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By
FRANK
RICHARDS



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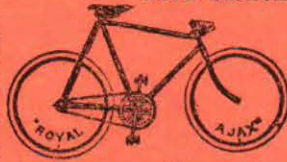
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ONE HALFPENNY



THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Caught in the Act.

CLICK!

Harry Wharton gave a start. He was coming along the passage at Greyfriars towards Study No. 1, the famous apartment occupied by the chums of the Remove.

His chums—Nugent, Cherry, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh—were waiting for him below, and Billy Bunter was in the school shop. Harry was going to the study for his cap, which he had happened to leave there. The sudden click from the room he had supposed to be empty naturally startled him. It was evidently the sound of a key turning in a lock, and, as the five occupants of the study were out, certainly no one had a right to be unfastening a lock there.

Harry Wharton smiled rather grimly at the thought of catching the unknown prowler in the act. He stepped quietly forward to the study door, which was half open, and looked in.

A fellow was bending over Harry's desk, which he had just unlocked. His back was turned towards Harry, but the latter knew him at a glance.

"Hazeldene!"

The junior in the study gave a guilty start as he heard his name spoken, and he turned swiftly round. His eyes met Harry Wharton's and a wave of crimson swept over his face and then receded and left him deadly pale.

"Wharton!" he stammered.

Harry stepped into the study.

"What were you going to my desk for, Hazeldene?"

The other stared at him dumbly.

Hazeldene was generally called "Vaseline" by the Remove fellows at Greyfriars, on account of his oily and

- THE - =NABOB'S= DIAMOND.

A SCHOOL TALE DEALING WITH THE ADVENTURES OF HARRY WHARTON AND HIS CHUMS.

BY

FRANK RICHARDS.

conciliatory ways, and an explanation—false or true—was generally the last thing he was likely to want.

But he certainly had not one ready now.

He stared dumbly at Harry Wharton, so utterly taken aback that he could not find words.

Harry glanced at the desk and then at the key in Hazeldene's hand.

"So you have a key that fits my desk?"

Hazeldene turned red again.

"Where did you get it?"

"I—I—"

"You had better explain yourself, Hazeldene," said Wharton quietly, closing the door of the study. "I've found you going through my desk. I keep valuables there—money, and something else, too, worth more money than I've ever had. How did you happen to have a key that fitted my desk?"

"I—I— Skinner has a desk like yours," stammered Hazeldene, "and—and I thought the key might fit it—so—"

"So you borrowed a key of Skinner?"

"Ye-es."

"Or took it without his knowing I expect?"

"He— Skinner always leaves his key in his desk."

"Not a very safe practice, with a fellow like you in the Form," said Harry Wharton contemptuously. "I always knew you were a rotter, Hazeldene, but I never expected this of you. You've shown once or twice that you had good points, but—"

"I—I—"

"What were you at my desk for? There's nothing there to interest you in any way. I can only come to one conclusion."

"What—what is that?"

"That you went there to steal."

Hazeldene became deadly pale again.
"Wharton, take care what you say!"
"Give me some better explanation, then. I don't want to think worse of you than I can help," said Harry Wharton quietly. "I keep money in that desk, and the big diamond Hurree Singh gave me the day he left Greyfriars. What else was there in my desk to make you unlock it?"
"I—I was only going to look at the diamond," gasped Hazeldene, with painful hesitation. "The—the nabob's diamond, you know."
Harry looked at him searchingly.
"You only wanted to see the diamond?"
"Ye—es, that's it."
"Why didn't you ask me to show it to you, then? I've shown it to lots of fellows, and I would willingly have shown it you."
"Well, we—we haven't been on very good terms—"
"And so you purloined Skinner's key, and opened my desk in my absence, just to have a look at the diamond out of curiosity?" said Wharton.
"Ye—es."
"That's rather steep, Hazeldene."
"It's—it's the truth!" muttered the cad of the Remove.
"I hope it is. I can't quite swallow it, but I'll give you the benefit of the doubt, at all events."
"You—you're not going to chatter about this?" asked Hazeldene eagerly. "No need to tell the fellows; they would be certain to place a wrong construction on the matter!"
Wharton smiled grimly.
"A right one, you mean, Hazeldene, I fancy. But set your mind at rest, I sha'n't talk it over the school. I mean to give you a chance. If I tell anybody, it will only be my own chums, who know how to keep their mouths shut. But mind, no more of these tricks. I shall warn Skinner not to leave his key about in future."
"You—you won't mention—"
"No, I won't mention your name. Put the key back where you found it, and say nothing. And now—get out of my study."
Hazeldene crossed the study to the door, looking like a whipped dog. He paused at the door, and looked back at the stern, grave face of Harry Wharton.
"Wharton, I—I hope you'll believe—"
"I'll believe as much as I can. It's not pleasant to think that there's a thief in the Greyfriars' Remove," said Harry shortly.
"I swear—"
"You'd swear anything, I believe. Do get out!"
And Hazeldene, with a drooping head, left the study. Harry Wharton stood still for some moments, and then gave an impatient shrug of the shoulders, as if dismissing unpleasant reflections from his mind.
He stepped to the desk, and opened a little drawer, and took out of it a small leather case. He touched a spring, and the case flew open, and there was a blaze of light from the velvet lining. A diamond lay there—a large and valuable stone, which had once shone in the diadem of the Nabobs of Bhanipur.
The junior looked at it for a moment or two, and then closed the case and slipped it into his pocket. The diamond was evidently no longer safe in the desk, with a duplicate key in existence and a fellow like Hazeldene in the Remove.
Harry locked his desk, picked up his cap, and left the study. His chums were getting rather impatient, and they hailed him as he came down the stairs.
"Thought you had gone to bed, Harry," said Nugent.
"Or fallen down and broken your neck," Bob Cherry remarked.
"The delayfulness has been great," remarked Hurree Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur, in his purring, Oriental voice. "The wastefulness of the time has been a consequence of the delayfulness of our respectable chum."
Nobody ever talked English like Hurree Singh, the Hindoo member of the Greyfriars' Remove—the Lower Fourth Form. His knowledge of our language was fearful and wonderful, and a source of never-failing mirth to his chums and to Greyfriars generally.
Harry Wharton smiled.
"It wasn't my fault, Hurree Singh," he remarked. "As a matter of fact, old chap, it was yours!"
The nabob stared.
"I fail to see how the faultfulness rests upon my honourable self," he replied; "but, if so, the apologise is great."
"How was it Hurree Singh's fault?" asked Bob Cherry, with wide-open eyes. "I don't see how you can make that out, Harry."
"Blessed if I do, either!" said Nugent.
Wharton laughed.
"It was all through that diamond Hurree Singh gave me the day he left Greyfriars," he explained. "Come out into

the Close; I don't want everybody to hear. You remember that diamond you gave me, Inky?"
"The rememberfulness is great," replied the nabob, with a nod. "I thought I was leaving the honourable school for everfulness, and I bestowed upon you the parting gift of a grateful heart."
"It was a jolly sight too valuable to give away!" said Wharton.
Hurree Singh waved a dusky hand.
"It was as nothing to a Nabob of Bhanipur."
"It might be nothing to a Nabob of Bhanipur," said Wharton, laughing, "but it's a lot to an English schoolboy. It is worth a hundred pounds at least. I have been rather bothered about it, as a matter of fact. It's too valuable to keep lying about; it might tempt people to steal."
"The wrongfulness would be extreme. Why not exert the lockfulness of the desk?"
"I have kept it locked up in my desk, but—" Wharton paused. "Of course, you understand that what I'm going to tell you is among us four only?"
"Rather."
"Certainly."
"Well, I just found a fellow at my desk. He had it unlocked with a duplicate key. He was after the diamond."
The chums gave a simultaneous whistle.
"He explained that he only wanted to look at it," said Wharton. "But he could have looked at it at any time by asking me."
"Rather a lame explanation."
"The lamefulness was extreme."
"So I thought," said Harry, with a nod. "It looks to me very much as if he meant to bone it. As he opened the desk with a key, there wouldn't have been a trace left behind as to how it went. I might even have suspected Skinner, if it had come out that the key of his desk fitted mine."
"That's serious."
"I should say so."
"You needn't tell us who the chap was," said Bob Cherry. "I fancy we can guess, anyway. But, I say, it won't be safe to leave the diamond there any longer."
Harry Wharton tapped his breast-pocket.
"It's safe here," he said.
"You're carrying it about with you?"
"For the present, yes. I'm blessed if I know exactly what to do with it to keep it safe. Hurree Singh used to wear it as a tie-pin, but nobody guessed the value of it. There are fellows knocking around the country who would kill a chap for a diamond like that."
"Nobody will know you are carrying it about with you," Nugent remarked. "It's all right for the present, anyway. Let's get off!"
The chums walked down to the gates of Greyfriars. It was a half-holiday at the school, and a fine April afternoon. The chums of the Remove were going down to the village, and the affair in the study had delayed them. As they approached the great stone gateway of Greyfriars—grey with the weather-stains of centuries—they saw Wingate, the school captain, standing there in conversation with a man in uniform, whom they recognised as the inspector from the local station. The inspector walked away as they came up, and Wingate glanced at the juniors.
"Anything up, Wingate?" asked Wharton, as he saw the grave expression of the captain's face.
Wingate looked at him. It was considered rather a cheek at Greyfriars for a junior to address the captain of the school without being spoken to first. But Wingate was a good-tempered fellow, albeit a little rugged outside.
"Ah, I wanted to speak to you, Wharton!" he said.
"Here I am, Wingate."

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"Do you remember a row you had with some gipsies the other week, when Hazeldene's sister was kidnapped?"

"Yes, rather!"

"I was not at the honourable establishment at that time," said Hurree Singh, "but I have heard of the adventure."

"The two gipsies were taken to the county prison," said Wingate. "What were their names? I forget."

"Melchior and Barengro."

"Ah, that's right! Well, they have escaped from prison, the inspector has just told me."

Wharton started.

"Escaped!"

"Yes. They are two dangerous ruffians, as you know. They are not, of course, likely to venture into this neighbourhood. All the same, as you had a hand in their arrest, you had better look out."

"Thank you, Wingate! I will."

"You are going out now?" asked Wingate, looking doubtfully at the chums of the Remove.

"Yes; down to the village."

"H'm! Well, of course, there's no real danger, I suppose. But you had better keep together; and don't go wandering in the woods."

"We'll look out, Wingate," said Wharton rather indefinitely. And the juniors hurried on before the captain of Greyfriars could extract a more definite promise from them.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Nadesha the Gipsy—A Joke of the Nabob.

"KIND gentlemen—"

The chums of the Remove stopped. They were passing the cross-roads when the voice suddenly broke upon their ears.

An old gipsy woman, with a coloured shawl wound round her head, was seated upon the milestone, and she had looked up at sight of the boys, and it was her voice that had arrested them.

Harry Wharton glanced at her pityingly. He could see little of her face under the red shawl—a dark, brown face, with two glittering eyes of coaly black, and white teeth glistening. But it was evident to him that the woman was tired, her whole attitude told of fatigue, and perhaps hunger. The schoolboy's hand went at once to his pocket.

"Young gentlemen—"

"Poor old soul!" murmured Nugent. "Looks as if she's tramped it a lot, doesn't she? Can we help you, mother?"

The black eyes turned upon him, and the hard glitter in them softened.

"You are in want?" said Harry Wharton.

"I am no beggar," said the gipsy, with a ring of pride in her voice. "But I will tell the young gentlemen's fortunes if my palm is crossed with silver."

Harry Wharton smiled. He drew a shilling from his pocket, and dropped it into the extended dusky palm of the old gipsy. The black eyes sparkled for a moment, and then they sought the lad's face earnestly.

"You do not believe in the power of the gipsy?" she asked.

Wharton shook his head.

"Well, I don't, as a matter of fact," he said. "But I'd like to have my fortune told, all the same."

"The tellfulness will be interesting, though the truefulness will be in lack," murmured Hurree Singh.

"Old Nadesha tells only the truth, even if her knowledge is not all drawn from the stars," said the gipsy. "The eyes of the old can read the face, and penetrate the heart's secrets there. The hand, too, tells much." She took Harry Wharton's hand, and fixed her eyes upon it, and then raised them to his face again. "Shall I tell you what your nature is, young gentleman?"

"Yes," said Harry, smiling.

"You are proud and reserved and hot-tempered, not always just, and sometimes taking offence for a trifle," said the gipsy.

Wharton turned red. The chuckle with which his chums greeted the gipsy's words showed how true they were—at least, in the opinion of the Removees.

"Oh, rats!" muttered Harry.

"You have been in danger of your life," said the gipsy, "and will be again, and your danger came from a Romany."

Wharton started.

"Hot and wilful and reckless," murmured the gipsy, half to herself; "but sound at heart, high-spirited, a born leader of boys, and then of men. Yet your life may be wrecked, and, if so, the danger will come from yourself—from your own temper and impatience."

Harry laughed rather uneasily.

"You are not flattering," he said.

"Nadesha does not flatter." The gipsy dropped his hand, and her eyes were fixed earnestly upon his face. "Young lad, you are brave and generous, but beware! The danger I speak of is near, very near. I cannot tell you more, but for safety's sake return to the school you come from, and do not stir beyond its walls again."

Harry Wharton threw up his head proudly.

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"Do you think I am a coward?" he exclaimed.

"There are dangers too great for a boy to face."

"I would not run away from them if there were. But what danger is this that you speak of? Is it real? And what is it?"

"I cannot tell you more."

Harry laughed again and stepped back. The chums had their fortunes told in turn, each crossing the dusky palm with silver. Harry stood with a thoughtful brow, hardly listening. The gipsy's words had made a strange impression upon him. What danger could be threatening him?

"How many wives am I going to have?" Bob Cherry was asking the gipsy, "and will they all be dark or fair?"

Nadesha smiled as she dropped his hand.

Bob was the last, and the chums of the Remove then went on their way, the old gipsy looking after them with a strangely-wistful expression upon the dusky face under the red shawl.

The shade of thought was still upon the brow of Harry Wharton. In spite of himself, the gipsy's words clung to his memory.

"I say, you're not letting that worry you, are you, kid?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, looking at him.

"Oh, no! But—"

"She seemed curiously in earnest," said Nugent. "Of course, there was nothing in it! Reading the stars is all bosh!"

"She said she did not get her knowledge wholly from the stars," said Wharton slowly.

"You mean she may have some information?"

"Yes."

"But how do you mean?"

"You remember what Wingate told us as we were coming out—about Melchior and Barengro escaping from the county prison."

"Yes. But she—"

"She is a gipsy, you know."

"My hat, of course! She may know those rotters—may be a connection of theirs—may know that they are in the neighbourhood, perhaps!" exclaimed Bob Cherry excitedly.

"That's what I was thinking."

"That puts a different complexion on the case," Nugent remarked. "If Melchior is about here anywhere, there is certainly danger for you, Harry, and for us, too, as we backed you up that time against the kidnappers. If the old lady knows them, and knows they're after you, it was decent of her to put you on your guard. They might knock her on the head if they knew about it."

"But how could she know Harry by sight?" said Bob.

"May have seen him about the village and learned his name."

"The probablefulness is extreme," said Hurree Singh. "I think we have hit upon the correctfulness of the matter. There are many astrologers in my native country, who tell the fortunes of princes from the stars, and they are greatly believed in; but I have heard my father say that their skill is what you English call spooffulness."

"More spoof than anything else, I fancy," said Bob Cherry. "But here we are at the tuck-shop, and it's Inky's treat."

"The treatfulness is great. Pray give the orders for the grubful supplies, and I will perform the payfulness with the cheerful countenance."

And the chums of the Remove made a raid upon the supplies of the village tuck-shop, which delighted the heart of Uncle George, the deaf old gentleman who kept the shop, and who depended chiefly upon the custom of the boys of Greyfriars for his livelihood.

Hurree Singh, being a prince in his own country, had ample supplies of pocket-money, which he was anxious to expend upon everybody he met. The chums of the Remove, however, were very strict upon that point. Hurree Singh had been admitted on an equal footing to the honourable fellowship of Study No. 1, but it was on condition that he supplied just as much as anybody else to the common stock, and no more. But every now and then the chums allowed him to stand an extra treat, delighting his generous heart by so doing. This was one of the rare occasions, and Hurree Singh did things in style.

The chums had purposely dealt very lightly with dinner at Greyfriars, so as to have room, as Bob Cherry expressed it, for the feed at the village shop, so they did full justice to the treat. They were getting towards the finish when Bulstrode and Hazeldene came in. The latter turned red at the sight of Harry Wharton.

"Hallo," exclaimed Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove. "I see you're standing treat, Inky! Well, it's only right that a confounded nigger should pay his footing, so I'll have some of those jolly tarts."

"Good idea!" said Hazeldene. "So will I!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh flushed under his dusky skin. The term "nigger" was freely applied to the nabob by

the more ill-natured boys in the Remove, and Hurree Singh objected to it strongly—not because it was anything disparaging in itself, but because it was applied in a disparaging sense.

"These are jolly tarts," said Bulstrode. "It's Hurree Singh's treat, Vaseline. Hand over half a dozen of them, Uncle George! No objection to my making it half a dozen—eh, Inky?"

"Certainly not," said the nabob quietly.

"I'll have some ginger-pop, too—eh?"

"I have no objectfulness."

"And some of those cream puffs?"

"Just as you like, my esteemed fathead."

"And a few chocolate biscuits?"

"Order as you fancy, my worthy friend."

The chums of the Remove looked at Hurree Singh in surprise. It was not for them to interfere, but they had not expected Hurree Singh to take Bulstrode's bullying manner so quietly. The Nabob of Bhanipur was the quietest and politest and best-natured lad in the Greyfriars Remove, but they knew well that he did not want for courage, or for determination when it was needed.

"Good!" grinned Bulstrode. "This is all right. Get a move on you, Uncle George! How beastly slow you are!"

"It's the rheumatiz, Master Bulstrode—"

"Hang the rheumatiz! Buck up! I'll have some milk-chocolate, too, to shove in my pocket. No objection—eh, Hurree Singh Jampot?"

"Certainly not," said the nabob placidly. "Why should I object to your ordering anything you like, my honourable and respectable Form fellow?"

Bulstrode stared at him.

"Well, you're going to pay, you know. It's your treat."

Hurree Singh shook his head.

"You are labouring under a great mistakefulness, I think," he said. "It is my treat for my chumful friends, not for any esteemed rotter who may happen to come into the shop."

Bulstrode glared, and the chums of the Remove chuckled. They saw now that Hurree Singh had only been pulling the Remove bully's leg, so to speak.

"Do you mean to say that you're not standing treat?" roared Bulstrode.

"I am standing treat to my honourable chums."

"Are you treating me?"

"Oh, no!"

"Do you mean that?"

"The meanfulness is explicit."

"You—you black rotter! You can shove all those things back, Uncle George! I sha'n't want them!" growled Bulstrode.

The old man gave something like a growl.

"But you ordered them, Master Bulstrode," he said, eyeing the Remove bully with no small disfavour.

"I tell you I don't want them. Do you think I've come here to buy up your blessed shop?" snarled Bulstrode.

"Put them over this side, my esteemed old gentleman," said the nabob. "We can perform the consumefulness."

And the esteemed old gentleman grinned as he obeyed. Bulstrode watched the good things with a hungry eye.

"If you care to make the great apologise, Bulstrode, you may perform the consumefulness," said Hurree Singh, relenting.

"I'll see you hanged first!" grunted Bulstrode. "Give me a bottle of ginger-pop, old rheumatiz! That's all I want!"

Uncle George slammed it down on the counter with no very good grace. Bulstrode was not a good customer. He generally wanted to run accounts, and Uncle George knew by experience that any account Bulstrode ran was likely to keep running.

The Remove bully drank his ginger-pop, and signed to Hazeldene, and left the shop. But Hazeldene did not follow.

"I'll join you with pleasure, Inky," he said. "It's awfully jolly to have you at Greyfriars, and I'm glad you came back."

"The gladfulness is of a grubby sort, I think," said the nabob. "But the joinfulness is welcome, and the grubby supplies are great."

And Hazeldene certainly distinguished himself by the way he wired into those grubby supplies. Hurree Singh settled up the bill, over which Uncle George was purring with delight, and the chums of the Remove left the shop, leaving Hazeldene finishing up the remains of the feast.

There was a gentle smile of satisfaction upon the clivo countenance of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. The smile broadened as he met the glance of Bulstrode, who was dawdling outside the shop waiting for Hazeldene.

"It was great joyfulness to pull the august leg of the esteemed rotter!" murmured the dusky youth. "The bullyfulness of Bulstrode requires to be taken down pegfully, as you English express it."

"Well, where are we going now?" said Bob Cherry, looking round. "We were thinking of the chapel in the Friar's Wood, but under the circumstances—"

"Why not go there?" asked Wharton.

"Well, if it's possible that those gipsy rotters are hanging about the neighbourhood—"

"Oh, who's afraid of the gipsies?"

"Nobody, that I know of," said Bob, rather nettled.

"But—"

"I haven't seen the old chapel," said Wharton. "I want to see it, and have a look at that subterranean passage that leads to Greyfriars. We've seen the Greyfriars end of it. Hang the gipsies!"

"You remember what Wingate said—"

"Oh, hang Wingate!"

"That's all very well, but you wouldn't say hang Wingate if Wingate happened to be in hearing," said Bob, rather irritated by Harry's manner.

Wharton's eyes flashed.

"Oh, keep your wool on, you two!" exclaimed Nugent, the peacemaker of No. 1 Study. "Are you going to begin ragging again?"

"I'm not beginning ragging," said Wharton shortly.

"Neither am I," said Bob Cherry. "I'm blessed if I can see what Wharton wants to keep on catching a fellow up for. That old gipsy had him down fine, and no mistake!"

"Oh, keep off that!"

"The keep-offfulness would be more tactful—"

"What do you mean, Cherry?" broke in Harry Wharton hotly. The curiously candid words of the old gipsy were ranking in his mind, and this allusion to the unflattering character old Nadesha had given him made his quick temper flame up.

"Oh, nothing!" said Bob, wishing he had not spoken, as he saw Wharton's flushed and angry face. Then a feeling of impatience came over him. Why should he always be bearing with Harry's hasty temper? And he went on sharply: "Well, as a matter of fact, the old lady had your character to a T, and you can't deny it, so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Harry Wharton!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Alone!

THERE was a painful silence for a moment or two. Harry Wharton's face had gone hard and set. The wilful temper he had been learning of late to keep in check was out of hand now, and rioting within him.

"Oh, shut up, Bob!" said Nugent uncomfortably. "Don't—"

"Oh, it's always I that have to shut up!" said Bob Cherry. "Why shouldn't Wharton do some of the shutting up, for a change?"

"The shutfulness should be bothful—"

Harry's lip curled bitterly.

"Oh, you may as well out with it, all of you!" he exclaimed. "The old gipsy said I was a pigheaded beast, or something to that effect, and you all think so, so you needn't deny it."

The words were a challenge. Nugent, always pacific, and Hurree Singh, painfully polite, would have passed them over. But Bob Cherry's temper could be as hot as Harry Wharton's on occasion, and the present was one of those occasions. Bob's eyes were flashing, too, now.

"I don't deny it, for one," he exclaimed. "I quite agree with the gipsy, if you want to know. If you get into trouble in your life, it will very likely be due to your rotten, uncertain temper, and that's my opinion."

"Thank you!" said Harry. "And what's yours, Nugent?"

"I'm not going to quarrel with you," said Nugent. "Hang it, you seem to be in a beastly temper this afternoon, Harry, and I'm blessed if I can see what all the fuss is about."

Harry shrugged his shoulders—a shrug he had which was irritating even to those who liked him best.

"Well, you don't want a fellow with a beastly temper chumming with you for an afternoon!" he exclaimed. "So—long!"

And he turned on his heel.

Bob Cherry did not make an effort to detain him, and Hurree Singh, new to these outbreaks of temper, did not know what to do. Frank Nugent made a step after Harry.

"Where are you going?"

"Where you needn't follow."

And Harry Wharton strode away, and disappeared among the trees of the lane. His last words had been too much for even the pacific Nugent, and he had turned back to Bob Cherry and the nabob with a set face.

Harry Wharton walked on with burning eyes and a grim face.

It seemed that the savage temper, so long controlled, was rejoicing like some evil spirit in its freedom at last. It had

mastered him, and he did not regret a word he had said, or his abrupt leaving of his chums.

He strode on, and took the first footpath he came to leading away from the lane into the thick woods, green and scented in the sunny spring weather.

He did not glance back once, but he knew that his chums were not following. They had taken him at his word, and he was to have the afternoon to himself.

Harry knew whither the footpath led—to the ruined chapel in the heart of the Friar's Wood.

In ancient days the chapel had been connected with the Greyfriars Abbey, and the existence of the secret subterranean passage connecting the two places was much talked of by the boys of Greyfriars.

Many of the juniors, especially the adventurous spirits of the Remove, were anxious to explore it, but such a proceeding was strictly forbidden by the Head.

The subterranean recesses of Greyfriars were too dangerous for them to be placed within bounds.

Wharton was curious to see the old chapel in the woods, and to look for the hidden passage, and it had been with the intention of exploring the ruin that the chums of the Remove had left the school that afternoon.

The quarrel with his friends made no change in Harry's intention. In fact, the obstinacy of his temper made him more than ever determined to carry out his original plan.

He strode on through the woods, following the tangled footpath, till amid the oaks and beeches he came in sight of the ruined chapel.

It was a wild and beautiful, and very lonely, spot. The woods had once been cleared from the spot where the chapel was built, but since the building had fallen to ruin, the vegetation had encroached upon its ancient domain.

Young trees grew amid the masses of broken masonry, and ivy and creeping plants grew thickly over shattered casements and broken walls. Moss encrusted flag-stones half buried in the soil. The grass was thick everywhere. A lonelier or more secluded spot could hardly have been found within the county.

The ruined chapel was rarely visited, save by the Greyfriars lads on half-holidays, and the village folk for picnics. There was no one in sight as Harry Wharton advanced towards the ruins, pushing his way through the clinging bushes.

But suddenly, as he came within full view of the ruins, he started.

A head was raised above the broken casement a dozen yards from him, and a pair of keen, black eyes looked towards the wood.

A man in the ruins had evidently been disturbed by the sound of the junior forcing his way through the brambles.

Harry's heart stood still for a moment.

For he knew the face!

A dusky, brutal face—the face of a gipsy, an outcast of the Romany tribes, as he knew, for he knew the man!

It was Barengro, the gipsy, the comrade of Melchior, who had kidnapped Hazeldene's sister and robbed her, and had been brought to justice by the efforts of the Greyfriars juniors.

In a moment Harry realised how terribly true had been the warning of Nadesha.

If Barengro was here, Melchior was not far off, and Harry Wharton stood at that moment in greater peril than he had ever been in before.

The gipsies, after their escape from the county prison, had made for this secure lurking-place, undoubtedly remembering it from their previous sojourn in the neighbourhood.

Harry Wharton drew back quickly into the bushes. For the moment he hoped that he had not been seen!

But that hope only lasted a moment. The savage look that came over the dusky face as it peered from the broken casement told him that he had been seen, and recognised!

A shrill whistle burst from Barengro's lips. Harry Wharton turned to run; but the whistle was answered from the wood, and the next moment a burly figure came bursting through the bushes.

A powerful hand gripped Harry Wharton by the shoulder, and he was dragged through the thickets, struggling ineffectually for freedom.

He was as a child in the hands of his powerful assailant, who did not even look at him, but dragged him hastily towards the ruins, and drew him within the shelter of the crumbling walls.

The ruffian's manner was full of uneasiness. He threw the boy to the ground, and set a knee in his back to pin him there, and then turned his glance back towards the wood, bent his head, and listened with painful intensity.

The silence of the wide woods seemed to reassure him. Barengro came from the broken casement, his black eyes glittering, and joined the ruffian.

"Melchior! So you caught him!"

"I heard somebody in the wood," muttered the gipsy. "I was following to see who it was—whether a keeper, or perhaps a warder! When I heard your whistle, I knew there was danger. But see, it is only a boy."

"Boy or not, he had seen me, and knew me."

EVERY
TUESDAY, The "Magnet" ONE
LIBRARY. HALFPENNY.

Melchior started.

"He knew you?"

"Yes. And do you not know him?"

"I have not looked at him. What do you mean?"

Barengro grinned evilly.

"He's an old acquaintance, comrade, that's all."

Melchior dragged Harry to his feet, and looked at him. Then a savage oath broke from the ruffian's lips.

"Harry Wharton!"

Harry pulled himself together. He was dazed from the rough handling he had received, and, with a ruffian on either side of him, he had no chance of making a dash for freedom. But even at that terrible moment his courage did not fail him.

"Yes, it is I," he said, without a falter in his voice.

Melchior gritted his teeth.

"You! Ah, I hoped that I might meet you; and now we meet!"

A look of terrible ferocity was in the black, glittering eyes, and distorting the dusky face. The gipsy's hand went to the belt under his ragged coat.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Melchior's Prize.

HARRY WHARTON'S heart was beating hard. He knew that the gipsy's hand was grasping a weapon, and that the ruffian was in a humour to use it. He faced the scoundrel with a calm face, but a feeling of black despair was creeping into his heart. But Barengro laid a hand upon his companion's wrist. Melchior shook it off, and glared at him angrily. Barengro spoke in a low voice.

"Don't be a mad fool, Melchior!"

"Let me alone!"

"Fool! Do you want to make it a hanging matter?"

"I will not let this cub escape! Besides, he knows the secret of our hiding-place now. He will bring the police here upon us."

"If you finish him, they will search for him, fool! It is the riskiest thing you can do. Don't be a mad idiot!"

Melchior hesitated. Then he withdrew his hand sullenly. Whether or not murder had been in his mind, he had given up the thought of a savage deed for the present.

"Have your way," he snarled.

"It is better for both of us."

"Bah! I am sick of your cowardly fears. You have trembled at every sound since we left the cell."

"And no wonder! Every sound may be the footstep of a policeman," said Barengro. "I tell you that if I am caught, I shall go back to prison, but not to the hangman. Don't be a fool! We cannot remain here."

"But for this cub—"

"Others of his fellows might come at any time. Let us see what he has about him. Perhaps enough to see us on our way."

"If we go, what of Nadesha?"

Harry Wharton started. His surmise that there was a connection between the old gipsy and these scoundrels was evidently correct. The ruffians did not notice him.

"She can follow," said Barengro. "She will know where to find us, with what she can bring. That will be easy."

"I do not wholly trust her," muttered Melchior. "She—"

"She is a true Romany. She would never betray us."

"I do not trust her. But no matter. Let us see what this brat has about him, and then we can leave him tied up to one of these trees, so that he cannot follow us, or give information of our movements to the police."

"Good! And Nadesha can release him when she returns."

"Or he can remain here all night!" said Barengro, with a brutal laugh.

Harry Wharton set his teeth. That should not happen if he could help it. He could offer no resistance to the ruffians. Barengro held him in an iron grip, while Melchior went through his pockets.

Harry's heart sank as the gipsy thrust his hand into the breast-pocket of his jacket. He remembered the nabob's diamond reposing there in the leather case.

The ruffian's hand was upon it. He drew out the case, and looked at it in some surprise. He felt for the spring, and the lid shot up. A cry of amazement broke from Melchior, and was echoed by his companion.

"Burn me!" cried Melchior—his usual savage oath. "A diamond!"

"A diamond?"

"And it is a real stone—a prize! By all that's lucky, it must be worth a hundred pounds!"

Barengro's eyes glistened.

"A hundred pounds! Are you sure?"

"That sum at least, I should say."

"THE CAPTAIN'S ELECTION!" Another Tale of Harry Wharton and his Chums,

by FRANK RICHARDS.

NEXT
TUESDAY.

Melchior held the diamond up to the light. Barengro fixed his eyes upon it greedily. In the excitement of finding the prize, the two ruffians gave little attention to Harry Wharton. The boy's heart beat hard. Here was his chance at last.

It was hard to abandon the diamond in the hands of the thieves; but to escape now was the best way to get a chance of recapturing it.

He drew quickly back, jerking himself from the relaxed hold of Barengro, and then turned and darted away. The gipsies turned swiftly round. Melchior sprang after him with an oath.

"Seize him!"

But it was too late. Harry Wharton sprang recklessly through a broken casement, plunging into a mass of fern and nettles outside. Barengro hung back from the reckless leap.

Melchior, with a savage snarl, leaped after the boy, caught his foot in a stone, and rolled over in the nettles, yelling with pain and rage.

Wharton had stumbled, but he was upon his feet again in a flash, and tearing away into the woods. Crashing through the thickets, he dashed on; and then, struck by a sudden thought, he paused to listen to hear if he were pursued.

There was no sound of footsteps behind him. He turned back, and peered through the bushes. The thought was in his mind that the gipsy had been injured by the fall, which had been a heavy one. He half expected to see Melchior groaning amid the ferns.

Instead of that, he saw the ruffian bending down, muttering curses, and evidently searching for something that had dropped into the ferns. Harry Wharton laughed slightly. He guessed that it was the diamond that had fallen as the gipsy rolled over, and fear of losing the valuable stone had stopped the pursuit.

But it was no time to linger. Melchior might find the stone any second, and there was Barengro, too, to deal with.

Harry Wharton turned again and ran into the wood, and found his way to the footpath by which he had approached the old chapel. There he dropped into a slacker pace. What was he to do now?

His brows wrinkled as he thought of the position. His first thought had been of flight, to save himself from the brutal violence of the gipsies; his second, to save the diamond from the clutches of Melchior.

But how was that to be effected? Long before he could bring the police on the scene the ruffians would have vanished. If only his chums had been there!

Harry's face flushed deeply as he thought of it. He had risked his life at the ruins through going there alone—all through a hasty word or two, in which he had himself been mostly to blame.

The shock of the adventure he had just been through had cleared the air, as it were, and there was nothing like rancour in Harry's breast now.

If only his chums had been with him! They were doubtless not far away; perhaps within sound of his whistle—the signal of the Greyfriars Remove. But he shrank from the thought of calling them to his aid. He had deliberately broken with them. It would be worse than mean to ask them to help him now that he wanted assistance.

"Never!" he muttered aloud.

And he shook his head decidedly. He did not wish the breach to remain unhealed, but the overtures must come from the other side.

He walked along slowly, his brow moody with thought, when all of a sudden there was a rustle in the wood. He started, and sprang to the middle of the path, his fists clenched, his eyes flashing, the thought of the gipsies in his mind at once. But a cheery hail relieved his fears.

"Hallo!—hallo!—hallo!"

It was Bob Cherry's cheerful voice. Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh came out of the trees, and all three of them looked curiously at Harry Wharton. Harry unclenched his fists, and turned crimson.

"So it's you!" he said, forcing a laugh.

Bob Cherry laughed.

"Did you think we were going for you?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, no."

"Then what did you jump for like a startled hare, and stick up in an attitude like a giddy prize-fighter?"

Harry Wharton laughed rather uneasily.

"You startled me. I—I thought it was the gipsies."

"Got the gipsies on the brain, haven't you?"

"I have just met them," said Harry Wharton, taking no notice of Bob Cherry's tone, which was just a little inclined to be chipping.

This piece of information, however, was quite sufficient to banish every other thought from the minds of the chums of the Remove.

"You have met them!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Yes, at the old chapel."

"My solitary hat!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "You have been in dangerfulness since you left us, my worthy chum."

"Yes. They collared me at the old chapel. They're in hiding there."

Bob Cherry's eyes flashed.

"Good! We'll lag them—shall we? There are enough of us to do it. We're four to two, and we can easily cut our selves cudgels in the thicket."

Harry Wharton hesitated.

"But how did you get away from them, Harry?" asked Nugent, speaking in his usual quiet, friendly way, just as if nothing had happened between the chums. That was Nugent's usual way, and it was about the best way possible of closing a breach like the present one.

"They have taken the nabob's diamond," said Harry, dropping into the old chummy way at once. "That gave me a chance to give them the slip."

"Have they collared the diamond? My hat!"

"We'll get it back again," said Bob Cherry.

"Certainly. The robfulness ought to be punished, and the rascally rotters ought to be laid by the toes, as you English express it."

"By the heels," laughed Harry.

"By the toes, I think, is the more correctful expression," said the nabob, gently but firmly. "I studied the beautiful language of this country under a Bengalee tutor, and picked up many of your excellent and ludicrous expressions, as well as the classic language of poet Shakespeare."

"Make it toes," said Bob Cherry. "Anything to please the pigs. I say, are you fellows game to go and get the nabob's diamond back?"

"Rather!" said Nugent.

"I say, you chaps," said Harry Wharton hesitatingly. "I—I'm sorry I bolted off like that. I was a bit out of temper—"

"That's all right," said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "As a matter of fact, we thought you were probably gone to the ruins, and we were coming after you, when we ran into you here. Let's get some sticks, and then go on the giddy warpath."

"The stickfulness will be the powerful argument with the esteemed ruffians," said Hurree Singh. "It is what you call a good wheezy idea."

The juniors all had pocket-knives, and they were not long in cutting four stout cudgels in the thicket.

Thus armed, they followed the footpath swiftly towards the old chapel. If the gipsies were still there, there would be a fight for the nabob's diamond!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Juniors Against Gipsies!

"HUSH!"

Harry Wharton muttered the word as he caught sight of the ruined walls of the chapel through the green trees.

The juniors of Greyfriars came to a halt.

Gripping their cudgels firmly, they peered through the leaves towards the ruins, in search of a sign of the foe.

There was nothing to be seen of the gipsies.

Had they already taken their departure? It was less than ten minutes since Harry had left Melchior searching for the dropped diamond among the fern.

"Better go and see," said Wharton.

"Lead on, Macduff!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"We are ready to follow the leadfulness of our esteemed and ludicrous chief," purred the nabob.

Harry Wharton led the way from the trees towards the ancient doorway of the chapel, now crumbled into mere ruins.

The masses of ancient masonry prevented the boys from seeing into the interior of the building till they were close to the gaps in the wall.

Then Harry came to a sudden halt.

"Look!" he muttered.

His hand rose to point. Through a gap in the old stone wall they caught sight of two ragged and savage figures. They were recognised at a glance! Melchior and Barengro were still in the ruins.

The Greyfriars juniors crept nearer.

"Now you have found it, let us go," Barengro was saying.

"I am quite ready."

"There is little to carry," said Barengro, with a snarl, "but the sooner we are gone from here now, the safer we shall be."

"If you had not let him get away—"

"Bah! It was your fault as much as mine!"

"Your infernal clumsiness—"

"If we waste time here bandying words, we may finish

our dispute in a prison cell," snarled Barengro. "I am going, whether you come or not."

"Burn me! I am coming!"

Harry Wharton glanced at his comrades.

"They're coming out this way," he muttered. "Down among the stones, quick, and jump out on the rotters as they pass."

"Good!"

"It is a wheezy good idea!"

"Silence now!"

The juniors crouched into cover, waiting with beating hearts for the gypsies to pass. Courageous as they were, they knew that it was no light task to tackle two desperate ruffians, who would stick at nothing for their liberty.

The heavy footsteps of the gypsies crunched on the stones, and the two burly forms came slouching by.

Harry Wharton sprang to his feet.

"Sock into 'em!" he shouted.

The ruffians were taken utterly aback.

Before they could make a movement, the four juniors of Greyfriars were upon them with whirling cudgels.

Melchior received two of the blows on his arm, and went to the ground, yelling like a wild animal with the pain and rage.

Barengro dodged, and darted off into the wood, with Hurree Singh and Nugent in hot pursuit, brandishing their weapons.

Harry Wharton dropped his cudgel, and flung himself upon Melchior.

The gipsy struggled savagely, but Bob Cherry took a grip on his collar, and held him down to the ground, while Harry knelt on his chest.

"You are our prisoner!" said Harry.

The only reply was a savage oath.

"Where is the diamond?"

"Find out!"

"I intend to. Hold him fast, Bob, and crack him over the head with your cudgel if he struggles."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Trust me!" he exclaimed. "Now, you mongrel, keep still, or I'll crack your topknot like a walnut. Do you hear?"

Melchior ground his teeth, but Bob Cherry was flourishing the cudgel in a rather dangerous way, and a blow might easily have cracked the gipsy's head. So Melchior contented himself with oaths, and ceased to struggle.

Harry Wharton was pretty certain that the diamond would be upon Melchior, not his comrade; and he was right.

In a minute or less he fished the leather case out of an inner pocket in the gipsy's rags, and opened it to ascertain that the diamond was there.

"Got it?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Yes, rather!"

And Harry Wharton snapped the case shut, and slipped it into his pocket.

"Good! Now we'll get this scoundrel to the lock-up."

"Where's the other, I wonder?" muttered Wharton, looking round.

Barengro was not to be seen. Hurree Singh and Nugent were returning to the spot, with disappointment written upon their faces. Barengro had evidently given them the slip in the wood.

"Never mind," said Bob Cherry cheerily. "We've got the worst of the two rotters. Here, hold him! He's wriggling like a beastly eel! Hold him, I say!"

Harry grasped the struggling ruffian.

Melchior was throwing the whole of his great strength into a terrible effort to free himself.

The sight of the two juniors returning from the unsuccessful pursuit of Barengro warned him that if he was to escape, he had not a moment to spare. With four foes to tackle his chance would be gone.

So great was the strength of the gipsy, so terrible his efforts, that he gained his feet, and in the struggle Bob Cherry was dashed against a fragment of masonry, and he released his hold upon Melchior with a sharp cry of pain.

Harry Wharton clung desperately to the ruffian, shouting to Nugent, and Nugent and the nabob dashed towards them at full speed.

But with a tremendous effort Melchior tore himself free from Wharton, and hurled the junior to the ground just as Nugent and Hurree Singh came up.

Hurree Singh stumbled over Wharton, and fell into the grass, and Nugent made a clutch at Melchior, and was hurled aside by a savage blow.

The gipsy fled away into the wood like a deer, and in a few seconds disappeared among the trees.

Harry Wharton staggered rather dizzily to his feet. He passed his hand over his eyes in a dazed way. Bob Cherry jumped up with a yell.

"After him!"

He was dashing away in pursuit of the fugitive, when Harry Wharton caught his arm and pulled him back.

"No good!" he exclaimed. "He's gone! No good, Bob!"

Bob Cherry rather reluctantly halted. But a moment's reflection was sufficient to show him that Harry was right, and

that it would be useless to pursue the gipsy through the tangled woods.

"You've got the diamond?" asked Nugent.

"Yes," replied Harry, "that's safe enough. After all, that was the chief thing, and we're not called upon to do the work of the police, are we?"

"No, but it would be a jolly good thing to get those two rotters under lock and key; and safer for us, too," said Nugent. "We had better call in at the police-station and tell them about it, and let them know all we can. It will help them to catch the scoundrels."

"Good! We'll do that. Hallo!" Harry Wharton broke off. "Look there!"

There was a glimmer of red among the green bushes, and the gipsy woman who had told the juniors' fortunes came into sight. She started at the sight of the boys, and came quickly towards them.

"So she belongs to those rotters!" muttered Nugent. "Yet she had rather a good face, I thought. But she's one of them."

"Yes, I heard them mention her by name. She seems to be a sort of scout for them, and I expect supplies them with food. Of course, they can't venture to go into the villages themselves."

"She would get into the trouble if the policeful sahibs knew that," Hurree Singh remarked. "It is what your lawyers call compounding a felonious intent."

"Ha, ha, ha! I never heard of that crime before," chuckled Bob Cherry. "But I say, the old lady is going to speak to us. Hallo, ma'am! Your friends have hooked it."

Nadesha looked at them anxiously.

"Have you seen Melchior?" she cried.

"Yes," said Harry. "He stole a diamond from me, and we have taken it back."

"He is gone?"

"Yes."

"Which way did he go?"

Harry pointed to the wood. Then he stepped a little nearer to the gipsy.

"Nadesha, you are old enough to be my mother, but I can give you a word of advice," he said quietly. "Those two men are utter scoundrels. Let them alone. You look honest and kind; I believe you are so. Have nothing more to do with them, then."

The old gipsy looked at him with a curious expression.

"A true Romany does not desert one of her blood in the hour of distress," she said proudly.

"I have heard that they are outcasts from their tribe," said Harry. "The true Romany does not steal, I have heard, and those scoundrels are thieves and worse."

Nadesha nodded.

"It may be so. But my faith belongs to them, while they are in danger, at least. But you do not understand—and I have no time to lose."

And without another word the old gipsy hurried away into the wood, and the red shawl disappeared from view.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

An Invitation from the Fourth Form.

"WHARTON!"

"Hallo, Temple!"

The chums of the Remove were coming in at the gate of Greyfriars. They had called in at the police-station after coming back from the ruined chapel, and they had found Inspector Snoop very glad of the information they gave him. The inspector promised that Melchior and Barengro should be laid by the heels before dark; whereat Bob Cherry coughed, and Nugent winked at Hurree Singh, and the Indian lad was all smiles. Wharton replied solemnly that he was sure of it, and they left the station and strolled back to the school. And as they went in Wharton was hailed by Temple, of the Fourth.

Now, the Fourth Form at Greyfriars was a high and mighty Form. The Remove, or Lower Fourth, was considered "not in it" with the Upper Fourth. Temple was head of the Fourth, and he was a very great man; at least, in his own opinion and that of his immediate friends. Temple was a rather elegant individual, given to dressy tastes, and his neckties were the envy of the Form. Temple adopted a patronising air towards the Remove; an air which the Removites were always swift to resent. They found it hard to bow down even to the mighty seniors of the Fifth and Sixth, and they were certainly not going to kow-tow, as Bob Cherry expressed it, to any Fourth Form rotters unhung.

The air of a good-natured patron was very noticeable about Temple as he hailed Harry Wharton at the gate, and Wharton's reply blended familiarity with contempt in a really skilful way.

"I want to speak to you, Wharton."

Harry glanced at his chums.

"THE CAPTAIN'S ELECTION!"

Another Tale of Harry Wharton and his Chums,
by FRANK RICHARDS.

NEXT
TUESDAY.

"Do you mind me speaking to this chap?" he asked.

Bob Cherry, entering at once into the joke, assumed an expression of profound thought.

"Well, you see, Wharton, there's the dignity of the Remove to consider," he remarked.

"Yes, that's what I was thinking of," said Harry gravely.

"Cut it short, anyway," said Nugent.

"Under the circumstantiality of the case, the shortfulness should be great," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Temple looked annoyed.

"Look here, you kids, if I condescend to speak to you

"I can give you three minutes," said Harry Wharton, taking out his watch. "Make the best of it. I know you're rather long-winded, Temple."

"Yes, rather," said Bob Cherry. "I've heard that some of the audience go to sleep when Temple's making his speeches in the Fourth Form Debating Society."

"I was told that a member was found dead in his chair once," said Nugent.

"The talkfulness of the honourable rotter is great!"

Temple turned red.

"Oh, don't be so funny!" he exclaimed. "When a chap is going to do you a favour, you might be a little more polite about it."

"Ladle out the favours," said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "What's in the wind, anyway?"

"One minute gone," said Harry.

"You know we chaps in the Fourth—the Upper Fourth, I mean, of course—have a debating society, meeting in the evenings in the classroom—"

"Haven't we just said so?"

"Well, it has been proposed to admit the Lower Fourth to the meetings," said Temple beamingly.

"To admit the what?"

"The Lower Fourth—the Remove—your Form."

"Call it the Remove, old son; there's nothing low about us, and, as a matter of fact, we do really take the top place at Greyfriars."

"Well, of all the cheek—"

"The topfulness of the Remove is extreme. As your Poet Shakespeare remarks, 'what's in a title; a rose by any other nomenclature would be equally gifted with the honourable and agreeable scent.'"

"Oh, ring off!" said Temple. "When I hear you talk English, it sets my teeth on edge—it does really. We are doing this thing as a favour to you kids. We thought that, as your elders and superiors, we ought to improve your minds. You can't deny that they want a lot of improving."

"Well, I take that as really kind of you," said Harry Wharton gravely. "But what's the wheeze? Do we take part in the debates?"

"Certainly not," said Temple promptly. "You are admitted to the room on debate nights, that's all. You sit down quietly and listen."

"What do we listen to?"

"A lot of piffle," said Bob Cherry.

"To the debates, of course," said Temple warmly. "The subject this evening is, whether the present system of the government of public schools is satisfactory. We are going to have a ripping debate on that subject."

"Yes, it sounds promising."

"I am up to speak, and Dabney and Bates. It will be worth listening to, I can tell you, if you want to improve your minds."

"Well, of course, we want to do that."

"Good! Then come."

"But we mustn't join in the debate?" asked Nugent, taking the cue from Harry, who had given him a sign that he had something "on."

"Certainly not. It would be an infraction of the dignity of the Fourth Form to allow Remove kids to join in the debates," said Temple. "But you can ask questions, of course."

"Oh, I see, we come out strong at question time?"

"Yes, you can ask one question each, if you like, and the speakers will reply to you, to clear up any doubts in your minds. I know you'll find it improving."

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

"You'll come, then?"

Harry looked at his companions and winked. The chums of the Remove all bowed simultaneously at the head of the Fourth Form, looking a great deal like a set of Chinese mandarins.

"Rather!" said Harry.

"Certainly!" said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, we'll come!" exclaimed Nugent.

"We shall be happy to seek the improvement of the brainfulness in the talkful debates of your honourable and esteemed rotten friends," said Hurree Singh.

"Good! The Fourth Form-room at seven sharp, then."

"Right-ho!"

And Temple strolled away. Dabney, his chum in the Fourth Form, joined him as he left the group of Removites.

"Are they coming?" asked Dabney.

Temple nodded.

"Yes, they were glad to come. Of course, they're pleased at our taking any notice of them, Dab."

"They ought to be," said Dabney rather doubtfully. "Have you explained that they won't be allowed to bother us with any talking?"

"Yes, they agree to that, except at question time."

"Good! Only those four coming?"

"Well, yes, I thought it would be better to try it with those four first, before letting in the bulk of the Remove."

"Good idea!"

"Yes, I think it's a good idea all round," Temple confessed. "You see, the Remove are always getting their backs up at us, pretending they're as good as the Fourth Form, and all that, and we've had lots of rows. Now, this is a way of putting them in their place, and making them follow our lead quietly and submissively as they ought to do, without any bother."

"You're right there."

All the same Dabney looked rather dubiously across at the Removites. Had they been grinning he would have suspected something. But the faces of the famous four were quite grave and thoughtful as they strolled across the Close to the schoolhouse. It was evident that the condescension of the Fourth Form leader had greatly impressed the usually unruly juniors of the Remove.

The four chums retained the same gravity of demeanour as they entered the house, and went upstairs; and not till they were safely within the closed door of Study No. 1 did they break out into any expression of the merriment that was consuming them.

Then Harry Wharton broke into a laugh, and Bob Cherry sat down on a chair and shrieked, and Nugent yelled, and Hurree Singh cackled away till Billy Bunter, who was getting tea in the study, asked him if he had an alarm clock going off in his neck.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"How kind of them!" said Harry. "We're going into the Fourth Form-room like a set of good little boys, to have our minds improved."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're not to take part in the debates," grinned Nugent. "Our voices are not to be heard in the assembly of grave and reverend seigneurs. My hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Except at question time," chuckled Bob Cherry. "At question time we come out strong, and have any little doubts in our minds removed by intelligent explanation from Fourth Form piffers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The questionfulness will be terrific," said Hurree Singh. "That is where we come out in a strongful manner. We must be early at the meeting, my worthy chums. As your English proverb says, 'procrastination is the receiver and as bad as the thief,'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ain't you ready for tea?" demanded Billy Bunter. "I've got it ready. I should have had to have mine alone if you hadn't come in."

"Good!" said Bob Cherry, looking at the well-spread tea-table. "Blessed if I knew we were so well supplied, Billy!"

"You weren't. I ordered these things at the tuckshop."

"My hat! Cheer, boys—cheer! It's Bunter's treat!"

"Not at all," said Billy Bunter, blinking at them through his big spectacles. "I'm going to stand a treat when my postal order arrives. I'm really expecting it by every post, but it's delayed."

"Where does this grub come from, then?"

"From the school shop."

"I know that, ass! But who pays for it?"

"It's not paid for yet."

"Oh!"

"It comes to ten shillings the lot," said the Owl. "You see, I thought you'd be hungry after your run in the woods, so I had a ripping feed ready. There's half-a-crown chalked up against each of you at the shop. See?"

"Why, you cheeky young imp—"

"I don't think that's a grateful way of speaking, Cherry, after all the trouble I've taken," said Billy Bunter, in a tone of remonstrance. "You wouldn't find many fellows in the Remove caring whether you were hungry or not after an afternoon out. I think it was very thoughtful of me."

"I suppose it was—and you'd have cleared the board, I expect, if we hadn't come in," said Bob Cherry. "Never mind; I'm jolly hungry, and as for the bill, that can wait, or we'll sell Bunter's watch and pay it—"

"Oh, I say, Cherry!"



"Oh! you may as well out with it, all of you!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "The old gipsy said I was a pig-headed beast, or something to that effect, and you all think so, so you needn't deny it."

"Dish up the eggs, Billy, and don't talk! We're hungry, and we've to attend an important debate to-night."
And the chums of the Remove were soon heartily discussing the tea so thoughtfully provided for them by Billy Bunter at their own expense.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER. An Interview Between Bars.

"IS Wharton there?"
A Third Form fag put his head in at the study door just as the chums of the Remove were rising from the tea-table to prepare for their visit to the meeting of the Fourth Form Debating Society. Harry glanced at him.
"Yes, I'm here, kid. What's wanted?"
"Note for you from your sweetheart," said the cheeky fag, tossing a crumpled envelope on the table. "Ripping girl, too!"
Harry coloured, and his chums grinned.
"What do you mean, Perkins, you cheeky young rascal?" exclaimed Harry.

"She spotted me inside the gate through the bars," said the fag, grinning. "She asked me if I knew Master Wharton, and I said I had heard of a rotter of that name who was not kicked out of the Remove yet."

"Go on, Perkins. Who was it?" said Bob Cherry.
"A gipsy lady," said the fag, "old enough to be my grandmother. But there's no accounting for tastes."
"Get out!" said Harry Wharton.

The chums had looked at one another quickly at the mention of the gipsy. The thought of old Nadesha came into every mind at once. But what could the old gipsy want with Harry Wharton?

The fag looked aggrieved.
"That's a nice way to talk to a chap who has brought you a billet-doux!" he exclaimed. "Isn't that letter worth a jam-tart?"

"Give him some tarts, Billy, and kick him out!"
Billy accordingly bestowed a couple of jam tarts and a hearty kick upon the fag, who, however, dodged the latter and cut off with the former. Billy lost his balance and sat down, and Bob Cherry slammed the door.

"Now read the letter, Harry. We're all curious."

"The strangeness of the communication stimulates the curiosity."

Harry opened the envelope, and read aloud the single sentence that was written inside.

"I want to speak to you.—NADESHA."

It was from the old gipsy. Harry looked at his chums, and they looked at him. They did not know what to make of the curious communication.

"What can she want to speak to me about?" said Harry.

Nugent shook his head. He gave it up, for one.

"Can't be another warning," said Bob Cherry. "You're safe enough here."

"Better go and see her," said Nugent.

"True. I suppose this means that she's still at the gate, and I'm to go down there and see her?" said Harry thoughtfully.

"No doubt."

"Well, I'll buzz off. As she says me, you fellows had better not come. I'll tell you about it afterwards."

"There goes a quarter to seven," said Bob Cherry, as the school clock chimed out. "You haven't any time to lose."

"If I'm not back in time, you chaps go to the Fourth Form-room, and I'll follow when I get in," said Harry Wharton, taking up his cap.

"Right you are!"

Harry left the study in a somewhat puzzled mood. What the old gipsy could have to say to him was a mystery. But he had already a liking for Nadesha in his heart. He had seen in her face that she was good and kind, and he wondered at her connection with the two brutal ruffians whom she was aiding to escape from the meshes of the law, but doubtless the strong Romany feeling as to the claims of kindred accounted for that.

The Close was dark now; it was considerably past locking-up time. A few boys were there in the dusk, crossing the Close, but there was no one near the gates. Harry hurried down to the great stone gateway, and there, in the dark shadow of the arch, he caught sight of a face on the other side of the iron bars of the gate—a dusky face, with bright black eyes, the head covered by a red shawl. It was Nadesha!

The gipsy woman uttered an eager exclamation as the boy came quickly to the gate and stopped.

"It is you?"

"It is I, Nadesha," said Harry. "I thought the note must be from you. I am glad to see you. But what brings you here?"

"I must speak to you."

"Well, I am here."

"You are in danger. Listen! Melchior took a large diamond from you to-day in the ruin in the Friar's Wood."

"Yes; but we got it back."

"Melchior is furious at the way you used him."

"He deserved worse."

"That may be," said Nadesha. "But he is furious, and he is determined to revenge himself upon you, and to obtain possession of the diamond, which he imagines is of great value—sufficient to enrich him for a long time, if he could obtain it."

"It is of great value—a hundred pounds, at least."

Nadesha looked at the boy sharply.

"How came you to possess such a stone, then?"

"It was given me by my friend Hurree Singh, whom you saw with me to-day. He is a prince of India."

"Then Melchior is right, and his project is not so mad as I thought. The police have been hunting him closely, and he must leave this part of the country; but he needs money—or something he can turn into money—and he is determined not to go till he has obtained possession of the diamond, and revenge himself upon you."

"Thank you, Nadesha! I shall be on my guard."

The gipsy drew a hurried breath.

"You do not understand. It is not an ambush in the woods you have to fear now."

"What is his intention, then?"

"He is coming here!"

"Here?" exclaimed Harry, startled. "To Greyfriars?"

"Yes."

Harry Wharton stared at the gipsy through the bars of the gate in amazement. The news was certainly startling enough.

"But—but I don't understand," he said. "How is he coming here? How can he come here?"

"I believe he is coming to-night."

"Oh, I see! You mean a burglary?"

"Yes."

Harry's heart beat hard. He understood now, and the thought of what might have happened but for this warning

made his heart beat. In the dead of night the savage gipsy might have gained an entrance to Greyfriars—might have found his way to the Remove dormitory, and then—

The junior shuddered.

The gipsy woman's black eyes were fastened upon his face anxiously. Nadesha saw the colour there waver for a moment. But only for a moment.

"So Melchior is going to enter the school to-night," said Harry quietly. "Good! But you, Nadesha—how comes it that you give us this warning?"

"To save your life."

"You think he would—would—" Harry shuddered again.

"Yes," she nodded. "Either that, or some terrible injury at least."

"Thank you, Nadesha! But—but now I know, I must tell Dr. Locke. He will be watched for—he will be arrested."

"I know it."

"Then you have made up your mind to let him be taken?"

"What choice had I, when it was a question of that or of this crime?" said the old gipsy bitterly. "I pleaded with him, and he was adamant, and then he struck me."

"Struck you?" exclaimed Harry, with a start.

The gipsy drew the red shawl aside, and showed a mark upon the temple—a mark clotted round with blood.

"He left me senseless in the wood," she said, in a low voice; "whether I woke again to life he knew not, nor cared."

"The brute—the cowardly brute!"

The words broke hotly from Harry Wharton.

Nadesha smiled. She drew the shawl about her head again.

"That blow was the end. I have done with him. But, even then I should not have betrayed him, but for you. I would not leave you to this danger. But now you know."

She made a movement to depart.

"Stop!" exclaimed Harry Wharton hurriedly—"stop, Nadesha! You have not told me enough! When is Melchior coming?"

"Some hour in the dead of night. I can tell you no more than that."

"He is sure to come to-night?"

"Yes, I think so. Now that the police are so close upon his track, every hour he spends in this neighbourhood is full of terror to him."

"Yes, I suppose so. But how does he propose to enter? It is not easy to get into a building like Greyfriars."

"I do not know. But he knows a way, I think, for he spoke with complete confidence of being able to enter the school at pleasure."

Harry Wharton looked puzzled. A skilled burglar, doubtless, would not find it more difficult to break into Greyfriars than into any other place. But this ruffian of the heath and the woods was not likely to be skilled in the burglar's art. Yet there was no doubting the information conveyed by Nadesha.

"I shall have to warn the Head—Dr. Locke—Nadesha."

"I know. Let matters take their course now. Barengro refuses to join in the enterprise; he knows it might end in hanging," said the gipsy grimly. "Melchior will come alone. Barengro has already fled. As for the other, let him take his doom."

The gipsy drew her shawl closer about her. The night wind was cold. She again made a movement to go. But Harry Wharton spoke again eagerly:

"Wait a little, Nadesha. Where are you going?"

She did not reply.

"Your people—what will they say of this, if they come to know it—and Barengro will guess, and may tell."

"I shall not go back to my people."

"You must not go like this. Besides, the Head may think I am romancing. You must come to him, to tell him what you have told me."

Nadesha hesitated.

"Promise me, Nadesha, that you will remain while I go to speak to the doctor," said Harry Wharton persuasively.

"I cannot open the gate, but I will not be long."

She nodded.

"I will remain."

"Good! I will be quick!"

And Harry Wharton cut off swiftly across the gloomy Close towards the principal's house. Seven chimed out from the tower, but Wharton had forgotten the meeting of the Fourth Form Debating Society by this time. There were more important matters to think of just now than the meeting of Temple, Dabney, and the other debaters. Harry mounted the steps of the principal's house and rang the bell.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Nadesha's Warning.

DR. LOCKE was seated in the drawing-room when he received an announcement that a junior named Wharton wished to speak to him very urgently. The Head smiled and frowned, and glanced apologetically at Mrs. Locke. The Head's wife, a kindly lady with a grave, gentle face, smiled too. She had noticed Wharton more than once.

"Let him come in by all means," she said.

"Very well," said the Head; "you may admit him, Mary."

So Harry Wharton was shown in by a semi-serious maid. The junior's face was very earnest and excited. Mrs. Locke glanced at him curiously.

Harry bowed to the Head and his wife, and stood, cap in hand, the colour coming a little into his cheeks.

"Well, Wharton," said Dr. Locke, "I hear that you desire to see me on very particular business!"

"Yes, sir."

"It is rather unusual for a headmaster to be interviewed by a junior, especially after school hours, but doubtless you have a very powerful motive."

The irony of the remark was not lost upon Harry.

On Harry Wharton's first coming to Greyfriars, he had had what the other fellows regarded as altogether too good an opinion of himself and his importance, and that fact had not been lost upon the doctor. There had been more than one interview in Dr. Locke's study, of a more or less painful nature. Harry flushed as he realised that the Head set his present visit down to a fresh attack of bumptiousness.

But Mrs. Locke's kindly glance encouraged him, and he answered quietly:

"Yes, sir."

"Well, please explain yourself, Wharton. It is close upon dinner," said the Head, looking at his watch. "I can give you a few minutes."

"If you please, sir, there is to be a burglary at Greyfriars to-night, and I thought I ought to tell you about it."

A bombshell exploding in the room could hardly have startled the listeners more. Dr. Locke gave quite a jump, and his wife uttered an exclamation.

"Are you serious, Wharton?"

"Quite serious, sir!"

"Do you mean that you have learned that a robbery is intended?"

"That is the case, sir."

"Then you did quite right to come to me," said the Head. "Pray go on, and tell me all about it, Wharton!"

"Certainly, sir!"

And Harry Wharton, in a few concise sentences, explained about the adventure at the ruins in the afternoon, and the visit of Nadesha to the school.

Dr. Locke listened in amazement.

"You should have reported this to me before, about this afternoon's happenings," said the Head. "But never mind! Where is this diamond you speak of?"

"I have it here, sir," said Harry, taking the case from his pocket. "I did not wish Hurree Singh to give me so valuable a thing, but I felt that I could not refuse a parting gift—and, indeed, he gave me no chance!"

He handed the leather case to the doctor.

The Head uttered an exclamation as he opened it, and the nabob's diamond flashed and sparkled into view.

"What a splendid stone!" said Mrs. Locke.

"Splendid indeed!" said the Head. "It is not possible for such a stone to remain in the care of a junior, Wharton. With your permission, I will lock it up in safety until the end of the Term."

"I should be glad if you would do so, sir."

"Very good! Now, about this gipsy; you say she is waiting at the gate," said the Head thoughtfully, as he slipped the little case into his pocket.

"Yes, sir. I asked her to wait, as I thought you might like her to corroborate what I have just told you."

"That was quite right, Wharton!"

"I am curious to see her," said Mrs. Locke. "What were you about to say, Wharton? There is something else in your mind, I can see."

Harry gave her a grateful look.

"Yes, ma'am! I was thinking that—that—"

"You may speak freely, Wharton," said the Head, kindly enough.

"Well, sir, I was thinking—what could be done for old Nadesha, sir," said the boy, colouring. "You see—she has broken with her tribe by giving us this warning, for they are sure to know about it—and—"

"And she is destitute?" said Mrs. Locke softly.

"Yes, ma'am, that is it. It seems a shame that she should go like this—alone—and penniless—without friends because she has served others—"

"You are right, Wharton; and it is very thoughtful of

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you, and shows a kind heart," said Mrs. Locke. "Something must be done for this person, if the facts are as they seem to be." And she glanced at the Head.

Dr. Locke nodded.

"Decidedly! Take this key, Wharton, and admit this Nadesha by the wicket, and bring her here as soon as possible."

"Yes, sir," said Harry, delighted.

And he hurried away. The Head's face was very grave.

"This is a serious matter," he observed. "Heaven knows what injury might have been done but for this warning. On the occasion when Hazeldene's sister was kidnapped, Wharton behaved splendidly. You remember it?"

"Yes, I remember. It was that which first led me to take an interest in Wharton," said Mrs. Locke. "I believe he is not very popular in his Form, but he is certainly a splendid lad."

"He had some ways when he came here, which caused the Remove to take a dislike to him. But he is making friends now," said the Head; "and certainly I know he is sound at heart. His faults are on the surface, and do not go deep."

"Something must be done for this gipsy woman," Mrs. Locke remarked, a shade of thought upon her brow. "Could she—if a suitable person—remain with us?"

"I leave that entirely in your hands, Alice."

In a few minutes there was a tap at the door, and Harry Wharton re-entered with his companion. Nadesha paused in the doorway, the colour deepening in her dusky face, and she drew the red shawl round her more closely, as if to escape observation. Mrs. Locke stepped towards her kindly. The good lady noted at once the fatigue of the gipsy, the worn look upon her face, and the cut on the temple. She made Nadesha sit down, and a moment later placed a glass of wine to her lips.

The tears gushed to Nadesha's eyes. From the clock-tower came the echo of a quarter chiming out, and Harry Wharton remembered the debating society in the Fourth Form-room, and gave a slight start.

The Head glanced at him.

"You need not wait, Wharton," he said. "Of course, you have your preparation to do. You may rest assured that all proper measures will be taken to secure your safety to-night, and to deal with the burglar. You may go!"

"Thank you, sir!"

And Wharton, saying good-night to Mrs. Locke, left the drawing-room. He hurried away from the principal's house, satisfied that he had done all that was required of him. He was free now to join his chums in the Fourth Form-room.

He looked in at Study No. 1 on his way, and found only Billy Bunter there. Billy was sitting at the table, carefully finishing up the remnants of the feed. There was no limit to the Owl's stowing capacities, at least, it seemed so to his chums. Whatever was on the table, Billy could always manage to clear it if required.

"Have they gone to the meeting?" asked Harry.

"Yes, long ago," said Bunter, without looking up from the remains of a steak pie.

Harry smiled and left the study. It did not take him long to reach the Fourth Form-room. Light was streaming out from under the door, and there was the sound of a voice, which he recognised as Temple's.

He could not distinguish the words, but the head of the Fourth Form was evidently on his legs and making a speech.

Harry opened the door and entered the sacred precincts of the Fourth Form-room, and looked about him with a great deal of curiosity.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Removites Ask Questions.

THE scene in the Fourth Form-room was an interesting one. The members of the Fourth Form Debating Society were there in force, some fifteen or sixteen youths of various ages from fourteen to sixteen being seated there with grave and attentive faces. The audience was not always so grave, but the presence of a group of Removites made the Fourth Formers particularly careful to keep serious appearances on this occasion.

The chums of the Remove were seated in a row on a form, listening to the speech with really owl-like gravity.

Bob Cherry and Nugent had their heads resting on their hands, their elbows leaning on the desks, as if to drink in every word of the valuable exposition of the subject now being poured forth by Temple.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was leaning back, nursing his

knee with both hands, his face filled with Oriental solemnity, and his dark eyes fastened upon the speaker's face with an unwavering attention, which Temple found rather embarrassing.

Harry Wharton stepped quietly to the form and sat down beside the nabob. Temple glanced at him, but did not cease his speech. But he was near the end, and a few minutes later he sat down.

Dabney, the chairman of the debating society, then glanced at a paper, and called upon Bates to expound his views.

Bates, a rather stout youth with a very red face, got up, and it was evident at a glance that he had forgotten a carefully-prepared speech.

"Mr. Chairman and gentlemen——"

"Hear, hear!" said the debating society, with one voice encouragingly.

"The question before us to-night——"

"Cut that; you're not chairman!" said Dabney.

"I suppose I can say what I like, whether I'm chairman or not," said Bates.

"Oh, go on!"

"The question is whether the present system of government in public schools is a satisfactory one," said Bates. "Our friend Temple has replied to that question in the affirmative——"

"Hear, hear!"

"I beg to differ. The system is—is——"

"Go on!"

"Is unsatisfactory. My reasons for this statement are—— Has anybody seen a little bit of paper lying about?" asked Bates, looking round him.

"No!"

"I had some notes written on it."

"Speak without 'em, then!"

"But I've forgotten my reasons!"

"Never mind the reasons," said Dabney. "Get on with the speech. We can't stay here all night, you know!"

"How can I get on with the speech when I've forgotten what I was going to say?" demanded Bates rather excitedly.

"Then let Dabney have his go first, while you look for your precious rotten paper, you ass!" said Temple, frowning a little as he glanced at the Removites. He was very sensitive about what the Lower Fourth-Formers thought of the proceedings of the debating society. The solemnity of the four faces over the desk was almost appalling, but Temple had a suspicion that the Removites were putting that on, with the idea of secretly "rotting" the meeting.

"Is it in order for a speaker to be called an ass?" asked Bates, looking at Dabney in an inquiring sort of way.

Dabney shook his head.

"I'm afraid not," he said. "The fact that he may deserve it does not excuse the use of the expression. You must withdraw the word, Temple."

"Oh, very well!" said Temple. "I withdraw it, but I shall punch Bates's head in the dormitory to-night. Get on with the washing, Dab."

"Right-ho! Gentlemen, I rise to remark——"

"Are you sure you haven't seen a little paper lying about anywhere, you fellows?"

"Shut up, Bates!"

"But——"

"Order! Silence!"

"Oh, very well; but if I don't find my notes I sha'n't be able to make a speech, that's all!" said Bates.

"Jolly good thing, too!" said Penny.

"Look here, Penny——"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Order! Order!"

"I rise to take the opposite side from that espoused by our friend Temple," said Dabney, when order was restored. He paused a moment and glanced at the Removites. All four of them, as if moved by the same impulse, were taking notes. Dabney felt slightly uncomfortable.

"Go on, Dab!" said Temple.

"Hear, hear!" said the meeting.

"I regard the present system as unsatisfactory," said Dabney, referring to a paper in the palm of his hand. "In the first place, the Fourth Form is not allowed to take a sufficiently prominent place in the school."

"Good!"

"Then, the lower Forms—such as the Remove and the Third—are considered to be really something on an equality with a Form like ours."

"Shame!"

The Removites were seen to be taking notes again.

"Then, the Fifth and the Sixth often think they have a right to bully us, and even cuff us sometimes," said Dabney, warming to his subject.

"Shame!"

"Cads!"

"The prefects are chosen from the Sixth Form solely. The captain of the School is always elected from the Sixth Form. Where is the Fourth Form in all this? I repeat, gentlemen of the Debating Society and fellow-Formers—I mean, Form-follower—that is to say, Former-follower——"

"Leave it at that. Get on with the washing!"

"I repeat, where does the Fourth Form come in?"

"At the door!" suggested a would-be joker, who was instantly squelched by a dozen or more freezing glares bestowed upon him by the Debating Society.

"My view therefore is," resumed Dabney, "that the present public-school system is a mockery, a delusion, and a snare! Unless an equal number of prefects is, are, and shall be, chosen from the Fourth Form, what becomes of the freedom for which our ancestors fought and bled at Waterloo and the Pass of Thermopylae?"

"Bravo!"

"What becomes of the boasted British Constitution, when the system of fagging the Fourth Form flourishes in these enlightened days of the twentieth century?"

"Hear, hear!"

"I move, therefore, that the public-school system will never be satisfactory till fagging is confined to the Remove and the Third Form, and prefects are chosen from the Fourth as well as the Sixth."

"Hear, hear!"

And Dabney sat down. He sat down as a speaker, and stood up again as a chairman, to put the amendment to the meeting.

It was carried by a majority, even Temple himself voting for it against his own resolution, so convinced was he by his chum's arguments.

The resolution was accordingly negatived, the amendment being adopted that the state of things was not satisfactory in the public schools of the twentieth century, for the reason set forth by Mr. Dabney in his telling speech.

"And, further," said Dabney, "I propose the resolution that this meeting, representing all that is best in the Fourth Form at Greyfriars——"

"Hear, hear!"

"This meeting, composed of intelligent and enlightened citizens, who have learned to think imperially upon questions affecting the welfare of the—the—the welfare of things generally, and so on, comes to the conclusion——"

"Quite time!" said Bates audibly.

"Order!"

"The conclusion," went on Dabney, "and passes the resolution that we don't care a rap for the Sixth, and all the prefects can go hang——"

"Hear, hear!"

"And that if any prefect interferes with us, we shall tell him to go and eat coke!"

"Time that light was out," said Carberry, of the Sixth, looking into the room. "Another five minutes, youngsters. If the light isn't out then, you'll hear from me."

"Yes, Carberry," said Dabney meekly.

And the prefect went out and slammed the door.

The debaters looked at one another rather uncomfortably. After Dabney's resolution, his reply to Carberry seemed rather inadequate. Temple broke the painful pause by looking across at the Removites and addressing them.

"Have you got any questions to ask, youngsters?"

Even the obnoxious word youngsters failed to break down the grave politeness of the Removites.

Harry Wharton rose to his feet.

"Certainly!" he said. "We——"

"I've found my paper!" interjected Bates, drawing a crumpled fragment of soiled exercise-paper from his waistcoat pocket. "It got in here somehow. Gentlemen——"

"Order!"

"I'm going to make my speech——"

"Too late. It's out of order!"

"You've been jawing all the time."

"You heard what Carberry said?"

"That's all very well, but——"

"Order! The honoured visitors have to be allowed questions, and we've only got a few minutes."

"It's not cricket!" said the aggrieved Bates. "I've found my notes, and——"

"Order! Shut up, Bates! Go on, Wharton!"

Harry Wharton gravely referred to his notes.

"We are allowed one question each?" he asked.

"Yes. And the chairman will do his best to reply."

"Certainly!" said Dabney.

"Very well. I should like to be enlightened on the following point. Mr. Dabney says he takes the opposite side from that espoused by his friend Temple. Espoused means married. Does the honourable chairman mean to imply that his friend Temple is a married man, and has left his wife, in order to come to Greyfriars and join the Fourth Form Debating Society?"

Temple turned red, and some of the debaters giggled. Dabney looked savagely at the Removites, but they were absolutely solemn. If anything, their gravity had grown more painfully serious, and they seemed to hang upon the chairman's reply as upon words expected from an oracle of wisdom. Dabney could not quite make it out.

"No," he replied shortly. "I didn't mean to imply anything of the sort. If you fellows are rotting—"

Harry Wharton sat down, and Nugent rose to ask his question.

"The chairman stated that the Remove is supposed to be on an equality with the Upper Fourth. Does he mean to insinuate thereby that the Upper Fourth is on an equality with the Remove? If so, I hurl back the insinuation in his teeth!"

"Look here, you rotters—"

"Order! Next question!"

Bob Cherry stood up.

"The honourable chairman made an allusion to our ancestors bleeding and dying at Waterloo and the Pass of Thermopylae. I should be glad to be informed how our ancestors got so far afield as the Pass of Thermopylae, as there were no Cook's excursions in those days?"

Dabney turned red.

"That was a—a—a figure of speech," he explained.

"Oh! I suppose—"

"You have no right to suppose," interrupted the chairman. "Next question!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh stood up, an expression of almost wistful earnestness upon his dusky face, but a glimmer in his eyes.

"I have listened to the debatefulness of the society with much instruction and general improvefulness to the brain," said the nabob. "The speeches of the ludicrous members—"

"Order!"

"Have greatly enlightened me as to the state of their brains, and I now know exactly how much intelligence there is in the Fourth Form at this honourable school!"

The members of the Debating Society looked at one another rather dubiously, not knowing exactly how to take this remark.

"Well, go on!" said Dabney.

"After expressing the pleasurefulness with which I have listened to the debateful talkfulness of the present esteemed rotters, I should like to be questionable on the following point."

"Ha, ha, ha! Go on, Inky!"

"The esteemed, rotten chairman says that this meeting represents all that is bestful in the honourable Form you belong to."

"Certainly!" said the chairman.

"Hear, hear!"

Hurree Singh looked puzzled.

"I have no doubtfulness of the statement made by the esteemed chairman," he said; "but if this meeting represents what is most bestful and intelligent in the Fourth Form, what is the degree of intelligence in the worstful members of that esteemed and ludicrous Form?"

The debaters looked at one another.

"The condition of the brainfulness of this honoured meeting has made itself apparent, but what is the brainfulness of the more stupid members of the Fourth Form like?" asked Hurree Singh. "Is it inexpressible, and can the force of Nature no further go, as your beautiful poet Dan Leno so well puts it?"

"Look here, you confounded nigger," exclaimed Dabney, starting up; the irrepressible grins of the Removites made it clear enough at last that the Debating Society was being rotted by the hitherto grave and reverent youngsters, "if you are looking for a thick ear—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "Answer the question. If this meeting represents the most intelligent portion of the Fourth Form, what degree of idiocy has been reached by the rest?"

"I am awaiting the replyful rejoinder of the honourable, rotten chairman!"

"You cheeky kids—"

"Turn 'em out!"

"Kick them out!"

The debating society made a rush. The Removites had already risen from the form, and they backed to the door. The Fourth-Formers dashed at them, and at the same moment the door opened, and Carberry looked in.

"Now, then, put that light out at once!"

The juniors stopped the rush. Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh walked calmly out of the room, and Carberry glared in while the Fourth-Formers prepared to go. From behind the cover of the prefect, the Removites placed their fingers to their noses in extended order, as a parting salute to the debating society. Temple and Dabney and their fellow-members gasped with rage.

Then the chums of the Remove walked away, and hugged themselves with merriment in the upper passage, and the corridor rang with their shouts of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was funniful," said Hurree Singh, wiping the tears from his eyes; "but I have a feeling that the esteemed rotters will not ask us to any more of their debateful meetings in the honourable Fourth Form-room."

And Hurree Singh was right. Temple and Dabney, after that experience, quite gave up the project of improving the minds of the Remove.

THE TENTH CHAPTER. Well Done!

"AND now, what about Nadesha?" said Bob Cherry, as the chums of the Remove went into No. 1 Study.

Billy Bunter had completely finished the feed, and the room was empty. Harry Wharton at once became grave, and he closed the door before he spoke. His chums looked at him curiously. They could see by his expression that there was something unusual on the tapis.

"It's a serious matter," said Wharton. "I'll give you the story in a few words."

And he explained what had happened during his absence from his chums. Bob Cherry gave an expressive whistle.

"Good old Nadesha!" said Nugent. "It was awfully decent of her. I suppose the Head will send for the police?"

"I suppose so," said Harry; "and some of the masters will stay up, I expect, with a policeman or two, to watch for the scoundrel!"

"We ought to be on in that scene," said Nugent.

"That's what I was thinking."

"Our noble presence would probably lead to the capturefulness of the giddy burglar," the nabob remarked. "But the instructor sahibs will not allow it."

"Not if they know," said Wharton.

"But if we sit up with them—"

"I wasn't thinking of sitting up with them. Look here, chaps, turn this over in your minds and tell me what you think. Nadesha says that Melchior spoke confidently about being able to break into Greyfriars. Now, I don't suppose a wandering ruffian like that has much idea of the skilful part of burglary; and where is he to get burglar's tools from, only just out of prison as he is?"

"That's true enough. But—"

"Yet he seemed certain of getting in. My idea is that he doesn't mean to come by door or window in the usual way."

Nugent stared, and Bob Cherry grinned.

"You don't think he means to come down the chimney, surely!" said the latter.

Harry did not smile.

"I think he has another way of coming in," he said quietly.

"Blessed if I can guess what it is," said Nugent.

"You remember that he was hiding with Barengro in the ruined chapel in the Friar's Wood, Nugent?"

Nugent gave a start.

"My hat! Do you mean that he may have discovered the secret passage leading from the ruined chapel to Greyfriars?" he exclaimed excitedly.

"Why not?"

"It is extremely likely," said Hurree Singh. "While I was in hiding that time in this esteemful school, I followed the passage to the old chapel to get some fresh airfulness for my health. There is nothing secret about it, if you pull away the ivy that grows very thickfully over the opening at the other end."

"It's more likely than not that Melchior found it, looking among the ruins for a safe hiding-place," said Harry Wharton. "If he discovered it, and found that it led to the school, all would be easy."

"My hat! And but for old Nadesha's warning—"

"We might have been killed. But now—"

"Now we shall have the golden opportunity of improving the shining hour," said Hurree Singh. "After the school is sleeping the sleep of the just, we shall proceed creepfully from the dormitory—"

"And get into the box-room, where the passage leads," said Harry quietly. "If the gipsy comes through the passage, he can only get out into the school by way of the box-room."

"Good! And we shall be there—"

"With a cricket-stump each—"

"And a rope."

"And the esteemed scoundrel will fall into our hands and be captured by our noble and respected selves!" exclaimed the nabob gleefully.

"Ha, ha, ha! My hat, but it's a good wheeze! It will be a feather in the cap of the Remove to capture a burglar single-handed!" said Nugent.

"It all depends upon whether the rotter comes by the secret passage," Bob Cherry remarked.

"To my mind it's certain," said Harry. "But in any case it will do no harm to watch in the box-room. We don't

"THE CAPTAIN'S ELECTION!"

Another Tale of Harry Wharton and his Chums,
by FRANK RICHARDS.

NEXT
TUESDAY.

"Intend to go to sleep when such an affair is on; and we have a right to take a hand in the game, as it was through us that the alarm was given at all."

"That's quite right."

"We'll wait in the box-room, and if the burglar comes in any other way, why, there will be others looking for him; and if we hear an alarm we can soon get downstairs and chip in."

"Good!"

"While if he comes by the secret passage," added Harry, "we'll capture him single-handed, and then call up the police. We shall want a stump each, and a coil of rope, and a dark lantern. You're all game?"

"Rather!"

"Then it's settled. And mind, mum's the word."

"The mumffulness is important," said Hurree Singh. "I shall be as dumb as the esteemed oysters in the oyster-bed."

And the chums of the Remove were exceedingly careful to keep their secret. Nothing unusual disturbed the routine of Greyfriars up to the bedtime of the Remove, when the Lower Fourth went up to the dormitory, the chums along with the rest. What measures were being taken by the Head Harry did not know, but he guessed that the police had been sent for; though they would not come till after the boys' bedtime, to avoid comment.

The famous four did not go to sleep with the rest of the Remove; they were too excited; and their hearts beat fast when they thought of the coming vigil in the box-room, and the possible—or, rather, almost certain—encounter with a desperate, and probably armed, ruffian.

They heard the clock strike ten, and then eleven. The house was very still. As the last stroke of eleven died away, Harry Wharton rose quietly from his bed. The other three followed his example without needing to be called.

The chums dressed themselves rapidly, and then took out the cricket-stumps which they had hidden under their mattresses. Harry Wharton picked up the lantern.

"Come on!" he whispered.

The Remove chums stole out of the dormitory, closing the door silently behind them. The passage was pitchy dark, but they knew the way well. They trod lightly upon the stair up to the box-room, remembering that it was given to creaking.

The darkness was intense. Harry Wharton felt for the handle of the door, and opened it. He paused to listen before he entered. There was no sound in the silence of the night. A glimmer of stars fell through the window upon the boxes and lumber in the room. Harry closed the door behind his chums, and then led the way through the lumber towards the little door which gave upon the secret passage.

"Better light the lantern now," whispered Bob Cherry.

"Good! Strike a match—and quiet."

The lantern was lighted and the light shut off. Harry placed it in the grate, ready to be picked up and turned on as soon as wanted.

During the past week a new lock had been placed upon the little door which led to the secret passage. It was intended to keep the boys of Greyfriars from exploring the dangerous recesses, but it was not likely to baffle Melchior long if he came that way.

"Cover!" whispered Harry. "I don't suppose he'll come along much before midnight; but he might, and we are best to be in time!"

"And remember the necessaryness of mumful silence," parried Hurree Singh.

The chums of the Remove took cover among the lumber, close to the little door, and grasped their weapons, and waited.

It was an anxious and weary vigil.

They heard the quarter chime out, then the half-hour, and then three-quarters; and finally midnight tolled forth upon the silent night.

Still not a sound had broken the quiet.

But a few minutes later came a slight sound, which started the Removites into new watchfulness, and sent the blood tingling through their veins.

It was a sound from the other side of the little door.

Was it a rat scuttling there? No. There was a sound of a hand groping over the door, and the chums breathed hard.

There was no mistake now.

Nadesha's warning had been a true one. Melchior was coming, and Harry Wharton had rightly divined the way the ruffian would come.

It was a matter of minutes now!

There was a creak—a grinding sound. The door was being forced by some tool inserted between the lock and the post. A sharp snap—the lock had parted. A glimmer of light came through, and the door swung open.

The juniors crouched, dumb and quiet, in their cover. They heard a movement; a man was standing in the opening, lantern in hand, looking cautiously into the box-room, to ascertain that all was safe before he entered.

Not a sound or a movement. Satisfied, Melchior, the gipsy, stepped into the room, his black eyes glinting. He stepped away from the door, and passed the big box which concealed Harry and Bob. He flashed the light to right and left, and gave a convulsive start as he caught sight of the ambushed juniors.

He was not given time to think or act. Harry and Bob sprang at him fiercely, slashing with the stumps. The lantern crashed to the floor, and the gipsy followed it, half-stunned by the blows he had received.

"The light—quick!" shouted Harry Wharton.

Hurree Singh seized the dark lantern from the grate and turned on the light. Harry, Bob, and Nugent piled themselves upon the dazed gipsy.

Melchior struggled madly.

"You whelps, you—"

"Hold him! Bash him if he doesn't give in!"

"Hold him!"

Hurree Singh set the lantern upon a box, where it shed light upon the proceedings, and joined in the fray. His aid was hardly needed, for the three lads had the gipsy pinned to the floor, and were holding him there, in spite of his desperate struggles.

"The rope!" panted Harry.

"Here it is, my worthy chum!" exclaimed the nabob. "I will execute the tiefulness of the esteemed rotter's hands!"

And while the chums held the gipsy fast, Hurree Singh bound his wrists tightly together, and then did the same with his ankles. Melchior was a helpless prisoner. He lay glowering at the Removites like a demon. There was a sound of steps on the stairs, and the door of the box-room was thrown open. The noise of the struggle had echoed far through the silent house. Dr. Locke, Wingate, Mr. Quelch, and a policeman, dashed into the room; the latter lantern in hand. They stopped and stared in amazement at the bound gipsy, and the triumphant, breathless chums.

"Why, what—what—" gasped the Head.

"We've got him, sir!"

"The gotfulness is complete!"

"What—how—"

"We thought he might come in this way, sir," explained Harry Wharton respectfully. "We thought we'd look for him here, sir. We've got him. We hope you will excuse us for leaving the dormitory without permission."

The Head smiled slightly.

"I see you have got him, Wharton! You should not have run this terrible risk; but, fortunately, no harm is done, and I excuse you. Go back to bed!"

"Thank you, sir."

"You'll do, you young rascal!" muttered Wingate, slapping Harry on the shoulder as the juniors passed him; and he laughed.

The chums of the Remove went back to the dormitory feeling extremely well pleased with themselves. The whole Remove was awake now, demanding information as to the row, and the part the four had taken in it.

"Oh, don't bother," said Bob Cherry; "we've been capturing burglars while you've been snoring, that's all! Lucky you have us chaps to look after you!"

And the chums of the Remove tumbled into bed.

The next morning they were the heroes of the school. Melchior the gipsy had been taken to the station, and was in safe hands, and not likely to escape again. Nadesha met Harry Wharton in the morning, and the boy learned, gladly enough, that the gipsy was to remain at Greyfriars, in Mrs. Locke's service. The quartette were lions in the Remove that day, and fellows even in higher Forms regarded them with envious eyes. They had distinguished themselves, and brought glory upon their Form, and the Remove was in a position to crow over the Fourth—and crow it did, to its heart's content!

THE END.

Next Tuesday!

"THE CAPTAIN'S ELECTION."

Another grand, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton and his chums.

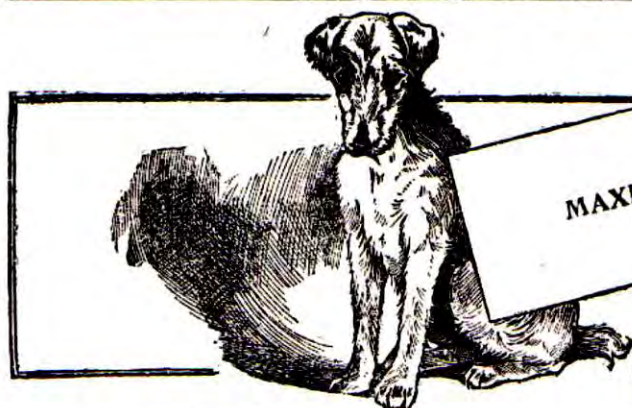
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NEXT
TUESDAY.



NEW STORY SHOWING HOW TWO BOYS BECOME DETECTIVES.

By LEWIS HOCKLEY.

GLANCE OVER THIS FIRST.

Frank Dennis and Bob Lomax, two City clerks, are thrown out of employment. Having no prospects they decide to make the detective business their profession, and assume the name of "Maxenniss."

Grip, their dog, in a strange manner is instrumental in getting their first client—a Mrs. Brewer—who is continually receiving threatening picture post-cards from Leigh-on-Sea; from some man evidently aware that his victim is coming into a legacy. Lomax visits Leigh and obtains the names of three regular senders of picture postcards—a Miss Bella Diamond, a Mr. Steve Gillard, and a Master Dick, surname unknown, but a pupil at a local school. The first-named he interviews without result.

What Lomax Did (continued).

So after breakfast Bob Lomax turned his attention to Mr. Gillard. Steve Gillard was, as were most of the able-bodied male population of Leigh, a fisherman—a shrimper. He was sufficiently popular, also, for the boots at the hotel, though not one of his bosom pals, was able to inform Lomax almost to an inch where he might be found.

"Yew go down, sir," said this worthy, in answer to Lomax's question—"yew go down to the Heel an' Flowerpot, an' look hout for a biggish young chap wi' a pock-marked face an' a moustache what's just a beginning to show itself, who's leaning against the houtside wall, wi' a half-gallon pot o' beer on the winder-sill 'longside o' him, an' yew'll find old Steve Gillard. If he ain't there I'll blooming well heat my 'at. Five minutes to eleven, arter the night's take o' s'rimps has bin got rid of, does Steve go an' hold up the wall o' the Heel an' Flowerpot, an' he ain't to be shifted not if his 'ouse were a burning an' his step-mother what lives with him was a being burned to a cinder."

With such illuminating instructions to guide him, Lomax had little difficulty in locating the man he sought. The Eel and Flowerpot was a low-eaved, diamond-windowed, narrow-doorwayed little beerhouse situated on the tongue of land jutting into the sea which forms the rearward portion of Leigh village, and serves as the loafing ground for all Leigh fishermen when they have no work to take them afloat. It is a strip of land that is invariably muddy, is soaked with the smell of fish, tarred ropes, and bilge-water, and is a place for any person owning a sensitive stomach to avoid.

Robert Lomax did not possess an ultra-sensitive stomach, but, all the same, he did wish Mr. Gillard had been partial to some less odoriferous locality for his forenoon musings.

Stephen himself he had no difficulty whatever in finding, though there were almost a dozen of the Leigh shrimp-catchers lounging against the outside wall of the beerhouse—holding it up, as the boots had said. All had pipes between their lips, all had their hands in their pockets, all were wearing guernseys, thick boots, and salt water-stained blue cloth trousers; some were middle-aged, but others were young; many were bearded, several clean shaven, or with hirsute adornments in their infancy; but only one was pock-marked, and by this sign Lomax recognised the man whom he sought.

Very brisk and businesslike he walked along the front of the Eel and Flowerpot, the object of mild curiosity to those who were engaged in keeping the beerhouse walls from tumbling down, and he pulled up opposite the young man whose face bore the marks of the smallpox. The boots had been correct; the young fisherman was not far from the beerhouse window, and on the sill stood a large pewter-pot.

"Mr. Stephen Gillard, I believe?" the young detective said, in a questioning voice.

The fisherman took his pipe slowly from his mouth, brought his eyes away from the sea to somewhere near

Lomax's face—he was crosseyed, so it was not easy to say offhand where he was looking very precisely—and stared at him wonderingly.

He was a tallish young fellow, somewhere between twenty-five and thirty years of age, the colour of mahogany, with sloping shoulders, deep chest, thick, powerful limbs, and enormous hands, a very fine specimen of England's seafaring manhood; not an Apollo in shape or a beauty in feature, but a stout, lusty chap, such as may be seen any day in the fishing villages around the English coast.

"Eh?" he grunted.
"You are Mr. Stephen Gillard, I believe," Lomax repeated.

The young man put his pipe back in his mouth.
"Yes, that's me," he answered. His companions along the wall began to evince a greater interest.

"Pleased to meet you," Lomax observed cheerfully.
"Who are yew? Don't know yew," Steve returned, with a directness some persons might have found disconcerting.
"I should be glad to have a little chat with you," Lomax continued pleasantly. "I think you're the man I am wanting to see."

"What for?" Mr. Gillard's brown eyes filled with suspicion; he looked or seemed to be looking at Lomax's right ear.

"What for? Well, I believe that you handle a good many postcards—picture postcards; that you write and send away a good many, I believe."

At the mention of picture postcards Mr. Gillard's face slowly reddened; he scowled, for a chuckle arose from two or three of his fellow loungers. He said nothing, and one of the other young men burst into a loud laugh, whereat Steve Gillard's face became much more highly coloured.

"Chuck it!" he observed curtly.
"Isn't that so?" Lomax queried.

"What's that to do wi' you, mister?" was the answer.
"Well," said Lomax, in a quiet, businesslike manner, "not a great deal, certainly, only I thought it just possible that you—"

He was interrupted by Mr. Gillard, who suddenly detached himself from the wall, made a forward movement, and placed one great hand on Robert's shoulder.

"'Ere," said the fisherman hoarsely, "be yew come from that blighted Jew, that Sheeny cove what comes snufflin' round 'ere sellin' pictur' postcards? Are yew one of 'is pals? 'Cos if so yew're just the man I want, an' I'm goin' to give yew a boost into th' sea like as I said I'd do if I ever cotched yew round 'ere ag'in. Yew're sellin' picture postcards, too, are yew?"

The young man's voice was decidedly threatening, the grip of his fingers anything but pleasant. He seemed to feel that he had a grievance against Mr. Solly Abrams and all of his kind, to which he suspected Lomax to belong.

Lomax twisted himself free.
"I'm not trying to sell you picture postcards, I'm not one of Mr. Abram's friends, and you're not going to pitch me into the sea. Moreover, you couldn't if you were to try."

This last was rather a dangerous remark to have made. Lomax by no means meant it as a challenge, but as such the young fisherman chose to regard it.

"Can't I?" he said, and his other hand took possession of Lomax's coat collar. "I'll just show yew that I can."

Now this was anything but what Lomax was looking for. Mr. Gillard evidently had a grievance against the Jewish pedlar of postcards, and having got it into his thick head Lomax was in some way connected with him, it was in his—Gillard's—mind to "take it out of him."

The other fishermen left their positions, greatly enlivened at the prospect of a fight, which seemed imminent. For Mr. Gillard, who was evidently one of those who don't let their threats become cold before proceeding to execute them,

began to push Lomax backwards, with the intention of carrying his promise into effect.

"I'll duck yew!" he said.

Now Lomax, although he did not forget that he was a detective, also remembered that he took such treatment as this from no man lying down; he didn't want to get drawn into any unseemly brawling—it would be prejudicial to his business at Leigh—but, at the same time, he wasn't going to submit to be handled thus by any man. Also, he remembered, he was a Yorkshireman, and the men of the broad-acred shire are the very last who are liable to submit to intimidation, or be unwilling to hold up their own end.

Mr. Gillard shoved Lomax backward a few paces—he was the taller as well as the bigger and heavier man—when the latter suddenly lifted his right leg, swung it, grabbing and jerking the fisherman's left arm at the same time, and Steve Gillard measured his length on the ground.

There was a gasp of surprise from the onlookers; no one had rightly seen what had happened, and the effect rather took their breath away. What had been done was, however, very simple. Lomax had brought into play a wrestling chip, which the men of the North country know well—known as the outside stroke—with a swinging stroke given with the edge of his right foot at the ankle of the fisherman's advanced left leg, and a simultaneous jerk to the same side, he had thrown Mr. Gillard fairly off his balance. And Steve was as ignorant as the rest of the fishermen how he had been brought to the ground.

The fall, being totally unexpected, was a heavy one, but the powerful young fisherman was up in a jiffy. Spitting out his broken pipe-stem, he made a fierce rush at the detective, his arms extended.

But once again he was foiled badly. As he rushed in Lomax ducked under his extended hands, caught him round one thigh with both arms, half lifted him from the ground, and inserting his own right heel on the inside behind Gillard's standing leg, threw the young fisherman a fair back fall. He came down heavily, and for a few seconds lay still, most of the wind being driven from his body. The other men stared at Lomax with open eyes and mouths agape.

Lomax stepped forward and bent over the fallen man.

"Now, see here," he said, "don't be a fool. I've got no reason for quarrelling with you, and I don't want to, but I wasn't going to let you duck me. I didn't mean to hurt you, and I hope I haven't; but, all the same, I had to throw you, and I'll do it again if it's necessary, but I hope it won't be. Come, got up and be sensible, and we'll have our talk."

He grasped Gillard's hand as he spoke, and the fisherman scrambled to his feet, somewhat angry, but a great deal more bewildered.

"How did yew do it?" he faltered.

Lomax laughed.

"Never mind that," he said; "I'll show you another time. Now, I've nothing whatever to do with Mr. Abrams, I'm not going to try to sell you cards, but I want you to tell me if that belongs to you."

As Lomax spoke he drew out of his pocket a picture postcard, the very last one that Mrs. Brewer had received, and held it towards Gillard.

The latter, slow witted, a little bewildered by his double fall, and Lomax's easy assurance of being master of the situation, took the card gingerly and looked at it, Lomax's eyes narrowly watching his face the while.

"Did you find this, mister?" the fisherman asked.

"Never mind that. Is it yours? Did you write it?"

"No, mister; never saw it before." And the man spoke as one who is telling the truth. "And now tell me, will yew—"

But at this precise moment a telegraph boy came hurrying towards the group, and coming to Lomax, held out one of the familiar orange-coloured envelopes.

"Is this for you, sir?" the lad asked. "I took it to the hotel, and they told me you were down here. I've been

all over the place, sir, looking for you. Came a long while ago."

"Robert Lomax, Leigh-on-Sea," was the address given on the cover, and it spoke well for the telegraphic clerk's acuteness that it had ever reached the proper person.

Tearing open the envelope, Lomax took out the pink form. "Come back at once," the wire read. It was unsigned, and had been handed in at Borough High Street post-office.

Dennis Has an Inspiration.

We left Frank Dennis on his way to the neighbourhood where Mrs. Brewer lived, to begin his work of obtaining information concerning that lady. He had accepted Bob Lomax's theory that sheer hard work was all that was required towards the elucidation of any mystery, and he was not looking for the intervention of any of those fortuitous circumstances which, in fiction, form part of the detective hero's stock-in-trade. He meant to begin by interviewing their client's lady friend, Mrs. Biddlecombe. As he walked along—Grip on the lead trotting behind him—he considered the various means whereby he might form that lady's acquaintance. He might be a book agent, a canvasser endeavouring to push the sale of some novelty, a sewing machine agent, or even a representative of a life assurance company. He weighed the pros and cons of the value of each artifice, and found great difficulty in deciding which was the best character to assume.

While pondering over the matter, a brilliant idea came into his mind annihilating all other suggestions, one of those ideas—he could not avoid the thought—such as invariably came to the rescue of his fictional heroes when they found themselves in a particularly tight corner with no obvious means of escape. He resolved to act on it forthwith, and set off towards the street where Mrs. Brewer resided, at a brisk and confident pace.

It was not difficult to find, and presently he found himself, his heart beating fast with excitement, outside the door of Mrs. Biddlecombe's domicile. He knocked, and a middle-aged woman, grey-haired, and of a most lugubrious cast of countenance, opened the door about six inches and put her face to the opening. She looked at the visitor as if she imagined the worst.

"Good-afternoon, madam!" Dennis said pleasantly. "Er—I—can you—I am—"

Now that the moment had come the idea didn't seem so easy to put into execution. The woman's stare disconcerted him. She looked at him and said nothing.

"Mrs. Brewer, I presume?" went on Dennis.

"No, I ain't!"

"But," Dennis said undecidedly, "I thought—I was under the impression—"

"I'm Mrs. Biddlecombe."

"Oh!"

Dennis looked disappointed. He was beginning to recover himself; his nervousness was wearing off, and the brilliant idea was beginning to get a chance.

"Mrs. Brewer don't live here," volunteered the lady.

"Made a mistake, I suppose," Dennis continued briskly. "And yet—surely it was somewhere about here that I was told she lived. Perhaps, madam, you may be able to help me. Do you happen to know if the lady I am desirous of seeing lives about here?"

"I do know a Mrs. Brewer," was the non-committal reply.

"Ah! Perhaps, then, that is she. May I ask where the lady lives?"

"Nex' door."

"Oh, so close as that! Then I'm not very far out. Sorry to have troubled you, Mrs.—er—Mrs. Biddlecombe. Thanks very much for the information. I'll just knock. I'm particularly anxious to see her—particularly. Thank you again. I—"

Dennis was about to turn away, when apparently re-collecting himself, he again faced round to the door.

Another long instalment of this fine serial next week. Please order your copy of the Magnet in advance.

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THE EDITOR.



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Tuesday's
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**The ball from Hazeldene scattered
the bully's bails before he could
look out !.**

*(An incident in next Tuesday's Long, Complete Tale,
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