't go wrong. I'm thinking of calling it George Washington!"

Skinner fell on the strength of that.

He, too, weighed eight-stone nine; he was also destined to succeed in his ambition!

"Doesn't seem possible to me!" remarked Nugent suspiciously. "What about trying Bunter on it?"

"Anyone you like for a penny!"

"Chortled Fish. "No limits an' no one barred!"

So Bunter was dragged out and placed on the pedestal.

Next moment there was a crash. But it was a bit louder than the previous crashes!

The results were rather different, too. Result No. 1 was that Bunter bumped to the floor; Result No. 2 was that Fishy's weighing-machine collapsed in ruins around him; and Result No. 3 was that about 200 printed cards shot out together.

By a strange chance, every one of the cards was stamped: "Get, gub," and each one also referred to success in an ambition.

The only possible conclusion is that Bunter went to succeed in 200 ambitions, and that he is going to succeed in 200 ambitions. Unfortunately, his reply cannot be printed!

SHAKESPEARE IN THE SUN

Wibley's Open-Air Play

"MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM" BECOMES NIGHTMARE

It was a bright idea of Wibley's to produce Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in the open-air. Crowds flocked down to Big Side where, by kind permission of the Head, the play was to be performed. The whole thing looked a gigantic success long before it had begun.

Of course, there were drawbacks: there always are. The sun got in the eyes of the audience so that they couldn't see, for instance. That difficulty was soon got over by getting the audience to move round to the other side of the field. There were no seats there, so they had to stand. One can't have everything, can one?

Act I was fine—everybody thoroughly enjoyed it. At least, they would have enjoyed it, but for the awful row from the birds in the rookery near by, which prevented anybody hearing a word.

Act II was interrupted a little by the unexpected arrival of a flock of sheep which were being chased by a stray dog. Apart from that, it went down very well, though it has to be admitted that the play suffered when the sheep got mixed up with the actors.

Act III deserved the enthusiastic reception it got. Perhaps we should say the enthusiastic reception it would have got if an aeroplane hadn't been stunting overhead, thus keeping all eyes fixed up in the sky from beginning to end.

Wibley and his company were really getting into their stride in Act IV. The audience settled down to enjoy themselves in earnest. Positively the only thing that detracted from the act was a torrential downpour of rain which started before half a dozen words had been spoken.

The triumph of the afternoon was, however, reserved for Act V, which was performed in the Hall. Only one thing was lacking—the audience, which had adjourned to the dormitories for a change of clothing.

Wibley has been asked when he intends to repeat the successful experiment of playing in the open-air. Strongly enough, he seems disinclined to repeat it at all. There's no understanding the moods of these theatrical contuses!



IF THIS GANG STUFF SPREADS? carried in the folks of his go w n. "Lonne it to mo an' the boys, huh, boys?"

"You bet!" spat out "Gunner" Prout, unslung his machine-gunner on the Greyfriars racket, stood in his armour-plated study, surrounded by the gang.

"Listen, boys, you gotta go gunning to-day!" he said hoarsely. "Squealer Holmes, that big stiff that runs the St. Jim's racket, is sending along his bunch to shoot it out. It's me or him now, an' it ain't gonna be him. Get me!"

"O.K., chief!" drawled "Spider" Quetch, caressing the automatic ho

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