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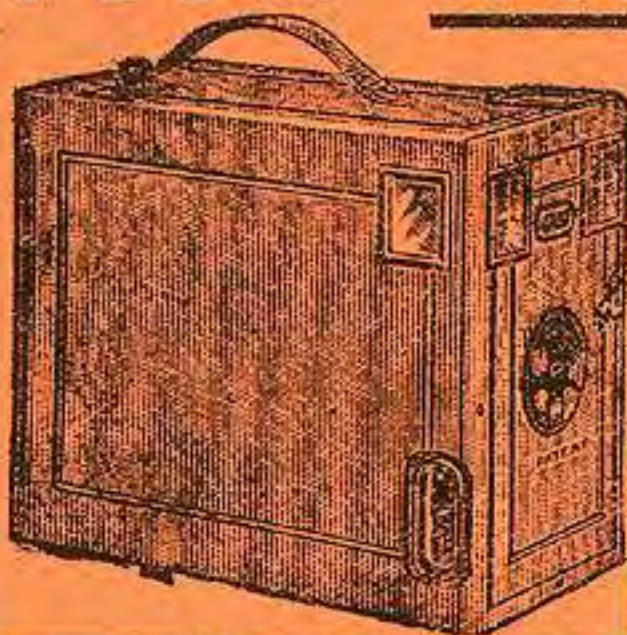
BILLY'S TREAT.

By
FRANK
RICHARDS



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A TALE OF HARRY WHARTON AND HIS CHUMS.

By FRANK
RICHARDS.



BILLY'S TREAT.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Wharton Has His Doubts.

"WHEREFORE that thoughtful frown?"

It was Bob Cherry, of the Remove at Greyfriars, who asked that question, as he met Harry Wharton under the elms in the Close.

Wharton had his hands in his pockets, his eyes fixed on the ground, and his brow was wrinkled in an expression of thoughtfulness that at once attracted the attention of the careless, genial Bob.

Bob Cherry was not much given to thought himself, and he roused Harry Wharton out of his reverie by giving him a hearty slap on the shoulder and propounding the above question.

Harry started as Bob's heavy hand descended upon him, and looked up.

"Eh?"

"Wherefore that thoughtful frown?" repeated Bob Cherry.

"In other words, what have you got on your little mind, kid?" Harry Wharton laughed.

"Nothing much. Only I've been thinking——"

"Then don't."

Wharton laughed again. But the thoughtful expression immediately returned to his face.

"It's really serious, Bob. You know that those French chaps

who were down here last week have challenged us to meet them at gymnastics——"

"Yes; and I know that we shall lick them as we did at cricket."

"I am not so sure about that."

Bob Cherry stared at his friend.

"My dear chap, you know the way they played cricket was too funny for words! You know we wiped the field up with them without half-trying!"

"Yes, I know that."

"Then it stands to reason that we shall do the same with them in another line."

"I wish I felt certain about it. They're stronger on gymnastics than they are on sports out of doors, you know. They can climb like monkeys——"

"They're rather like monkeys in other respects, too," grinned Bob Cherry.

"The worst of it is, that since the accident to the roof of the gymnasium here the place has been closed for repairs, and we can't get in much practice before the meeting comes off."

"Oh, we're all right," said Bob Cherry confidently. "We shall beat them hollow!"

"I tell you I don't feel sure about it. We shall have to get in some practice first, somehow. We don't want to meet them and get licked."

"By Jove, no!"

"The meeting comes off on Saturday——"

"But won't it have to be put off till the gym is in order again?"

Harry shook his head.

"It can't be done. The French team have to go home next week, and so it's now or never. If we wanted to put it off they'd think we were funking it."

Bob Cherry whistled.

"Lerouge has suggested having the hall in the village for the show, and letting the people in to see it," went on Harry Wharton. "That looks as if he were confident, doesn't it?"

"Well, they were confident about the cricket; and you know what kind of a game they put up."

"This is different. We shall have to look out, or they will show us up. As we can't practise in the gym, the only thing is to rig up something in the study or in the Remove room and practise there."

"Good! No harm in that, anyway; and, after all, we can't be too careful about getting fit for a meeting like this."

The chums of the Remove walked into the house together. Wharton was still looking very thoughtful; but Bob Cherry was whistling cheerfully. Even a serious trouble would not have damped Bob Cherry's volatile spirits for long; but Harry Wharton was captain of the Remove, and he felt the weight of the responsibility upon him.

A team of French schoolboys on a holiday in England had visited Greyfriars, and had met the Remove eleven on the cricket-field, and had been most ingloriously defeated.

Ere they departed, however, Henri Lerouge had challenged the Greyfriars fellows to meet them at a gymnastic display; and Harry Wharton had readily accepted the challenge.

To win or lose, he was not the fellow to shrink from any athletic contest, but he could not help realising that this contest would probably be very different from the last one, and would probably end very differently.

Afternoon school was over at Greyfriars. It was a sunny June afternoon. Nugent was coming out with his fishing-rod under his arm as Harry Wharton entered. He stopped.

"Coming out up the river, Harry?"

Wharton shook his head.

"Got business in hand," he replied.

"What's the trouble? Anything on?"

"Yes. We are meeting the French fellows again on Saturday afternoon."

"Well, what does that matter? No need to worry about that until Saturday afternoon, and then there won't be anything to worry about," said Nugent cheerfully.

"Suppose they lick us?"

"Oh, rot!"

"The rotfulness of the supposition is terrific!" exclaimed Hurree Janset Ram Singh, who had joined the other Removites as Harry spoke. "After the extreme wifefulness of the cricketful licking the Frenchful youngsters will not have a show against us. It will be the over-walkfulness for us."

Harry Wharton smiled; whether at Hurree Singh's confidence or at his English, we cannot say.

"That's all very well, Inky," he remarked. "But I'm captain of the Remove, and I'm not going to risk getting licked. I think you had better put your fishing off and come in and have some practice."

"The fishfulness in the pleasant summerful sun is gratifying; but anything to oblige an esteemed chum."

"I say, you fellows—"

"We can rig up some parallel bars in the Remove room," Harry Wharton remarked thoughtfully. "We can get some ropes up to the skylight, too. Then—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"We haven't done much in the gym lately, that's true," said Bob Cherry. "Wharton's idea is a good one, kids."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Are you speaking, Bunter?"

"Yes, I am speaking," said Billy Bunter, blinking through his big spectacles indignantly. "I have been speaking for some time—"

"Then it's time you left off," said Bob Cherry. "Don't say any more, there's a good chap! Suppose we see about rigging up the parallel bars at once—"

"I say, Cherry—"

"Dry up, Billy, there's a good chap! We can get a scaffold pole from the new building by the river, Harry, and that will—"

"I say, Wharton—"

"What is it, Billy?" asked Harry Wharton, turning good-naturedly to the Owl of the Remove.

"I've been thinking—"

"Go and do some more, Billy," said Bob Cherry encouragingly. "I can stand you much better when you're thinking than when you're talking."

"Really, Cherry—"

"Oh, come to the point, Billy!" exclaimed Wharton. "What's the row?"

"I've been thinking that as we're going to meet the French fellows at gymnastics on Saturday you'd better include me in the Greyfriars team," said Billy Bunter. "The French chaps are strong at gymnastics, and we shall have to put up our very best men to get anywhere near them—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wish you wouldn't laugh when I'm talking, Cherry. It's rude, and it disturbs me, and interrupts what I'm saying. I'm willing to undertake the parallel bar part of the business—"

"Can't be did," said Bob Cherry, shaking his head. "There isn't a parallel bar in existence that would bear your weight, Billy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter certainly was not slim.

"That's all very well, Cherry. A joke's a joke; but as we shall have to put forth our strength, as it were, against the froggies, I don't see how Wharton can afford to leave one of the best out of his team—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You know that I've been in a lot for physical culture lately," went on Billy Bunter. "You can't deny that I made rather a stir in the Remove—"

"You did, Billy. I'm not denying that. You made a stir in Bulstrode, too, when you dotted him on the nose in mistake for the punching-ball."

"I had my glasses off then," said Bunter. "I'm rather short-sighted, and I can't see very well without my glasses. Bulstrode should not have got in the way. But there's my offer, Wharton. You'll be sorry if you don't accept it."

"Well, we'll see, Billy," said Wharton, with a smile. "Keep up practice till Saturday, and I'll see what I can do for you."

"Good! I think that a fellow of your judgment will be hardly likely to leave me out," said Billy. "Are you coming in to tea now?"

"No; we're going to get up some practice. Besides, we shall have to have tea in the Hall this evening," said Harry. "Grub's run out in the study."

"Well, there's plenty more in the tuck-shop," said Bunter.

"Unfortunately, Mrs. Mimble has a bad habit of wanting to be paid for it," said Harry. "It grows on her too."

"Oh, come, I suppose some of you have some tin. I don't see how I can be expected to cook for tea if there isn't anything to cook."

"Well, it would be asking rather a lot. We shall have to have tea in the Hall."

"I don't see how that can be done, Wharton—I don't really. I'm fearfully hungry, and tea in the Hall is rotten—bread-and-scraps and weak tea—not at all what I'm accustomed to."

"You'll get accustomed to it in time, Billy," said Nugent. "You never know what you can do till you try."

"Are you all really broke?" asked Bunter.

"Yes—or next door to it."

"Couldn't you wire to your uncle for some money, Wharton?"

"No, I couldn't."

"I shouldn't mind walking down to the village with the wire," said Bunter generously. "I never mind taking a little trouble for a friend. It's a long walk, and the sun is very warm, and I'm not a good walker, but I don't mind doing it for you, Wharton."

"You're too good, Billy. But don't trouble."

"I shouldn't mind a bit. I will go anyway, and you'll see afterwards that it's a good idea. Your uncle is a decent sort, and will shell out—"

"You young ass, there wouldn't be time for my uncle to send the tin, even if I had the cheek to telegraph to him for some!"

"Oh, yes, that's all right—you can send money by telegraph," explained Billy. "He could easily wire a couple of pounds to Friardale. I'll go at once."

Harry Wharton's hand dropped heavily on the shoulder of the fat boy of the Remove as he was turning away.

"You won't do anything of the sort, Billy. If you send a wire to my uncle, I'll give you the biggest licking you ever dreamt about."

"I think you're very selfish, Wharton. Still I can go to Friardale and pawn Inky's watch if you like."

"The pawnfulness is not a cock that will fight, as your English proverb says," said Hurree Singh. "My watchful timekeeper will remain in my honourable pocket."

"Shall I take yours, Wharton?"

"No, thanks."

"I don't see why not. You pawned your watch yourself once to spend the money on Hazeldene, because he was—"

"Hold your tongue, confound you!"

"Certainly. I'm sincerely sorry if I've let any cats out of the bag," said Billy Bunter, blinking round. "Still, it's quite impossible for me to have my tea in Hall after what I've been used to, so something will have to be thought of."

"You'd better think of it, then," said Bob Cherry, grinning. "Come along, you chaps!"

And the chums of the Remove walked away to the Form-room, leaving Billy Bunter to think out that weighty problem.

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THE SECOND CHAPTER

Wharton is Equal to the Occasion.

THE Form-room was empty when the chums of the Remove entered it. Harry Wharton glanced about him, and then up at the big square skylight in the roof.

"Easy enough to get a rope fixed to the crossbar there," he remarked. "A couple of ropes for that matter, with a scaffold-pole slung between them, and there's your horizontal bar."

"It is a wheezy good idea, my honourable chum. But how will you execute the climbfulness to the esteemed skylight?"

"Oh, we can get up there somehow!" said Bob Cherry, confidently.

"Yes. But howfully?"

It was not an easy question to answer. The skylight was a good forty feet above their heads. When the glass was cleaned it was done by means of a long ladder inside; but the juniors hardly hoped to get Gosling's ladder into the Remove-room without being spotted by masters or prefects.

Harry Wharton wrinkled his brows in thought. It was to the young captain of the Form that the Removites always turned in times of difficulty, and Harry Wharton was generally equal to the occasion.

"We cannot climb flyfully up the perpendicularity of the walls," the nabob remarked thoughtfully; "neither can we ascend wingfully in the manner of the esteemed sparrows. How are we to get the rope to the ironful bar, my worthy chum?"

"Perhaps we could sling it over," Bob Cherry suggested.

Harry laughed.

"If you could sling a rope up forty feet over an iron bar, Bob—"

"Well, I dare say it would be difficult."

"The difficulty would only be equalled by the totality of the impossibility," observed Hurree Singh.

"No; we must think of some other way," said Harry.

"If the mountain won't come to Mahomet, Mahomet will have to go to the mountain, that's all. The skylight is up there, and we're down here—ergo, we shall have to climb on the roof and tackle it from outside."

"But if you go Mahometfully to the mountain in this instance, the breakfulness of the neck will have great probability."

"I shall risk that. Some of the bed-room windows look out on the leads of this roof, and it would be easy enough to get out of one of them. If the roof didn't slope it wouldn't be risky at all."

"But it does slope," said Nugent, "and it's jolly dangerous."

"Oh, I shall be careful."

"If you rolled off into the Close you would be smashed to a pancake," said Bob Cherry. "I think we'll leave that idea alone, Harry."

Wharton shook his head.

"Not at all. It only requires some nerve, and there's really no danger. Come on, and let's get the rope, and then we'll get it done."

"Well, if you've made up your mind—"

"I have."

They quitted the Form-room. Nugent and Cherry were looking rather anxious. The nabob shook his head solemnly. But they knew that it was not of much use arguing with Harry Wharton when he had made up his mind.

The coil of rope for the purpose was soon obtained. The chums of the Remove had one in their study, which had often borne the weight of a junior descending from the window, and would have borne half a dozen together.

"Now, which window are we going to use?" Harry remarked reflectively, as they went up the second staircase. "Do you know whether Herr Rosenblum is in?"

"No. I saw him go out," said Nugent. "That was about a quarter of an hour ago."

"Good! Then we'll use his window."

The juniors stopped at the door of Herr Rosenblum's room. Herr Rosenblum, the fat and genial German, was staying at Greyfriars, and acting as German master while the new academy was being built by the rippling waters of the Sark. Herr Rosenblum was a popular master at Greyfriars, and he deserved to be; for although he sometimes flew into a passion, he was generally beaming with good humour.

Harry tapped at his door to ascertain whether he was there or not. There was no reply to the knock, so he opened the door and the chums of the Remove entered. Harry crossed to the window and threw up the sash.

The window looked out upon the leads of the Remove-room roof, which was only a few feet below the sill. Harry drew himself up on the window-sill, and let his feet drop to the leads.

"Hand over the rope, Nugent."

"You'd better let me come with you?"

"One is enough, and we don't want to be spotted. Some of the other windows overlook this roof, and the more we are the more likely to be seen."

"That is a matter of factfulness," the Nabob of Bhanipur remarked.

"You are going alone, then?"

Harry Wharton nodded decidedly.

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"Yes. You fellows get back to the Remove room, and don't forget to close the door here. I sha'n't come in this way; I'll come down the rope into the Remove room when I've fixed it to the bar."

"But—"

"Oh, buzz off! Herr Rosenblum may come in any minute, and then the whole thing will be mucked up."

"Oh, right you are," said Bob Cherry. "Come along, kids!"

And the chums of the Remove left the German master's room, and went downstairs, leaving Harry to carry out his task alone. The window was shut, and if the German had come into his room it was doubtful if he would have noticed the presence of anyone on the leads. Harry turned towards the skylight.

He reached it by crawling along the leads, and to fasten the end of the rope securely to the transverse iron bar was not difficult. Then he allowed the coil to slip through the skylight, and it uncoiled as it fell.

The chums of the Remove were now in the room below. They gazed upward, and their hearts beat as they saw Harry Wharton swing himself in on the rope.

There were other eyes watching Harry if he had only known it. A face was flattened for a moment against the glass of the German master's window. It was only for a moment, and Harry, busy with the work in hand, did not observe it. He swung himself in at the open skylight, and went down the rope hand under hand.

The Removites below watched him anxiously, but they soon saw that he was safe. He came nimbly down the rope, and dropped on his feet upon the floor.

"Good!" exclaimed Nugent.

"The goodfulness is great. The honourable French rotters will have at least one dangerous opponent in our worthy chum Wharton," Hurree Singh remarked.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It was nothing. Let's get to practice."

"Hallo! who's that?"

The chums looked round anxiously as the door of the Remove room opened. It was not likely that a master would enter at that time, but if one did discover them, it would mean a very speedy termination to gymnastics in the Form-room. But it was not a master. It was Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove, who entered the Form-room.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Gymnastics.

BULSTRODE had a far from pleasant expression upon his face. He came straight towards Harry Wharton, and the hero of the Remove glanced at him. There had never been any love lost between Wharton and Bulstrode, especially since the bully of the Remove had been thoroughly licked in a fair fight by his younger opponent.

"I want to speak to you, Wharton."

"Well, we're busy now," said Harry. "Won't it keep?"

"No."

"Then fire away. What is it?"

"It's about this competition on Saturday."

"Well, what about it?"

"You are getting up a Remove team to meet the French gymnasts. The fellows have made you captain of the Remove," said Bulstrode, with a sneer, "so the management of the matter has fallen into your hands."

"It couldn't be in better hands," said Nugent warmly.

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, of course you would say so! You fellows are always sucking up to Wharton, but you can't expect me to do the same."

Nugent turned crimson.

"I expect you to keep a more civil tongue in your head or else take your jacket off," he said. "You can take your choice."

"It wouldn't take me long to lick you, Nugent."

"You're welcome to start."

"I didn't come here for a row, though. The fellows have chosen Wharton for Form captain, and I suppose they have a right to do as they like?"

"Have you only just found that out?" asked Bob Cherry.

Bulstrode bit his lip.

"Well, as the arrangements are in your hands, Wharton, I've come to speak to you about it, that's all. I'm pretty good as a gymnast, and I think I ought to be one of the representatives of the Remove in the contest on Saturday."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"I don't think so, Bulstrode."

"Of course, you would say so."

"Well, if you knew that, you needn't have asked me," said Wharton rather tartly; "but it's quite apart from any personal feeling. You are not up to the form of a dozen fellows I could name in the Remove."

"I could lick any fellow in the Form."

"It's not a question of fisticuffs. You petered out on the cricket field in the last Remove match because you had no wind. As a matter of fact, I know perfectly well that you smoke cigarettes in your study."

Bulstrode sneered.

"Are you setting up to preach to us?"

"No, I'm not," said Harry Wharton sharply. "But anybody who knows anything, knows that a fellow who smokes will never make anything of an athlete. You know it as well as I do. You think it's smart and up-to-date to break the rules of the college, and it's no business of mine; but you can't expect me to take you into the Remove team and let you make a failure in public, and get the Remove and yourself laughed at."

Bulstrode turned crimson.

"So you think I should be laughed at, do you?"

"I know you would. You can't have forgotten how the fellows cackled the other day when you were wheezy in a little run across the cricket field. A kid in the Third Form beat you in pace."

"You can put it how you like," said Bulstrode bitterly; "but I know your real motives well enough. You made up your mind when you first came to Greyfriars to oust me, and take my place in the Form."

"That's not true."

"It is true, and you know it. And I'll make you repent it yet."

And Bulstrode, driving his hands deep into his trousers' pockets, strode from the room. The Removites stared after him.

"By Jove, he's cutting up rough about it!" Nugent remarked. "I knew he wouldn't be pleased; but this is a bit thick."

"The thickfulness is terrific."

"Oh, never mind him!" said Bob Cherry. "Let's get on with the washing."

"That is a goodful idea. I am waiting impatiently for the washfulness to proceed."

"Right-ho!" said Harry. "Shut the door or we shall have a crowd round. Let's get on this rope; it will easily bear the weight of the lot of us, and we can do some climbing practice at any rate."

The chums of the Remove were stronger at outdoor games than at indoor gymnastics. But they were lithe and active, and they could climb. Harry Wharton was determined that the representatives of the Remove at the contest should be in good form, and was willing to work his chums to skeletons, if necessary, for that object. Nugent dropped off the rope gasping.

"I say, this takes the wind out of you!" he exclaimed.

"Never mind; come on!"

"Wait a minute."

"Come on!"

"The waitfulness would be gratifying to the weary limbs," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "The exertfulness of the climb is terrific."

"Come on," said Harry Wharton inexorably. "I'm going to climb up this rope to the skylight, and you're going to climb after me."

"But——"

"Come on!"

"Oh, come on!" grunted Nugent. "He won't be happy till he's broken all our necks. It's getting dusk, Wharton."

"I've noticed that," said Harry cheerfully. "It generally does get dusk in the twilight of the evening, you know."

"Oh, don't be funny!"

"Come on!"

"If the comefulness is imperative, we had betterfully obey the orders of the esteemed beast," said Hurree Singh. "Come onfully!"

"Follow your leader."

Harry Wharton swung himself up the rope with tireless arms. After him went Bob Cherry, and then Nugent, then Hurree Janset Ram Singh. Bob Cherry gave a sudden howl.

"Ow, ow!"

"What's the matter?" asked Harry, glancing downward as he swung.

"You've shoved your beastly boot on my beastly nose, and nearly broken the beastly thing," said Bob fiercely.

"You shouldn't shove your nose against my boot."

"I didn't. You shoved your boot against my nose."

"Oh, blow your nose! Come on!"

"We are coming, my esteemed chum; but the breathfulness is petering out," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "Nugent, my esteemed chum, could you kindly contrive not to kick me on the chin again?"

"Well, I'll try, since you're so polite about it," said Nugent. "You shall have the next cosh on the ear instead."

"Thank you. I would rather have it chinfully than earfully, but if you would be morefully careful, my worthy chum——"

"Hush!" muttered Harry Wharton. "Cave! There's some beast coming in."

"I expect it's only Bulstrode."

"Hush!"

The door of the Form-room had opened again. In the dusk, which was deeper in the Remove-room than out of doors, a dim figure was visible to the juniors hanging on the rope. It was not Bulstrode this time. Even in the dusk, from the height of nearly twenty feet, they knew well enough the figure of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove.

"My only hat!" murmured Frank Nugent.

"Quiet!" whispered Harry Wharton.

"The quietfulness is——"

"Hush!"

"My esteemed chum——"

"Hush, fathhead!"

Mr. Quelch was crossing to his desk. In the dusk he did not see the rope dangling from the ceiling, and as he did not glance upward, he naturally did not see the juniors. What the Form master would say if he found them at their gymnastic exercises in that style they could guess. But there was a chance that he would leave the room again without discovering them.

The juniors hung on to the rope with bated breath. Mr. Quelch walked straight across the room in the dusk—and ran right against the swinging rope. He started back with an amazed exclamation as it "biffed" upon his nose.

"Dear me! What—what—what——"

The rope was swinging to and fro. Mr. Quelch put out his hand and caught it.

"Dear me, it is a rope!"

The Form master was amazed. A rope swinging from the skylight was sufficiently unusual in the Remove-room. The master of the Remove grasped it and shook it as he glanced upward to see where it was fastened. There was a gasp from above.

"Hold on there!"

Mr. Quelch let go the rope in his amazement.

"There is somebody——"

"Don't shake the rope like that, sir!" gasped Nugent. "We shall all drop off like apples if you do."

"Nugent!"

"Yes, sir."

"What—what are you doing? How came this rope here? What are you doing on this rope?"

"Hanging on, sir."

"Don't be impudent, Nugent. Descend to the floor at once."

"Certainly, sir."

Nugent slid to the floor. The Form master fixed a stern eye upon the three figures still clinging to the rope in the dimness above.

"Come down at once, all of you!"

The Remove master did not mean exactly what he said. He meant that the juniors were all to descend immediately. But they took him at his word, and all came down at once. There was a slithering sound, and three juniors whizzed down and rolled on the floor round the feet of the astounded Remove master.

Mr. Quelch uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Good heavens! Are you hurt, boys?"

"No, sir," said Harry Wharton, regaining his feet. "I'm all right for one, sir."

"So am I," said Bob Cherry, getting up. "You told us to come down all at once, sir, and we thought we ought to obey you."

"You caused me alarm."

"Sorry, sir, but we always obey orders."

"How dare you fasten up this rope in the Form-room, and perform these ridiculous antics upon it?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, changing the subject.

"The gym is closed for repairs, sir."

"That is no reason why you should turn the Form-room into a bear-garden, I presume," said the Remove master, sternly.

"Oh, no, sir; we were turning it into a gymnasium, that's all, sir," said Bob Cherry innocently. "We haven't any bears or animals of any sort here."

Mr. Quelch bit his lip.

"You will all be dealt with severe—— Hurree Singh, why do you not get up? How dare you remain sprawled upon the floor in the presence of your Form master?"

The Nabob of Bhanipur groaned.

The chums looked alarmed for a moment. Harry Wharton knelt by the nabob's side and caught a wink from his eye, and a lurking grin on his dusky face, and understood. But the Remove master saw neither the wink nor the grin.

"Hurree Singh, are you hurt?"

The dusky junior groaned again.

"You see the result of this absurd freak," said the Remove master severely. "Hurree Singh has been injured by——"

"By coming down so quickly when you called him, sir."

"Nonsense! Hurree Singh, where are you hurt?"

The nabob only groaned.

Mr. Quelch looked really concerned. He was a severe but kind-hearted man. He stepped nearer to the sprawling nabob.

"Hurree Singh, my poor lad——"

"Pray excuse the groanfulness, respected sahib," said the

nabob faintly. "I wish you would extend the beneficence of the gracious pardon to me and——"

"Certainly I pardon you, Hurree Singh. But——"

"If the benignity of the greatly to be esteemed pardon could extend itself to the worthy rotters here, I should——"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Quelch, looking worried. "This is a most unfortunate occurrence. I am willing to overlook this absurd freak, Hurree Singh, on your part and the part of the others. I only hope you are not severely hurt."

"The painfulness is greatly relieved, worthy sahib."

"What do you mean?" asked the Form master suspiciously. "Is it possible that——"

"It was the anticipativeness of the heavy punishment that caused me to groan with the terrors of the apprehensions," said the nabob. "I am all right limbfully, respected sahib."

And the Nabob of Bhanipur showed that his limbs were all right, as he said, by immediately getting upon his feet.

Bob Cherry suppressed a chuckle. Nugent turned his head to hide a grin. Harry Wharton remained as grave as a judge, and as for Hurree Singh, his features might have been carved in bronze. The colour crept into the Form master's cheeks.

"Hurree Singh, you led me to suppose that you had been injured by the fall."

"I am truly sorry for the misunderstandingfulness," purred Hurree Singh. "I was simply overcome by the terrors of the sahib's wrath. The terrorfulness was terrific, and——"

"I have pardoned you."

"It was noble of the esteemed sahib to——"

"You may go."

"Certainly, sahib."

"But if any of you ever play these tricks in the Form-room again I shall cane you severely. You understand?"

"The understandfulness is great."

"Now go!"

"Shall we get the rope down, sir?" asked Harry Wharton.

"No; I will tell Gosling to get his ladder and do so. The rope will be confiscated. You may go."

And the chums of the Remove left the Form-room, glad enough to get off so cheaply. In the passage they hugged the grinning nabob.

"Good old Inky!" said Bob Cherry, giving him a slap on the back that made him stagger. "You saved us from a hundred lines each, at least."

The nabob grinned blissfully.

"It was the great brainfulness that enabled me to pull the august leg of the teacher sahib," he remarked. "It was somewhat roughful on the Quelchful sahib, but——"

"But it was ripping," said Nugent. "Let's get along to the study and see if Billy Bunter has scared up anything for tea. It's too late for tea in Hall now."

And the chums of the Remove hurried along the passage to No. 1. The door of the study was open, and a scent of frying bacon proceeded from the room. It was evident that Billy Bunter had been equal to the occasion.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Billy's Treat.

THE chums of the Remove entered No. 1 Study with rather mixed feelings. They were hungry after their exercise, and they had had no tea, and that meal was long overdue.

The scent of frying bacon was extremely gratifying to them. But they could not help wondering how Billy Bunter had raised the funds.

Mrs. Mimble at the school shop would not have trusted him with a stale bun. She knew him too well. On a previous occasion Bunter had raised the wind by selling Harry Wharton's cricket bat, for the good of the cause. Bob Cherry's pocket-knife had had a narrow escape of sharing the same fate. And so the question was a very important one to the Removites. How had Billy Bunter raised the wind?

Bunter looked up with a face as red as a beetroot from the grate. He had a large frying-pan going, on a fire of wood, and he was hot. He was in his shirt-sleeves, with the sleeves rolled up to the elbow. Bob Cherry felt in his pocket to ascertain that the pocket-knife was still there, and breathed a sigh of relief when he discovered that it was.

Harry Wharton glanced at the table. It was spread with a nice white cloth, and on the cloth were various comestibles. There was a new loaf and a pat of butter, a pot of strawberry jam, and a jar of marmalade. There was ham and tongue, and radishes. The bacon was cooking, and the eggs were done, and spread in a dish on the hob.

"My only hat," said Harry, in amazement. "Where did you get all this from, Billy?"

Bunter grunted.

"That's all right, Wharton. It's my treat."

"That's all very well," said Nugent. "If it's your treat we're awfully grateful. But where did you raise the tin?"

"That's all right."

"Have you sold Wharton's new cricket bat?"

"No, I haven't."

"Have you pawned anything belonging to any of us?"

"Really, Cherry, you are very suspicious. I always told you that I was going to stand a feed when my postal order came——"

"Oh, if it's your postal order come at last, that's all right,"

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said Bob Cherry. "It's been a jolly long time coming, and I thought——"

"There has been some delay in the post——"

"But has it come at last?" asked Nugent.

Bunter was busy turning the bacon in the frying-pan, and he pretended not to hear the question. Nugent tapped him on the shoulder.

"Has your postal-order come, Billy?"

"Eh?"

"I say, has your postal-order come?" roared Nugent.

"The bacon's nearly done——"

"Has your postal order come?"

"I've poached the eggs—I thought you fellows would like them best that way, and I think you'll agree that they're really ripping——"

"Has your postal order come?"

"Eh? Did you speak, Nugent?"

"Yes, I did, and you know it jolly well. I asked you if your blessed postal order had come," said Nugent, wrathfully.

"I don't see——"

"Has it come?"

"Really, Nugent——"

"Has it come?" roared Nugent.

"Well, no, it hasn't exactly come," said Billy Bunter, wriggling. "I'm expecting it by every post now, and I really don't quite understand the delay, but it hasn't exactly come, Nugent."

"I was pretty sure it hadn't——"

"I don't see why——"

"Where did you get the tin from for this feed?"

"I'm standing treat——"

"I know you are, but where did you get the tin from?"

"Really, Nugent——"

"If you haven't pawned anything belonging to us, what have you sold?"

"I haven't sold anything."

"Then what utter mug have you found to lend you money?" demanded Nugent.

"I don't see why a fellow should be a mug for lending me money, Nugent. I should pay it back immediately my postal order came."

"Do you mean to say that somebody has lent you money on the strength of your giddy postal order?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Yes, I do."

"What ass was it, then? I should have thought everybody in the Remove knew you and your postal order too well."

"Really, Cherry——"

"There's a new chap in the Form," said Nugent, "Levison, you know. He may not know Billy Bunter's little ways."

"That's it," said Bob, with conviction. "Bunter has been plundering Levison."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Levison doesn't look to me the kind of fellow to lend money very easily, without any security," he remarked.

"Well, that's so, but a fellow who knew Billy Bunter wouldn't lend him twopence and expect to see it again, so I fancy it must have been the new fellow."

"Was it Levison, Billy?"

"I'm sincerely sorry, but I can't answer impertinent questions——"

"Why, what do you mean, you young ass?"

"I don't see why——"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Let him keep the secret if he likes," he said. "As we are going to wolf the feed, we shall stand the cash when it's wanted, I suppose, and meanwhile, I'm jolly hungry. Let's have tea."

"The wisdomfulness of our worthy chum's remark is terrific. Let us have the tealful meal, my esteemed friends."

"No objection," said Bob Cherry. "I can't understand it, that's all, and I don't see what Billy wants to be so close about it for. He generally has his mouth wide open and all his affairs running out of it."

"Really, Cherry——"

"Oh, hand over the bacon, and some of the eggs, Billy."

"But I say——"

"No, don't say anything. Your cooking is ever so much better than your conversation. Let's have the eggs."

"Oh, very well, but——"

"That's right, pass them along."

The hungry juniors fell to on the viands with a will. There was plenty, and there was variety. There could not be a doubt that Billy Bunter was a good cook. As he had been taking snacks, as he called them, all the time he had been cooking, he was not in a hurry for his tea, and he served all the others first. Then he sat down to a big plate containing half a dozen rashers of bacon and as many eggs.

"Ripping," said Bob Cherry.

"Yes, rather," said Nugent, as he helped himself to a fourth egg.

"The ratherfulness is terrific," said the nabob, who was eating banana fritters, his meals always being much lighter than those of his English chums. "The esteemed Bunter is worthy of the medal of tin."

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in, fathead," said Bob Cherry in his polite way.

The door opened, and a somewhat thin-faced lad stepped in. It was Levison, the new boy in the Remove Form.

Bob Cherry looked round.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Come and have tea, Levison."

Levison looked at him suspiciously.

"Thanks, I remember the last feed I had with you fellows," he replied. "I'm not taking any more doses of liquorice powder in my grub, thanks."

"That was an accident—"

"Yes, I know exactly how much an accident it was."

"If you have come here to get a thick ear, you're going just the right way to work," exclaimed Bob Cherry, reddening. "When a fellow doubts my word I generally wipe up the floor with him."

"Oh, keep your wool on—I know all about the jokes played on newcomers, and of course I couldn't expect—"

"I tell you—"

"Oh, don't argue with him," said Nugent. "He's a pig, that's what's the matter with him. This isn't your sty, pig. Travel."

Levison turned red.

"I came here—"

"Yes, we can see that; now we want to see you go. Shut the door."

"As your great poet Shakespeare remarks," said Hurree Singh, "some are born pigs, some achieve piggishness, and some have piggishness thrust upon them. The first and the second apply to the esteemed Levison. The third applies to our honourable selves: we have piggishness thrust upon us in the shape of the esteemed rotter Levison. The pleasurefulness will be great when he disappears from our viewfulness."

"I came here to speak about the contest on Saturday," said Levison, "not to have any of your rotten grub, or to listen to any of your rotten jokes. I hear that you chaps are going to make guys of yourselves in the town hall in Friardale, with the French gymnasts to show you up."

"Got anything more nice to say?" asked Bob Cherry. "You may as well get it all over before I sling you out into the passage."

"Only that I'm willing to take part in the gymnastics if you like. I'm pretty good in that line, and I've taken a prize—"

"A prize for swelled head, I suppose?"

"I've taken a prize in a gymnastic competition—"

"All entries under nine years of age, I suppose," said Nugent sarcastically.

"I'm willing to—"

"Are you willing to get on the other side of that door?" asked Harry Wharton. "If you are not, you'll get put there."

"Oh, very well. I've said enough—"

"Too much," said Bob Cherry. "Too much, my friend; much too much."

"The too muchfulness is terrific."

"Well, I'll go, but—"

"That's right, go, and never mind the but."

Levison walked out of the study and slammed the door. The chums of the Remove grinned round the tea-table.

"That fellow gets on my nerves," Bob Cherry remarked. "I never met such a distrustful beast in all my natural."

"I say, you fellows—"

"He still thinks we played a joke on him the day he came to Greyfriars, though we all had some of the stuff, and were all ill," said Nugent. "I'm beginning to think that what he wants is a licking."

"And the lickfulness ought to be terrific," said the Nabob of Bhanipur emphatically.

"We don't want any of his gas about his gymnastic prowess," Harry Wharton remarked. "There may be something in what he says, but that wasn't the way to say it. Whether he would be of any use or not, we can't stand him."

"Quite correctful."

"I say, you fellows—"

"What's the matter with you, Billy?"

"Have you decided whether I am to represent the Remove in the contest on Saturday?" asked Billy Bunter anxiously. "I want to see the Form make a good show, but I'm not going to take the trouble to practise unless I'm to take a part."

"I think we'll leave you over till we have a gastronomic contest," said Harry Wharton. "You could keep your end up in that line. But I'm afraid that gymnastics are not quite your mark, Billy."

"Well, you really don't know much about it, Wharton—"

"Thank you," said Harry, laughing. "All the same, Billy, I don't think we shall want you to help us on Saturday. You can cook a big feed for us when we get back, if you like."

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Wharton Is Suspected!

HERR ROSENBLAUM came along the upper corridor with his little jerky steps, and his fat face glowing after his walk. It was dusk in the corridor, but he did not trouble to take a light. He knew his way well enough. He opened the door of his room, and entered. The blind was down, and the room was very dark.

"Mein gootness," murmured the German master. "Tat plind must haf come down mit itself pefore. I did not take it down after."

He felt his way into the room. He knew there was a box of matches on the dressing-table, and he groped his way towards it. Suddenly he gave a terrific yell, and bumped down heavily upon the carpet.

It was a nasty fall—not that the Herr was much hurt, but the suddenness of it had jarred all his nerves.

He sat up dazed.

"Mein gootness!"

His foot had caught in a cord stretched along the floor, and he had gone down helplessly. As he realised that he had fallen into a trap set by some practical joker, the German's fat, good-natured face grew savage. He could understand a joke, and pardon one, but not one of that kind.

He rose gingerly to his feet and groped to the table, taking care to feel every step before he put his foot down. He felt for the matches, found them, struck one, and lighted the gas. Then he looked for the trap into which he had fallen.

The cord was stretched across the floor from a leg of the bedstead to a nail jammed in the wainscot of the room. It had been directly in his path as he entered, and even had it been lighter he would probably not have seen it. But the blind had evidently been lowered, so as to make it certain that he would not see the cord.

The German's brow was very dark.

"Ach! Tat is a trap for me to fall into!" he murmured, "and I fall into it meinself in te dark after! Ach!"

He rubbed his limbs ruefully. He had hurt them a little, he had a bruise or two, and his heart was still palpitating from the shock.

"I tinks tat tat poy who laid tat trap wants some bunishments," murmured Herr Rosenblum. "I tinks tat he gets it, too."

The German went to the door, and glanced out into the passage.

He had been some time out, and who might have been in his room in the interval he could not possibly guess.

Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, was coming along the passage, and the German called to him.

"Vingate, I speaks mit you."

The captain of Greyfriars stopped.

"What is it, Herr Rosenblum?"

"Look at tat," said the German master, turning back into the room, and pointing to the taut cord stretched across the floor.

Wingate looked, and his brow darkened.

"Did you fall over that, sir?"

"Ach! Ja, ja, and I feels te pain in my pones," said the German master.

"It is a silly and dangerous trick," said the Sixth-Former. "The perpetrator of it ought to have the biggest licking of his life."

"Ach! Tat is vat I tinks, too."

"You don't know whom it was, sir?"

Herr Rosenblum shook his head.

"I have not te idea, Vingate. I not knows te poy tat blay such a trick."

"It was one of the youngsters, of course. One of the rougher lot in the Remove, I expect," said Wingate. "Have you punished any of them lately?"

"Dere vas Bulstrode. I gif him hundret lines."

"H'm! I should think Bulstrode would have too much sense for a trick like this. He is older than most of the fellows in the Remove. But we shall be able to find out, I expect, who has been hero. Shall I inquire, sir?"

"Certainly, Vingate."

The captain of Greyfriars walked away with a frowning brow. He could forgive horseplay among the juniors; but this was a dangerous trick, and called for condign punishment. A sprain, or even a broken limb, might have been the result of such a fall in the dark.

Wingate went towards the junior common-room, but as he passed No. 1 Study he changed his mind. He knocked at the door and went in. Even prefects at Greyfriars always knocked at the door before entering a junior study.

The chums of the Remove had finished their tea. Billy Bunter and Nugent were gone, but Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Hurree Singh were still in the study.

"Has anyone of you been larking in Herr Rosenblum's room?" asked the captain of Greyfriars, coming directly to the point.

The Removites looked at one another without replying.

It was easy to see that they had something in their minds on the subject, and Wingate's look grew darker as he fixed his eyes upon them.

"I want an answer to my question," he said.

"We haven't been larking there," said Harry Wharton.

"That is not a direct answer," said the Greyfriars captain sternly. "Have you been in the room at all?"

Harry Wharton had never been known to tell an untruth. His eyes met Wingate's fearlessly as he replied:

"Yes."

"All of you?" asked the Sixth-Former.

"Yes."

"What did you go there for?"

"To let a rope down through the skylight of the Remove-room to do some gymnastic exercises."

"Did you tie a cord across the floor for Herr Rosenblum to fall over?"

Harry Wharton looked amazed.

"Certainly not."

"Was anyone of you alone there?"

"Yes," said Harry at once. "I was alone there, but I didn't tie any cord across the floor. I like Herr Rosenblum too well to play such a trick on him, especially such a dangerous trick as that."

"Someone did so," said Wingate. "I'm sorry to have to suspect you, Wharton; but you say you were alone in the room while Herr Rosenblum was out?"

"That is true."

"Then I——"

"But I say also that I never played such a trick," said Harry. "I did not know that anyone had done so."

"Is Herr Rosenblum hurt?" asked Bob Cherry.

"He seems to be. He is angry, anyway. You had better go along to his room and explain to him, Wharton."

"Certainly."

"The explainfulness will clear up the misapprehensiveness on the subject," the nabob remarked. "My esteemed friend Wharton is incapable of the fatheaded jape you describe, Wingate."

"I hope he is," said Wingate grimly, and he left the study.

Harry Wharton was looking rather blue.

"I suppose I must go," he said. "This is rotten. I don't like Herr Rosenblum to suspect me of playing a trick on him."

"If he's wild about it, he mayn't stop to inquire too closely," Bob Cherry remarked. "Suppose you leave it over for a bit before you go?"

Harry laughed.

"They might come to look for me. I'd better go."

And the hero of the Remove left No. 1 Study, and took his way upstairs to the German master's room.

Herr Rosenblum looked up as he appeared at the open door.

"Ach! Is tat you, Vharton?"

"Yes, sir."

"You vishes to speak to me, ain't it?"

"Wingate has sent me to you, sir," said Harry Wharton, quietly and respectfully. "I was in your room while you were out——"

The German master's genial face darkened like a thunder-cloud.

"Ach! You vas in mein room, Vharton?"

"Yes, sir. I——"

"And you vas blay tat trick on me, ain't it?"

"No, sir," said Harry Wharton quietly. "I shouldn't play a trick like that upon anybody, and certainly not upon you, sir. I came through this room to get out on the leads, to let a rope down into the Remove-room. That is all, sir."

Herr Rosenblum looked at him keenly.

"Den who vas it tat tie te cord tat I fall over mit meinself?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Ach! You vas here, and I know not if anypody else did come here, and yet you can tell me tat you not tie te rope."

"I did not, sir."

The German nursed his fat chin thoughtfully.

Harry Wharton met his glance fearlessly. There was truth in the junior's face and in his tones, and the German master nodded his head at last.

"I pelieve you, mein poy. I pelieve you; but dere has been somevun who play tat trick, somevun who did come to mein room, and I tink I find him sometime and make him sorry; hein?"

"I wish I knew who it was, sir; but I haven't the faintest idea," said Harry Wharton earnestly. "Nobody in the Remove, I think, would play such a trick on you. They might on some of the masters."

The German smiled genially.

"Dere are two or tree poy in te Remove who might, I tink," he said. "But no matter. I tink I find out, and den I talks to him after. You may go, my poy."

"Thank you, sir."

Harry Wharton left the room. There was a thoughtful frown upon his face.

His mind was busy as he went downstairs. In the passage upon which the Remove studies opened he met Bulstrode.

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The bully of the Remove looked at him with a grin, and a sudden suspicion flashed into Harry's brain.

He walked straight up to the burly Removeite with a flash in his eyes.

"Bulstrode——"

"Well," said Bulstrode, with a sneer, "what's the trouble?"

"Did you tie the cord in Herr Rosenblum's room for him to fall over? Did you tie it there because I had been there, and you hoped that the blame would fall upon me, you cad?"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter's Gymnastics.

BULSTRODE was so taken aback for a moment that he could only stare at the captain of the Remove.

Harry's eyes were blazing, and his fists were clenched. It needed very little to make him attack the bully of the Remove there and then.

But Bulstrode quickly recovered himself.

"Who says I tied a cord in the German rotter's room?" he exclaimed.

"Nobody. I asked you if you did."

"What business is it of yours?"

"This; that I have been suspected of it."

Bulstrode laughed mockingly.

"If you play such tricks as that on a master you must expect to get licked," he said. "I can't say I'm sorry for you."

"But I did not play the trick, and I have not been licked," said Harry Wharton quietly.

Bulstrode stared at him blankly.

"I thought you had just come from Herr Rosenblum's room."

"Yes, and you thought I had been licked, too," said Harry, with a scornful curl of the lip. "But Herr Rosenblum believed my assertion that I was not guilty, and he is still looking for the fellow who did it."

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders.

"Hope he will find him," he remarked.

"I believe it was you yourself," said Harry Wharton abruptly.

"Can you prove that?"

"Oh, I should not think of giving you away to the German master," said Harry contemptuously. "You knew that I had been to the room, and you did this to get me into a row, I believe. If I were sure, I should take the matter into my own hands. If I discover that it is the truth for certain, you can look out for yourself."

And Harry Wharton strode on, leaving Bulstrode standing in the passage, and scowling after him savagely.

"Licked?" was Bob Cherry's first question, as Harry re-entered No. 1 Study.

Wharton shook his head with a smile.

"No. The Herr believed my explanation."

"Good old Dutchy!" exclaimed Bob Cherry heartily. "But I wonder who it was played that little jape on him?"

"I think it was Bulstrode."

"Bulstrode! I shouldn't be surprised, but how do you know?"

Wharton explained. Bob Cherry nodded emphatically.

"Bulstrode right enough," he exclaimed, "but you can't very well wipe up the floor with him without some kind of proof."

"No, I suppose not."

"But if you should know certainly, then the wipefulness should be terrific," observed Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

The door of the study was opened at that moment, and Nugent looked in. He was grinning gleefully.

"You fellows here!" he exclaimed, "come along."

"What's on?"

"Billy Bunter is—but he'll be off pretty soon, I expect, so come on."

"What the——"

"Oh, buck up!"

And Nugent ran down the passage. Somewhat mystified, the chums of the Remove followed him into the common-room. The room was crowded with grinning fellows, and the centre of attraction was Billy Bunter.

Bunter was on the table. He had a chair there, and it was evident that he was trying to balance himself on his hands on the chair, with his feet elevated above. The fellows had crowded round to watch. They knew Bunter's physical culture of old, and they expected disaster.

Bunter glanced round as the chums of the Remove came in. He adjusted his spectacles and blinked at Harry Wharton.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, "What's the little game, Billy?"

"I am giving a small gymnastic display for the benefit of the fellows," explained Billy Bunter. "There will be a lot of the balancing and so on to-morrow, at the contest in Friardale Hall, and I thought I'd show you how this should be done."

"Bravo!"

"I am going to balance myself on my hands on this chair, with my feet in the air," explained Bunter.

"Go it, Bunt."

"The chief difficulty is, that whenever I turn my head upside down, my spectacles slip over my forehead," said Bunter. "That is a difficulty which most athletes don't have to contend with."

"But then they don't have your splendid physique," said Hazeldene.

"Well, that's true enough, so I suppose I mustn't grumble," said Bunter, "but it's a difficulty in the way of the demonstration, that's all."

"Why don't you take your goggles off?" asked Skinner.

"Really, Skinner, I couldn't see if I took them off."

"You don't want to see to stand on your head."

"I'm not going to stand on my head; I'm going to stand on my hands, and it's a difficult feat of balancing. However, I am just going to begin."

"You've said that before."

"I am really going to begin now. You might watch me, Wharton, and you too, Cherry. You might pick up a wrinkle or two from me."

"Certainly," said Harry laughing. "Go ahead."

Bunter laid his hands upon the seat of the chair, and raised one leg from the table. Then he put it down again.

"Well, why don't you go on?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Really, Cherry, I—"

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing, but there is really no hurry. You spoil these things by hurrying them. What I really want to show you is a wrinkle in gymnastics—"

"Well, go ahead and show us then," said Nugent, "and cut the cackle."

"Really, Nugent—"

"Oh, get on with the washing."

"Pray allow the washfulness to proceed, my worthy idiotic chum," purred the Nabob of Bhanipur. "We are waiting with terrific impatience for the washfulness to proceed."

"I'm just going to begin."

"Oh, begin, and not so much jaw," said Russell.

"Well, here goes, then."

One of Billy Bunter's fat little legs was raised again, then the other one followed it. He doubled up his knees and supported himself for a moment on his hands with his feet clear of the table. Then he plumped them down again.

"There you are!" he exclaimed, looking round.

"There who is?" asked Skinner.

"I mean, there's the performance."

"The what?"

"The balancing trick I was going to show you—"

"Well, you haven't shown us yet. You said you were going to begin, and you haven't."

"Yes I have. That's it."

"What's it?" asked Bob Cherry, looking mystified.

"Weren't you watching me?" exclaimed Billy Bunter, indignantly.

"Yes, I was watching you, and I thought you were going to start, but you haven't started yet."

"Really, Cherry—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent. "Billy thinks he has done it! He's raised his fat tootsies about a couple of feet from the table and thinks—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Nugent, you exaggerate—"

"Well, yes, perhaps I do a little, Billy—about eighteen inches from the table would be more correct," said Nugent, innocently.

"I didn't mean that way—"

"I say, when is the performance going to begin?" demanded Hazeldene, "blessed if I'm going to wait here all night waiting for Bunter to start."

"Really, Vaseline—"

"Oh, I'm off."

"Hold on," said Billy Bunter, "it is possible that when one is upside down, with one's spectacles falling off, the true sense of vision is impaired."

"Go hon!" said Skinner. "Upon the whole, I should say it was possible."

"I will now give a second demonstration, and you will note that I shall raise myself in a perfectly perpendicular position with my feet in a direct line above my head."

"I'll believe that when I see it."

"You will see it in a moment, Skinner. I'm just going to begin."

"Begin, then, ass, and cut the jaw."

"Go it, Owl!"

Bunter placed his hands on the chair again. His fat little legs rose in the air, and stuck out almost at right angles with his body.

"Is that straight up?" he asked breathlessly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, is that straight up?"

"'Nother yard!" howled Bob Cherry. "Your legs are sticking out like signs on a finger-post. You're like a pocket knife half open."

Billy made a great effort and got his legs about an inch straighter up.

"Is that right?"

"It's according to what you mean it for," said Nugent. "If you're representing a jack-knife in the process of opening, it's not so bad."

"Am I straight up?"

"'Nother yard or two will do it."

Billy Bunter made another effort, and his legs went higher but unfortunately he lost his balance in making the effort.

The chair reeled over and Billy Bunter plumped on the table, and rolled off it upon the floor, before a hand could be raised to save him. He sat up on the floor with a dazed and bewildered expression that made the Removites shriek with laughter.

"Wh-wh-what has happened?" he gasped.

"You have," yelled Skinner. "Oh, my hat!"

"What? Eh, what—?"

"You went over, you ass!"

"Did I? I feel a very painful jarring in my bones," said Bunter. "Where are my spectacles? They must have fallen off. Lend me a hand, Wharton," he added, as Nugent came towards him with outstretched hand to help him up.

"I'm not Wharton, ass."

"Oh, is it you, Nugent. I'm rather short-sighted without my glasses. Mind you don't tread on them. If you do they will break, and then I shall expect you to pay for them."

Bob Cherry put the glasses on Billy's nose.

"There you are, Owl."

The Owl blinked at him.

"Thank you, Buistode."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean Cherry. I have received a shock to my system, and shall not give any more gymnastic displays this evening."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And upon second thoughts, Wharton, you needn't count on me for the gymnastic contest to-morrow. It's really hardly worth my while."

"That's all right," said Harry, laughing. "I wasn't counting upon you, Billy."

"I don't suppose any of the French fellows will be up to my form," Bunter went on, unheeding. "We must be fair, and give them a chance. Dear me, I feel quite giddy, and I have two or three different pains in different places. Yes, decidedly, upon the whole you had better not count upon me for to-morrow, Wharton."

And Billy Bunter toddled away to look for some embrocation, followed by a yell of laughter from the Remove.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Strange Disappearance.

"NOBODY here!"

It was Bob Cherry who spoke, as the chums of the Remove came through the trees on the bank of the Sark on Saturday afternoon. School was over, and dinner too, and the Greyfriars Remove had several hours before them, before the time came for meeting the French gymnasts in the village of Friardale.

The idea of borrowing a scaffold pole from the new building to be used as a horizontal bar, was easy enough to put into practice now that the workmen were gone. The new building was in a very early stage of its erection, and scaffolding and ladders and ropes lay about in confusion. The chums of the Remove looked quickly about them as they came upon the scene. But there was no one in sight.

"Nobody," repeated Bob Cherry. "Easy enough to run off one of the poles."

"Not so easy to get it into the study, though."

"Oh, easy enough," said Bob airily. "We shan't try to carry it upstairs, of course. It wouldn't go into the house for one thing."

"It would be easier to get it into the room windowfully," Hurree Jamset Ram Singh remarked.

"Exactly, my Inky friend; that's the idea."

"It won't all go into the study," said Nugent, glancing at the pole Bob Cherry was looking at.

"That's the beauty of it," said Bob. "A lot of it will remain outside the window, and we can fasten it to the window-sill at an angle."

"Then it won't be a horizontal bar."

"I don't see why a slanting bar won't answer the purpose. Don't start hunting for difficulties, Nugent."

"What I say is—"

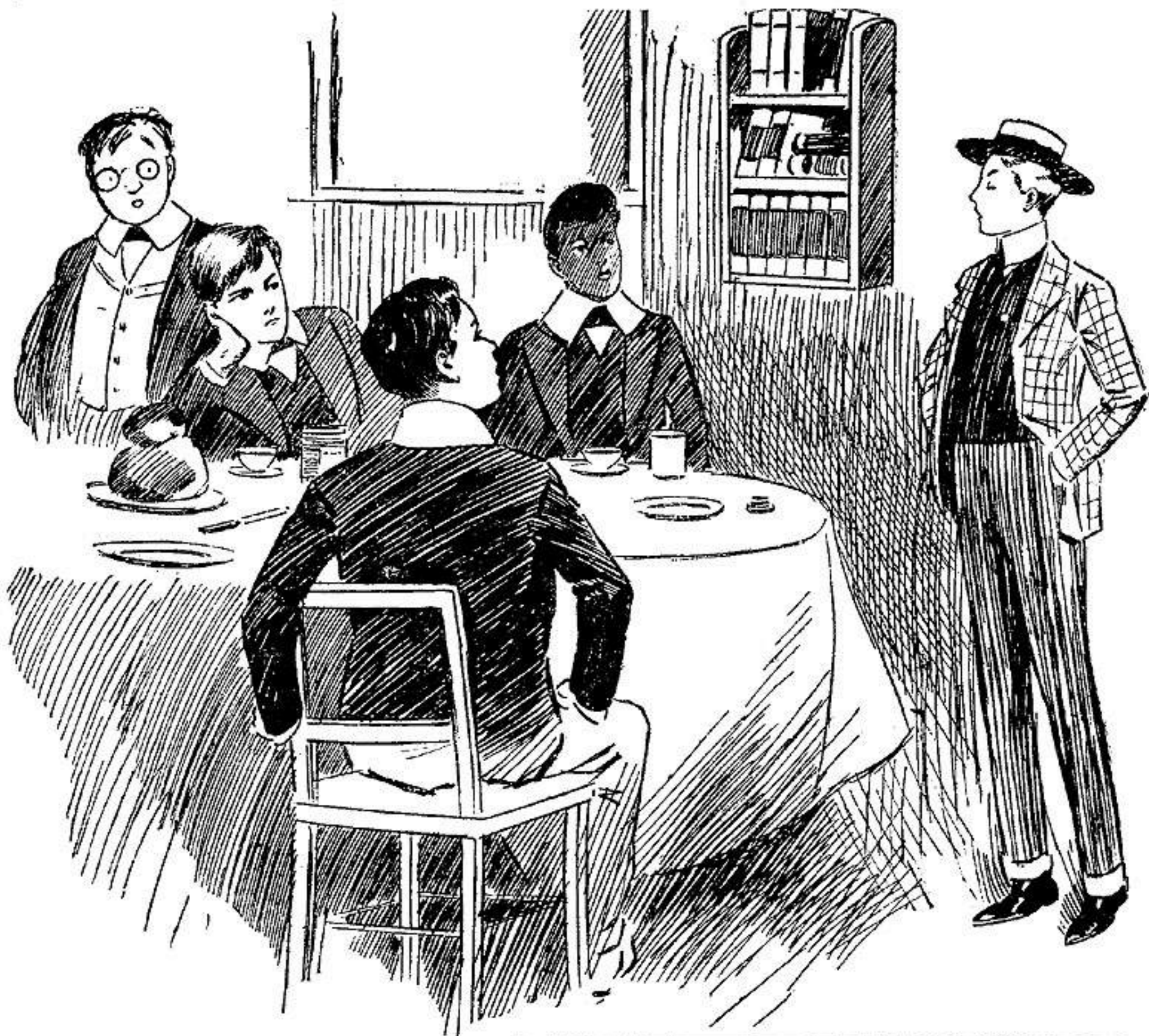
"Oh, rats! let's get on with the washing. The Head and the Quelch-bird are both away. Now's our chance."

"Something in that," said Harry Wharton. "But I'm blessed if I can see what use the pole will be to us when we've got it there."

"You didn't think so before—"

"Well, I was thinking of a short length that we could fix up—"

"Jolly row you'd get into if you started sawing up their scaffold-poles," said Bob Cherry.



"If you have come here to get a thick ear, Levison, you're going just the right way to work," exclaimed Bob Cherry, reddening.

"I didn't mean to saw one up. We might find a short piece."
"I can't see it, anyway; and, besides, I don't see why my deas shouldn't be carried out sometimes," said Bob Cherry.
"I always back you up."
"Oh! if that's how you look at it, all right," said Harry, laughing. "We'll have the scaffold-pole into the study, if it were a hundred feet long instead of twenty."
"It isn't twenty—only about eighteen, I think."
"Let's get hold of it," said Nugent. "I believe there's a watchman supposed to be about here somewhere, and if he found us walking off the scaffold poles he might cut up rough."
"Come on, then."
The juniors picked up the scaffold-pole. It did not take a minute to get it away from the building area into the shelter of the trees. Then Bob Cherry paused to consider.
"Can't take it in at the gates," he remarked thoughtfully.
"Has that only just dawned upon you?" queried Nugent, in a tone of sarcasm.
"Look here, Nugent, if you're going to find fault all the time——"
"Oh, I'm not. I'm waiting for orders."
"I don't see why we couldn't get it over the little gate into the Head's garden, and then rush it into the Close."
"That's about the best idea," said Harry Wharton.
"It is a wheezy, good plan," assented the Nabob of Bhanipur.
"Then come on, and don't grumble."
"Who's grumbling?"
"Oh, rats! Let's get a move on."

They carried the pole to the little gate in the low wall of the Head's garden. It was easy to climb the gate and drag the pole over. Then they carried it up the garden path towards the gate that gave admittance to the school Close.
There was the crunch of a step on the path.
"My only hat!" gasped Nugent. "It's the Head!"
The tassel of a scholastic cap bobbed over the rhododendrons. The juniors dropped the scaffold-pole and dodged into cover.
The stately figure of Dr. Locke, the Head of Greyfriars, appeared along the garden path a moment later.
"Quiet!" breathed Harry.
But the juniors hardly needed telling. They crouched behind the rhododendrons with bated breath. The Head's garden was forbidden ground to the juniors of Greyfriars. Sometimes members of the Sixth were permitted to walk there. Otherwise the place was, as Bob Cherry had remarked, awfully select. Juniors found within its precincts were certain of inputs, if not of a caning.
"Dear me!"
The crouching juniors peered through the rhododendrons and saw that the Head had stopped in the path. He was adjusting his glasses and looking down at the scaffold-pole lying at length before him.
"Dear me! This is astounding! How could this pole possibly have come here."
Dr. Locke looked round him in amazement.
Save for himself, the garden appeared to be quite deserted, and all was silent and still in the bright June sunshine.

The Doctor stared at the pole again.

"Is it possible that the workmen can have brought this pole here by mistake?" he murmured, "or is it that some of the boys have placed it here for a joke? In the latter case, I shall certainly see to it that an exemplary punishment is administered."

The juniors heard the muttered words clearly. The Head was not six feet away from them as they crouched in cover.

It did not occur to the Head to look behind the thicket. He stared at the scaffold-pole for a full minute through his gold-rimmed glasses.

"Extraordinary!" he murmured. "I will speak to Mr. Quelch about this. It is probably a joke of some of the Remove. Mr. Quelch!"

"My aunt!" murmured Harry Wharton. "The Quelch-bird is here, too."

But there was no reply to the Head's call. The Remove-master was not within hearing. The Head turned away and walked back towards the house.

"You utter ass!" Nugent whispered fiercely to Bob Cherry. "You said that the Head and Quelch were both away——"

"I thought they were."

"And they were only in this garden——"

"Get a move on," muttered Harry. "If Quelch comes here he'll look behind the thicket. Besides, he knows all about the gymnastic ideas, and he'll guess what the scaffold-pole is for, and who brought it in."

"What are we to do——"

"Get the pole away before they come."

"Buck up, then!"

"We shall have to whisk it off backupfully," murmured the nabob. "Mr. Quelch is not far away, and the Head sahib will——"

"Come on."

The juniors darted into the path, picked up the scaffold-pole, and ran off with it towards the school wall. There was a sound of voices in the garden.

"Shove it over," muttered Harry.

The pole was dropped over the wall. If the juniors had followed, they would have risen into full view of the two masters. There was a little greenhouse close at hand, and Harry Wharton whipped into it, with his comrades at his heels.

The Head and Mr. Quelch had reached the spot where the scaffold-pole had lain, and in the quiet garden Dr. Locke's voice came to the ears of the hidden juniors in the greenhouse.

"It is here, Mr. Quelch—a most extraordinary thing. A scaffold-pole, lying in the path—and nobody near it."

"That is very strange, sir."

"Extraordinary! I can only imagine that it is a jest of some of the younger boys."

"A jest that calls for severe punishment, sir," said the Remove-master. "But where is the pole you speak of, sir?"

"It is here," said the Head, looking round. "At all events, it was here a few minutes ago," he went on, looking puzzled.

"Perhaps it was a little further on."

"Perhaps so," assented Mr. Quelch doubtfully.

They walked on almost to the end of the path. But there was no scaffold-pole to be seen, and no sign of one. The Head looked decidedly puzzled, and a slight smile was lurking upon the Remove-master's face. It disappeared as the Head glanced at him.

"This is very extraordinary, Mr. Quelch."

"Very, sir," assented the Remove-master.

"We must have passed the spot."

"We could hardly have passed it without seeing such an extremely conspicuous object as a scaffold-pole, sir."

"It is very strange. Yet we have evidently done so."

"Let us look back."

They turned back and retraced their steps. No scaffold-pole was to be seen. The Head was looking mystified and uncomfortable.

"That is extraordinary, Mr. Quelch," he said, again, after a long pause.

And the Remove-master made the same reply as before.

"Very!"

"I saw it lying here, in full view."

"It is very strange. Perhaps it has been taken away since."

"But I was only a few moments bringing you to the spot, and there was no one in the garden. I am assured that there was no one in the garden."

"Very amazing," said Mr. Quelch, inwardly wondering what the Head had had to drink with his lunch.

"I cannot understand it."

"There may have been someone concealed in the garden, sir; perhaps behind these rhododendrons," suggested Mr. Quelch, "and he may have taken advantage of your momentary absence to remove the pole."

"Ye—es, that is possible. It is in fact the only possible explanation," said the Head slowly. "Unless the whole thing was a delusion—an effect of the bright sunshine upon the gravel, perhaps—and yet I could really affirm most conscientiously that it was a scaffold-pole I saw here."

The two masters walked slowly away, discussing the strange

problem. In the little greenhouse, four juniors heaved sighs of relief as their footsteps died away.

"That was a narrow shave," murmured Harry Wharton. "The sooner we get out of this the better."

"Yes, rather. Let's shift."

They shifted. A minute more and they were over the wall in the school Close, and the scaffold-pole was picked up again and carried off.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Preparing for the Contest.

BOB CHERRY was looking very thoughtful. It was easy enough now to get the pole in at the window of No. 1 Study, if the juniors wished.

"But, I say," muttered Bob Cherry. "If anything is seen of a scaffold-pole about the school, Quelch will be on to it like a lion."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Yes; and then the Head will know that it was a real scaffold-pole he saw in the path, and not an optical delusion," he remarked.

"Right-ho," said Nugent. "This giddy pole is a corpus delicti——"

"A—a what?"

"I mean it's the thing that gives us away," explained Nugent. "A pole sticking out of a study window on any other occasion might or might not attract attention. But on the present occasion it will give us away to the Quelch-bird."

"The giveawayfulness would be terrific."

Bob Cherry grunted.

"Well, I suppose we shan't be able to carry your idea out, that's all, Wharton," he remarked.

Wharton stared.

"My idea! What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. We shan't be able to carry your idea out after all. It's no good looking for trouble, you know."

"It was your idea——"

"Oh, come don't twist a thing round like that," remonstrated Bob Cherry. "You first made the suggestion of getting a scaffold-pole into the school to use as a horizontal bar."

"Yes, but you——"

"I simply showed you the easiest and most effective way of doing it," said Bob Cherry. "That was all I really had to do with the matter. I never really thought much of your idea from the start. But, of course, I had to help you carry it out. But now, really, Wharton, you'll have to give it up."

Harry laughed.

"Well, it will have to be given up, anyway," he assented.

"The question is, what are we to do with the scaffold-pole?"

"Oh, hide it somewhere."

"The hidefulness will not be the easyful task, my worthy chum."

"Oh, we can shove it behind the woodshed," said Bob Cherry. "We may fish it out and get rid of it on some other occasion. Just at present we haven't any time to waste. We ought to be practising gymnastics. We've spent too much time already over your rotten ideas, Wharton."

The scaffold-pole was accordingly bestowed behind the woodshed, where it was safe for the present, at least. Billy Bunter met the chums of the Remove as they came back into the Close. The fat boy of the Remove was beaming.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Have you come into a fortune, Billy?" asked Bob Cherry, looking at the fat, contented visage of the Owl.

"No, Cherry, but——"

"Has your postal-order come?"

"Well, no. But I'm in funds all the same, and I'm standing treat," said Bunter. "Will you fellows come along to the tuck-shop, and feed with me?"

The chums of the Remove stared at him.

"In funds again, Billy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Wonders will never cease!" said Nugent. "Whom have you been robbing, Billy?"

"The robfulness is the only explanation of the fundfulness of the esteemed Bunter," said Hurreo Singh, with a shake of the head.

Bunter grinned.

"I haven't been robbing anybody. But I'm in funds, all the same. Look!"

He jingled the money in his pocket, and then drew out a handful of silver. Shillings and half-crowns jostled in his palm. The Removites stared.

"Where did you get all that money, Billy?" asked Harry Wharton seriously. "You know, it's a curious thing, and it looks strange."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I've borrowed it," said Bunter.

"Borrowed it!"

"Certainly. Why shouldn't I borrow it, if I like?"

"But who would lend you money?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "There's something fishy about this. Nobody at Greyfriars

would lend you money like that, unless it was a new fellow who didn't know your little ways——"

"Really, Cherry!"

"Was it the new fellow Levison?"

"No, it wasn't."

"Then who was it?"

"I'm not going to tell you," said Billy Bunter. "I don't see why I should if I don't want to. I don't think you ought to be so curious, Cherry, I don't really. I'm going to pay all this money back when my postal-order comes."

"Oh, rats!"

"The ratfulness is great——"

"Really, Inky——"

"There's something fishy about this," repeated Bob Cherry emphatically. "I only hope you've not been getting into any trouble, you young ass!"

"Oh, that's all right, Cherry. Will you fellows come to the tuck-shop? It's my treat, you know, and you can order anything you like."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Not just now, Billy, thank you. We've got to practise for the contest this afternoon."

"You others——"

But the others likewise declined. Billy Bunter walked off to the tuck-shop by himself, but he soon found plenty of friends to join him in the feed. The chums of the Remove looked at one another uneasily.

"I can't understand where Billy is getting that money from," Harry Wharton said slowly. "I'm not going to touch any of it till I know, anyway, though I don't want to hurt Billy's feelings."

"Same here!" said Nugent. "I'm blessed if I can understand it! Nobody who knows Billy would lend him money expecting to get it back again. Of course, we lend it to him sometimes, but we know we sha'n't see it again, and it's only small sums. He must have had nearly half-a-sovereign just now."

"I only hope there's nothing wrong," said Harry Wharton, with a shade on his brow. "I can't understand it at all. Hallo, here's Meunier!"

Adolphe Meunier, the French junior in the Greyfriars Remove, came up with a beaming smile. Meunier was to be with Lerouge and the French team who were coming to contest with the Removites that afternoon.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Wherefore that expansive grin?" queried Bob Cherry.

Meunier grinned more widely than ever.

"It is ze time zat ve go to ze village!" he remarked. "Ze train it come in at four of ze clock."

Harry Wharton glanced up at the clock tower.

"By Jove, you're right!"

"Ve meets ze team in Friardale zis time," said Meunier. "I goes to ze station to meet zem and bring zem to ze hall, mes amis."

"That's right!"

"I zink zat zere be a good audience."

"I hope so."

The French junior's grin grew more expansive.

"Good! Ve shall see vat ve shall see!"

"Did you work that out in your head?" asked Bob Cherry.

"We'd better get ready now," Harry Wharton remarked. "I suppose half Greyfriars will be there. We haven't had so much chance of getting into form as I should have liked, but it can't be helped now."

And the juniors entered the house. A quarter of an hour later they were in the village of Friardale, preparing for the contest.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

French against British.

"GIEL! Ze pleasure is great of to meet my friend Wharton ze vun time more!"

It was Henri Lerouge who spoke.

The little hall in the village of Friardale was filling with spectators. Admission was free, and many of the villagers as well as the boys of Greyfriars were crowding in for the display. The hall was used by the local athletic club, and Harry Wharton had easily obtained permission to use it that Saturday afternoon. The Removites were very nearly ready when Henri Lerouge and his friends arrived, guided by Adolphe Meunier from the railway-station.

The utter licking the French youths had received on the cricket field at the hands of the Greyfriars juniors did not seem to have depressed them much. They were overflowing with good-humour and self-confidence now. As a matter of fact, the contest was on lines which were particularly suited to them, and they had the advantage. They knew it, and meant to make the most of it.

Henri Lerouge was as effusive as ever. He shook the hand Wharton held out to him, but he was not satisfied with that.

"Ze pleasure is great," he went on. "Ah, I must embrace ze fri nd of my heart! I must kees him!"

Harry Wharton concealed a grimace.

There was no help for it. The French youth embraced him affectionately, and kissed him on both cheeks. Harry had

been through it before, and he stood it with a good grace. The other French boys were equally effusive. They were chattering away to themselves at a great rate, and Harry, whose French was very good, understood most of what they were saying, and knew that they were triumphing beforehand over an anticipated victory.

"They expect to knock us into a cocked hat, Bob!" he remarked, as he was changing his clothes for the lighter attire of a gymnast.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Blessed are those who don't expect," he remarked. "They don't get disappointed."

"I'm afraid there's something in it this time."

"Oh, don't creak, old chap!"

"I'm not creaking. Only indoor gymnastics is the strong point of French school kids, and we haven't had time or opportunity to get up to their form."

"Never mind; we'll lick them."

"I wish I felt sure about it."

"Rats! We've got to do it."

Harry Wharton said no more. Nothing would shake Bob Cherry's confidence but defeat. But it was soon to be put to the test.

In their light close-fitting garb it could not be denied that the English lads made a better show than the French. They were taller on the average, and their limbs were much sturdier and their carriage more erect and determined. Their quietness, too, compared favourably with the chattering, gesticulating volubility of the French; at least to an English mind. When they appeared in the hall a cheer from the Greyfriars crowd round the circle greeted them, and there was another cheer for the foreigners.

The Remove gymnasts were the pick of the Form. Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh were the best. But Hazeldene, Micky Desmond, Skinner, Russell, and Harris were by no means to be despised.

But when the gymnastic display commenced it was seen that the French lads had the advantage. Their monkey-like activity was amazing, and their nerve was certainly good.

They seemed as much at home on ropes, bars, or the trapeze as on the ground, and there was no doubt that they excelled their opponents in that line.

The English lads had heaps of pluck, but they had not the limbs of monkeys, and they simply could not equal their opponents above the ground.

But in other respects they more than held their own.

Lerouge, in his self-confidence, had willingly included boxing and wrestling in the list of the events, and in that line the Greyfriars lads came in an easy first.

The contest with the gloves was between Wharton and Lerouge, and Bob Cherry and Meunier.

It did not last long.

In the first round Wharton knocked his opponent right and left, and but for the thick gloves Lerouge would have fared very badly indeed.

"Mon Dieu!" gasped Lerouge, as he lay on his back at the end of the round gazing up at the ceiling, amid laughter and cheers. "Mon Dieu! Vat have happen?"

His second picked him up.

"It is zat ze English garcon hit you on ze nose!" explained Mercier.

"Helas! I feel as if ze mule did keeck me."

Lerouge staggered in his backer's arms. He was evidently done, but his good-humour was proof against defeat.

"Are you going on?" asked Harry.

Lerouge shook his head.

"Non, mon ami! Ze nose pain me ver' mooch, and I not zink zat I sall be able to box you viz ze glove!"

Harry Wharton smiled.

"Zat is ovair," said Lerouge, peeling off the gloves. "If I fight viz you in ze French fashion I zink I beat you, but you not call it fair to keeck."

"Well, rather not," ejaculated Harry.

"Zat is ze vay ve fight in Franco, mon ami, but I not go on," said Lerouge. "I zink I have no chance."

And he threw down the gloves. Adolphe Meunier, however, had picked up something of English boxing at Greyfriars, and he stood it out for another round with Bob Cherry. But in the second round Bob Cherry walked all over him, as he afterwards expressed it, and even Meunier did not risk a third.

He owned up that he was beaten, and the boxing contest closed with an easy victory for Wharton's side.

But fortune smiled on the French contestants upon the whole.

There were hearty cheers from the crowded spectators when the French team formed the pyramid—more than a dozen youths supporting one another's weight, and rising one above another—five on the ground, four on their shoulders, then three, then two, and finally Henri Lerouge at the top, with arms outstretched.

The essay of the Removites in the same direction met with disaster.

They had done the same kind of thing in the Greyfriars gym, though not on the same scale, and they had pluck enough to attempt anything.

But knack was wanted more than pluck in a case like this. The first row stood like rocks, and the second were planted pretty firmly on their shoulders. But the third storey was wobbly in the extreme. And when Micky Desmond, in the middle of the bottom row, paused in his efforts to scratch his nose, disaster swiftly followed.

There was a swaying and tumbling and bumping, and the Removites sprawled in various directions over the floor.

A yell of laughter rang through the hall, in which the French youths joined, cackling like geese.

Harry Wharton picked himself up, feeling rather dazed.

"My hat!"

Bob Cherry rubbed his legs.

"It was that ass Desmond——"

"Sure, and it's no good blaming me!" exclaimed Micky Desmond indignantly. "It wasn't my fault intirely."

"You ass——"

"I just scratched me nose——"

"You—you villain! I'll scratch your nose for you!" howled Bob Cherry, making a rush at him.

"Sure and I——"

Nugent caught the excited Bob by the arm and dragged him back.

"Hold on, Bob——"

"I'm going to wipe up the floor with that howling ass!" shouted Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the audience.

"Hold on!"

"I tell you——"

"Sure and I——"

"You can't have a row here," grinned Wharton. "Keep your wool on, Bob. Micky ought to be scragged, but you can scrag him in the dormitory to-night."

"Well, yes, I never thought of that," said Bob Cherry, calming down a little. "I'll teach the howling ass to stop to scratch his nose when I'm standing on his beastly shoulder."

"Sure, and I——"

"Oh, shut up! I've got an ache in my bones I sha'n't get rid of for a week."

"The achefulness of the honourable bones is terrific," said Hurree Singh, rubbing his elbow ruefully. "The sufferfulness of the pain is also extreme."

"Sure, I didn't mane——"

"Never mind what you meant, ass. We know what you did," growled Bob Cherry. "If I don't wipe up the dormitory with you to-night you can use my napper for a football."

"We won't try the pyramid business again," said Harry Wharton. "We're not quite up to it, and that's the fact."

And the others ruefully agreed.

But it was some minutes before the French youths stopped cackling and were prepared to get on with the contest.

THE TENTH CHAPTER. Billy Bunter's Secret.

"LICKED!"

That was Nugent's expressive comment as the Greyfriars lads went in to change when it was over.

Harry Wharton nodded, and Bob Cherry grunted. And the Nabob of Bhanipur remarked that the lickfulness was terrific.

There was no doubt that the French team had got the best of the gymnastic display. The audience had agreed on that point, and the Greyfriars' lads had to agree too.

"Still," remarked Hazeldene comfortingly, "they haven't given us such a licking as we gave them on the cricket field."

Bob Cherry brightened up.

"Well, that's true," he agreed. "We've given them a run for their money, anyway; while the cricket match last week was just a walk-over for us."

"We want practice," said Harry Wharton quietly. "There's no doubt that we have neglected this branch of gymnastics, and the French kids have licked us because they haven't done so. We've got to pull up, that's all."

"Yes, rather."

"The ratherfulness is great."

"We've come rather a cropper," said Harry. "But we've done our best; and not so badly, considering. Whenever we had a chance we scored, as in the wrestling and boxing. And we haven't had such a defeat as we gave them on the cricket field. There's nothing to be ashamed of. And—well, we're not monkeys!"

"That's it," agreed Bob Cherry. "We're not monkeys, and that's where they have the advantage."

The French team were grinning and cackling gleefully over their victory.

Even their politeness, which was great, could not make them conceal the fact that they were bubbling over with satisfaction.

But they were as effusive as ever to the Greyfriars' lads.

and the two parties were on the best of terms during the tea which followed the contest.

The Greyfriars boys took their set-back in a manly way, without complaint or ill-humour, and did not forget that the foreigners were their guests.

The tea was a very pleasant function.

And when it was over, the Greyfriars party walked to the railway-station with the French team to see them off.

Lerouge embraced Harry Wharton on the platform.

"Ve have had a great time," he remarked. "I am only sorry zat ze time have come to part. Ve return to La Belle France next week, and I not see you any more. I veep viz grief."

"Oh, don't!" said Harry in alarm.

"Oui, oui, I veep," said Lerouge, without, however, any tears coming into his eyes. It was, as Bob Cherry murmured to Nugent, "a dry weep."

The train came buzzing in.

"Perhaps you come to France some day," said Lerouge. "Zen you come to me, and ve vill have ze good time. Helas! Ve must go."

He embraced Wharton yet once more, and kissed him effusively, and stepped into the train.

With a final shriek of "Adieu!" the French team were gone.

"Well, they're not a bad lot, and they know something about gymnastics," Harry Wharton remarked, as he left the station with his friends. "But I really wish they wouldn't kiss a fellow."

"Oh, it's only their little way," grinned Bob Cherry, rubbing his cheeks. "You have to take it with the rest. Hallo, hallo, hallo, here's Billy, looking in finer form than ever!"

Billy Bunter joined them. His fat face was wreathed in a seraphic smile and a smear of raspberry jam.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Yes, we're hungry," said Bob Cherry. "I had hardly a snack at tea-time; I was so busy doing the giddy polite host."

"Same here," said Nugent feelingly.

"The samefulness is in my honourable case. In my interior is the aching voidfulness," said Hurree Singh.

"Good," said Billy Bunter. "I'm standing treat this time. I've got plenty of tin, you know, and it's time I treated you fellows. You've treated me several times."

As Billy Bunter lived and thrived on his share of the study provisions, and never by any chance contributed anything towards their purchase, this was not over-stating the case.

Harry Wharton was silent. He was rather worried in his mind about Billy Bunter. The Owl's possession of funds was so unexpected a happening as to be remarkable, and his refusal to explain where he got the money was very strange. Billy Bunter was not a clever youth, and his ideas as to the rights of property were none too clearly defined. Harry was uneasy on his account.

As they entered the gates of Greyfriars in the June dusk they passed Bulstrode. Bunter nodded to him in the most friendly way, to which the bully of the Remove replied with a savage scowl, which the Owl was far too short-sighted to observe.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, looking from one to the other. "Have you been having any trouble with Bulstrode, Billy?"

Bunter blinked at him in amazement.

"Certainly not, Cherry."

"Then what is he scowling at you for?"

"You must be mistaken. I am on the best of terms with Bulstrode," said Billy, with a grin. "I suppose he meant it for a smile."

"Have you been quarrelling?"

"Certainly not. He'd know better than to quarrel with me I should think."

Bob Cherry stared.

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"What do you mean, you young ass? Bulstrode could thrash you with one finger."

"Ho jolly well wouldn't, though!"

"What do you mean?"

"I know what I mean," said Billy Bunter, with a mysterious shake of the head. "Don't you ask questions and I'll tell you no lies, Bob Cherry."

"Look here, Billy, you're getting altogether too mysterious," said Bob Cherry, taking the Owl by the collar and shaking him. "Now, what do you mean?"

"Don't shake me—"

"What do you mean by this mysterious rot?"

"If you shake me my spectacles will fall off," grunted Billy Bunter, "and then they'll break, and I tell you, Bob Cherry, that if you break my spectacles you'll have to pay for them, so there!"

"Why shouldn't Bulstrode dare to quarrel with you? Why should he be afraid of such a miserable little worm?" said Bob Cherry. "He looked just now as if he would like to wring your neck. My only hat——" Bob Cherry broke off, as a new idea flashed into his mind. "Is it Bulstrode you have been getting money from, Billy?"

"Leave off shaking me——"

"Is it Bulstrode who lent you money?"

"I'll bet it is!" exclaimed Hazeldene. "I saw them jawing together just before we went down to Friardale, and Bulstrode was in an awfully bad temper, and he handed something over to Billy. I wondered at the time what it meant, but I was busy thinking about the gymnastics."

"Now then, Bunter, speak up——"

"If you break my glasses you'll have to pay for them."

Bob Cherry released the wriggling Owl of the Remove. Billy Bunter gasped for breath and adjusted his spectacles.

"Cherry, you beast, I——"

"Now, then," said Harry Wharton, in a quiet voice which silenced Billy Bunter. "Now, then, Billy, you've got to explain yourself."

"I don't see——"

"No need for you to see. You've got something up against Bulstrode, and you've been extorting money from him."

"I haven't."

"Didn't Bulstrode give you the money you have been spending lately?"

"No."

"Is that the truth?"

"Yes, it is the truth, Wharton. I don't see why you should doubt my word. I never doubt your word. Bulstrode didn't give me the money. He lent it to me."

"You young ass! You got it from Bulstrode?"

"Oh, yes, I got it from Bulstrode! I suppose he can lend me money if he likes, can't he?" said Bunter in an injured tone.

"Yes, certainly; but in this case he hasn't liked. He has given you the money against his will, and you've got to explain yourself," said Wharton sternly. "I am captain of this Form, and it's my duty to look into this, even if I were not interested in keeping you out of a scrape, you young ass! Why did Bulstrode give you so much money?"

"I'm going to settle up with him when my postal order comes——"

"How much have you had from him?"

"Oh, not much! About a sovereign altogether."

The chums of the Remove stared. Billy Bunter, who was always impecunious, and who would spend anybody's money, spoke very airily of a sovereign. But to the Removites a sovereign was a considerable sum of money.

"You mean to say that Bulstrode has given you a sovereign!" exclaimed Harry Wharton in amazement.

"Well, no, he hasn't given it to me, he's lent it to me, and I'm to settle up when my postal-order comes. I made a particular point of that. I said to him plainly that I should regard the money only as a loan, to be repaid when my postal-order came."

"And what did he say?" asked Nugent.

"I can't tell you, Nugent. I didn't hear very distinctly, as he only muttered it, but it sounded like a swear-word."

"He didn't want to lend you the money?"

"Well, he was naturally grateful to me for doing him a service," said Billy Bunter. "He suggested giving me money himself, but I refused. I'm not a mendicant. I'm not going to have people give me money. Of course, I was glad of a loan, and I pointed that out to him. I was willing to accept a loan until my postal-order——"

"What service did you do him?"

"Oh, nothing in particular. He was afraid I should speak about having seen—I mean about him, and he——"

"About having seen what?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Do you see that fountain there, Billy?"

Billy Bunter adjusted his glasses.

"Yes, Wharton. I'm rather short-sighted, but I can see the fountain perfectly well, thank you."

"Well, you are going to be ducked in that fountain——"

"Really, Wharton——"

"Unless you own up to the truth in this affair," said the captain of the Remove sternly. "Bob said there was something fishy about it at the start, and it's time the truth was out."

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

Now, what was it you saw Bulstrode do that he paid you for not telling about?"

"Oh, that isn't the way to put it, Wharton. I'm sincerely sorry to see you take such a view of the case. I was temporarily hard up, and Bulstrode lent me a pound or so until my postal-order arrives."

"Will you answer my question?"

"Oh, it was really nothing, you know. I saw him go into the German master's room."

Harry Wharton started.

"When?"

"It was when you were doing that gymnastic business in the Remove-room. I saw him go into Herr Rosenblum's room just after he had spoken to you in the Remove-room, and I wondered what he was up to, so I looked through the key-hole——"

"You young rotter!"

"If you don't want me to tell you——"

"Go on!"

"You called me a——"

"So you are—a mean young rotter, to spy on anybody. But go on, or you'll get ducked in the fountain. Buck up!"

"Well, he was tying a cord across the floor for the German to fall over," chuckled Bunter. "He came out quite suddenly, and ran into me. I think he was rather annoyed; but I told him I shouldn't think of mentioning the matter to anybody, as that would be sneaking, and it was a good joke, anyway. Then he offered me half-a-crown; but, of course, I wouldn't take it. I told him he could lend me five shillings if he liked, but I should look upon it simply as a loan, and repay him the moment my postal-order came."

"And he did?"

"Yes."

"And since then he has lent you more?"

"Well, yes, he has parted with a little on several occasions since. I have pointed out to him that he would get into a fearful row if I gave him away, and that his money is really quite safe, and that I shall repay him directly——"

"That will do."

Harry Wharton turned to his chums with a stern gleam in his eyes.

"It's all clear enough now," he said. "I knew that it was Bulstrode who played that mean trick on Herr Rosenblum, and tried to throw the blame upon me. Billy was a little rascal for not speaking out——"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"But he is more stupid than anything else, and he doesn't seem even to realise that his conduct towards Bulstrode in this matter amounts to blackmail."

"Wharton!"

"What else would you call it, you young ass?"

"You shock me, Wharton, you do really. It seems awful to me that Bulstrode can't lend me a pound or so without your talking about it like that, and using such horrible expressions."

"Oh, cheese it! I suppose it's no good talking to you. How much of Bulstrode's money have you left?"

"About five shillings."

"You are to take it back to him."

Bunter's jaw dropped.

"What?"

"You are to take it to him at once, and hand him every penny. Tell him that the rest of the money he has given you will be paid back to him, and that I shall see to it."

"Really, Wharton——"

"Tell him that I know now who was the cad who played that trick on Herr Rosenblum, and tried to throw it upon me, and that I am waiting for him behind the chapel. Tell him that if he doesn't come there and meet me, he's a coward as well as a cad."

"Really——"

"And I'll come with you, Billy," grinned Bob Cherry, "to see that you deliver both the money and the message. You might forget to do both."

"I say, you fellows——"

But Bob Cherry linked his arm in Bunter's and marched him off.

Harry Wharton, Nugent, Hazeldene, and the nabob, walked on, and waited under the trees behind the chapel where many of the fistic encounters of the juniors were fought out. Harry Wharton's face was sternly set, and his eyes were gleaming. An ill time was boded for Bulstrode—if Bulstrode came!

But would he come?

The Removites waited.

Bob Cherry came into sight at last round the chapel; but he came alone.

Harry looked at him.

"You gave my message?"

"Yes."

"And he——"

"He won't come."

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Let him stay away then, if he is a coward," he said. "I

have given him a chance to prove that he is not, and I don't care if the affair goes no further."

And the chums of the Remove went into the School House.

Billy Bunter met them in the hall with a lugubrious face.

"I say, you fellows—"

Harry Wharton smiled.

There was no getting Billy Bunter to understand what he had been guilty of.

Wharton tapped him on the shoulder.

"Cheer up, Billy! You'll see sometime that you've only been made to do what was right."

"Oh, I dare say you were right, Wharton, and I'm sincerely sorry if you think I've done anything wrong," said Bunter. "But there's a registered letter for you, and very likely it contains—"

"Good!" exclaimed Cherry, Hurree Singh, Nugent, and Hazeldene together.

Harry laughed as he took the letter. It contained a postal order for a sovereign from his uncle.

"I say, Wharton, of course, you'll stand a feed now."

"Yes," laughed Harry. "Come along, all of you, and we'll celebrate the occasion."

And they did, and once more the fat face of Billy Bunter was wreathed in contented smiles.

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton and his Chums next week, entitled "The Famous Four." Please order your MAGNET in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)



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 "Maxennis."

Grip, their dog, in a strange manner is instrumental in getting their first client—a Mrs. Brewer—who is continually receiving threatening picture postcards from a man evidently aware that his victim is coming into a legacy. Having strong suspicions of one of Mrs. Brewer's lodgers—"Sleeping" McDonald, a pugilist—Dennis visits a Mr. Abrams, a dealer in post-cards, who is known to be friendly with McDonald. Dennis shows the dealer an incriminating card that McDonald had dropped in the street, and which Grip had brought to his master. On seeing the card, the Jew, helped by McDonald, attacks Dennis, who is only rescued, after a severe struggle, by Lomax and a youth named Punch. After leaving Abram's house, Lomax informs Dennis that Mrs. Brewer has disappeared. "Disappeared!" ejaculates the startled Dennis.

Again on the Trail.

"Yes. When I went there this morning, she wasn't there. A girl in the house told me she had gone out, and she didn't know when she would be back again. So I went and had a chat with the next door neighbour—the loquacious lady—and she confirmed it. Said Mrs. Brewer had gone out the morning previous as usual, and hadn't come back again. Hinted at kidnapping or murder by the people who're so interested in getting the good lady's money."

"Well, I'm blessed!" was Dennis's comment.

"And now, for all we know, there may be something in what that long-tongued woman said, and these two fellows we've just left—they may be members of a gang, and not doing this on their own—have perhaps carried Mrs. Brewer off or murdered her."

"Well, what do you say?" Lomax demanded when Ludgate Circus had been reached without the exchange of further words.

"Say! Why, that this is one of the queerest cases a detective ever handled," Frank said solemnly. "No sooner is one point cleared up than two more come into being to make things more complicated than ever."

"You're right. I'll have to do some hard thinking," Lomax said.

When the two young detectives left Mr. Abrams's shop in Houndsditch, the proprietor thereof and his companion indulged in those recriminations which, considering the circumstances, were to be looked for. Each blamed the other. Both were considerably frightened, and their mutual anger was in proportion to their fright. They spoke heatedly, and some exceedingly disagreeable things were said on both sides. Suddenly the Jew made a move towards the door.

NEW STORY SHOWING HOW TWO BOYS SUCCEED AS DETECTIVES.

By LEWIS HOCKLEY.

"Where yer off to?" demanded his companion.

"Fetch the polithe!"

"Yer ain't."

"I am."

"Yer ain't," the prizefighter said firmly; and he stepped towards Abrams.

The Jew measured him with his eyes, but, despite McDonald's used-up condition, it was obvious that if it came to a question of force, he'd be a good first, and the Hebrew a long way behind.

"We don't want no coppers in 'ere," the pugilist declared. "I don't want 'em at all."

"But I can have 'em locked up for forthibly entering my houthe!" the Hebrew squeaked.

"Yus, and when they're here, what're yer goin' to tell 'em, eh? Why, a lot of things which we don't want 'em to know."

"You're afraid of getting locked up, that'th what'th the matter with you!" sneered the Jew. "Not that it'd be the firht time either," he added tauntingly. "Should think you'd be uthed to it by thith time."

"'Old yer tongue!" McDonald thundered; and his badly-damaged face looked so terribly evil that the Jew fairly quailed. "If yer say anything more to me about that I'll—I'll murder yer!"

"Well," Abrams said sulkily, "you've got uth into thith meth; you'll have to get uth out of it."

"'Tain't my fault, I tell yer!" McDonald growled. "You shouldn't 'ave let those fellows come in."

"I didn't; they got in."

"Then you shouldn't have let 'em."

"If you hadn't loht that pothtcard there wouldn't have been any trouble at all," retorted the Jew. "They wouldn't have known anything about it, and—"

"Will yer shut up?" shouted McDonald; and he was so violently threatening, Abrams put the table between himself and the other. "I didn't lose it a-purpose, yer fool!"

"But you've loht it; that'th quite enough."

"Well," growled McDonald, after an uncomfortable silence, the Jew's eyes looking stealthily amidst the heterogeneous collection scattered about the floor for his revolver; with that weapon in his hand he would have less fear of his dangerous accomplice—"well, there ain't so much 'arm done, after all."

"Harm!"—and the Jew fairly yelled the word—"harm! Vy, mother o' Abraham, vot more harm do you vant to thee done? Grathioth heaventh! Don't you think there'th any harm done until ve're both in quod?"

He became so excited he was almost incoherent.

"We ain't going to quod—at least, I ain't!" the pugilist declared.

"You'll believe it when you're there, young man!" sneered Abrams. "If you hadn't loht—"

"Quit!" shouted McDonald, and the Jew held his peace.

"THE FAMOUS FOUR."

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

NEXT
TUESDAY.

"What good'll the card do 'em now they 'ave got it?" he went on.

"Why, they know you wrote it—"

"You told me to," interrupted McDonald quickly.

"And they'll get out a warrant for your arretht. Didn't you hear the big chap thay tho? That'th what they'll do, and then—"

"Then I'll tell 'em you told me to write it."

"Will you? Well, my friend, don't you be thinking that'll do you any good, for it won't. You've wrote it, and you'll —" "have to stand the consequences," Abrams was going to say, but thought better of it.

"Well?" asked the prizefighter aggressively.

"Have to get it back," Abrams concluded.

"What's the good? Without Mrs. Brewer they can't do nothing, and they can't get 'old of 'er."

The Hebrew pricked up his ears suddenly, and looked at his companion in blank amazement. What did he mean? How were the detectives to be prevented from getting hold of Mrs. Brewer, without whose consent they could, in fact, do but very little? They knew her address.

"Vat d'ye mean?" he gasped.

McDonald, who had fetched a bottle of whisky and a tumbler from a cupboard, poured himself out a liberal dose of the spirit and drank it off before he replied. He was so long, his companion repeated the query.

"What I says," he replied, and his face flushed a trifle.

"But why?" persisted the Jew.

"Because they can't. I've took care o' that."

Abrams looked, if anything, still more surprised.

"You!" he repeated. "And vat've you been doing?"

The prizefighter laughed shortly.

"Never you mind!" he said, and he took another dose of whisky.

Abrams stood considering for a moment; then he went and stood in front of his accomplice, and looked him fairly in the eyes. The Jew has never yet showed himself deficient in courage, either physical or moral, and Abrams was no renegade.

"Look here, my friend," he said, speaking very quietly and distinctly, "what'th the meaning o' thith? What've you been doing that you haven't told me of? We're in thith job together—thee? and what we do we do together. There ain't going to be any hanky-panky between uth. I've been thraight with you; you'll have to be thraight with me—thee? Now, what ith it?"

McDonald wasn't altogether a brute. There was some brain in him, as the shape of his forehead showed; but he had more brawn than brain, and the intelligence of the Jew was of a higher order than his.

With the two together the Hebrew would always be the master; his brain would always dominate McDonald's, though there might now and then be signs of rebellion; and though he did it reluctantly, McDonald submitted now and answered the question.

"Why, look here, and blow me, but yer ought to be jolly thankful for it, it's like this. When that fellow let me know as 'e'd got the card 'is rotten dog pinched, I says to myself there'll be trouble over this; and when 'e 'ad me up at 'is office and talked about it, I was sure of it, an' so I just persuades old Mrs. Brewer, as a change of air'd do 'er good, that she'd be better for going away from Walworth for a bit."

"Oh!" Abrams was, in vulgar phraseology, "struck all of a heap" by this announcement. He had never credited his confederate with so much brains. The value of getting Mrs. Brewer out of the way now that the detectives knew so much was patent to the Jew; that the prizefighter should also have comprehended so much, startled him. Then a terrible thought came to him.

"Have you killed her?" he asked, in a whisper.

"No, but I blessed well will sooner'n go to prison!" the pugilist answered fiercely.

The Jew felt relieved. Conspiracy, fraud, robbery he didn't mind, but he was of the stuff that cannot deal in murder.

"Why didn't you tell me thith?" he demanded.

"Because I 'aven't 'ad time," McDonald replied.

The pugilist had another reason, and a great deal better one, but he didn't choose to make it known. He was a good deal more cunning than his accomplice had ever suspected, though the latter's respect for him was increasing considerably.

The game of terrifying his landlady into disbursing some of her wealth for his—and Abrams's—benefit having started, and the untoward circumstance of the detectives' acquaintance with it having transpired, he had conceived the idea of getting Mrs. Brewer out of harm's way; while at the back of his head was the thought that any profit ultimately resulting through the landlady would fall to himself alone, his partner being thus cheated out of his share.

What he had done had been alone. He had meant to keep it to himself, but in the stress of circumstances the fact had come to light.

"It'd have thaved a lot o' trouble if you'd told me thith

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

at firht," the Jew observed, after a short silence. "Why didn't you tell me? When did it happen?"

"Two days ago—day afore yesterday."

"Well, then"—and Abrams heaved a sigh of relief—"we ain't got much to fear from thothc bletthed detectiveth, after all. Where ith the?"

McDonald bent his head, and whispered a word in the Jew's ear.

"You don't thay tho!" Abrams exclaimed, open-eyed.

"But I do, honour bright!" returned McDonald. "And I guess it'll take those blessed sweeps a long time to find her; and if what yer says about the warrant is right, then we ought to be safe."

What that whispered word was which had occasioned Mr. Solomon Abrams so great surprise, two young men, cooking a meal in their office-lodging, would have dearly loved to know.

Robert Lomax and Frank Dennis, while engaged in the necessary work preliminary to satisfying the inner man, had much to say concerning the disappearance of their client, whereof Lomax had notified his chum as they came along.

"One thing I'm quite sure of," Dennis observed decidedly, suspending for a moment his business of toasting a huge rasher of gammon bacon, "and that is it'd be of no use you or I talking either to the Jew or his pal about it. We've got the whip-hand of 'em seemingly; but if we let 'em into the knowledge of our client's disappearance, our hold of 'em weakens a deal."

"Strikes me," Lomax said suddenly, "that they know of it already, and that's why they were so saucy this day."

"Don't think that," Dennis rejoined. "If they did, the Jew wouldn't have attached such a deal of importance to the recovery of the postcard."

"May be. Anyway, arguing won't settle it, or find Mrs. Brewer, and that, I take it, is our next job."

"Yes; and where we're going to begin I don't know."

"We didn't know a lot before we handled this case. We've got to ferret it out, same as we've done the rest. Anyway, I'm going to start with the assumption our Houndsditch friends do know of Mrs. Brewer's going away. Now, considering the matter in the light of common-sense, what is apparent? Who's most likely to benefit by her vanishing?"

"Not us, certainly."

"Don't be flippant!"

"Not Abrams & Co., for if their idea is to get money out of her, she's got to be somewhere where they can reach her—somewhere near to their hands."

"Precisely. And where nearer or more convenient than in some place of which they've the key. In fact, suppose they've got her prisoner?"

"Lomax, my boy, you're getting imaginative."

"Not a bit!" the Yorkshireman retorted warmly. "This is pure, common-sense, deductive reasoning. It gives the motive, and when that is supplied one's got something to work upon. With the woman in their power, our friends, the enemy, would be in a strong position."

"Yes, so strong that they wouldn't need to go to the length of murdering me to get back the postcard," Dennis objected.

"Very good. We'll agree to differ," Lomax said. "I'll work on my theory, you on yours—if you have one."

"Not yet," confessed Frank; and the partners continued with their meal without further reference to the subject.

But, as we have seen, though Lomax was more or less correct in his theory, his partner was not so very far wrong in his disagreement therewith.

That evening the lad Punch did not turn up as he had promised, and Lomax departed alone to prosecute the line of action upon which he had decided.

"I'm going to shadow either Abrams or McDonald," he told his partner before he went. "If they have got Mrs. Brewer boxed up anywhere, I reckon I'll find it out in good time. I guess you won't see me all day, Frank; but I'll look in here every evening if I can to see you and hear or tell you of anything that turns up. If I want you, I'll send you a wire here."

"All right, old chap," Dennis said. "Sorry I can't see the same as you do over this; but if I'm wrong I'll admit it; and you can count on me to give you a hand whenever you want it."

That night Bob Lomax tracked "Sleeping" McDonald—aided by a reporter of a sporting paper and two or three enthusiastic upholders of East London pugilism, to whom the scribe referred him—to the ring side of a select little club not a hundred miles from Oxford Circus, which made a speciality of boxing bouts as an attraction for its members.

He talked freely with McDonald, and the latter answered with enthusiasm to Lomax's overtures to the boxer concern-

ing a further boxing bout in which Lomax was willing to back a lad of his fancy against McDonald.

McDonald introduced him to his backer, Mr. Soily Abrams, and the trio had an interesting conversation together; but it is exceedingly doubtful if the pugilist and his friend had been so genial and eager for business if they had dreamed for one moment that the bespectacled, bearded gentleman in the soft wideawake and long, light overcoat, and who spoke with an accent which they couldn't decide was South African or Yankee, who flourished rolls of bank-notes—bogus ones—and talked at large, and whom they styled a real good sort, although a teetotaler, was the young man whose knuckle-dustered fists had earlier in the day left their impression on the boxer's countenance.

A disguise will work wonders, and Bob Lomax expended some of his capital most judiciously. Anyway, neither the Jew nor the boxer recognised him.

All unconscious of the identity of their new acquaintance, the sight of whose bank(?)notes was sufficient to make him welcome, Solomon Abrams and "Sleeping" McDonald, to use a Colonial expression, "froze on to him," and before long the three were on the most amicable terms. It was a pity, they thought, that so good a fellow was a teetotaler, but he smoked, and shared with them some really first-class cigars, and was ready to pay for all the drinks they cared to have.

As for the man whom he was willing to back against McDonald, they, the pugilist in particular, he being on very good terms with himself—the events at No. 142, Houndsditch notwithstanding—believed themselves in for a soft thing. They took him for a mug, proved conclusively that his knowledge of pugilism and pugilists was not extensive, and did their level best to engineer him into definitely fixing up a match. Lomax, pretending to be excited, fell in with their suggestions, and proposed all three should go to his lodgings forthwith to draw up the articles of agreement. The proposition was accepted, a growler was called, and the three got inside.

It was late by this time, about two in the morning, and Lomax had scarcely been in the cab five minutes before he fell asleep.

"Here, wake up, old man!" exclaimed Abrams; and he seized Lomax by his knee and shook him vigorously. "I'm wanting another of thotho very fine thigarth of yourth. Wake up; you ain't in bed yet!"

But Lomax only stirred and grunted; and after one or two more ineffectual attempts to waken him, the precious pair broke into a laugh.

"Done up!" said McDonald.

"And on water, too!" laughed the Jew. "Motheth! But what a fellow to thleop!"

"He's tired out, let him alone," said his companion.

"Ere, I say!" and he suddenly sat bolt upright.

"Vat ith it?"

McDonald laughed loudly, and then glanced quickly at the sleeping man, whom, however, the noise hadn't disturbed a little bit.

"Vat ith it?" repeated the Jew impatiently.

"The old woman!" And McDonald laughed again.

"Who?"

"Old Mrs.—Mrs. Brewer. Good name that; feel like one myself." And once more his mirth was released.

"Thut up!"

The Jew glared at McDonald, and then at the peacefully sleeping man. The inside of the cab was none too light, but Abrams could see that their new acquaintance's eyes were closed, and could hear his regular breathing. But McDonald frightened him. The prizefighter had taken quite a lot aboard, and it was now beginning to show effect on him.

"Sha'n't shut up!" he rejoined. "Must laugh; th' joke's too good. Ha, ha, ha! Old woman locked up without a bit to eat or drink. Should like another drink myself. Ain't it rich?"

"Thut up!" exclaimed the Jew again, angrily. "Keep your mouth thut, or he'll hear you."

"Can't; 'e's asleep. Ain't

yer, old sport? Sound as a bell." And leaning across, the pugilist in drunken playfulness shook Lomax by the leg.

"Sound asleep in yer little cot, ain't yer?"

"Will you be quiet!" cried Abrams, in a fierce whisper.

"Am quiet. Who says I ain't is a liar!" McDonald exclaimed indignantly. "'E's a liar, ain't 'e, old sport?"

But Lomax never moved a muscle, even when McDonald tried to give his hair a clumsy tug.

"Locked up without food or water. That's what we'll be getting jolly soon, won't we, old pal?" continued the tipsy rogue, who was not to be silenced. "Bread an' water, bread an' water! Water! Oh, my jiminy!"

His laughter was checked by the Jew, who grabbed his arm and shook him fiercely, and McDonald turned on his confederate angrily.

"'Ere, who're yer touchin'?" he demanded angrily. "I'm the blessed ten-stone champion, ten-stone champ, and I ain't goin' to let no one—'Ere, where are we?"

He leaned to the window and peered out, nearly falling on the knees of Lomax in the attempt, and he would have done so but that Abrams held him up. They had been driving nearly a quarter of an hour, and both had been too much occupied to note in which direction the cab was travelling. They had not heard what directions their friend had given to the driver, and when Abrams, startled by the prizefighter's sudden remark, also turned his eyes towards the window, the little he could see left him in quite as much doubt as if he had been in the same condition as the pugilist, who wasn't in a fit state to recognise anything.

"Look here, Thandy," and the Jew took McDonald's arm and tried to drag him from the window, "you don't know vat you're thaying, tho hold yer tongue. Thuppose he did hear?"

"What of it? Good fellow! Wouldn't 'urt a fly," rejoined Sandy. "Got pile 'o' money, though, an' thinks 'e's got a man as can fight—fight me! Jiminy! Ha, ha!"

"Well, thut up, then; I don't know where we are."

"Dunno where we are? Well, I do, then, old sport. We're where I've took old woman to—old woman Brewer. Good name, ain't it? This is the street, an', jiminy, there's the 'ouse, the very 'ouse! No. 4—that's it!—4, Ringwood's Court, New Cut. That's where I've got 'er, old pal, all as safe an' sound as a babby in its mother's arms. Never get out no more—never no more, my boy, not till—"

"Will you—" began Abrams, shaking with helpless anger, the while he fearfully eyed the impassive man in the corner of the cab.

But McDonald's tongue was loosed, it was not to be stayed, and he rambled on, sometimes but half coherently, yet continually coming back to the subject of the "old woman Brewer."

And all the while Lomax lay back in his corner, motionless, impassive, the perfect presentation of a man overcome by exceeding fatigue and weariness, the subject of sleep profound and absorbing. Yet though his body was quiescent, his brain was very wide awake, acute, and vigilant. Not a word that passed between the two rogues opposite him missed his ears, and every word of consequence was immediately photographed on his memory.

He would not have believed himself capable of a deception so convincing; he surprised himself. True, he was aided by the condition in which were his companions, as well as by the gloominess of the interior of the cab; but to him was due all credit for the truly marvellous ascendancy that his will during that cab drive enforced upon his body.

This had been his plan, though its carrying out had been vague even to himself when he started to find McDonald and his backer. Believing that one or both were concerned in Mrs. Brewer's disappearance, he had decided to shadow them, in the hope that he might be led to where he believed that his client had been imprisoned.

(Another instalment of this fascinating serial next week, also the first chapters of "In the Ranks.")



For Next Week

The Editor, "MAGNET" Library, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London, will be glad to hear from you.

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