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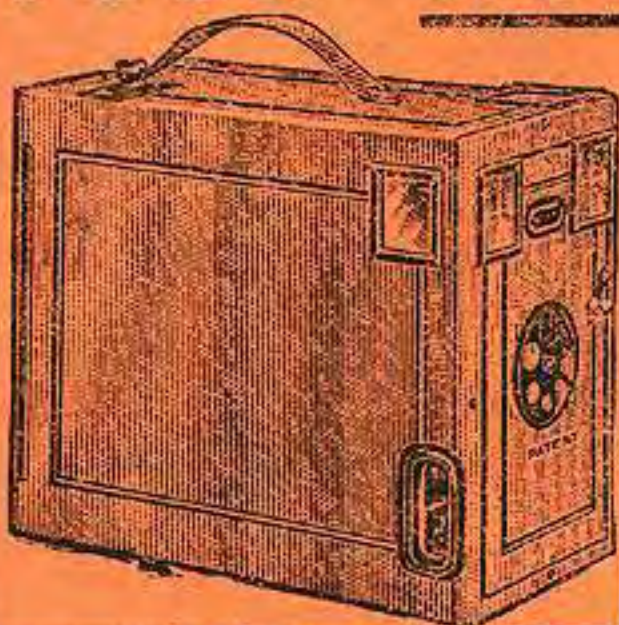
THE FAMOUS FOUR.

By
FRANK
RICHARDS



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"FUN BY THE SEA!"

Another Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.,
by FRANK RICHARDS.

**NEXT
TUESDAY.**

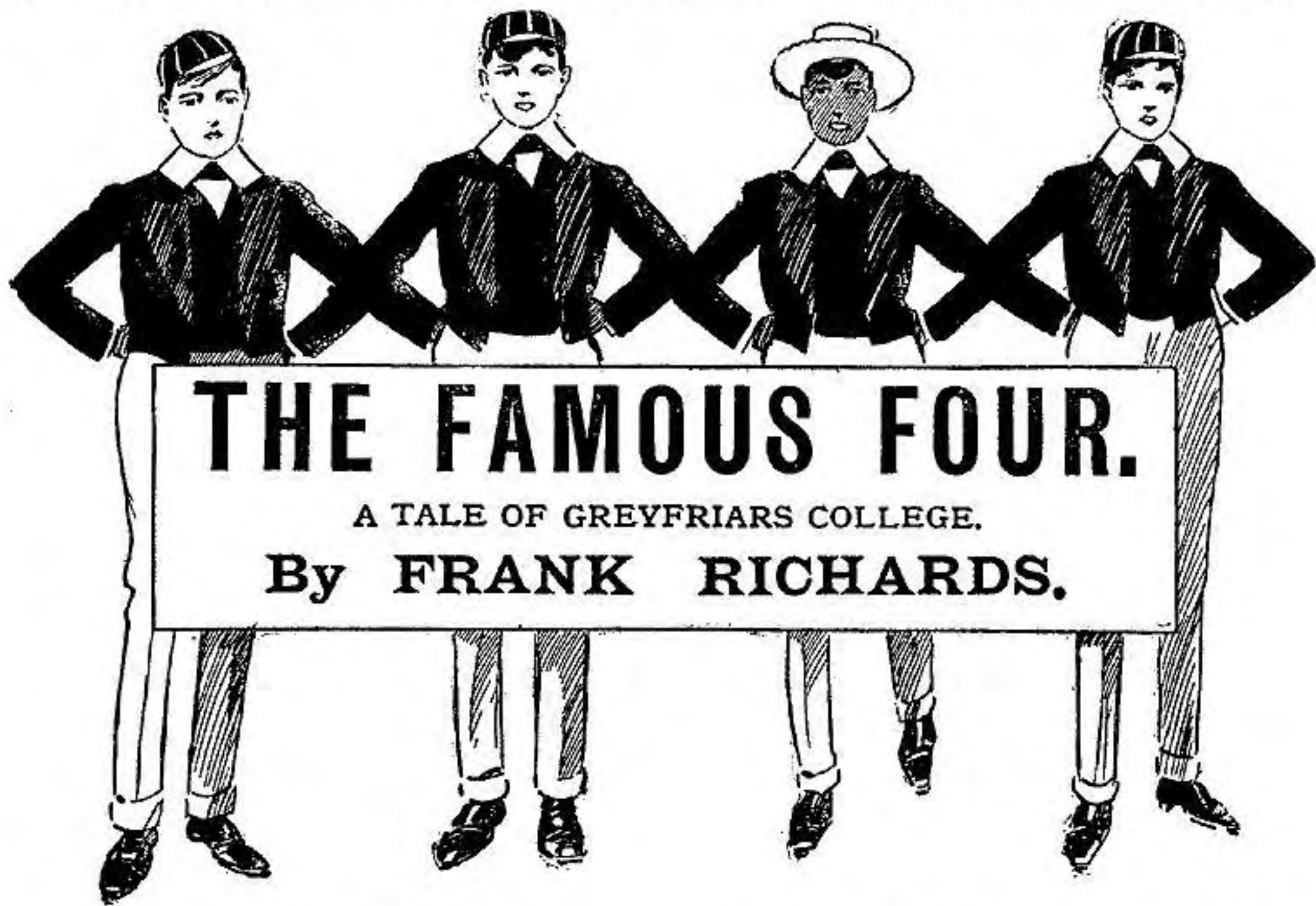
EVERY TUESDAY



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A Complete Story-Book,
attractive to all Readers.

ONE HALFPENNY



THE FIRST CHAPTER. An Important Question.

WHERE'S Bulstrode," said Nugent.
Harry Wharton knitted his brows thoughtfully.
"Bulstrode can play cricket!" said Bob Cherry,
"but he's a beast to get on with. If you let him
into the eleven, he'll think you can't do without him, and
he'll want to start bossing things at once."

"That's what I was thinking," he remarked.

The chums of the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars—were met in consultation in No. 1 Study, and the topic under discussion was an important one. The Form cricket match—between the Remove and the Upper Fourth—was to take place shortly, and Harry Wharton, the cricket captain of the Remove, felt the full weight of the responsibility upon his youthful shoulders. The question of making up the Remove eleven was not an easy one.

Nearly every fellow in the Form considered that he was entitled to play, on merit alone. But it was not quite feasible to play forty fellows a side, and the task of selection and rejection was a thankless one.

"Upon the whole," said Bob Cherry, thoughtfully, "I'm not sorry they elected you cricket captain instead of me, Wharton."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It isn't all skittles," he remarked.

"Quite so. If you lose the match, the Remove will be ready to scalp you."

"I know that."

"And if you win, every fellow will attribute the victory to his own batting or bowling, and won't think that you had much to do with it."

"Rather," grinned Nugent, "that's always the way of it."

"The ratherfulness is great," said Hurree Singh, the Hindoo member of the Remove at Greyfriars. "The thanklessness of the worthy Wharton's taskfulness is terrific."

"But it's up to me to pick out the eleven," said Harry Wharton, "I've got to do it. You fellows will be in, of course, and that will give the team a backbone. Hazeldene ought to go in too."

"Rather," said Nugent. "There's a jolly good reason for putting Hazeldene in."

"What's the reason?"

"His sister Marjorie."

Harry coloured.

"Well I should like to please Marjorie Hazeldene in the matter," he said. "But I hope you fellows don't think I'd put Hazeldene in if he wasn't worth the place I give him in the eleven?"

Bob Cherry slapped him on the back.

"That's all right, old chap. We know you put cricket before everything else in a matter of making up a playing eleven."

"Of course," said Nugent. "I was only joking. Marjorie will be glad to see Hazeldene play, all the same. I suppose Micky Desmond is going in."

"Yes, I've got Micky's name down, and Skinner's. There's Russell, Mills, and Curtis. They're all good."

"But the eleventh man——"

"I'm not decided about him."

"Bulstrode can play," Nugent said thoughtfully. "But he was captain of the Form eleven last term, and there is bound to be trouble, I suppose, if you take him in."

"That's the difficulty. I know he can play when he chooses, though as a rule he's too lazy to keep himself in form, and as a matter of fact he has spoiled his wind by smoking. But I don't know any other fellow in the Remove who is up to his form, except those already members of the eleven."

The chums of the Remove looked very thoughtful. Billy Bunter, who was cutting bread-and-butter at the tea-table, looked very thoughtful too. His knife ceased to operate, and he blinked reflectively at the chums through his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows——"

"You see, if I take in Bulstrode, and he starts bossing the show, he will have to be kicked out again," Harry Wharton remarked. "That leaves us just where we were."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Yes, and it's so much time lost," Nugent assented. "If Bulstrode knew how to keep his place it would be all right, but to have a swaggering fellow in the team putting on side would be intolerable."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Did you speak, Billy?"

"Yes, I did, Wharton," said Billy Bunter, indignantly. "I spoke three times."

"Then don't do it a fourth time," said Bob Cherry. "Suppose you were to speak to Bulstrode, and put it plainly to him——"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Don't, Billy. Why don't you cut that bread-and-butter instead of talking? It would be over so much better."

"I have a suggestion to make——"

"Go ahead, then," said Harry Wharton. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings—you know the rest, Bob. Billy may have thought of somebody we've overlooked."

"That's exactly how the case stands, as a matter of fact, Wharton."

"Then go on, and be quick."

"If you hurry me I lose the thread of my thoughts, and get confused," said Billy Bunter. "You'd better let me take my own time——"

"Get it over."

"I wish you wouldn't interrupt me, Nugent——"

"Will you get done?" roared Bob Cherry.

"Certainly, Cherry. There's no need to get excited about it that I can see. From what Wharton says you seem to be hung up for a fellow for the team——"

"That's it."

"You want a chap who can field, bat, and bowl—in fact a jolly good all-round cricketer?"

"That's it."

"Well, there's one you've forgotten."

"Who is it?"

"Myself," said Bunter, modestly.

"Eh?"

"I am pretty good at cricket. I have become wonderfully strong since I took up physical culture. With a little practice I have no doubt that I should play the game better than you fellows——"

"Kill him, somebody," said Bob Cherry.

"Don't take any notice of Cherry, Wharton, as he is only actuated by envy——"

"Oh, my hat," gasped Nugent.

"Of Nugent, who knows that I should jolly soon put him in the shade——"

"The cheekfulness of the worthy Bunter is terrific."

"Or of Hurree Singh, whose cricket compared with mine is mere bosh——"

"My dear Billy, you are all right as a champion ass, but you'll never make a champion at cricket," said Harry Wharton, good-naturedly. "I'm afraid that I shall have to leave you out."

"I'm sincerely sorry, Wharton—not for my own sake, but for the sake of the side. I shall be sincerely sorry to see the Remove eleven licked for want of a really-good all-round man in it to give the side a tone——"

"Well, Billy's a good all-round man, in a sense," remarked Nugent, regarding Billy Bunter's ample figure with a grin. "As round as a barrel, I should say."

"Really, Nugent——"

"I daresay he could roll after the ball as fast as we could run."

"Really, Cherry——"

"Better make the tea, and give up visions of figuring as a cricketer," grinned Bob Cherry. "It's not quite your mark, Billy."

"There is a lot of jealousy in these things," said Bunter; "I make the suggestion for the sake of the side, not from any desire to put myself forward. I only wanted the Remove to win, but if you prefer defeat, I daresay it will be a lesson to you."

"I say——" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Well, what is it?"

"What about that new chap Levison? I know he plays cricket."

Harry Wharton looked thoughtful.

Ernest Levison was a new boy in the Greyfriars Remove, and he was not an easy boy to get on with. But that counted for little if he was willing and able to take his place in the Form eleven.

"I had forgotten him," said Harry. "Have you seen him play, Bob?"

"Yes, I watched him at the nets yesterday, and I thought his batting was very decent. I know we don't want batsmen particularly, but he may be able to field. Might as well give him a trial."

Wharton nodded.

"I will. We'll have him out after tea, and see the kind of fielding and batting he can put up. If he won't do, I suppose we shall have to fall back on Bulstrode."

And the discussion ended, and the Chums of the Remove fell to at the tea-table.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Levison is Suspicious.

CHEERY and green looked the cricket ground at Greyfriars when the chums of the Remove came out. In the fine summer evening there was light enough for cricket for an hour or two after tea, and the young cricketers did not fail to take advantage of it.

Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh walked down to the pitch. Nugent had stayed behind to call for Levison and bring him out.

The stumps were already pitched. From different parts of the field sounded the merry shouts of the players, both the Fifth and the Sixth being at practice on the ground, in their allotted spheres.

"Hullo, where's Levison?" asked Harry Wharton, as Nugent came down to the ground alone and joined them.

Nugent grinned.

"He says he's busy."

Wharton's brow darkened.

"Did you say his Form Captain wanted him to give him a trial at cricket?"

"Yes."

"Like his cheek not to come," said Bob Cherry.

Wharton nodded.

"I'll go and speak to him," he said.

Harry Wharton walked into the house. The incident strangely reminded him of his own early days at Greyfriars. He could remember how, in the sullen obstinacy of that time, he had refused to come down to the football ground when ordered by the captain of the school, and had been carried there by force by the grinning Removites.

Perhaps that recollection made him decide to deal more gently with the new boy than he would otherwise have done.

He knocked at the door of the study Levison shared with two other fellows. There was no reply, and so he opened the door and entered.

Levison looked up with his quick, keen eyes.

"Hallo, Wharton! Do you usually come into a room without being invited?"

A WONDERFUL NEW STORY.

A WORLD AT WAR,

By **ANDREW GRAY.**

NOW STARTING IN

"The Boys' Herald."

Harry Wharton's eyes gleamed for a moment, but he was determined to keep his temper. He looked straight at the new boy in the Remove.

"I knocked," he said quietly. "I want to speak to you. You may not be aware of it, but I am cricket captain of the Form you belong to—"

"I daresay I've heard it mentioned," said Levison, carelessly.

"And I am willing to give you a trial to put you in the Form eleven."

"I'm willing to go in."

"You would have to have a trial first."

"I don't see why. I played cricket at my last school, and I fancy my form is a bit above that of most of the fellows in the Lower Fourth here."

"You may fancy so, but I don't think a conceited ass is likely to be much of a cricketer," said Harry angrily.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"I want to see you play—"

"What's the little game?" said Levison suddenly.

Harry stared at him.

"What do you mean? There's no little game that I know of. I don't know what you're driving at."

"There are lots of fellows in the Form would jump at the chance," said Levison. "I suppose you've got a motive for trying a new fellow. Are you really thinking of putting me in the eleven, or are you thinking of getting me down on the cricket field and guying me?"

Harry Wharton compressed his lips.

"I haven't any time to waste guying you," he said, "and I dare say you would be no good, anyway. You can stay where you are."

And he turned to the door.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Levison hastily. "I don't mind playing if you're serious. I've got to go down to the village for some things, but when I get back—"

"You can go and hang yourself!"

"I say—"

Harry Wharton walked out of the study and shut the door hard. His brows were still knitted when he rejoined his chums on the cricket field.

"Isn't he coming?" asked Nugent.

Wharton shook his head.

"I'm not going to give him a chance. He may be able to play cricket, but he gets on my nerves too much. We should never hit it."

"Good! I suppose it will have to be Bulstrode."

"I'll think it over. Let's get to practice now. Have you seen Hazeldene?"

"He's just coming out."

"I say, you follows—"

"Oh, run away and play, Billy!"

"I say—"

"My dear kid, you can't play cricket, so—"

"I haven't come here to play cricket, Cherry. I'm going down to the village to the post-office—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What are you going there for? You don't mean to say that you've got a postal order?"

Billy Bunter shook his head.

"No, Cherry. I haven't. I've been expecting one for some time, but owing to some delay in the post it hasn't arrived. I'm going to the post-office to inquire about it. You know they're so careless in country post-offices. My letter may be lying there all the time with the postal order in it—"

"That would be hard cheese, Billy."

"Yes, and I think it's time I inquired. If you fellows want anything brought back from the village I am quite ready to oblige you. I shall be passing the tuck-shop."

Bob Cherry laughed.

"You can pass it, Billy."

"Well, it might save a journey to the village another time if I called in now as I was passing," said Bunter. "There's these nobby little cream cakes they sell there. You can't get those at the school shop here, you know. I shouldn't mind carrying them back if you'd like me to get some."

"Suppose you got a dozen, Billy, how many of them would get as far as Greyfriars if you started carrying them home?" asked Nugent humorously.

"Really, Nugent—"

Harry Wharton picked a shilling from his pocket.

"Make it a bob's worth, Billy."

"Certainly, Wharton. I shall be very pleased to oblige you by going to the tuck-shop and getting you the cream cakes. I dare say you will do as much for me another time. I expect my postal order is waiting for me at the post-office, and I shall in that case bring back a ripping good feed from the village, and we'll have supper in the dormitory," said Bunter. "I'm off now."

"I say, look out, you know," said Hazeldene, joining the group. "I hear that the gipsies are in the neighbourhood again now, and we had trouble with them when they were here before."

"Oh, they won't kidnap me!" said Billy Bunter. "They kidnapped your sister, Vaseline; but I haven't anything valuable about me except Wharton's shilling—"

"You may be staggering under the weight of a consignment of postal orders coming back," Bob Cherry remarked.

But Bunter seemed to be willing to risk a hostile meeting for the sake of the cream cakes. He toddled down to the gates of Greyfriars, and the chums of the Remove went on the cricket field.

They were at practice when Levison came out of the house with his cap on. He stood looking at them for some time, but did not speak. Harry Wharton did not even glance at him.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Footpads.

"MASTER Harry!"

Harry Wharton had come off the field. He had put in a half hour's practice, and there was no doubt that the young leader of the Remove was in fine form. Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars School, had given him a word of commendation as he came off the field. And a word of commendation from Wingate on cricket matters meant a great deal.

Harry, still in his cricketing flannels, and looking very handsome and fit, was strolling under the old elms, when the voice came softly upon his ears.

He looked round, and raised his cap with a good-humoured smile.

It was old Nadesha who stood before him—the old gipsy woman who had warned Harry of an intended robbery at the school by an outcast member of her tribe, and who had since then lived at Greyfriars in the service of the Head's wife, kindly Mrs. Locke.

"Oh, it is you, Nadesha!" said Harry, turning towards the old gipsy.

Nadesha nodded.

"Master Harry—"

She paused.

"You wish to speak to me?" said Harry Wharton.

"Yes. You are in danger."

Harry looked at her blankly.

"I? In danger!"

"Yes. Have you not heard that there are gipsies in the neighbourhood of Friardale now?" said Nadesha in a low, swift voice.

Harry smiled.

"Yes, but they will not harm me. Why should I fear the gipsies?"

"Have you forgotten Melchior and Barengro?"

"But they are in prison, I believe."

"That may be, but they have friends. The gipsies who have come here are not the true Romany, whom you would have nothing to fear from. These are of Melchior's kidney, and if you should fall in with them in a lonely lane you would be in danger."

"Thank you for the warning, Nadesha. I shall be careful."

"They will not stop in the neighbourhood long. They will go; they are wanderers. For a few days, then, will you remain within the gates?"

Harry laughed.

"Remain shut up in the school because I am afraid of a visionary danger, Nadesha?"

"It is no visionary danger. It is real."

"Even then it would make no difference. I can take care of myself."

The old gipsy made an expressive gesture.

"As self-willed and hot-headed as ever," she murmured.

Harry Wharton caught the words, and coloured.

"Not so, Nadesha," he replied. "But you fear too much for me. I should be laughed at if I remained within gates to avoid a danger which might never arise."

"You will have your way, at all events," said the gipsy. "I can do nothing but warn you."

"And that is enough, Nadesha. You have put me on my guard, and now it will not be easy for them to catch me napping if they mean me harm."

"Harry!"

It was Bob Cherry's voice calling under the trees. Nadesha nodded her head, and disappeared. Harry Wharton watched the old gipsy's red shawl till it vanished, and then he turned away, with a thoughtful brow, to join his chum. Old Nadesha had shown a regard for him ever since she came to the place, which moved Harry, and he would willingly have done anything he could to please her. But he was not the lad to take a single step to avoid danger.

"Harry! Where have you got to?"

"Here I am, Bob."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! I wondered where you were? I thought I heard you talking to somebody."

"So I was. It was old Nadesha."

"The gipsy?"

"She warned me about the gipsies being near Friardale again, and doesn't want me to go out of gates till they're gone," said Harry, with a smile.

Bob Cherry laughed.

"That wouldn't do, Harry. It's just as well to be careful, though. I hear that there was a robbery in Friardale Wood yesterday, and a man belonging to the village was knocked senseless and left in the wood for hours till he crawled away."

Harry's brows knitted.

"We don't want to run into anything of that," Bob Cherry remarked.

"I should be glad to run into the scoundrel who did it!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "I suppose the police haven't found him?"

"Oh, no! The Friardale police couldn't find anything. I say, that affair, now I come to think of it, occurred in the footpath—the one we use for a short cut to the village—"

"What about that?"

"Only Billy Bunter will go that way."

Harry looked serious.

"If he fell in with the gipsies he might get into trouble," said Bob Cherry. "He's too blind to see any danger till he was right into it. Suppose we take a stroll down and look for him."

"I was just thinking of it."

"I'll call Nugent and Hurree Singh, then."

It was getting towards time for locking up, but there was time for the chums of the Remove to go down the footpath to look for Billy. The Famous Four left the gates of Greyfriars, went down the lane, and crossed the stile into the footpath through the old shadowy wood.

The dusk was growing thick in the wood. Dark shadows were thrown across the footpath, moving as the foliage trembled in the breeze.

The wood was silent and still. The chums of the Remove were silent as they walked on under the over-arching boughs. The thought that there might be a dangerous ruffian lurking in the shadows there was quite enough to make them serious.

Harry Wharton suddenly stopped and held up his hand.

"Hark!"

It was the sound of a voice from beyond a turn of the footpath ahead. It was a voice they knew well, and the chums of the Remove could not help grinning as they heard it.

"I'm sincerely sorry, my good man, but I haven't any money. If I had any I would give it to you with a great deal of pleasure. But I have been disappointed about a postal order, and I am quite stony."

A rough, savage voice growled out a reply.

"Hand over your watch!"

"I'm sincerely sorry, but I haven't a watch."

"Knock him on the head, Simon!"

"That I will if he doesn't—"

"Please don't get excited, my dear fellows. I haven't any money, or any watch, or I should give them to you with pleasure. You can have some of these cream cakes if you like. They are very nice, and freshly made this afternoon."

Harry Wharton made a sign to his companions.

"Come on!" he whispered.

"Rather!" murmured Bob Cherry and Nugent.

"The ratherfulness is terrific," purred the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Silently on the grassy footpath the chums of the Remove ran swiftly forward. They passed the turn in the path in a few moments, and came upon the scene.

Billy Bunter was standing in the middle of the path, with a paper bag of cream cakes under his arm, and blinking through his big spectacles in a very scared way.

Two ruffianly-looking, swarthy fellows were blocking his way, one of them with a thick, heavy cudgel under his arm. Their faces were savage and threatening. They knew by Billy's cap that he belonged to the big school, and they had evidently hoped to make something like a haul from him. To find that he had nothing more valuable about him than cream cakes was disappointing; and it looked as though the ruffians meant to compensate themselves for the disappointment by brutality to their victim.

"I—I—I wish you'd have some of these cream cakes!" whimpered Billy Bunter. "Please don't be violent. I—I—"

"Knock him on the head, Simon!"

The man with the cudgel under his arm let it slip into his hand.

Billy Bunter started back.

"Please—I—oh—dear—"

"At them!" shouted Harry Wharton.

The Famous Four rushed to the attack.

Their coming had been so silent that the gipsies were taken wholly by surprise. Harry Wharton's fist crashed into Simon's swarthy face like a lump of solid iron, and the ruffian went reeling half a dozen paces before he fell to the ground.

Bob Cherry and Nugent jumped at the other gipsy like a couple of cats, and had him on the ground in a twinkling.

Billy Bunter reeled against a tree with a gasp of relief.

"Go for them!" he panted. "Go for them, Wharton! Punch his head, Cherry! Knock him silly, Inky!"

Simon sprang to his feet. He had dropped his cudgel in his fall and he faced Harry Wharton with clawing hands. But

the junior's right crashed into the swarthy face again, and the left followed it up like a hammer.

The ruffian reeled into the bushes and fell—and picked himself up and ran like a hare.

The other rascal had wriggled himself loose and jumped up. He seemed about to spring at the boys, but changed his mind and darted away after his comrade.

"After them!" yelled Bob Cherry. And he was rushing after the gipsies when Harry Wharton caught him by the shoulder and swung him back.

"Hold on, Bob."

"Oh, come on! We can run them in—"

"We could never find them in the wood, dark as it is," said Harry Wharton; "and I don't want to be knocked on the head either, Bob."

Bob Cherry stopped.

"Oh, just as you like. Hallo, hallo, hallo, Billy—why, the boulder's feeding!"

Billy Bunter was indeed sampling the contents of the paper bag. He had a cream cake between his teeth. It was plain that the scare had not impaired his appetite in any way.

"I'm jolly glad you fellows came along," he remarked. "I believe they were going to bash me with that cudgel, you know. It was beastly of them, wasn't it?—especially when I offered them some of the cream cakes. Upon the whole, I'm not sorry that they didn't know anything about my postal order at the post-office. If I had had it with me, those rotters might have taken it."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I dare say it will come by the first post in the morning, Billy. Let's get back to Greyfriars, or Gosling will lock us out."

The chums of the Remove lost no time in getting to the school. Gosling the porter was coming out with his keys when they arrived. He gave a grunt as they walked in. Gosling would have given a good deal to be able to lock them out. He was generally on hostile terms with the Famous Four.

"Hallo, Gossy!" said Bob Cherry affably. "Don't be worried; we're in in time, you see. I can see you've been anxious about us!"

Gosling grunted.

"What I says is this 'ere," he said. "I—"

"You were going to keep the gates open a bit longer for us?" asked Nugent. "Now, I take that very kindly of you, Gossy."

"What I says is this 'ere—"

"Hallo! Going out?"

It was Harry Wharton who asked the question, and the person he addressed was Levison, the new boy in the Remove, who came down to the gateway at that moment with his cap on and a light overcoat on his arm.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Knocked Down.

LEVISON glanced at the chums of the Remove, but he had been about to pass them without a word, when Harry Wharton spoke to him.

He nodded shortly.

"Yes, I'm going out."

"Then you won't come in agin," said Gosling, the porter, emphatically. "Which I shuts the gates according to horders. And what I says is this 'ere, that horders is horders."

"I've got a pass," said Levison coldly.

"Which seeing is believing," said Gosling, with a sniff.

"There it is."

Gosling looked at the pass Levison held out. It was signed by Carberry, a Sixth Form prefect, and was quite in order. Gosling grunted.

"Which if you'll go out I shall be able to shut the gates," he said.

"I don't see why I should hurry to please you," said Levison.

"You're not very obliging to me. You can wait."

Gosling snorted. But he had to wait.

"You're going to the village?" asked Harry Wharton.

"I really don't see why that should interest you very much," said Levison. "But, as a matter of fact, I am going to the village."

Harry flushed angrily.

"It doesn't interest me in the least," he exclaimed. "You can go to the village, or to the deuce, for all I care, but—"

"Then I don't see why you should ask questions about it. I'm afraid I must be off, anyway; I've left it later than I intended already."

"Wait a minute—"

"Which I am waiting to shut the gate, and what I says is this 'ere—"

"Wait, then," said Levison, unpleasantly. "What are you paid your wages for?"

Gosling glared.

"I want to speak a word to you, that's all," said Wharton.

"If you're going to the village, I only want to warn you that it's not safe."

Levison stared.

"Not safe! What do you mean?"

"There are gipsies in the wood."

The new boy in the Remove laughed.

"I suppose gipsies in the wood won't worry me. I'm not afraid of gipsies, however much they may scare some people."

"If you mean that I am afraid—"

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"I didn't say so, did I?"

"No, you didn't; but—" Harry paused. It was not worth while bandying words with the fellow, anyway. "Let me finish. There was a robbery with violence yesterday near Friardale."

"I haven't heard anything about it."

"Well you have now."

"Such things do happen. I suppose," said Levison carelessly.

"But I suppose everybody can't go about in a state of nerves because there has been a robbery with violence."

"It happened in the wood, and as we came through the wood just now, we met the gipsies. They had stopped Billy Bunter to rob him."

Levison closed one eye significantly.

"They were going to ill-use Bunter because he had no valuables about him," Harry Wharton went on, controlling his temper with difficulty. "We came up just in time—"

"Like a party of heroes, and no mistake," grinned Levison.

"I suppose you attacked the villains and wiped up the ground with them?"

"They got away."

"What a pity! You might have got no end of glory by running them in, you know—and then people would have believed your yarn, too."

Wharton's teeth came together hard.

"Do you mean to say that you don't believe me?" he exclaimed.

"Well, I don't say that; but it sounds to me a lot like a fairy tale," replied Levison. "If you could prevent me from getting out with this yarn, I can imagine how you would snigger over it afterwards."

"It is true."

"Oh, of course it is! But you can't keep me in and gey me so easily as all this, you know. You would have to make it a bit more plausible."

"I say, Levison," said Billy Bunter, "it's all true, you know. They were going to bash me with a cudgel, though I told them I was sincerely sorry I had no money."

Levison laughed.

"Pile it on!" he remarked.

"You're a silly ass!" growled Bob Cherry. "You've had a fair warning, and if you go running into danger now, it will serve you right what you get."

"I'm quite willing to risk it. Have you finished?"

"The silliness of the ass is terrific!" remarked Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh. "Supposedly we wipe the ground up dustfully with the silly ass, as a lessonfulness not to show the piggish doubtfulness of our honourable word?"

"Good wheeze!" said Nugent.

"Oh, rats!" said Levison. "You can't take me in. But it's no good getting ratty about it. I'm going out, anyway!"

"Which I'm waiting—"

"Wait, then!" said Levison.

"What I says is this 'ere—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"One word more," said Harry Wharton. "I have warned you of your danger, and it is a real one. If you go to the village, go by the public road, not by the footpath through the wood."

"The footpath saves a quarter of an hour."

"Then you are going that way?"

"Yes."

"After what I have told you?"

"Oh, rats!"

Harry Wharton's eyes blazed.

"You confounded cad!" he exclaimed. "I have half a mind to give you the licking of your life now, on the spot!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Levison. "You can't take me in. I've got my eye-teeth cut, you know. A silly yarn like the one you've just told me—oh!"

Levison broke off as Harry's fist came out. Wharton was noted for his patience, but Levison would have tried any fellow's patience. To be given the lie was a little more than Harry would have stood from anybody. His fist flashed out before the words were fairly off Levison's lips, and the new boy in the Remove rolled over on the ground.

Gosling broke into a chuckle. He was as irritated by Levison as anybody, and the prompt punishment that had fallen upon him was a very pleasing spectacle to the Greyfriars porter.

Levison sat up and rubbed his mouth.

"You did that when I wasn't looking!" he growled.

"You were looking," said Harry contemptuously. "But, anyway, get up, and I'll give you some more when you're looking! I've had enough of your confounded insolence."

Levison slowly rose to his feet. There was a trickle of red from the corner of his mouth, and he wiped it away with his pocket-handkerchief.

"I sha'n't fight you now," he said, "I'm going out. I'll call this to your mind to-morrow, Harry Wharton."

"Whenever you like," said Wharton disdainfully.

Levison turned to the gate.

"My worthy friend," said Hurreo Singh, "the dangerousness is real, and it is not a hoaxful joke. I advise you to—"

But Levison was gone. Gosling locked up the gates after the Remove had gone out, and the chums turned slowly towards the house.

Harry Wharton's face was darkly shadowed. He had regretted that passionate blow a few moments after it was struck. But the old hasty temper that had caused him—and his friends—so much trouble in the past, was not gone yet. Nugent glanced at him as they crossed the Close.

"You're not bothering about that chap?" he asked. "If he gets into trouble it will serve him jolly well right."

"Rather," said Bob Cherry.

"The ratherfulness is great."

"I'm sorry I hit him," said Harry, in a low voice. "He wasn't worth it, and—and, as a matter of fact, he can't fight me. He's not half up to my form, and I should walk over him. You know I licked Bulstrode, and Bulstrode wouldn't make a mouthful of that fellow. I oughtn't to have struck him."

"By Jove! If ever anybody deserved it he did," said Nugent warmly. "I wonder you kept your temper with him so long. He was enough to provoke anybody's temper, especially yours."

"Yes, especially mine," said Harry bitterly. "I know it's a beastly one."

"I didn't mean that," said Nugent quickly.

"But it's a fact all the same. I wish I hadn't; but there, it's no good bothering about it now. Let's get in."

And the chums of the Remove went indoors.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Missing!

WINGATE, of the Sixth, captain of Greyfriars, was in his study, conning over a list of names on a sheet of notepaper, when a tap came at his door. The Remove were not the only fellows at Greyfriars concerned with questions of cricket. Wingate was captain of the First Eleven, and he was thinking out his team—the team that was to uphold the colours of Greyfriars at an important away match, when the knock came at his study door.

"Come in!" rapped out Wingate.

Harry Wharton entered the study. The captain of Greyfriars gave him a genial nod. Time had been—and not so long ago—when Harry Wharton had been shown the rough side of Wingate's character, and he had found it very rough indeed. But the captain of Greyfriars had marked the change in Wharton, and by many a quiet action had helped Harry in fighting his battle—and winning it. The head boy of the Remove and the captain of the Sixth were on excellent terms now—as good terms as the difference in their Forms allowed.

"Hallo, Wharton!"

"Can I speak to you a minute, Wingate?"

"Certainly. You can sit down. Something about the cricket?" asked the Greyfriars' captain pleasantly.

"No, not this time, Wingate. I want you to advise me later about that, if you will. But just now there's a matter I thought I ought to speak to you about."

"Go ahead," said the captain of Greyfriars tersely.

Harry Wharton related the incident in the wood, and the rescue of Billy Bunter from the footpads. Wingate listened with knitted brows.

"You were quite right to tell me this," he said, "I will mention it to the Head, and particulars can be sent to the police in Friardale."

"But that isn't all."

"No? What else is there?"

"Levison was going out as we came in, and he wouldn't listen to my warning. He thought I was rotting. He's gone out, and he means to take the footpath through the wood. In fact, he's there before now."

"The young fool! But what does he mean by going out at this time?"

"He had a pass from a prefect."

"Oh, I see, that's all right! But he ought to have had sense enough not to go after what you told him. Let me see—that is a new boy in the Remove, isn't it?"

"Yes; he hasn't been here much over a week."

"H'm! I hope the young fool won't get into any mischief. You say the gipsies cut off after your row with them."

"Yes."

"They mayn't hang about the same spot. Levison probably won't meet them, but—but he might. How long as he been gone?"

"Twenty minutes, I think. I had to go to calling-over, and then I came here."

"Then he's close to the village by now. It's too late to think of following him and fetching him back," said Wingate.

"Anyway, he will have to be in by bedtime, and we can only leave it till then. The young ass ought to have a licking for

going out under the circumstances, but it can't be helped now."

Harry Wharton rose.

"I thought I ought to mention it to you, Wingate, in case—"

"Certainly, that's right. I expect he will turn up in time for bed, and then if the captain of his Form gave him a licking for being an obstinate ass, I don't think any harm would be done," grinned Wingate.

Harry Wharton laughed, and quitted the study. He felt less uneasy after the interview with the captain of Greyfriars. After all, it was not likely that Levison would fall in with the footpads.

Wharton entered the junior common-room, when Hurree Jamset Ram Singh immediately claimed him for a game of chess.

In the intense occupation of the game Harry forgot all about Levison and his obstinacy. He glanced up with a start when Carberry the prefect came into the room with a growl.

"Bedtime, you young rotters."

Carberry was one of the most unpopular prefects at Greyfriars. His mode of address to the juniors was always something in this style, unless there were masters near. Carberry liked to have the authority and consideration of a prefect, but he did not care for the duties that were attached to the office. When his turn came for seeing the lights out in the Remove dormitory, he generally growled at what he regarded as a troublesome waste of his time, and bullied the youngsters to compensate himself.

Harry Wharton looked at his watch. It was twenty-five minutes past nine, and half-past was the bedtime for the Remove. Wharton looked quickly round the room, remembering Levison. The new boy was not there.

"Mate in four," murmured the Hindoo junior softly.

Harry Wharton nodded assent, and the chess were swept into the box. Carberry, as well as Harry Wharton, was looking round the room.

"Where is that rat, Levison?" he asked.

"Haven't seen him," said Bulstrode, at whom the bully of the Sixth was looking as he asked the question.

"I gave him a pass to go to the village after locking-up," said Carberry. "He was to bring something back for me. He hasn't been to my study."

"Has he come back?" said Harry Wharton.

Carberry stared at him.

"You don't mean to say the young rotter may have had the cheek to stay out till this time of night!" he exclaimed. "By James, I'll warm him if he has."

Carberry, with an angry brow, inquired right and left for Levison. But he was not to be found. Hazeldene went to look in his study, but he was not there. No one had seen him since calling-over. It was clear at last that he had not returned.

"I'll skin him for this," said the prefect, snapping his teeth.

"He may have been kept away," said Harry Wharton.

"What could have kept him away?"

"If he has met with some accident."

"Rubbish!"

"He may have met the footpads in the wood."

"Rot!"

Harry Wharton compressed his lips.

"Get off to bed, you young rotters," said Carberry. "Hanged if I know why I should have to drive you to bed of a night as if I were a nurse! Get off to your dormitory or I'll warm you. Where are you going, Wharton?"

"I'm going to tell Wingate that Levison hasn't come back."

"You needn't trouble to do anything of the kind. Go up to the dormitory."

"Wingate wishes me to tell him."

"Do as I tell you, and never mind Wingate."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," said Harry Wharton quietly; and he walked away towards the seniors' room, where he knew he would find Wingate at that hour.

Carberry clicked his teeth. Like most bullies he overstepped the limit sometimes and provoked defiance, and was then non-plussed. The Removites were chuckling at his discomfiture, and he cuffed several of the smaller boys right and left, and bullied the rest till they crowded upstairs to the dormitory.

Harry Wharton entered the seniors' room, where he found Wingate talking to Baker and Green, and several others of the Sixth. The captain of Greyfriars looked towards him at once. He had not forgotten Levison.

"What is it, Wharton?"

"Levison hasn't come back."

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure, Wingate. We have looked for him every where."

"That's curious," said the captain of Greyfriars, looking worried. "Have you asked the porter whether he has let him in?"

"No; but—"

"Better go and ask him to make sure."

"Certainly."

Harry left the School House, and went down to the porter's

lodge. Gosling growled at Wharton's knock, and opened the door. Gosling was having his supper, and did not want to be disturbed.

"What is it?" he grunted. "Why hain't you in bed, boy? What I says is this 'ere, that kids ought to be in bed at the proper time. I says—"

"Have you let Levison in, Gosling?"

"I hain't let nobody in."

"Then Levison is still out?"

"I s'pose he is, and if I was the Head I'd skin him. What I says is this 'ere—"

But Harry Wharton did not stay for more. He returned to the house, and reported to Wingate. The captain of the school looked deeply troubled.

"You had better go to bed," he said. "I will tell the Head about it, and we will see what is to be done. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Wingate!"

The Remove were already in bed, and Carberry was turning the light out when Harry Wharton entered the dormitory. The prefect looked at him with a scowl.

"Well, as you're late you can undress in the dark," he remarked. "Don't let me catch you lighting anything in this dormitory or I'll make it warm for you!"

Harry Wharton did not reply. He had undressed in the dark before, and he could do it again. But as a matter of fact he did not intend to undress at all just then.

The prefect left the dormitory and shut the door hard, and the boys were left in darkness.

Bob Cherry sat up in bed.

"What about Levison, Harry?"

"He's not to be found. Gosling hasn't let him in."

"Then the young fool has really got into trouble after all," said Nugent.

"It looks like it."

"The faultfulness is in his honourable self," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The obstinacy of the ass was terrific. But all the same, I should be sorry if he has fallen among thieves and received the cudgel bashfulness."

"I think it's very likely he has fallen in with the gipsies," said Harry quietly. "I can't account for his staying out in any other way. He is a new boy here, but he knows what a serious matter it is to stay out after bedtime. If he has done it for no good reason he will be flogged or expelled."

"Serve him jolly well right," said Bulstrode, turning over. "I'm not going to worry over him for one. I'm going to sleep."

"Go to sleep, then."

"Oh, I darsay he'll turn up all right," said Hazeldene, and he, too, settled his head on his pillow.

Harry Wharton sat on Bob Cherry's bed. He did not undress, his brow was dark with thought and anxiety. Bob Cherry squeezed his arm.

"What are you thinking about, Harry?"

"Levison."

"Yes, I know, but why don't you go to bed?"

"I'm thinking—"

"Go on, old chap."

"Well, something must have happened to Levison to keep him away like this. It is an accident, or else he has been attacked—perhaps badly hurt." There was a catch in Harry's voice. "You know what happened just before he went out, Bob."

"He deserved it."

"Perhaps so, but—but to think of him, beaten senseless, perhaps in the wood—or—or perhaps murdered—you don't know what those desperate scoundrels might do—and with the mark of my blow still upon his face—"

Harry broke off.

"It's rotten," said Bob Cherry, in a low voice. "I understand, but I don't see why you should blame yourself so much. You couldn't foresee this. But—but I hope nothing has happened to him."

"I am going to see."

"What?"

"I can't go to bed with a worry like this on my mind. I'm going out to look for him."

Bob Cherry nearly jumped out of bed in amazement.

"You are going to look for him?"

"Yes," said Harry resolutely. "Of course, the Head will send out to search for him—I expect Wingate will go with some of the Sixth—but—"

"They'd never let a fellow from the Remove go with them."

"I know they wouldn't."

Bob Cherry drew a deep breath.

"Then are you thinking of going on your own?"

"Yes, unless you care to come with me, Bob."

"No question about that," said Bob Cherry. "If you go, I go."

"Good."

"We shall have to get out without being seen, then," said Bob Cherry. "It means a fearful row if we're spotted."

"I'm quite ready to risk that."

'So am I, for that matter. But we shall have to be careful. Shall we two go alone, or—what about Nugent and Inky?'

"Leave it to them to decide."

The talk had been in low whispers, audible only to Harry and Bob. Bob Cherry crossed to Nugent's bed and whispered:

"Nugent—"

"Hallo!"

"Wharton and I are going out to look for Levison—"

"My hat!"

"Are you coming with us?"

"Yes, rather."

"Good."

"And I am coming too, ratherfully," purred the soft voice of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "We shall go forth all togetherfully, my worthy chums."

"Right-ho, Inky."

Quietly in the darkness of the dormitory, the chums of the Remove dressed themselves. From two or three beds came drowsy inquiries as to what was up, and Bob Cherry politely told the inquirers to go and eat coke. Then the four chums left the Remove dormitory.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Search in the Wood.

THE passage was dark and gloomy, but from the stairs came a glimmer of light from the lower hall. The chums of the Remove crept cautiously along to the head of the stairs and looked down.

Dr. Locke was standing in the hall, talking to Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, and Wingate. The Head was looking very troubled, and there was a shade of anxiety upon Mr. Quelch's face. Carberry the prefect stood a few paces away, silent, his face also clouded.

"The boy must be searched for," said Dr. Locke. "It can only be an accident that has kept him away after the bedtime of his Form."

"He may be staying in the village, sir," said Carberry. "He might have heard something about the gipsies there, and been afraid to return after dark."

The doctor's clouded face brightened a little.

"Yes, that is possible. What was his reason for going to the village, Carberry?"

"He wished to make some purchases at Tucker's, sir," said the prefect, with a momentary uncomfortable expression.

"H'm; I cannot see that he wanted a pass after hours to do that," said the Head, glancing at Carberry. "Still, matters of this kind are left to the discretion of the prefects; and, of course, you knew nothing of the road being dangerous."

"I had heard nothing of the gipsies then, sir, and even now I don't think it likely they would do any harm to a schoolboy."

"They stopped Bunter in the wood," said Wingate quietly, "and they would have done him harm if Wharton and the others had not come up."

"So Wharton says."

"Do you mean that you doubt Wharton's statement, Carberry?" asked the Head quickly.

"Oh, no, sir," said the prefect, biting his lip. "But juniors have vivid imaginations, you know, and Wharton might try to make himself out a hero—"

"Wharton is not that sort of lad," said Wingate. "For my part, I believe implicitly every word of his statement upon the subject."

Carberry sneered slightly, and was silent.

"Well, in any case the boy must be searched for," said the Head. "We cannot sleep to-night while he is out of doors, perhaps in danger, and possibly injured. If he is in the village he can be brought back. Will you go to the village, Mr. Quelch, with Wingate and Carberry, and inquire for him. You might go by the way of the footpath through the wood, and see if there is any trace of him there."

"Certainly, sir," said the Remove master.

"I shall wait very anxiously for your return," said the Head.

The chums of the Remove stole back quietly from the stairs. Harry Wharton's face was dark.

"No getting out that way," murmured Bob Cherry. "Somebody or other will be on the watch there for hours yet."

"Ratherfully, my worthy chum."

"Did you hear what Carberry said?" muttered Wharton.

"The cad!" said Nugent. "My belief is that Levison is getting something for him in the village that he wouldn't care for the Head to know about."

"I was thinking so too. Levison had some business of his own to attend to, I suppose, or he wouldn't have gone, but there was no reason why he should get a pass for the evening just to go down to Tucker's. Perhaps he had to go to some place it wouldn't have been prudent to go into in daylight."

"The Green Man, for instance?"

"Yes, very likely."

"I should not be surprised, and it would be just like Carberry. If anything has happened, though, he stands a very good chance of being shown up."

"Serve him rightfully."

"But how are we going to get out?" said Wharton. "I suppose the only thing is to try one of the back windows."

"That's the wheeze."

"Then we shall have to get the rope from the study. Wait here for me and I'll get it, and I'll bring the lantern along, too. We shall need it."

"Hurry up, then. If we don't get ahead of the fellows down there, we sha'n't be able to look for Levison in the wood. They are going by the footpath."

"I won't be a minute."

Harry Wharton hurried away, and in less than a minute returned with a knotted rope and the bicycle lantern.

The juniors hurried to the lower box-room, where they were pretty secure from interruption, and Harry opened the window.

"Fasten the rope to the grate," he said. "That's about the safest place."

"Ratherfully."

Harry dropped the loose end of the rope from the window. It touched the ground.

"Come on."

Harry swung himself from the window, and went down hand below hand.

A jerk on the rope announced that he was safely on the ground. There were but few stars glimmering in the sky, and it was very dark in the Close.

Bob Cherry went down next, and then Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Nugent was last, and he closed down the sash of the window before he swung himself down the rope.

"Here we are again," said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "Now for a sprint."

The Removites hurried round the house. The great door was open, and the light streamed out into the Close. Mr. Quelch, Wingate, and Carberry were crossing towards the gate. Wingate carried a lantern, and each of the three had a stout stick. The chums of the Remove kept well back in the shadows.

"We shall have to sprint to get ahead of them," said Nugent.

"We'll sprint then," said Harry. "Come on."

It was easy to climb the ivy in a certain spot well known to the juniors. The Famous Four were soon over the wall, and they were sprinting along the Friardale Road before the Remove master and his two companions were outside the gates. Bob Cherry gave a chuckle.

"They won't put on much pace," he exclaimed. "They're not quite so young as we are, and I can't imagine Quelch running like this on a dark night. We shall be miles ahead of them."

"Yes, rather."

"The ratherfulness is great," purred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Lo, we are almost at the stile already."

It did not take the four best runners in the Remove at Greyfriars long to reach the stile which gave access to the footpath through the wood. They were over it in a twinkling, and plunging into the shadows of the wood.

Then silence fell even upon the plucky, stout-hearted chums of the Remove.

The wood was dark and silent, and hardly a ray from the stars penetrated to the footpath through the thick, overhanging foliage.

Their footsteps were quite silent on the velvety grass, and so, of course, would have been the footsteps of any others who might have been on the path in the darkness.

At any moment they might run into the one they sought, or into others whom they did not seek—or—and the thought made them shiver—they might stumble over some still form stretched in the gloom under the deep shadows of the trees.

What had happened to Levison?

Only an accident could have kept him away, the juniors believed—and they pictured to themselves the junior reeling beneath the brutal blow of a cudgel, and thought of the still, white face upturned in the gloom of the wood.

"Think it's safe to light the lantern, Harry?" asked Bob Cherry, in a whisper.

"Yes, I think so. They can't be half-way to the stile yet."

"Good!"

Bob Cherry struck a match, and the lantern was lighted. It was a bicycle lantern of the acetylene variety, and gave a brilliant white light.

The rays glimmered on the leafage with a ghostly effect.

Birds rose with a rustle from the thickets as the unexpected light flashed upon them, and the juniors started and looked round.

Each of the four had brought a stick with him, and now they grasped them firmly. They would not have been surprised at any moment if the lantern light had shown them an evil savage face staring from the underwood.

"Come on!" said Harry.

They pressed on up the path. Bob Cherry flashed the light of the lantern to right and left. The juniors watched the path and the bordering trees and bushes for any sign of Levison.

If the boy had been attacked and injured there would probably be some trace of it left, and that would furnish them with a clue.

The Removites had covered about half the distance through the wood when Harry Wharton gave a sudden start.

"Look there!"

On the grass, which seemed to be trampled in this spot, a small package lay in the glimmering light of the lantern.

"What is it?"

Harry stooped and picked up the packet, and held it out in the light.

It was a packet of cigarettes.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Kidnapped or —?

THE chums of the Remove stared at the packet blankly. They had hoped to find some trace of Levison, but they had not looked for anything of this kind.

"Do you think it was Levison dropped them here, Harry?" asked Nugent slowly.

Wharton nodded.

"But surely the young ass doesn't smoke!"

"I don't think so, but you have forgotten that he was going to the village for Carberry. Carberry smokes in his study, as I know perfectly well."

Nugent gave a whistle.

"I see. He was fetching cigarettes for Carberry from Friardale."

"Yes, I fully believe so, and that's why Carberry gave him a pass; and that's why he's anxious about what's become of Levison, too."

"Looks as if there had been a bit of a struggle here," said Bob Cherry, flashing the light on the trampled grass.

"Yes, you're right!"

"The rightfulness is great. The grass has been trampled downfully," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "Somebody has been struggling here, and it is to be supposed that it was the esteemed Levison."

"Not much doubt about it."

Harry Wharton knitted his brows thoughtfully.

He believed he had found a clue to Levison, in the packet of cigarettes, but where was the junior?

Harry would not have been surprised to find him lying in the path, stunned by a savage blow.

But there was no sign of him.

He had been there, and the marks in the grass, and the fact that he had dropped the packet, showed that there had been some kind of a struggle.

What had been the result of it? Where was Levison?

"Perhaps he was attacked here, and bolted?" suggested Bob Cherry. "They might have pounced on him as they did on Billy Bunter, but he's a bit cuter than Billy. He might have got away and bolted."

"And scuttled back to the village," said Nugent.

"But then he's had time to get to the school by the road," said Harry Wharton.

"He may have been too scared."

"He could have reported to the policeful sahibs at the station, and obtained the protectfulness to return to the honourable school," said Hurree Singh, "or he might have hired the hackful vehicle at the railway-station, and returned to the college carriagefully."

"But he didn't!" said Wharton. "I don't believe he got back to the village at all, or he would have done one or the other, or sent word to the school somehow."

"Carberry suggested——"

"Carberry is afraid to think that anything has happened to him, and the wish is father to the thought with him. He's in mortal terror lest it comes out that Levison was to bring him cigarettes from Friardale."

"I suppose so."

"Let's get on, anyway, and see if there's any trace of Levison further along the path!"

"Good! If we linger here, we shall soon have Quelch spotting us."

"What about that packet of cigarettes, Harry? Oughtn't we to leave it where we found it, as a clue to Mr. Quelch if he notices it?"

Wharton hesitated.

"We don't want to get Carberry into a row," he said. "He's a bully, and a rotten cad, but if the truth came out in this matter he would be expelled from Greyfriars."

"Good riddance, too!"

"Yes, in one way, but we don't want to have a hand in ruining a fellow," said Harry quietly. "You know what it means to be expelled from school. After all, Quelch will see the grass trampled here, if he's got his eyes opened, and that will be clue enough for him."

"Something in that!"

Harry slipped the packet of cigarettes in his pocket.

"Come on," he said.

The juniors pressed on. They scanned the path and the bordering wood carefully as they went forward, but there was no sign of Levison.

"There's the road!" said Bob Cherry.

They were at the end of the footpath.

The lantern glimmered upon the little gate that opened on the Friardale Road. The juniors halted.

"Put out the light, Bob. We don't want it now, and Quelch will be along soon."

Bob extinguished the lantern.

"What's to be done now?" said Nugent. "If Levison is in the village, or——"

He paused.

"I do not think he is in the village," said Harry Wharton. "I think it stands to reason that if he were there, he would have contrived to send word to the school somehow."

"Well, one would think so."

"He is still in the wood. You know what happened to Hazel-dene's sister when she met those rotters Melchior and Barendro, who belonged to the same gang. They kidnapped her."

"My hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "And they've kidnapped Levison."

"But why?" said Hurree Singh. "Whyfully, my worthy chums? Whatever cashfulness he had upon his honourable person they could take, and the worthy Levison is not worth taking away simply as a pleasant companion."

"It looks to me more likely," said Bob Cherry, in a low voice, "that he resisted them in the attempt at robbery, and they——they——"

Nugent shuddered.

"They wouldn't, Bob. They couldn't be such beasts! It's impossible!"

"They might have struck too hard——"

"Good Heavens!"

Harry Wharton compressed his lips.

"It is possible," he said. "I don't see any reason why they should kidnap Levison, but kidnapped he certainly is, unless worse has happened. We shall know more when we find him."

"When we find him!" said Nugent. "Yes, but how are we to find him? It's close upon eleven now, Harry."

"I know it. But I am not going back to Greyfriars until I have found Levison."

"It will mean a fearful row if they find we are missing."

"I don't care!"

"Well, I don't, for that matter, and I'm as anxious as you are," said Nugent. "But what can we do? We've searched all along the footpath."

"We must find him," said Harry passionately. "I struck him before he left the school, and now he—he may be lying under the trees——"

"Don't think of that. You couldn't foresee anything of this kind. But we'll go on looking all night if you like."

"Ratherfully."

"Look out," muttered Bob Cherry, "there's a light in the wood!"

"It's Quelch."

A lantern was glimmering in the gloomy depths of the footpath. It was coming towards the juniors as they stood at the gate, and it evidently belonged to the other search party that had followed them from Greyfriars.

"Get into cover," muttered Wharton. "If they were to see us——"

"They won't see us."

The Removites plunged amongst the trees. The light came glimmering by, and Mr. Quelch, Carberry, and Wingate, passed within a dozen paces of the hidden juniors. They were talking, and their words came clearly to the juniors in the dead stillness of the wood.

"The only thing to do is to go to the police," said Mr. Quelch. "That trampling of the grass looks very much as if there had been a struggle there."

"It seems certain to my mind, sir," said Wingate.

"Suppose we inquire in Friardale first, sir," said Carberry, who was looking very white. "If he hasn't been seen there, we could go to the police-station."

"Certainly, Carberry!"

The three passed on. The light was extinguished when they passed the gate, and the Removites heard their steps die away in the night towards the village.

Then the chums came out of the trees.

"They are going to hunt for him in the village," said Bob Cherry. "We're not wanted there, anyway."

"Carberry looked in a blue funk," said Nugent. "He knows what it might mean for him. I'm rather glad we kept the cigarettes dark now."

"The quality of mercifulness is not strained, as your poet Shakespeare remarks," said Hurree Singh. "It dropfully falls like gentle rain from heaven, and blesses him that gives and him that receives takefully."

"Let's get back into the wood," said Harry Wharton abruptly. "The coast is clear now."

"Right-ho!"

And Bob Cherry relighted the lantern, and the Greyfriars chums plunged into the gloomy wood once more.

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Levison to Harry Wharton. "You can't take me in; I've got my eye-teeth cut, you know!"



THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Nabob on the Track.

DARK and gloomy was the wood under the midnight sky. The hearts of the juniors were beating faster than usual as they plunged under the grim shadows of the trees in the quest which they knew might prove to be one of terrible peril. But they did not hesitate for a moment to follow their leader.

It was not long before they reached the spot where the packet of cigarettes had been found. The lantern light glimmered on the trampled grass.

Harry Wharton scanned the ground closely.

"Show the light here, Bob."

Bob came towards him.

"What is it?"

"If Levison has been taken away he must have left the foot-path at this spot or near it. There ought to be some traces left."

"Nothing that will tell us much, I expect. We can't follow a trail like a Red Indian hunter," said Bob Cherry.

"We can try," said Wharton quietly.

"If I may make the suggestfulness—"

"What is it now, Inky?"

"I think I can followfully find the track of the rascalful rotters if they have left one," said the nabob modestly. "You will remember that my boyhood was passed in India, and I was often with the shikarees at the hunt of the deer and the

cheetah, and I have even been on a tiger hunt on the back of an elephant. The shikarees taught me muchfully, and I think I could findfully pick up the track if it is there."

"Good!" said Harry Wharton. "Come and try, Inky."

"Come on," said Bob Cherry. "I'll show you the light."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh bent over the trampled grass. His suggestion came as a surprise and a relief to the juniors.

The nabob was so modest about his own attainments that it had not crossed Harry's mind that he might be of use here; but he realised that if there was one of the juniors who might be able to follow a foot-track through the wood, that one was Hurree Singh.

Many a long day the nabob had passed with the hunters in the Indian forests ere he came to England, and the experiences of an Indian prince were naturally more varied than those of an English lad of the same age.

The nabob examined the grass, and moved on, without raising his head, into the trees beside the footpath.

"They went this way?" asked Bob Cherry.

The nabob nodded.

"The grass is yet crushed by their bootful feet," he replied.

"There were certainly two of the rotters, but I do not see any trace of the footsteps of the esteemed Levison."

"He must have been with them if they kidnapped him."

"The esteemed Levison has left footmarks in the grass there on the path, but not under the trees," said the nabob. "Here are only the prints of two pairs of very large and nailful boots."

"They must be the two ruffians who were attacking Bunter when we came upon them," said Nugent.

"No doubt about that," said Bob Cherry; "but if Levison was not with them when they left the path after the struggle—"

"They may have been carrying him," said Harry Wharton quietly.

"I didn't think of that."

"The probability is great," said the nabob. "If they made him a prisoner he would not go quietly, and they would remove him carefully."

"And if they had struck too hard," muttered Harry Wharton, "and if there was a body to hide, then they would carry him."

Nugent caught the muttered words, and went white.

"For goodness' sake, Harry, keep that thought out of your mind till we know something for certain," he said. "It's no good thinking of the worst."

Wharton nodded without speaking.

Hurree Singh was following the track into the wood with his eyes close to the ground, and Bob Cherry by his side holding the lantern.

Wharton and Nugent followed them.

The wood from the path looked almost impenetrable, with masses of tangled undergrowth among the great trees; but as the juniors advanced into it they found that a rough, unmarked track wound among the trees, with no obstruction save the boughs and ferns that had to be pushed back as they passed.

Here and there Hurree Singh found a fresh trace of the footprints. Suddenly he came to a halt.

Harry Wharton hurried on to him.

"What is it?"

"Look there!"

Before them lay a mass of bushes through which the foot-pads had evidently plunged. On the brambles could be seen fragments of a light-grey cloth, torn from an overcoat in the rough passage through.

Harry Wharton understood.

Levison had been carrying a light overcoat on his arm when he left the school. He had doubtless donned it in the village on his return, and was wearing it as he came through the wood. The fragments clinging to the brambles showed that he had gone this way, and the fact that no traces had been found of his footprints proved that he had been carried.

That point was settled now.

But now the chilling doubt returned with more terrible force, the haunting question—alive or dead? Had the ruffians been carrying away a kidnapped prisoner, or a body to hide it in the recesses of the wood?

The question was in everyone's mind, but no one uttered it.

"Let us get on," said Harry feverishly.

They plunged through the bushes.

Suddenly the nabob grasped Bob Cherry's hand, and blew out the lantern he was holding. The juniors stopped in the midst of the clinging brambles.

"What the—!" began the astonished Bob.

But a dusky hand was pressed upon his lips, and the nabob murmured:

"Silence!"

"What is it?" whispered Harry.

"Someone is near at hand in the wood."

"You heard something?"

"Yes."

The juniors remained breathlessly silent, listening. Round them was darkness as black as pitch, unbroken by a ray of light. Through the darkness came the sound of cracking bushes.

There was someone in the wood, someone close to them.

The noise suddenly stopped, but in the deep silence a sound of hurried breathing came to their ears.

They were almost trembling now—not with fear, but with excitement. Who was their near neighbour in the darkness? What did he intend? Did he know that they were there?

Through the silence came the sound of a rough, savage voice.

"I can see yer. You may as well show the light again, burn yer!"

Harry drew a quick breath.

It was the voice of one of the ruffians who had stopped Billy Bunter in the footpath. He knew it again quite well.

"It is one of them," he whispered. "And he is alone."

"And he knows we are here."

"He knows someone is here. He cannot have seen us, but he has caught a glimpse of the light. It's pretty certain that these scoundrels have a hiding-place somewhere in the wood."

"I can hear yer," came the rough voice again. "Will you show that light?"

"Have you a match, Bob?"

Bob Cherry started.

"Yes; but surely—"

"Light the lantern again, then."

"But he will—"

"He will come towards the light," whispered Harry, "and

then we shall have him. We are four to one, and if we are careful he cannot escape. Then we can force him to tell us what has become of Levison."

Bob Cherry chuckled silently.

"I didn't think of that. It's a good wheeze."

"Light the lantern, then."

There was the scrape of a match. The light glimmered out in the thickets, and Bob re-lighted the lantern. He set it on the ground, and the juniors plunged back to the bushes into cover.

There they waited, grasping their sticks, with bated breath and beating hearts.

There was a grunt in the darkness, and a sound of parting twigs, and a dark evil face glowered through the brambles.

The gipsy came quickly towards the lantern as it gleamed on the ground, his quick black eyes darting suspicious glances to right and left like those of a wild animal.

"Give it him!" muttered Harry Wharton.

The chums rushed into the light with their sticks brandished.

The gipsy sprang back, with a gasping exclamation. But the chums of Greyfriars were all round him now.

He dodged the descending cudgels, receiving only one blow, and that on his arm, and then with a snarl he turned to fly. He had evidently not expected to find so many foes, and perhaps not such determined ones.

Harry Wharton sprang right at him, and fastened a fierce grip upon his collar and dragged him to the ground.

The gipsy went down with the boy clinging to him, but the next moment he returned grip for grip, and Harry gasped in the powerful grasp of the ruffian.

"Help!"

The chums of Greyfriars hardly needed calling. They were already piling themselves on the gipsy, and his grip on Harry relaxed as he had to encounter fresh foes.

He was a powerful ruffian, but the boys were four to one. They would not have hesitated to use their sticks with effect if they had been needed. But the odds were great enough.

The ruffian, struggling furiously, was pinned to the ground under the weight of the juniors, and his savage struggles gradually ceased.

With Harry Wharton's knee planted on his ribs as he lay on his side, with Bob Cherry sitting on his legs, and Nugent and Hurree Singh gripping a wrist each, the gipsy had little chance of freeing himself.

He lay with his dark face upturned, his black eyes scintillating with rage, his teeth bare and gritting like those of a captured animal.

"Burn ye!" he muttered savagely. "Burn ye——"

"Hold your tongue!" said Harry.

The gipsy looked at him, and was silent.

Harry's face was hard and determined, and there was a look in his eyes before which the ferocity of the ruffian quailed.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Kidnapped!

HARRY WHARTON fixed his eyes upon the savage, glittering orbs glaring up at him.

The gipsy was silent, his lips drawn back in a fierce snarl.

"You are our prisoner," said Harry quietly.

The man gritted his teeth, but did not speak.

"Where is the boy you kidnapped on the footpath?"

There was no reply.

"We are here searching for him," said Harry Wharton. "If you tell us where he is, and he has not been harmed, we will let you go free."

Still the gipsy was silent.

"Where is he?"

"Find out."

"I tell you that if we find him unharmed you shall be released. Otherwise, we shall hand you over to the police."

"Burn ye!"

"You will not tell us?"

"No."

The man spat out the word with the savageness of a spiteful cat.

Harry Wharton knitted his brows.

"You will tell us," he said. "You are in our hands now, and we shall use your own methods upon you if you are obstinate. If you do not tell us where to find Levison I will thrash you like a dog."

The gipsy's eyes glittered, but he did not reply.

"Very well," said Harry, between his teeth. "We will see. You cowardly hound, do you think we shall deal gently with you when you have kidnapped, perhaps murdered, one of our schoolfellows? You shall see."

"The thrashfulness would be a wheezy good idea," said the nabob, with a flash in his black eyes.

"And he shall have it if he does not speak."

Harry Wharton unbuckled the gipsy's belt.

The man began to struggle again, but a knee grinding into his ribs soon reduced him to gasping quiescence.

The belt was fastened securely round his wrists, and then his foul neckerchief was dragged off, and his ankles were tightly bound with it.

Then the juniors could safely release him. They rose to their feet, breathing hard from their exertions, and stood round the captured ruffian, upon whose evil face the lantern light gleamed.

"Now," said Harry Wharton, in the quiet voice his comrades knew well, which seemed to convey so much more than raised tones could have conveyed. "Now, my man, you are going to tell us where Ernest Levison is."

The gipsy gritted his teeth.

"Not a word, burn you!"

"Then you will take the consequences."

"The cord fastened round the neck, and twistfully tightened into the knotfulness, is a method used in India," said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"I think a stick well laid on will have the necessary effect," said Wharton with a slight smile.

"Burn you!"

"Turn him over."

"Right-ho!" said Bob Cherry, grasping the ruffian and rolling him over with his face in the grass. "Sit on his hoofs, Nugent."

"Certainly," said Nugent.

"Let me alone, burn yer!"

"I'll sit on his head," said Bob Cherry. "If he chokes he's only got himself to thank, and he'll know the reason why."

"Gerroff!"

"Not this evening."

Bob Cherry coolly planted himself on the gipsy's head, and Nugent sat upon his legs. The man wriggled and writhed under them in vain. Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh twirled in the air the thick, flexible Malacca cane he carried.

"Shall I bestow the thrashfulness upon the esteemed rotter, my worthy chums?" asked the nabob.

Wharton nodded.

"Yes."

Slash! The cane came down with a terrific swipe across the gipsy. Simon gave a gasping yell, which Bob Cherry drowned by jamming his face down into the thick grass.

"You mustn't make that noise here, you know," said Bob Cherry, shaking his head. "I hope I haven't hurt your nose. I thought I heard it knock on a stone."

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"

"If that's your native language, I can't understand it."

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"

"Give him another, Inky. His 'gr-r-r-r-ing' is getting on my nerves."

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh looked inquiringly at Wharton, who nodded his head. The cane descended in a second slash upon the ruffian, and another muffled yell rang out.

"Now let him speak, Bob."

"Right-ho!"

Bob got off Simon's head, and the gipsy rolled over. He turned upwards a face grimed with dirt, and blazing with rage and hate.

"Burn you!"

"Will you tell us where Levison is now?" asked Harry Wharton, with compressed lips and gleaming eyes.

"No!"

"Then you shall have a dozen more, and we will see the effect. Roll him over again and don't let him loose till he has had a dozen."

"Right you are."

"Hold on!" gasped the ruffian, weakening before the evident determination of the juniors. "Hold on!"

"Will you answer my question, then?"

"I—I don't know where he is."

"You were with the other scoundrel in kidnapping him."

"Ye-es."

"Then where is he?"

"I—I don't know."

Harry Wharton bent over the gipsy. His face was white and his eyes ablaze.

"Have you murdered him?"

"No," gasped the man. "I swear he isn't hurt—only for a tap, a little tap on the head—nothing much. He would struggle."

"I believe you. Then where is he?"

"He is with Black Seth."

"Is that the man who was with you to-day when we met you on the footpath?"

"Yes."

"You left Levison with him?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Two hours ago," muttered the gipsy. "I've been to the village—to the Green Man. I left the boy with Black Seth."

"Why did you make him a prisoner?"

"It was Seth's doing. I was against it."

"Where did you leave your companion?"

"In the wood."

"Ah, you were returning to him when you saw our light in the wood," said Harry Wharton quickly.

The ruffian was silent.

"Answer me! Were you going to rejoin him when you came upon us here?" demanded Harry sharply.

"Yes," muttered the man.

"I thought so. You know where he is. Tell us where we shall find him."

"Seth would half kill you if you——"

"That is our business. We are not more afraid of him than we are of you," said Harry Wharton contemptuously.

"Where shall we find him?"

"I was to meet him at the stream," said the gipsy slowly and unwillingly, as if every word was torn from him. "And if you let him know I told you, he will be the death of me."

"We shall tell him nothing."

"I know that stream," said Nugent, who had been at Greyfriars longer than any of the others, and knew every foot almost of the woods around the old school. "It's a good place to look for otters. There's an earth cave in the bank, and it's just the place these rascals might hide Levison in, if they knew of it."

"Is that the place, my man?"

"Yes," muttered the gipsy.

"Then we are on the track," said Harry Wharton. "at last! If this man has not lied, we shall find Levison now."

"I have not lied," muttered the gipsy.

"That is what we have to prove now."

"Let me go!"

"If you have told the truth you shall go," said Harry Wharton. "Until we are sure upon that point you remain a prisoner."

Bob Cherry gave a low whistle.

"We can't take him along with us, Harry. He would dodge us and get away."

"I know that, Bob. I wasn't thinking of that."

"If we take him to the police-station in Friardale——"

"No time for that. We can leave him here. We can bind him to a tree to make him secure. If he has told us the truth we will release him afterwards."

"He might get released by calling."

"Not if we gag him."

"Good! You think of everything."

The gipsy began to struggle as he was dragged to a tree; but bound as he was, his struggles amounted to little. There was no rope to be had, and a whipcord that Bob Cherry produced from his pocket did not seem as if it would go far towards binding the powerful ruffian to the tree. But Harry Wharton was equal to the occasion. He had selected a slender tree, but quite stout enough to resist the efforts of the strongest man to break the stem. The gipsy's hands were unfastened, and his arms passed round the tree. Then his wrists were fastened together with the belt on the other side of it.

The ruffian was powerless to resist. He muttered savage threats while the juniors were securing him, to which the boys did not even listen. There was little doubt that he was secure. Harry examined the fastening of his wrists, and it was strong enough.

"I am sorry if you are uncomfortable," Wharton remarked, with a shrug of the shoulders. "You have only yourself to thank for it, and if you escape going to prison you will be fortunate."

"Burn you!"

"Anybody got a piece of twine?"

"I have a short lengthfulness of the twineful string," said Hurree Singh, taking it from his pocket.

"Thank you. I'll fasten the gag in so that he can't get rid of it."

Harry stuffed his handkerchief into the gipsy's mouth by way of a gag, and secured it there with the twine round the back of his head. There was no danger now of Simon the gipsy giving a warning to his comrade in evil.

Bob Cherry picked up the lantern.

"Better put that out," said Nugent. "I know this wood like a book, and I can find my way to the earth cave on the stream in the dark quite easily."

"Good!" said Harry. "Put it out, Bob."

The lantern was extinguished. In silence the boys plunged on through the dense darkness of the wood with beating hearts, but with high hope now. They felt that they were nearing the end of the midnight quest, and the knowledge that they were going to face a dangerous ruffian in his lair did not make them hesitate.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

At Close Quarters.

THERE was a glimmer of silver light through the dense gloom of the wood. The juniors sighted it at the same moment, and stopped. Nugent, who was in the lead now, glanced back.

"It's the stream!"

The stream it was, the shallow, rippling Wraye, that wound through the heart of the dense wood, overhung by trees, and deeply shaded even in the daytime. Now the darkness of the

night was upon it, but here and there on the stream's surface glimmered the rays of a star. It was the starry glimmer on the water that had caught the eyes of the chums of Greyfriars.

"Then we are getting close," muttered Harry Wharton.

"Yes. The cave is along the stream on this side, under the thickets there. We shall have to wade in the water to get into it."

"Never mind that."

"We could drop in from above," said Nugent, in a low voice; "but not without giving the alarm if there is anyone there. The cave is just a hollow in the bank, covered over, sort of roofed-in, by vegetation. I have dropped through it once, one afternoon; but it was by accident. I was exploring."

"I fancy we'll go by way of the stream," murmured Bob Cherry. "We don't want to fall on the head of Black Seth."

"Ratherfully not," said the nabob. "It does not matter so much about his esteemed head as about our honourable limbs which might be brokenfully busted."

"Exactly! I wasn't thinking of his esteemed head, you may be sure," Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Tuck your trousers up," said Harry Wharton. "Do you know how deep the water is, towards the hollow, Nugent?"

"Not more than a foot."

"That won't hurt us."

"Of course, we don't know that the ruffian is there," Nugent remarked. "If he's hiding about here at all, that's the likeliest place, and I rather think that that fellow spoke the truth."

"I think so, too."

"Blessed if I can get on to his reason for kidnapping Levison, all the same," said Bob Cherry. "He can't be mad enough to think of holding him to ransom, can he?"

"He might. It's been done before."

"There's a disappointment in store for him, if that's his game," said Nugent. "Mind, he mustn't get away. We're here to rescue Levison, but we want to take that scoundrel to the police-station as well."

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is great."

"Lead on, Nugent. You know the way."

"Right-ho! Follow your uncle!" said Nugent cheerfully.

The spirits of the juniors had risen very much since they had learned that the worst had not happened. The haunting fear that the new boy in the Remove might never be seen alive again was gone now. He was a prisoner, and whether they rescued him or not, his life was not likely to be in danger. And the juniors regarded the rescue now as a matter of almost certainty. The danger they cared little for.

Nugent led the way cautiously along the bank of the stream.

The glimmering of the stars through the boughs above showed the juniors some light now, and it was very welcome, for they could not venture to light the lantern without risk of giving the alarm to the gipsy.

The bank was high and abrupt here, the stream flowing at a level of six or seven feet below, the slope being thickly clad in bush and bracken.

In flood time the stream rose to a higher level, and then the hollows of the banks were filled with water, and only tenanted by otters and rats; but now the stream was at a low level, and the caves were dry.

The juniors descended the bank, pushing their way as quietly as they could through the clinging vegetation, and plunged through the rushes into the water.

In a depth of about a foot of water, they continued their way along the stream. The starlight was clearer here, and showed them their way.

Nugent stopped at a spot where a black mass of thicket rose on the steep bank, seeming as impenetrable as the side of a hill.

He did not venture to speak, but held up his hand to his followers.

Harry Wharton sniffed slightly.

There was a scent of damp vegetation in the air, but clearer than that came a well-known smell to his nostrils—the smell of tobacco.

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

Someone was smoking, and probably within a dozen yards of the spot where the juniors were standing; and it could only be one person.

The quarry was at hand.

"Quiet!" whispered Nugent. "Not a sound!"

"Right! Where is the opening?"

"I will show you."

Nugent bent down, and groped among the thick reeds and overhanging creepers. He suddenly disappeared into the black wall of vegetation.

Harry Wharton stared for a moment, and then followed closely upon his track, and found that the creepers hung down here like a massive curtain over a dark opening in the earthy bank.

He passed under the mass, still dragging his feet through the water, and felt Nugent's hand touch him in the darkness.

Black as pitch was the darkness under the screen of vegetation, but ahead of the boys was a glimmer of light.

Mingled with the scent of tobacco was a smell of burning oil, and the juniors knew that the glimmer came from a lantern.

"He's here," muttered Nugent, scarcely audible, with his lips close to Harry's ear.

Harry Wharton pressed his arm.

Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh came through the thick screen, and the four comrades stood together in the darkness, watching the glimmer of light in the hollow of the bank.

As their eyes became more used to it, they saw that before them opened a wide gap in the earth, the roof of which was formed of thick tangled creepers and the roots of trees extending over the hollow.

The water ended just within the hollow, and the chums, wading silently on, drew their soaking feet from the chilly stream.

The glimmer came from beyond a bend in the hollow, a shoulder of earth looming up where the cave extended further into the bank.

Grasping their sticks firmly, the chums of Greyfriars stole quietly forward, and looked past the bend into the hollow beyond.

The ground here was higher, and quite dry.

A lantern, slung upon a stick jammed into the earthy wall, shed a glimmering light in the cave, the rays shining weirdly on the leafy screen that formed the roof overhead.

Upon the ground were spread several horse-blankets and some coats, showing that the cave was used as a camping-place for the footpads.

On one of the blankets lay a boy asleep.

The juniors stared as they saw him, and exchanged glances of satisfaction.

It was Levison!

He was fast asleep, and his face, turned towards the lantern, showed white and haggard, and there was a streak of a dull red upon the forehead.

The "tap" the gipsy had spoken of as all of Levison's hurts, had evidently been a somewhat severe one. But the hurt did not prevent the weary lad from sleeping, nor did the fact that his feet were bound, and his wrists loosely shackled with a cord. The gipsies clearly meant to run no risks of their prisoner escaping.

A few paces from Levison, the gipsy was seated upon a log, with his back against the earthy wall of the hollow. It was the man the juniors had seen that afternoon, when Billy Bunter had been stopped on the footpath. It was the man they had expected to see, and they knew him again at the first glance.

The kidnapper had been run to his lair at last!

He had not the slightest suspicion that enemies were at hand, for he smoked placidly, and knocked the ashes from his pipe upon the log. It was pretty clear that he was waiting for the return of his companion. Harry had noticed that the man Simon's pockets were stuffed with packets, and he had guessed that the ruffian had been purchasing food and drink in the village—probably with the money taken from Levison.

The water squelched in Nugent's boots as he moved, and the gipsy looked round. The chums drew back from sight, and the ruffian called out:

"Is that you, Simon?"

His voice awoke Levison. The junior started up with a scared expression upon his face, and stared wildly at the gipsy.

"Where am I? Where—"

The ruffian chuckled.

"You're with me, my kid," he said, grinning. "Did you think you were in the school again, eh?"

Levison shivered.

"I—I was dreaming. I thought I was back at Greyfriars."

"You won't see Greyfriars again in a hurry, young gentleman."

"I suppose I shall see it about the same time that you see the inside of a prison," said Levison, whose danger apparently had not made him less bitter of tongue.

The gipsy scowled. His hand groped for a moment towards

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the stick that was leaning against the wall, but he did not take it in hand.

"Hold your tongue," he growled.

"You would be more sensible to let me go," said Levison. "You must be mad to think of getting any money for my release. My father would never pay it."

"We shall see."

"As soon as the Head gets your letter, if you have the insolence to send it, he will place it in the hands of the police."

"Does he wish to see you again, do you think?" said the gipsy, in a low, sneering tone, his black eyes glittering.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Well, if he sends twenty quid to the place I tell him of, I shall send him directions where to find you when I've left this quarter. If he doesn't, you'll lie here till the water-rats eat you bone by bone."

"You would never dare—"

The ruffian gave a short laugh.

"That would be safer for me, my fine young gentleman, as you've been at the trouble of telling me that you've noted my face, and could denounce me anywhere," he sneered. "Maybe, if you live, you'll learn to keep a wiser tongue."

He turned towards the opening of the hollow again.

"Simon! Is that you? Are you there?"

The gipsy had heard some sound, and imagined that it was his confederate returning. He seemed surprised at receiving no answer, and he stepped towards the bend in the hollow. A moment more, and he was upon the Greyfriars' comrades.

But they were ready for him!

As he caught sight of them, and started back with a wild oath on his lips, the four lads sprang at him like tigers.

He was borne backwards by the rush, and went with a crash to the ground.

They piled upon him furiously.

"Got the brute!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Hold him!"

"Give him socks!"

The gipsy was struggling madly.

So great was his strength that he hurled off the juniors and sprang to his feet, his breast heaving, his eyes blazing, panting for breath.

He made a spring towards the spot where his bludgeon stood, and had he been able to take it in his hand, it might have gone hard with the juniors yet.

But he had no chance of that.

Harry Wharton's stick descended with a crash upon the arm outstretched to take the weapon, and Seth's hand dropped to his side, as he shrieked with pain.

"At him!" panted Harry.

And the comrades sprang to the attack again.

The gipsy made a desperate spring towards the opening of the hollow, but they were before him, and he reeled back.

He sprang back into the cave, stumbled over Levison, and reeled—and then the grasp of the Greyfriars' juniors was upon him again.

Again he tore himself loose, and made a wild spring towards the top of the hollow, where the tangled roots and creepers shut in the cave.

His grasp closed upon a strong root there, and he drew himself up.

"Don't let him get away," gasped Bob Cherry, springing after the gipsy.

The next moment he reeled back as a boot struck him on the chest. Harry Wharton narrowly escaped a savage kick as he sprang forward. He dodged in time, and then the gipsy dragged himself, by a herculean effort, through the tangled vegetation, and disappeared above.

The juniors stared after him in dismay.

The gipsy had gone—his escape was the effort of an utterly desperate man, and there was not one there who could have followed him.

"The rotter!" panted Bob Cherry. "I say, Wharton, give us a bunk up—I'll be after him in a jiffy."

Wharton shook his head.

"But he'll get away—"

"We can't help it," said Harry. "If we clambered out, we could never get hold of him again now. He's gone."

The crashing of thickets had been heard for a few moments, and had died into silence again. The ruffian was evidently fleeing at top speed. Black Seth was gone—and the juniors, disappointed, gave up the idea of pursuit.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Levison's Gratitude.

LEVISON had watched the Greyfriars juniors with staring eyes during the brief but terrible conflict. He seemed to be hardly able to believe the evidence of his senses.

When the desperate gipsy was gone, the panting juniors turned to him.

"Well, we've found you, old chap," said Bob Cherry cordially, as he stopped to unfasten the cord with which Levison was bound.

"I—I—"

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"Rather takes you off your balance, I suppose," said Harry Wharton, with a smile. "You didn't expect to see us here?"

"No, I didn't," said Levison.

"The unexpectedness is only equalled by the joyfulness of the meeting," beamed Hurree Singh. "I am truly glad to set the eyefulness of my glance upon the esteemed countenance of the honourable Levison once more."

"We're jolly glad to see you, chappy," said Nugent. "We were afraid something terrible had happened. Use my knife, Bob. You can't untie those knots."

"Right you are!"

Bob Cherry cut the prisoner loose. Levison rose to his feet, blinking uncertainly at the chums of the Remove.

"What are you chaps doing out of the school at this time of night?" he asked.

"I should think you could see," replied Bob Cherry. "We came here to find you."

"You left Greyfriars on purpose to find me?"

"Yes."

Levison was silent. He rubbed his wrists where they had been chafed by the cords. There was a curious expression upon his face.

"We parted on ill-terms," said Harry Wharton. "I'm sorry I struck you, Levison. I lost my temper—"

"You don't want to fight me to-morrow?"

"No."

"You need not have minded. I don't box half so well as you do, and you are bigger than I am, too."

Harry Wharton compressed his lips.

He made no reply to Levison's remark; but Bob Cherry was not so patient. He broke out angrily, with blazing eyes:

"What do you mean, Levison? Harry Wharton could knock you out in half a round if he liked. He doesn't want to fight you because of what's happened to-night."

"Oh, all right!" said Levison. "Keep your wool on, Cherry. There's nothing to get ratty about that I can see. If Wharton doesn't want to fight me, I don't want to fight him, and really I don't care much either way. How did you find me here?"

"We took a lot more trouble than you were worth—that's how," grunted Bob Cherry.

"The troublefulness was great, and the worthfulness is very small," observed the Nabob of Bhanipur. "I look upon the esteemed beast with contemptuousness."

"Did you find me here by accident?"

"Yes, of course," said Bob Cherry. "It's a common custom of ours to go wading in streams and fighting gipsies in the middle of the night."

"I thought you might be out here poaching fish or something—"

"Never mind what you thought. Let's get back to Greyfriars. We've rescued you, but I'm blessed if I think you were worth the trouble now."

"That gipsy beast had my watch and money," said Levison, looking round. "You've let him get away—and he's taken them with him, I suppose."

"Could we help it?"

"You were four to one. Don't think I'm grumbling; only it was a valuable watch, and—"

"If your head didn't look as if it had been bashed enough, my friend, I should get it into chancery just now," said Bob Cherry. "Come along, and shut up!"

"Well, it was all your fault," said Levison. "You can't get out of that, anyway."

Harry Wharton stared at him.

"How do you make that out?" he demanded.

"You knew the danger I was going into, and you ought—"

"We warned you."

"I thought you were rotting," said Levison. "You played a trick on me when I first came to Greyfriars, some of you, putting some stuff in my grub, and I thought you were guying me again. If you had—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Bob Cherry. "Let's get gone!"

"If there is no shutupfulness, there will be some thick-earfulness," said the nabob. "I, too, have not the Jobful patience."

The chums of the Remove quitted the hollow. Levison followed them in silence. Not one of them addressed a word to him again. They had not expected—or wanted—gratitude for what they had done; but this kind of return from the fellow they had rescued could not fail to "put their backs up," as Bob Cherry expressed it.

"We'll keep our word to that rotter who told us where to find the cad," said Harry Wharton. "We can let him loose as we get back. This will be a surprise at Greyfriars."

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"You're right, kid. I don't suppose we've been missed; and it will be an eye-opener for them when we stroll in with the giddy rescued prisoner."

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Back to Greyfriars.

BOB CHERRY was right.

It was an "eye-opener," as he called it, for Greyfriars. The ringing of the bell at half-past one in the morning brought Gosling out of his bed in the worst of tempers. The Head had been too anxious to retire; but Gosling, the porter, was not particularly anxious. He had been sleeping soundly enough when the pealing of the bell startled him from his slumbers. He turned over to go to sleep again, with a grunt. But the bell would not allow him. It rang and rang till the porter came, growling, down to the gate.

Gosling nearly fell down when his lamp showed him the grinning faces of the chums of the Remove through the bars of the gate.

"We've come home, old son," said Bob Cherry.

"My heye," gasped Gosling—"my heyo! What I says is this 'ere—you ought to be in bed, and——"

"We've brought home the missing heir—I mean our long-lost brother," said Bob Cherry. "Look at him! Ain't he a beauty?"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Levison.

Gosling, in blank amazement, opened the gate. The ringing of the bell had been heard by half Greyfriars; and the Head, in the vague hope that it might be news of the missing junior, had opened the door, and was staring out into the Close, with the light from the hall streaming out behind him. Mr. Quelch was at his side; and Wingate had come out into the hall, too, with Carberry. The searchers had returned unsuccessful to the school, quite oblivious of the fact that other—and more successful—searchers were still on the track.

"Dear me," said the Head, "what can it be? I hope it is news. Bless my soul!"

Dr. Locke fairly gasped as the chums of the Remove came into the light of the door with Levison in their midst.

The juniors took off their caps respectfully.

"Wharton! Cherry! What does this mean?" said the Head dazedly.

"We've found him, sir."

"Levison!"

"I have been knocked down and kidnapped by a ruffianly gipsy, sir," said Levison. "These fellows found me, and they say they came out on purpose."

"I hope you will forgive us for breaking bounds at night, sir, under the circumstances," said Harry Wharton respectfully.

standing, cap in hand, before the amazed Head. "We felt that as Levison was a member of our Form we ought to find him—and we thought we could do it. Will you forgive us?"

"Under the circumstances, Wharton, I can scarcely refuse to do so," said the Head. "You took a serious—a very serious step, but thank Heaven you have brought this boy back in safety to the school. Go to bed now, all of you, and I will hear your story in the morning. Thank goodness it has all turned out so well!"

The Removites, tired out, but extremely satisfied with themselves, went upstairs. Wingate and Carberry followed them; and the captain of Greyfriars patted Harry Wharton on the shoulder.

"Bravo, my lad!" he said. "Bravo, all of you!"

And Wingate went into his room.

Carberry was scowling.

"You ought to be licked for your cheek," he said. "If I were Head I'd lick you!"

"Thank you!" said Harry. "But you're not Head; you're only a prefect—and not much of a prefect, anyway. By the way, here's something that belongs to you, I think. Levison dropped it when the gipsies collared him. I thought you wouldn't like me to give it to you before the Head."

Carberry gasped as Harry handed him the packet of cigarettes. Without a word, he thrust it into his pocket and strode away.

The chums of the Remove chuckled as they went on to their dormitory.

"Well, I'm jolly tired!" said Bob Cherry, as he began to undress. "And I suppose all of you are the same. I suppose they won't expect us to get up at rising-bell in the morning. If they do, it's the last time I shall go out in the middle of the night to look for lost asses."

"We should have got into a fearful row if we hadn't brought Levison back with us," grinned Nugent.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I fancy so," he said. "But all's well that ends well."

"That is quite correctful," purred the Nabob of Bhanipur. "As your English proverb says, 'Nothing succeeds like the successfulness,' my worthy chums."

And the chums of the Remove agreed with Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh.

THE END.

(Another splendid tale of Harry Wharton and his Chums next Tuesday. Please order your copy of the MAGNET Library in advance.)

GRAND TALE OF THE REDMINSTER CADET CORPS.



The Terrible Telegram and Its Consequences.

"Charge!" yelled Lieutenant Jack Dashwood, brandishing his sword; and the front rank, bringing their rifles down to the "trail," the cadet corp of Redminster Grammar School came tearing across the playing field, shouting like fiends, straight for the enemy!

As the enemy were composed of a brilliant array of delighted mothers and pretty sisters and dainty cousins, assembled to witness the annual prize-giving, the lieutenant generously decided to spare them; and when the excited line was within fifteen paces, up went his arm again, and he cried, "Company, halt!"

As smart Master Dick Vivian, who was right guide, stepped out with recovered arms, and the boys formed on him, there was a great flutter of gay parasols and clapping of kid gloves, and the fellows who had not joined the newly-formed corp bellowed lustily, and made noble resolves to do so next term.

"Shoulder arms! Present arms!" cried Jack Dashwood again.

And, taking his place in front of his men, the applause broke out afresh, and this time it was so loud and long that the worthy Head, Dr. Prothero, was obliged to raise his hands deprecatingly before it died away.

They never did things by halves at Redminster, and you may be quite certain if they yelled themselves hoarse over the cadet corp that the smart, grey-uniformed company deserved it.

Then, from the little group of masters gathered behind the table on which the prizes glittered in the sun, stepped Major-General Sir Ponsonby Smithers, K.C.B., G.C.S.I., etc., who had come down specially to inspect the company.

On the whole, the school had been just a little disappointed with the general, expecting a gorgeous apparition in scarlet and gold, with waving plumes in his cocked hat; and the great man was, perhaps, the simplest figure in that gathering, in his well-fitting frock-coat, with nothing to mark him from the others but a face bronzed by the Indian sun, and a white moustache twisted fiercely at the corners.

Still, they knew all about the guns he had charged in the

Mutiny, and the Sepoys he had slain single-handed. Besides, was he not an old comrade of Jack Dashwood's father? And was not that good enough for Redminster Grammar School?

Jack Dashwood was captain of the school, a broad-shouldered lad of sixteen, whose brown hair had a shade of auburn in it, and whose eyes were grey.

He had inherited the sinewy form of his ancestors, who had been fighters for centuries, and it would only be a matter of time before he would take his Majesty's commission, as all the Dashwoods had done in the past.

Great at all sports was Jack, and mighty with the gloves; and Major-General Sir Ponsonby Smithers, K.C.B., G.C.S.I., and all the rest of it, strode out with a pleasant smile on his brown face.

"Bravo, boys!" cried the general. "You are a credit to Redminster and to your lieutenant, whom Dr. Prothero tells me, is chiefly responsible for your drill and discipline."

"Hurrah!" howled the young gentlemen onlookers in Eton collars. "Dashwood for ever!"

"Yes," continued the general, when he could make himself heard. "And you little know how that same shout of 'Dashwood for ever!' rings in my ears as it was uttered by five hundred parched and weary throats, nearly forty years ago, when we were marching to the relief of Lucknow under Colin Campbell, and your young lieutenant's father led his hussars at the rebels, and saved my battery by a brilliant charge!"

Jack's face flushed crimson at this mention of his father, and an expectant silence fell over the gathering.

"Well, we have much to do this afternoon," said the general, smiling, "but I will tell you the story, though I fear I am only an old smooth-bore-muzzle-loader."

And he bowed his head apologetically to the line of gay parasols.

But, alas! the most interested listener of all was not to hear the tale, for an unexpected interruption took place.

A telegraphic messenger, hot and perspiring, had elbowed his way up to Dr. Prothero, and, as the worthy Head opened the ominous orange-coloured envelope, those about him saw him start, suddenly pale, and whisper something to the Major-General.

He glanced anxiously at the young lieutenant, standing square and soldierly in the sunshine, and when the general had read the telegram he, too, looked at the lieutenant, and walked forward, biting his lip under the fierce moustache.

"There is bad news for you, Dashwood," said the general, laying his hand on the lad's shoulder. "But you will bear it like a soldier, you will bear it as he would wish you to bear it."

And the veteran's face quivered a little.

"Your father is very ill, my boy. You must go to him at once."

Dashwood fell back a pace, then the military strain in his blood stiffened him and came to his aid. It was no part of a soldier's duty to desert his men under any circumstances, and he faced them resolutely.

"Company, right turn—dismiss!" he cried, in a voice that echoed among the school buildings.

And as they obeyed, and moved off quietly with their arms at the "slope," only then did he sheath his sword mechanically, and look at the general in a dazed, uncertain way.

"Mr. Cattermole," said the Head, beckoning to one of the masters.

And, amid a buzz of subdued excitement, that gentleman took Dashwood by the arm and led him through the crowd into the doorway of the old, red-brick, ivy-mantled school-house.

"Like his father!" muttered the general. "An ordinary lad would have collapsed on the spot—ay, and many a man too. What is this? Another telegram, doctor?"

The doctor tore the second message open and handed it to the general.

"No hope! Poor Harry Dashwood!" said the general. "Go to the boy, doctor. I will address your visitors until you return."

Scarcely had the usher and the stricken boy reached the huge stone-flagged hall, than they were joined by Dr. Prothero, and with him came Vivian, Jack's especial chum.

"Come, Dashwood, my poor lad!" said the Head. "You must, indeed, bear it like a man, as I know you will. Vivian, here, has implored me so earnestly to let him go with you that I cannot refuse, so you will not travel alone. Mr. Cattermole will you see Dashwood out of his uniform, and have a cab ready. There must be no delay, for the case is serious."

Kindly Dr. Prothero went into his study, took down a railway guide, and looked out a train. Then he took five pounds from his purse, and, disregarding the gay assembly outside, went upstairs to the boy's room, to find the master and chum cramming things into a bag, lacing Jack's boots for him, and performing all manner of little attentions that

the poor sorrow-stricken fellow seemed incapable of performing for himself.

"There's a train in half an hour, Dashwood," said Dr. Prothero. "You will catch that easily. Here is some money that will see you home. If there's anything that I can do for you, you must not hesitate to write. I am sorry to my heart, my boy—more I cannot say."

Jack Dashwood wrung the doctor's hand, and well-nigh broke down, and, turning hastily away, the Head strode down the corridor, his face working, and a heavy sigh breaking from his lips.

Dick Vivian pitched some shirts into a portmanteau, and proclaimed himself ready to start, and the trio descended the stairs without loss of time.

"This is awfully good of you, Cattermole," said Jack Dashwood to the usher, omitting the usual prefix, which Mr. Cattermole, good fellow that he was, did not resent under the circumstances, and, then, hailing one of the numerous cabs that stood in the quadrangle, they drove away at a hard gallop to the little railway-station, where the up-train was already signalled.

Mr. Cattermole took the tickets, Dick Vivian shouldered the bags, and in five minutes our hero found himself in an empty first-class carriage, with the well-known wooden platform receding rapidly from view, and the smiling country quickly becoming an indistinguishable blur as the train got under way. So engrossed had he been with his own thoughts, and so keen was the anxiety of his friend for him, that they had not noticed another cab, which dashed up at the last minute into the station-yard, nor did they see another boy, who, in an imperious voice, demanded a ticket, and was only just in time to tumble in at the tail end of the train.

"It's awfully selfish of me, old chap, to go off like this," said Jack, lifting his tear-dimmed face from his hands, and staring at Vivian. "But you know what a good chap the governor has always been, and, although I knew it had to come some day, it's no less a blow."

"My dear Jack, just you make yourself easy on that score. Never mind about me. I'm here to see you through, and that's all I can do, and I'm sorry I can't do more."

Jack Dashwood took his friend's words literally, relapsed into his corner, and thought of many things. Master Richard Vivian, lighting a cigarette—for I grieve to say the Sixth Form fellows indulged in that deleterious practice—stared out of the window, occasionally casting a furtive glance at our hero in the opposite corner.

The train stopped at Norwich, and then away through the silver Norfolk landscape to Ipswich, where tickets were collected, and shortly after noon the express glided into Liverpool Street Station, and came to a stand.

"Now, don't you worry about anything, old chap," said Dick Vivian, betraying more administrative ability than he had given himself credit for; and, seizing a porter, with whom he entrusted their luggage, he took his friend's arm, and marched him straightway through the subway to Bishopsgate Street, and never opened his lips until they reached Paddington.

There, coming out of the booking-office on to the platform, crowded with luggage, and all the busy bustle that attends the departure of a mail train, he ran into a boy of about his own age—the same who had driven up to Walsingham Station, and had travelled, unknown to them, as far as Paddington.

"Hallo! you here!" exclaimed Dick Vivian.

"Yes, I'm here," said the boy, a good-looking, dark-complexioned lad. "Is there anything very unusual in that? My father wired to me that my uncle was going to peg out, and told me to come along."

"Oh, did he?" said Dick Vivian, rather sourly. "Well, I suppose you had better travel down with us."

But there was no warmth in the invitation, and the dark-complexioned lad muttered something in the way of an apology.

"No, he would not worry Jack," he said. He'd see him at the other end.

And as Dick Vivian marched to the door of the carriage, there was a very ugly expression on his face.

"Never could stand that fellow!" he muttered to himself. "There's something underhand and sneakish about him. I'm jolly glad he did not come with us. Do you know your Cousin Leonard is in this train?" he said, when they started.

Jack stared at him.

"Well, I suppose it's the proper thing," he said slowly. "But I must say I could have done without him. Leonard and I never were friends, and never will be. I like him as little as I like Uncle Dominic, and that's saying a good deal."

Perhaps he would have liked him less if he could have seen the face of Leonard Dashwood, who lay at full length on the cushions of an empty carriage, smiling at the ceiling with a strange, forbidding smile.

"I wonder how he will take it?" he muttered. "I suppose there'll be a fearful row, and he can lick me out of hand if he likes; but I always hated him with his superior ways, and now I'm going to have a bit of my own back."

His dark face grew very evil as they neared the station at which the three boys were to alight, and when Master Leonard Dashwood got off his seat and gathered himself together, it was almost with an air of reluctance.

Few people alighted at the little roadside station, and the first thing they saw was a coachman in livery awaiting the approach of the train. He came to the carriage door with a grave face, touching his hat, and holding out his hands for the portmanteaus. It was not thus that Withers was wont to greet the home-coming of his young master; and if a tear lingered in the corner of his eye, it was a very honest tear, which he made no effort to conceal.

"How is my father?" said Jack, before the train had come to a standstill.

"He's no better and no worse, Master John; but it's no good holding out hope, for the doctors say he cannot last many days—in fact, he might go at any minute."

Nothing more was said, and soon the gravel scrunched beneath the dog-cart, Jack sitting beside the coachman, having no heart to drive, and noting with a lack-lustre eye all the familiar features of his home.

His arrival was expected, and, as they dashed through the village, women with sympathetic faces came out into the doorways and curtsied to the young master, and the blacksmith and his men at the door of the forge pulled their forelocks as Withers took the sharp turn that brought them out on to the high road. Then, on and on, through two miles of lovely Berkshire country, and into the park gates, along the winding avenue, and then a sudden pull-up at the hall-door, and Jack sprang down, and was home again. A clean-shaven man, bearing a remarkable likeness to Leonard Dashwood, met our hero on the steps. It might have been fancy, but there was the same nervousness in his manner as he took Jack's hand that Leonard Dashwood had betrayed, and, looking across his nephew's shoulder, Uncle Dominic exchanged a swift look of intelligence with his son, who followed in his cousin's wake.

"Come into the library, Jack," said his lawyer uncle. "You must take something after your long journey, and you cannot see Sir Harry just now, for he has fallen into a doze, and must not be disturbed. I am very, very sorry for you, boy. This is indeed a sad home-coming, but it is fortunate that you have arrived in time."

"Is there really no hope, uncle?" cried the poor lad, setting his mouth firmly, and gazing at the clean-shaven, legal face before him with an expression of mute entreaty.

"None," was the reply. "Two doctors have been with him since the moment of his seizure, and I am expecting a physician from London, who should have arrived by your train."

Although he had nerved himself to face the thing in the only possible way that such things are to be met, the lad broke down again at the sight of the colonel's books ranged in orderly rank round the room, and his sword over the mantelpiece, and the presentation portrait in oils that hung above it; and while Dick Vivian placed a sympathetic hand on his shoulder, deploring his own helplessness to do or say anything to comfort him, uncle and cousin took that opportunity to leave the room. Dick Vivian saw them walking up and down the terrace side by side, the older man talking earnestly to the younger, who nodded his head from time to time, and somehow the feeling came into Dick Vivian's honest heart that he could have wished them miles away rather than in that place.

(Another instalment of this splendid new serial next week. Don't forget to order your copy of "The Magnet" Library in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)



Lomax Gains His Information.

But this simulation of slumber had been an inspiration, a sudden suggestion that had sprung into his mind, and he had acted upon it instantly. And it had succeeded far beyond his expectations. If the words of the drunken prize-fighter were truth, and not the wild imaginings of his over-mastered brain, he had, and at once, learned what he so desired to know—the place where Mrs. Brewer was concealed.

He had pretended sleep, and once started, the deception had to be carried through. Only by the strongest effort of will had such been possible. At every moment he had feared discovery. The strain had been awful; the tension of brain and nerve an agony. When McDonald had attempted to pull his wig, his muscles had twitched with the desire to act and restrain him. When he heard the man declare the address whereat Mrs. Brewer was hidden, the impulse to betray, either by expression or movement, the exultation that leaped into his heart, and sent the blood pulsing the quicker through his veins was all but irresistible. Yet he had resisted it successfully, and neither McDonald nor the Jew was aware that their words fell upon the ears of a man whose brain was far from being asleep.

Still the cab rolled on. Lomax had told the driver that he was just to drive wherever he pleased; he'd be told when his fares had had enough of it. And the cabman, though he thought his hirer mad or drunk, knew he was piling up a respectable sized fare, and went where he listed—not too far away, nor at too hurried a pace. His private impression was that Lomax was a lunatic, and the other two men his keepers.

All at once McDonald's voice, never very low, began to be raised. He wanted to get out, and the Jew's attempts to restrain him aroused his temper. He was quickly passing from the loquacious to the quarrelsome stage of intoxication.

"Want to get out!" he declared.

"No, you don't!" the Jew answered him.

"Tell yer I do; an' I'm goin' to get out!" returned the boxer. "Who says I ain't—eh? Ain't this the street? Ringwoods Court, New Cut? An' ain't that 'ouse there No. 4? Who'll keep me 'ere away from my 'ouse, I'd like to know? Ain't old Brewer there? All alone, nothin' to eat an' nothin' to drink. 'Ere, ol' pal, lemme out, so's I can get 'er a bite, or she'll be deaded, an' then we won't get none o' the dibe at all."

"Will you thit down?"

"Not if I knows it, when I wants to get out. 'Ere!"

McDonald's hand found the window-strap. He jerked it, and the window fell with a crash that would have waked the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.

And then Lomax, having heard all that he required to hear, and fearful of over-doing his part, awakened with a sudden start; his eyes opened, and he sat upright in his corner with a jerk that almost drove the hat from his head.

"Here, I say—Why, what—where am I? I—why, what's this? I been asleep?"

The acting, though it might have been improved upon by a Beerbohm Tree or George Alexander, was sufficiently good to impose upon Bob's companions. McDonald turned on him with a vacant laugh, and the Hebrew pulled him down into his seat.

(To be continued next week. Give your friend this number, and let him commence "In the Ranks," our grand new serial—Your Editor.)

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THE EDITOR.

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